


The X-Files

1998

FOX

\$22.98

RATED PG-13

Species II

1995

MGM

\$103.99

UNRATED

Files—is that it plays to audiences' two most powerful instincts, to suspend disbelief and to connect everything on screen. It makes everyone something of a Mulder, watching movies by night from an unkempt couch, perversely secure in the faith that there's more to them than meets the unglazed eye.

As characters in these dramas go, the *X-Files* hero is the exception, a professional paranoid who can lecture his partner Scully on the need to "anticipate the unforeseen... in a universe of infinite possibilities" and do it as boilerplate, half jokingly, to cover over why she should follow another of his hunches. *Body Snatchers* gives us old-fashioned innocents woefully unaware of infinite possibility. The paranoia is all ours as Dr. Miles Bennell (a splendid Kevin McCarthy) opens director Don Siegel's 1956 film insanely ranting "I am not insane!" before recounting, in a long flashback, his tale of the pod people who one by one are replacing humanity.

The metaphors commonly attached to *Body Snatchers* arise from innocence too—the Commie infiltrators who might dupe a trusting soul, or in Philip Kaufman's 1978 remake starring Donald Sutherland, the consciousness-raisers who, in the counterculture's wake, promised to cool you out without drags. Fear is merely the pulse, a bass line shadowing the theme, which is how tragic life without emotion would be. For sheer heartbreak and visual spookiness, I prefer the '78 version (and find Abel Ferrara's '94 take a stiff). Yet *Body Snatchers* is such an elemental fable, it probably should be

The Pod Squad

How do you know alien beings haven't taken over your body? The *X-Files* movie creeps you out but *Species II* just creeps, **by George Blooston**

IS IT PARANOIA IF EVERYBODY is out to get you? You bet, and in most cases it's a well-founded, highly communicable strain of the dread disease. At least that's how it

works in movies when the aliens arrive and start flooding the market with cheap knockoffs of humankind. Our heroes seem delusional when they're merely aware, and we

the audience get infected.

In fact, we're predisposed. The great thing about paranoia—and about the cinema of paranoia, from **Invasion of the Body Snatchers** to **The X-**

remade every 20 years.

Species should also be made every 20 years—rather than every three. The franchise began as a nicely naughty lesson about governmental arrogance and naiveté—let's make a new life-form by adding alien DNA!—and with model Natasha Henstridge as the gorgeous product who's hot to replicate, sexual predation as well as alien invasion get a clever twist. But there are no new kinks or implications to worry us in the new-to-video **Species II**, which finds Henstridge reconstituted and under heavier glass until our mission commander to Mars (Justin Lazard) returns harboring an alien male within.

Mulder might see something deeper in the oily goo that attacks the astronaut, but *Species II* uses it for a low-rent premise—Stud from Hell can spawn 30 times a day. As an exercise in paranoia, this sequel fails twice: We see it all coming, right down to the dripping exoskeletal colossus that *Alien* made the standard sci-fi monster, and what we see doesn't resonate. It's just a chase movie. Even the humans (Michael Madsen, Marg Helgenberger, Mykelti Williamson, George Dzundza) pursuing this government-abetted threat to civilization are mostly annoyed with each other rather than scared.

The hardest-working man in paranoia, FBI special agent Fox Mulder (David Duchovny), just misses being his own best audience. Mulder's big-screen debut, once subtitled *Fight the Future*, lays a lot of answers on his table. He now knows (hey, you might as well read this before the series' fall season starts Nov. 8) that a vast alien-human conspiracy is all too obviously going forward among us, that coloniza-

tion may not be far off, and that The Syndicate collaborating with the aliens has a vaccine to fight the "black oil."

What Mulder can't appreciate is that this first in an expected series of *X-Files* movies—cheeky, gorgeous, and insouciantly aware of its big-screen occasion—tickles as it scares. Director Rob Bowman has each character enter with a flourish and even

leaves room for the crowd's applause; back at home, the movie plays big even as it hews to the series' rules. Evidence destroyed, the trail going cold, the FBI tribunal not buying it, agent Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) in mortal jeopardy—we've seen it all before but can take the movie for the hugely special episode it is, reaching to the ends of the earth and into the last ice

age, as well as taking us a level higher in the conspiracy's power structure.

The rest of us can savor the endless ramifications, but Mulder needs answers. This is all that separates us from the FBI's most special agent. Hapless fiction that he is, he seeks truth. Hapless beings that we are, we seek fun. *Invasion* ('56): B *Invasion* ('78): B+ *Species II*: C- *X-Files*: A-

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HOLLYWOOD'S BOY NEXT DOOR



EVOLVER A 1968 publicity photo for *Planet of the Apes*

LIKE HIS FRIEND Elizabeth Taylor, Roddy McDowall, who died of cancer at age 70 on Oct. 3, was the rare child star who stayed a star all his life. "Most child actors have a tremendous problem when they grow up," he told *Interview* in 1989. "They suddenly have to learn how to act." McDowall's native charm masked his craft. Though seldom the leading man, the eternally youthful character actor worked constantly, amassing more than 100 movie credits and just as many

TV appearances, as well as numerous stage roles, including one in *The Fighting Cock*, for which he received a 1960 Tony. Among the most sociable of Hollywood denizens, McDowall, born in London to a merchant seaman father and a mother who encouraged his acting, was famous for his loyalty to his friends, many of whom became subjects for his accomplished side career as a portrait photographer. McDowall took up the camera in the '50s after he came to New York to get stage experience, fearing he was finished in movies. Little did he know that he was just getting started. His finest performances include

- **HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY** (1941, Fox) In his breakthrough role, 12-year-old McDowall played the youngest son in a mightily struggling Welsh coal-mining family. His sensitive portrayal is the heart of John Ford's film.

- **LASSIE COME HOME** (1943, MGM) McDowall ensured his screen immortality by starring in the boy-and-his-horse story *My Friend Flicka* and this, the original Lassie movie. He wrings every tear from the lost-collie saga.

- **CLEOPATRA** (1963, Fox) Amid the opulence and an opulent cast (Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Rex Harrison), McDowall gave a standout performance as deceptively effete backstabber Octavian.

- **PLANET OF THE APES** (1968, Fox) As gentle Cornelius, McDowall, buried in makeup, created the soulful simian who would link all five *Apes* films. —Michael Sauter