

# The X-Files Meets the Skeptics

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*When Chris Carter, creator of the popular Fox TV drama The X-Files, spoke at the CSICOP Twentieth Anniversary Conference, the result wasn't quite what anyone expected.*

*Chris Carter, creator and executive producer of The X-Files, was the invited luncheon banquet speaker for the first day of the World Skeptics Congress and CSICOP Twentieth Anniversary Conference in Amherst, New York. The banquet, in the atrium of the State University of New York at Buffalo Center for the Arts, was packed. Tables were jammed together. Other people listened from second floor walkways or while standing against the walls. We present here essentially the transcript, only slightly edited for brevity, of that fascinating event, which consisted of informal introductory remarks by Carter followed by an extensive question-and-answer session. Not all of the audience's questions were recorded, but Carter summarized many of them before answering. Carter was introduced by reporter Eugene Emery of the Providence Journal-Bulletin, who, even though he had written several somewhat critical pieces about The X-Files, enthusiastically supported that Carter be invited to speak and served as his host. We begin with Emery's remarks.*

—Kendrick Frazier, Editor

I'm Gene Emery, science writer, computer columnist, and occasional contributor of Media Watch columns for the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER.

I've written about a lot of things in my twenty-five-year career, but few topics have produced more angry mail than my criticisms of *The X-Files*.

Since the show's debut on the Fox network on September 10, 1993, the adventures of two FBI agents thrown into cases with supernatural twists have gathered a growing legion of fans.

Originally based on *The Night Stalker*, a Darren McGavin series with an occult theme, *The X-Files* premiered with the words: "The following is inspired by actual documented events" and proceeded to depict an alien abduction. Stories of monsters, psychokinesis, and the face on Mars followed.

Dana Scully, the FBI agent who is supposedly the skeptic of the pair, was depicted as close-minded, ill-informed about the supernatural, and unwilling to recognize extraordinary phenomena that were clearly occurring on the show.

In short, the program—although fiction—seemed to be a nightmare for people interested in encouraging the public to take a rational look at the supernatural.

But *The X-Files* has evolved into something far more interesting, something even hard-core skeptics can appreciate.

The "actual documented events" line was dropped after the first show.

These days, when FBI agent Fox Mulder gets involved in a case because it seems to have supernatural overtones, he sometimes discovers a more down-to-earth explanation.

When the FBI agents come across something that appears supernatural, instead of ooohing and aaahing over the phenomenon from afar, they pursue it, they dissect it, they try to get to the bottom of it, and they're not afraid to report a prosaic explanation if they find it—unlike

the promoters of the supernatural with whom we're all familiar.

Although the show posits that extraterrestrials *really did* crash at Roswell, the show has been downright nasty to the Gulf Breeze UFO photographs and the Fox network's own "Alien Autopsy" specials.

Even as actor Peter Boyle played an insurance salesman who could correctly predict the date and nature of anyone's death, the show skewered the so-called police psychics who are always predicting that you'll find the missing person's body "near water."

In the fictional world of *The X-Files*, world governments *really are* violently covering up past contacts with extraterrestrials, monsters *do* lurk in the shadows, and people with psychic powers *do* exist.

Yet, ironically, this fictional show that promotes the paranormal on one level sometimes demonstrates more skepticism and more critical thinking than the so-called "reality-based" television shows that feature paranormal topics, where the producers ignore the research showing less sensational explanations for strange phenomena, and the skeptics, if they're lucky, get a ten-second sound bite that gives the illusion of balance.

Open for debate is whether *The X-Files* could do a better job of educating viewers about the general public's superstitions and folklore, while maintaining the show's dramatic tension and impressive ratings.

Mr. Carter and his show have received many honors, including the 1995 Golden Globe Award for Outstanding Drama Series, even Emmy nominations this past year, and the outstanding television series award from the Academy of Television Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror.

Last year, Mr. Carter was nominated for an Emmy Award for "Outstanding Writing in a Dramatic Series." He was also nominated for the Edgar Allen Poe Award by the Mystery Writers of America.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Chris Carter.



Photo: K. Staniforth/Fox.

**H**i! I'm Chris Carter, heretic. I agreed to speak to this group a long time ago, and I didn't realize that I was going to be eating lunch here. When they told me I was going to be "had for lunch," I got kind of worried.

I'm anticipating some very tough questions here today, but I feel that I should face my accusers and try to

best explain why I do what I do and how I think I serve the purpose of what it is you do.

I'd like to read to you a letter that was sent to me just recently from a person who is a high school teacher. I think that this is what I anticipate will be the kind of questions and certainly the sentiment that I'll be addressing here today. It says:

"Dear Mr. Carter:

(This is a man named Tucker Hiatt from the University High School in San Francisco.)

"In just a few days you will be speaking before the World Skeptics Congress. Your audience there in Amherst will not consist of your adoring fans. Rather you will be—politely and with good humor, I hope—criticized as a key purveyor of anti-skeptical, antiscientific, and generally irrational thinking among the television viewing public. They may argue that *The X-Files* is actually hurting people.

"I am sending you the attached copy of Carl Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World* for two reasons: first, so that you may know your enemy and thereby be prepared for the skeptical onslaught at Amherst, and so you might even come to adopt these skeptics' point of view and therefore be willing to make the modest occasional and purely evolutionary change in *The*

*X-Files* described in the paragraph below.

"I am a high school physics and philosophy teacher. I cannot easily afford to send twenty-six-dollar books to strangers. Nevertheless I'm persuaded that you have the power to do something wonderful for the television watching world.

"If you will peruse pages 373 through 477 of this book—*The X-Files* is discussed on page 374—you will find Mr. Sagan bemoaning the current poverty of prime time television's depiction of science. 'Where in all these programs are the joys of science, the delight in discovering how the universe is put together, the exhilaration of knowing a deep thing well?' I'm afraid that *The X-Files* in particular is helping to make this the most entertained and least scientifically informed—no, the least rational—nation in the industrialized world.

"I believe that in this instance you are hurting people. Our children and my students, at least, deserve better. To that end I ask you to consider 'The Y-Files.' Just once every month why not run an *X-Files* episode that is shorter than the requisite forty-eight minutes? As the episode ends you could air a brief epilog called 'The Y-Files' that would finish the hour. 'The Y-Files' might involve any of the seven themes that Mr. Sagan identifies on page 377 of his book, in particular, the presentation of real scientific investigations into the preceding episode's paranormal hook. It could be both thrilling and enlightening. It needn't be expensive, either. (I don't know how he would know, by the way.) That week's *X-Files* set could be used. Dozens of scientists there at the World Skeptics Congress would love to set up quick and entertaining experiments for free.

"Mr. Carter, please give this book a read. Please also consider why 'The Y-Files' is a good idea. Generations of scientifically literate citizens, better able to exercise their healthy skepticism because of a few minutes of *X-Files* time, may be deeply indebted."

I have to say, I couldn't agree more. I believe one of the things television should do is educate, and I believe it doesn't do it enough. But I'm here to tell you that I am a dramatist, I create entertainment, and I am unapologetic for that. I think that what I do is actually a great service to science. I'm willing to defend what I do in that way. I believe it draws people to science.

I have a brother who's a Ph.D. He got his degree in physics from Berkeley. He's now a research scientist at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Washington, D.C. I asked him, "Can I mention your name, Craig, to these great skeptics, here at this convention?" He said, "Why?" He was a little nervous that he would all of a sudden happen to be allied with me, the purveyor of antiskeptical material.

Anyway, I asked him because my brother was a great lover of science fiction as a kid. He read everything, all the science fiction canon. It is, he says, what drew him to science, what made him want to be a scientist. Even though he's not a big science fiction fan now, that is what, in fact, made him want to be what he is.

I believe in the same way *The X-Files*, even though it may

not give some people as balanced an approach as you may like, does the same thing. It is smart, intelligent, it doesn't write down, it is in fact built on a foundation of real and good science, as good as we can make it. We're very, very rigorous about the kind of research that we do on the show. I talk with scientists regularly. I have many friends who are scientists, who are contributors to the show in research. I think I can safely say that as far as any entertainment show on network television, that my show is, I believe, the most responsible to hard science.

On top of that, we deal with the paranormal, which I know you are all interested in—or disinterested in. We do that in a way—that's the way we tell our stories, and even though we come to no conclusion at the end of the show, we, in fact, do say or suggest that these possibilities may exist; but they are always leavened by Agent Scully's scientific point of view, she being the great big anchor of science, toning down the wonder of Agent Mulder's need to believe.

If you've seen the show, if you're a fan of the show, you'll know that from the very beginning, in the pilot episode, that Agent Mulder, who plays the believer on the show, had a poster on his wall that said: "I want to believe." It didn't say, "I do believe," or it didn't say, "This is real, this is all true." He had a desire to believe; he wanted to find the truth that was out there.

I believe there is something that is very human, that we all want a religious experience. Even if we don't believe in God, I believe we're all looking for something beyond our own rather temporal lives here that is going to shake our foundations of belief. That's a personal feeling of mine, and it has sort of infused the whole show.

I don't have a lot more to say, or to defend for that matter. I'm going to open up the floor for questions, because I am sure there are many.

I surely have been reading the book that was sent to me, and I turned to a page and maybe this is a good place to begin our discussion because, while I'm very impressed with this book and I've been a reader of Mr. Sagan's for quite a long time—I read *Broca's Brain* as a young man, and I read *The Dragons of Eden*, also as a young man, and got a lot out of them. I should also mention that I am a skeptic; I'm not a believer or a purveyor, in the schlocky sense of the word, of this kind of pseudoscience, but I do use it for what I do, which is storytelling.

I want to read you a paragraph that kind of stuck out to me and it's this. Mr. Sagan is saying, "An extraterrestrial being newly arrived on Earth scrutinizing what we mainly present to our children in television, radio, movies, newspapers and magazines, the comics, and many books, might easily conclude that we are intent on teaching them murder, rape, cruelty, superstition, credulity, and consumerism. We keep at it, and through constant repetition many of them finally get it. What kind of society could we create if instead we drummed into them science and a sense of hope?"

I'm confused, and maybe you guys can answer this question for me: how science creates hope in the world. I'll just throw

that question out to you because I was thinking about what kind of hope it presents to me: the hope that a giant meteor is going to hit the earth and we all die, that my cell phone gives me a brain tumor—I just want to know what that means to you, what kind of hope you think science can give in our lives today. So that's my question to you. [Pause.] No answers.

*[Inaudible question from audience.]*

I agree with you. Medical science gives hope that we may live long, fruitful lives, but it actually does just that. In fact it creates a long life here and it doesn't answer anything about our emotional lives or our need to . . .

*[Inaudible question.]*

It does. Quality of life. I agree. But I'm trying to make a point, and I'm being a little provocative about it: I think people's need to believe in these superstitions—paranormal and the like—has to do with their emotional lives, which is what I deal with as a dramatist, and I think that sometimes gets confused. I believe that if mysticism or ghosts or magic were taken out of all literature or drama, we would actually lose a lot of great drama, including Dickens, Shakespeare, Gabriel García Márquez. So this is something that is used in a lot of drama to treat and limn human experience and existence. . . .

I'm trying to make a point—this is what I do as a dramatist, this is the subject matter, how I use it. I'm not trying to be a purveyor of pseudoscience. It is merely a dramatic tool for me.

*[Inaudible question.]*

The question is: Do I think a desire to believe is different from the search for truth? I believe that they are different, but they are not inseparable. I think that scientists search for the truth and they do it in a very noble way. I don't want anyone to get the wrong idea—I'm here because I respect what you all do as scientists and I think that it's a noble pursuit and calling. I believe, though, that—I'll tell you an interesting story in a second—that there is indeed, beyond the truth, beyond the facts, there is a need to have a spiritual life that for me is a need to believe, a need to believe in an afterlife or God, for that matter.

One of the reasons I'm here is because I had an interesting meeting with two people who I know have been associated with this group, the magicians Penn and Teller. They came into my office, and I had a very interesting meeting with these guys. They're very, very smart guys and very, very certain that there is nothing beyond the pale, that there is in fact nothing that science cannot explain.

I asked them if they believed in God, and they said no. And I asked: Do any scientists believe in God? And they said: "None of the important ones." [Laughter.] I just found that somehow, I don't know, very disturbing. I think that need to believe is, in fact, even with the most hardened atheist. I think that there must be at some point in their lives a need to at least search for some kind of personal answers for existence itself, and I think that's a feeling that infuses the show and certainly informs it in the stories that we tell.



The X-Files' David Duchovny (Agent Mulder) and guest star Roy Thinnes. Photo: K. Staniforth/Fox.

*[Inaudible question.]*

The question is: Agent Scully represents a skeptical point of view, but she was abducted herself; and, now, how can she maintain a skeptical point of view? If you're a regular watcher of the show, you'll know that Agent Scully was in fact not abducted by aliens; it hasn't been explained who she was abducted by, and the whole question of alien life has never been answered in three years of the show. We've suggested it strongly, but last year, people who know the mythology of the show know that we took away that very thing. We actually explained it away, which is, I believe, what I've been trying to do—I've been trying to offer a sort of balanced approach, saying that this could be just the depredations of a government who wants to keep the truth from us, which I believe is absolutely true.

*[Inaudible question.]*

The question is, to summarize, why is it that even if we present things from a skeptical point of view, the paranormal always seems to outweigh the skepticism? My intention, when I first set out to do the show, was to do a more balanced kind of storytelling. I wanted to expose hoaxes. I wanted Agent Scully to be right as much as Agent Mulder. Lo and behold, those stories were really boring. The suggestion that there was a rather plausible and rational and ultimately mundane answer for these things turned out to be a disappointing kind of storytelling, to be honest. And I think that's maybe where people have the most problems with my show, certainly this group, I believe. But it's just the kind of storytelling we do, and because we have to entertain and because I set out in this show when I created it—all I wanted to do, and still really all I want to do in a very smart way is to scare the pants off of people every Friday night. That's really the job they pay me for, and that's the thing I'm supposed to do.

*[Inaudible question.]*

Thank you very much. I'll tell everyone I resisted the label of science fiction in the beginning because I never liked science



Agent Mulder searches for answers in an episode of *The X-Files*.  
Photo: K. Staniforth/Fox.

fiction as a kid. I never read it. I honestly admit to you I've never watched a single episode of *Star Trek*. I resisted the label, but I realized then that the label actually brought a certain audience to me and that what we are doing is science fiction, because it is fiction and it is speculative science. So I'll accept the label because I think it's fitting.

*[Inaudible question.]*

I think it's a good question. Am I a mongerer for the paranormal; am I in fact by telling these stories leading people to believe they have been abducted by aliens and/or any of these other paranormal things? I think it's a question that really is not dissimilar to the one about violence on television: Is violence on television promoting violence in society? I think it's a bogus argument, to be honest. I don't believe people are empty vessels waiting to be filled up with kooky ideas and going out and acting on them. I believe that mostly people are smart and reasonable, and the people who are going to be influenced by these things will be influenced by them. I can't be responsible for them; that is not my responsibility. I try to present a fair, intelligent, reasoned, and entertaining—to be honest—approach to these things. I think that there's a great debate right now about arts and artists' responsibilities. There's an interesting article in *Vanity Fair*, a conversation between Oliver Stone and John Grisham about the artist's responsibilities. Several people have actually killed others and themselves after watching the movie *Natural Born Killers*. The question John Grisham had is actually more than a question. He's placing some blame on Oliver Stone for creating a product which promotes a certain type of behavior. I think that it's a very dangerous suggestion. I think it certainly says a lot about the freedoms in this country. If, in fact, I've led people to believe that they've been abducted by aliens, I'm truly sorry—unless of course they have been abducted by aliens.

*[Inaudible question from audience member Steve Allen.]*

The question from Mr. Allen is: Is there a disclaimer on the back of my show, or should there be disclaimer, saying that this is not real or shouldn't be perceived as real? It's a valid question. I really don't know how to answer it. I can tell you

that when you create entertainment and you don't put it forth as the truth, that it is not our responsibility at the end of the show to do anything other than to say, "This does not represent actual events and/or individuals." I don't know that it's my responsibility to say that I've just created a fiction that is a fiction. I think what I do is not astrology, it is drama; and those are two different kinds of things. It's a valid question, though, but I just don't see the need for it myself.

*[Long inaudible question from audience.]*

The question or statement was about my question about hope. This gentleman says, what greater hope is there than the one provided by self-knowledge, knowing the universe and knowing ourselves? My feeling is that you're right. That is, in fact, all we can do. But beyond that, people have great needs to believe that there is an afterlife. This is my belief; it's not necessarily my personal quest. But I know about the emotional needs of people, and I think that's what drama and fiction deal with.

*[Long comment from audience; applause.]*

I'm in violent agreement with you. Preaching false hope. Nor do I preach or promote quackery or the like. I offer up these stories, parables in some way, in order to possibly take a better look at ourselves and to entertain; once again to scare us with what is, in fact, I think frightening, which is our fear of violent death, et cetera. But I agree with you. We shouldn't promote things that are, in fact, antithetical to a good, real approach to science and medicine.

*[Inaudible question.]*

I thought this was supposed to be hostile.

*Member of audience (Neil deGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist): One of the goals of good writing is to anticipate the reaction of the reader so that one can communicate more effectively. For you to humbly admit that your show is fiction, while a significant portion of The X-Files audience thinks the content is fact, means that you have misled them—inadvertently or intentionally. Occasionally, after your show, I get a phone call from a friend of mine who asks me, "Was what I saw on The X-Files really true?" or "Could that really have happened?" Not everybody has an astrophysicist as a friend whom they can call to sort out fact from fiction on television. For this reason, I believe you are setting back the nation's attempts to combat science literacy. Do you believe your show is harmful to viewers who may have difficulty sorting the fact from the fiction? Note that television shows such as The Twilight Zone and The Outer Limits did not confuse their audience about whether they were fact or fiction, yet they were nonetheless successful.*

Do you believe it's harmful? . . . I believe anyone who takes this at face value and this doesn't force them to ask themselves questions is a person who is gullible anyway, and you have to do your job as a scientist. [Boos from audience, followed by long comment from audience, laughter.] I think this is why there are fiction and nonfiction sections in bookstores. I think

that people who take this as the truth are perhaps not looking at it carefully enough. It never purported to be the truth. It is a fictional show, it is drama, it is entertainment; and it never tries to say that this is the truth, you should believe this. In fact, we are never conclusive about anything. There is a dramatic story told, and so I think that if these people are believing it, they have a willingness and a want to believe that is uninformed. I'm going to turn to this side of the room; this is a very hostile side of the room. [Laughter.]

*Member of audience: Hi. I'm interested in the sexual reversal that I see in your show. I believe that women are more gullible than men [shouts of NO! from the audience]. I'm interested to know whether you were conscious of this and made a conscious decision, or whether it just turned out that way.*

It's a good question. There is in my show the woman as scientist, as a skeptic, and the man as believer. It's a role reversal of the gender stereotypes. It was a very conscious thing on my part to do that. [Smattering of applause from audience.] I see I'm winning points back by the minute.

*[Inaudible question.]*

To be honest I try very hard to stay away from those classic science fiction conventions because my feeling is the show is only as scary as it appears to be believable. Now, I know that probably doesn't sit well with this group, but I must stay away from things like time travel and science fiction conventions because it gets away from the groundedness of the show, and Agent Scully would no longer have a valid point of view.

*Member of audience: If you could create a show as effective as Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds," would you put it on, and where would you draw the line?*

I never thought of it. We did an episode this year called "War of the Coprophages," and it was about cockroaches from outer space, believe it or not, and it was a kind of war-of-the-worlds idea. It didn't get people around the country thinking that their towns were being invaded by alien cockroaches, but it was a kind of play on that. I don't believe that in this era of media saturation we could probably ever do that again. I think that it would be impossible. Would I do something that irresponsible? Certainly not. Anyway, I don't think it was irresponsible. Would I do something with that intention? It was never Orson Welles' intention to have the kind of reaction that he got.

*Member of audience: You mentioned that there are literary devices in Shakespeare and in literature where ghosts and soothsayers are part of the plot. Let's face it: they're usually right. You always know if you see someone predicting something, it's going to happen in that particular episode. I'm wondering if you are saying to us that basically there are no dramatic devices to make the revealing of a hoax as interesting as always leaving it unknown and a mystery. Is that what you've run into? Does being a dramatist mean that you can't always have them revealed as a hoax?*

I'm not sure how to answer the question. I use these devices

because I think it's a way to reflect back on ourselves. I feel that I should hold up a mirror to existence and the human drama. As far as hoaxes go, all I can say to you is that the idea of dramatizing a hoax is a very downbeat idea. I believe there are places to do that; there probably is a show in which you could do that and it probably is a very good idea to explore doing that. It just doesn't work that well on the kind of things that I do.

*Female member of audience: I just felt that one thing that was left out is that Scully is one of the finest role models for women that we have.*

Her comment was that Agent Scully, who is a scientist and medical doctor, is a great female role model. I'm very proud of that because I think there aren't a lot of good female role models on TV. I was very selective in casting her role, because I wanted someone who actually wasn't a sex-kittenish, TV-bimbo type. I was really up against it because the people who hire me and pay me money were very concerned about Gillian Anderson, the woman who plays Agent Scully—they were concerned how she might look in a bathing suit. It was very hard to convince them, in fact, that she wasn't going to be in a bathing suit. So, thank you for the comment.



Assistant Director Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) and Agent Scully (Gillian Anderson). Photo: K. Staniforth/Fox.

*Member of audience: My question concerns the demographics of your audience. What percentage of your audience is children under the age of, say, twelve, and how do you think they're taking in the show?*

My key demographic—I feel like a scientist now—is nineteen- to forty-nine-year-old adults, and the smallest segment of our audience is two- to, I think, eleven-year-olds. They're watching the sitcoms on Friday nights. So my feeling is that this show probably is too scary for some younger kids, but once again I think that what it does is the same thing science fiction did for my brother; it will draw people toward science rather than away from it, and make them possibly smarter and more rational and more skeptical actually.

*Member of audience: I think all of us here feel that we have pretty good critical thinking skills and that the basis of our group is in imparting critical thinking skills to everyone. I enjoy your show. I do employ my critical thinking skills, and I believe that's what the big concern with the show is, that we are worried about people watching it who just go "OOH" and don't even think about it, don't try to evaluate the evidence. But I also think that's our job. We are to go home and help impart critical thinking skills to everyone we come in contact with, and you keep on making good shows.*

Thank you.

*Member of audience: Do you think that a SKEPTICAL INQUIRER-type program could survive on commercial TV?*

I think that if it was done right and it stars Pamela Anderson Lee, yes. [Laughter.] I don't know, really.

*Member of audience: Tell us more about the conspiracy. Lots of your episodes seem to be running around conspiracy. Tell us more about it.*

Yes, my show does deal with conspiracies. I was a child of the Watergate era. I distrust authority. I believe that the government does lie to us regularly and people are working against our best interests on an ongoing basis. So the conspiracy ideas in the show come as a result of my great belief that we're being suckered. That's the last question I'm going to take. I have to call my actors up here. . . .

## Scully, Science, and Skepticism

Chris Carter concluded his appearance at the CSICOP conference asking two volunteers from the audience to read a portion of an early script of *The X-Files*.

Carter: I have to call my actors up here because I'm going to actually prove something, a great big experiment with Mulder and Scully. This is a scene from the pilot episode for *The X-Files*. It's a scene in which Agent Scully meets Agent Mulder for the first time. It's a little lengthy but there's a point that's very important. Listen to the words, and I think you're going to understand how I approached the show from the beginning and where we came from, if you don't know the show.

SCULLY: Agent Mulder, Hi! I'm Dana Scully. I've been assigned to work with you.

MULDER: Well, isn't it nice to be suddenly so highly regarded. So, who did you tick off to get stuck with this detail, Scully?

SCULLY: Actually, I've heard a lot about you. I'm looking forward to working with you.

MULDER: Really? I was under the impression that you were being sent to spy on me.

SCULLY: Listen, if you have any doubt about my credentials or qualifications . . .

MULDER: You're a medical doctor, and you're teaching at the academy. You did your undergraduate degree in physics: "Einstein's Twin Paradox: A New Interpretation, Dana Scully's Senior Thesis." Now, there's a credential: rewriting Einstein.

SCULLY: Did you bother to read it, by

any chance?

MULDER: Yes, I liked it. It's just, in most of my work the laws of physics rarely seem to apply.

SCULLY: Could you be a little bit more specific?

MULDER: Maybe you can give me a medical opinion, though. Oregon female, age twenty-one, no explainable cause of death, nothing in the autopsy, zip. Two distinct marks, however, are found on her lower back. Can you ID these marks, Dr. Scully?

SCULLY: Needle punctures maybe? An animal bite? Possibly an electrocution?

MULDER: How's your chemistry? This is the substance found in the surrounding tissue.

SCULLY: It's an organic, isn't it? I'm not sure. Is it some kind of synthetic protein possibly?

MULDER: Beats me. I've never seen it either. But here it's found again in Sturgess, South Dakota—

SCULLY: Do you have any kind of theory about this?

MULDER:—and again in Shamrock, Texas. I have plenty of theories. What has me stumped is why a Bureau policy is to label these cases as unexplained phenomena and ignore them. Do you believe in the existence of extraterrestrials?

SCULLY: I've actually not given it much thought in my life.

MULDER: As a scientist?

SCULLY: Well, logically I'd have to say no, of course, given the distances needed to travel from the far reaches of space, the energy requirements, they would definitely exceed—

MULDER: Conventional wisdom. That girl in Oregon, she's the fourth member of her graduating class to die under mysterious circumstances. When convention and science offer no answers, might we not consider the fantastic as a possibility?

SCULLY: The girl obviously died of something. It was natural causes and it's plausible something was missed in the postmortem if she was murdered. It's possible there was a sloppy investigation. What I find fantastic is any notion that there are answers beyond the realm of pure science. The answers are there; you just have to know where to look.

MULDER: And that's why they put the "I" in FBI. See you bright and early then, Scully. We leave for Oregon at 8 A.M.

[Applause.]

Carter: Thank you very much. That was the original scene and it really set up Dana Scully's skepticism in the show. I think that it's clear that we came at it from a very skeptical point of view with her. And I've always thought that Scully's point of view is the point of view of the show. I'd also like to use this as an example: I know that there are a lot of magicians here involved with this group, and I think that most of them like to dispel the idea that there is actually magic; and I would like to use it as proof positive that in fact what I do on Friday nights at nine is magic; and that these fine folks here were kind enough to show us a little bit of that.

Thank you very much. [Applause.]