

Government shields Nazi scientists' experiments on aliens

Ruah Carlyle reviews *The X-files*

THIS could be a headline in the *Daily Sport* or, quite plausibly, a plot for *The X-files*, the hugely popular imported American sci-fi TV series on BBC1. Slickly made and entertaining, it plays on every paranoid conspiracy theory and on every wildest wet dream. It is total bilge!

For those three people who haven't seen the show, it depicts two FBI agents who investigate paranormal events and invariably discover that they are caused by aliens, government conspiracies, a cult, or all three. Or have some other bizarre cause. Recent plots, for instance, have included vampires, alien bounty hunters and — weirdest of all — Southern US cannibals running a chicken factory.

The show is a success because it taps into a rich seam of paranoia in American (and now it seems British) society. Millions of American people have asserted in surveys that they have been abducted by, or seen, aliens. A large number also believe that the government has know of the existence of aliens for years but keep it secret. (There is never any explanation for why they'd bother to keep this secret).

This paranoia is an indication of how little control people feel in their lives; there must be a conspiracy working behind the scenes. It is the psychology of a small child who really doesn't control his or her life.

The X-Files translate this paranoia into pseudo-factual TV, adding a bit of New Age, Mother-earth, peace, more herbal tea, vicar? bullshit. I suppose this is an attempt to give a purpose to all these conspiracy theories.

As such things do, *The X-Files*, has generated a *Star Trek*-type cult fan club. Why do naff sci-fi shows always have such massive nerdy fan clubs? I suppose it's vaguely more interesting than trainspotting.

To any *X-file* fans out there, I say this: look, you with the *X-file* t-shirt, *X-file* mug of tea, *X-file* video and tin foil wrapped around your head to stop aliens invading your brain, grow up! Get a life! Read a book instead!



The cast of *Pulp Fiction*

twice as long as in an American one. Hollywood may go for visual stimulation above character and dialogue, but American independent film (think of Jim Jarmusch's *Night on Earth* or Stephen Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape*, or John Sayles' magnificent *Matewan*) can often manage both. There are plenty of structurally-innovative films — Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, for example.

What does mark Tarantino out is that he is an independent film-maker who has managed to be vastly more successful; he is therefore 'independent' no longer.

The uniqueness of Tarantino — and what is controversial — is his amoral humour, and in particular his use of violence as a way of getting a laugh. Post-modernists like to speak of reality as merely 'surfaces', and that sums up Tarantino's work very accurately. His films could be taken as satires on the collapse of all life into its media-saturated surfaces. The hero of *True Romance* is a comic-book obsessed ingenue who falls in love on a first date because that's how love is supposed to be, and murders his new wife's pimp because that's how heroes are supposed to act (She agrees: 'That's so... romantic,' she declares, upon hearing of the pimp's dispatch). They embark on an adventure because the only mode of existence they can imagine is one borrowed from trash-culture.

Tarantino's original script of *Natural*

Born Killers is focused much more than the eventual film around the character of the sleazeball TV presenter who runs a show about serial killers. A long sequence concerns a 'documentary' about Micky and Mallory which includes scenes from a movie made about them (departing drastically from 'fact', naturally). Tarantino's script is about the media which makes heroic murderers, turning morality on its head. (The inferences, in Stone's film, that people are naturally violent, and the bizarre section with the insightful native Americans, are entirely absent from Tarantino's script).

Pulp Fiction is famous for the obsession of its characters with hamburgers and other commercial trivia as they go about their business of shooting people. When the Samuel L Jackson character decides to give up being a professional killer, there is little suggestion that he has questioned his career morally; even his religion is just another surface.

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Yet in fact, Tarantino's concerns are less satirical, less political, than this interpretation suggests. This is not to say that the interpretation isn't valid — film like any other art form doesn't necessarily work only on its intended level. But Tarantino's concerns are much more 'self-referential' than that. *True Romance* is self-consciously an 'homage' to Terence Mallick's *Badlands*. *Pulp Fiction* is stuffed full of movie references: the sequence in which Harvey Keitel is brought in to clean up the hitmen's brain-spattered car is less about the dehumanisation of violence than a joke about Mafia 'cleaners' in films.