

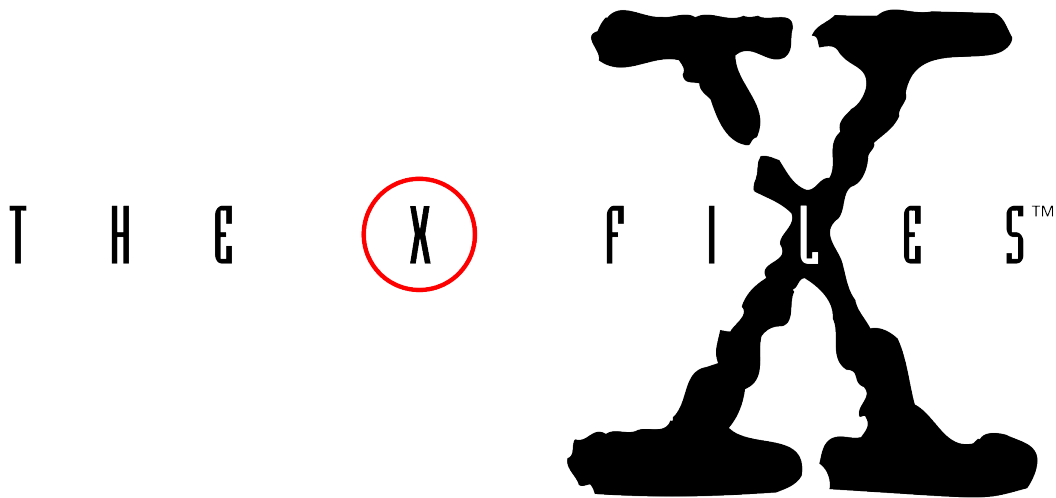
THE X-FILES: COMMISSIONING REPORT

TOTAL WORD COUNT FOR ASSIGNMENT:

BY

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**SUMMARY:** This is an exercise undertaken whilst studying towards my Master's qualification. The brief was to evaluate and critique a proposed pilot for an *X-Files* reboot. It is accordingly presented as a commissioning report.



## COMMISSIONING REPORT

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** RIVAS & TODD

**READER:** ROB PLUMPTON

### **Series premise: (59 WORDS)**

Two initially mismatched FBI agents are forced to cooperate during an ongoing investigation into missing persons that dovetails into extraterrestrial involvement. Through the related investigations, Todd - the 'believer' - pursues answers relating to his missing son whilst the skeptic, Rivas, applies Occam's razor. At the close of this series, Rivas becomes a believer after learning of her own alien origins.

### **Comments (259 WORDS)**

The first commendable aspect of this submission is its inclusivity: one protagonist is hispanic, and the more important roles within this series are race-neutral. However, there is a slight failing insofar as those with mental difficulties are not addressed, and this inclusion could make for a very interesting dynamic whilst remaining at the cutting edge.

With a superficially sound storyline, there are a couple of issues that are apparent after a couple of read throughs. The biggest issue is the role of characters after this series ends. In short, Rivas learns that she is part alien and, with her partner - an FBI agent named Todd - uncovers an arrangement between aliens and the American government to exchange human beings for technology. This means that Rivas cannot begin the next series as a credible skeptic, and the tensions that make this franchise work will be missing, failing to catalyse the drama.

Overall, this offering remains faithful to the original series up to a point. Whilst it is true that a reboot need not be a carbon copy, there are still audience expectations connected with this franchise. The most apparent being the issues raised above, Burt also because Todd, unlike Mulder, seems to enjoy a degree of credibility already, with virtually no pushbacks, along with tensions, from colleagues who view him as odd.

It is worth noting that these salient criticisms can be addressed with reasonable ease. Although at this stage the verdict is a 'Pass', it is felt that once the identified issues are addressed, it could be a strong contender.

**VERDICT:** PASS

### **READER'S NOTES (728 WORDS):**

The protagonists are endearingly fallible. Rivas is able to easily detect lies, but cannot determine Todd's veracity at a given moment. This is a double edged sword since it also undermines her ability as an interrogator; if one person is able to confound her, then others almost certainly can. If Rivas is to be the 'Everyman' character, seeing cases

from a detached and scientific angle could be undermined by a shortcoming in one of her marketable abilities.

Continuing the 'Characters' theme, it is relevant to consider this series' second protagonist: Todd. While it is granted that he believes 'In all possibilities', with him being what could be described as a 'traditional' scientist, it would be worth stating instead: 'all possibilities that are deemed falsifiable'. This would anchor Todd as a true investigator, rather than relying on intuition that seems to permeate his dealings later on.

Finally, we have the Vaping Woman. This is an interesting analogue to the previous series' character, Carl Gerhard Busch / The Cigarette Smoking Man. While the inclusivity element of this is laudable, the switch to vaping simply detracts from the drama. Where the harmfulness of cigarettes emphasised Busch's nihilism, taking the healthy alternative seems to water down the drama. In addition, like a plot, every cigarette has a beginning, middle and end. This can lend certain scenes a degree of urgency by showing and not telling.

As the pilot is pretty much disconnected with episodes two to ten, it seems sensible to look at this in isolation. The premise lacks certain pieces of information. The characters' needs, wants and so on are unaddressed. There is no clear consequence for failing to achieve these. It is also unclear from the premise how ingrained this character is with the residents of this Hogsback Creek, whether they intend to remove him from their community and if he truly poses a threat. A chequered past could mean anything from adultery to dealing in illicit substances and the nature of his iniquities ought to be grounded within this narrative.

When Skinner assigns Rivas and Todd, it is stated that she asked them to 'investigate possible paranormal connections' within a particular case. The fact that a superior entertains the possibility of the paranormal seems contrary to the brand and its dynamic. Take, for example, the episode 'Squeeze' from the initial series' first season. Mulder is assigned to an odd case and encounters resistance from contemporaries. This leads to the villain's release a few episodes later. This kind of tension is missing here.

The type of phenomena also seems a little wide of the mark. Todd, is fuelled in this case with his obsessive attention to extraterrestrials, plus alien abduction. This seems a little short-sighted. Paranormal phenomena come in all shapes and sizes. This character seems to possess a 'one size fits all' attitude to the paranormal. This is illustrated by a seemingly spurious link between any unexplainable phenomena and the loss of his son.

The shaman's character is also a little flimsy. He has a chequered past, that leaves him as an apostate, but the missing parties apparently tried to blackmail him. It seems unreasonable that a man in self-imposed isolation would have anymore secrets. Lastly, these same individuals who

left society behind seem all too ready to leave with no apparent conflict between family attachments and their desire to disappear.

The remaining story arc relates to episodes two to ten. This arc will be briefly examined as a whole. The first element, within Episode Two, is largely sound. However, Todd seems to give up on the case far too easily. There is no detail relating to any kind of conflict, be it internal or with another. This is true for the subsequent eight episodes, too. For instance the paths invoked when Maria dies and is swiftly cremated; this is the kind of tension upon which 'The X-Files' thrives. However, there is something a little 'Deus ex machina' about such things as Todd's discovery and rescue in the desert.

From Episode Four onwards, this is a far stronger offering, with the introduction of information that propels Todd's backstory significantly (the agreement between extraterrestrials and Earth's powers, to swap humans for alien technology). This works very well and, with episodes five to ten, the introduction of a morally questionable antihero in the form of Aileen certainly provides a true 'X-Files' flavour.