

## FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Date 1 April 1979

Field Report

March 30, 1979

Following relocation from Martha's Vineyard to Washington, DC, BILL MULDER and his son are under surveillance to ensure compliance. Mulder's work on [REDACTED] is critical at this time. Work at SD, HQ, Pentagon and [REDACTED] location.

SUBJ FOX WILLIAM MULDER, 17 years of age, exhibits a photographic memory and a high level of intelligence. He has NBC as to the circumstances around [REDACTED]'s disappearance—agent may [REDACTED] to keep him in the dark SYD. Evaluate for future recruitment for [REDACTED] within SD.

Also watch his relationship with [REDACTED]; father [REDACTED] worked at [REDACTED] Air Force Base. Wife was [REDACTED]

Wife/mother TEENA MULDER remains in the family home and is not under surveillance.

-X

Field Report

April 1, 1979

CAPTAIN SCULLY recently relocated the family from Miramar Naval Base back to Annapolis, MD. Promotion to Admiral discussed. Transfer was initiated by [REDACTED]. Youngest child SUBJ DANA KATHERINE, born February 23, 1964. [REDACTED] vaccination 29510 on [REDACTED].

Aged 15 years, subject shows signs of seeing [REDACTED] and/or post death. Bears observation and testing R&I. Such [REDACTED] may help departments communicate with the [REDACTED] we have entered into a treaty with October 13, 1973, [REDACTED] Air Force Base.

Continue surveillance. Test with [REDACTED] protocol.

-SA Gerlich

On 1 April 1979 At DC/Maryland File # \_\_\_\_\_

By Special Agents \_\_\_\_\_ X \_\_\_\_\_ Date Dictated \_\_\_\_\_

Classified until  
01/03/2017

File Number 9781250119568  
AGENT OF CHAOS / Kami Garcia

Washington, DC

March 30, 1979, 3:32 PM

Packs of teenagers rushed past the black sedan parked across from the high school, unaware they were being watched from behind the car's tinted windows. Pumped for the official start of spring break, jocks wearing Wilson High jerseys carried girls on their shoulders, while other guys horsed around in the street, showing off for girls who pretended not to notice them. Most of the teens didn't even notice the car. Black vehicles with tinted windows were as common as pigeons in Washington, DC—home base of the Secret Service, the CIA, and the FBI.

The man in the passenger seat scanned the face of every boy jaywalking across the road, looking for one in particular. "No sign of him yet," he said, directing his comment at the older man behind the wheel.

"A powerful observation, Reginald," his boss deadpanned. He sounded like someone's grandfather, and next to Reggie, he looked like one.

Even if the boss ditched the three-piece suit and conservative side part, he couldn't hide the deep lines carved into his pale skin like scars or the worn look behind his cold blue eyes. Reggie's dark-brown skin was as smooth as a baby's butt. His bushy black mustache kept him from looking like a college kid, and his short Afro tucked under a tweed newsboy cap complemented the fitted white shirt, red blazer, and flared black slacks he wore to mark him as a man with style.

"Look how oblivious those kids are." Reggie watched the teens with a pang of envy. "It's like they think nothing can touch them. Remember how that felt?"

"No. I was never an idiot." The boss tapped his thumb against the steering wheel without disturbing the funnel of ash on the end of the cigarette in his hand. "People see what they want to see, which is generally nothing important."

Reggie continued to search the horde of kids. "There's no way we could've missed him."

"Your powers of deduction never disappoint me." His boss took a drag from the Morley, then exhaled slowly. Reggie ignored the cloud of smoke making his eyes water and focused on the funnel of ash, waiting for it to break off.

"The prodigal son appears." The boss pointed his cigarette across the street at two boys walking down the sidewalk with backpacks slung over their shoulders.

Fox Mulder was a good-looking kid—lean like a swimmer, with a look that was the perfect balance between clean-cut and I-don't-give-a-crap. His dark brown hair hit just past the collar of his striped shirt, and the front was long enough to cover his eyes a little. Girls ate up that kind of thing. He stared into space as he shuffled along, holding a crumpled piece of paper.

The other boy was a different story. His straight blond hair hung in his face, as if he was growing out a bad bowl haircut. The kid's dirt-brown T-shirt featured a faded image of a scene from *Star Wars*, and his jeans were so

long that the frayed bottoms dragged on the sidewalk.

The kid was talking nonstop, gesturing wildly and buzzing around his friend like a housefly. From the look of it, he could use a strip of duct tape to cover his mouth.

Reggie wasn't a fan of talkers; they were a liability. "Who's the short kid with Bill Mulder's son?"

"Are you familiar with the concept of research?" The boss finally tapped the cigarette against the edge of the ashtray, and the long funnel of ash broke off in one piece, as if on command. He crushed the butt and aimed his watery-blue eyes directly into Reggie's dark-brown ones. "Let me enlighten you. It's a practice professionals use to obtain information so we don't have to rely on *assumptions*."

Reggie was tempted to fire back a condescending remark of his own, but the boss would make him regret it later. The organization they worked for was built on the backs of men and women with ice running through their veins—individuals willing to do whatever needed to be done, regardless of the cost—and the smoking man next to him was one of them.

"What's my assignment?" Reggie wanted to get down to business. "Do you want me to *collect* Bill's son?" *Collect* sounded more civilized than *abduct*.

"Taking Samantha Mulder was partly insurance to keep her father from talking." The Boss opened a new pack of cigarettes and flicked his wrist, freeing one from the box. "And we all had to make sacrifices. But it would break Bill if we took his son, too, and right now we need him. The Project is at a critical stage that requires people with specific skills, and Bill Mulder is one of them."

The boss lit another Morley and continued talking, with the cigarette tucked in the corner of his mouth. "So we need to keep an eye on both Bill and his son. Follow the kid around and let me know if you see anything interesting. We're also assessing Fox for potential recruitment."

Tailing a high school kid during spring break was a crap job, but Reggie wasn't high enough in the food chain yet to complain about it. So instead he asked, "Who the hell names their kid Fox? His parents must hate him."

"Bill and Teena are too busy hating each other. They were barely speaking when Bill moved out of the house in the fall." The boss stared out the window, tracking Fox Mulder's progress down the street. "The timing was perfect, actually. We stepped in and relocated Bill from Martha's Vineyard to DC so he could work on the Project full-time. Fox came with him."

"I'm surprised the kid's mom let him go," Reggie said. "My aunt and uncle divorced when I was young, and they butted heads about everything."

"If I gave you the impression that I want to swap childhood memories, let me clarify. I don't." He took a long drag from his cigarette, and a new funnel of ash began to form. "Interestingly enough, sending Fox to live with his dad was Teena's idea."

"Doesn't that seem strange?"

"It does." He exhaled and a ribbon of smoke curled its way toward Reggie, who finally coughed and reached for the window handle. The boss snapped his fingers and pointed at the glass. "It stays up."

Reggie ignored the burning sensation in his throat. He refused to appear weak in front of a man who had referred to weakness as a disease during a debriefing. "Do you think the kid's mom knows something?"

"The jury is still out. But when the verdict comes in, I'll deal with Teena Mulder personally." Another trail of smoke snaked from the Boss's chapped lips. "You focus on Fox. Update me directly—and only me."

"So no reports?"

"Keep them to a minimum. We don't want to leave any breadcrumbs. So from this point on, you no longer have a name. Sign your reports as 'X.'"

Fox Mulder stared at the C written at the top of his history test as he walked down the sidewalk with Gimble. His friend hadn't stopped talking since the bell rang at the end of sixth period, officially signaling the beginning of spring break. That was the thing about Gimble—nothing fazed the guy. He would never waste his time fixating on one lousy grade, while Mulder couldn't let it go.

After three tests that had all followed the same format—thirty multiple-choice questions taken directly from the textbook and twenty short-answer questions—their history teacher threw the class a curveball and switched to essay questions.

"I don't get it." Gimble glanced at Mulder's paper. "Didn't you read the chapters?"

"Yeah."

"Then what gives?" Gimble asked. "With that superpower of yours, you should've aced it."

Mulder usually didn't tell people about his photographic memory, but he couldn't hide it from Gimble once they became friends. Quoting entire scenes from *Star Trek* episodes verbatim gave him away.

"American history textbooks are biased," Mulder said. "Lots of information in them is inaccurate."

Gimble clapped a palm against his forehead. "Dude? Tell me you didn't write that on the test?"

"Why was John Hancock's signature the biggest one on the Declaration of Independence?" Mulder asked him without missing a beat.

"Wait. I know this one." Gimble snapped his fingers as he tried to remember. "It was something about Hancock wanting the British—or the king—to see his name first."

"Nicely done," Mulder said. "And your answer would be *incorrect*. John Hancock was practicing calligraphy and wrote his signature on a piece of parchment. A few weeks later, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence around Hancock's signature to save paper."

"No way." Gimble shook his head and his straight blond hair swung back and forth over his eyes like windshield wipers.

"It's true. Look it up."

Gimble scratched his head, considering it. "Whatever. You couldn't just write down the junk from the book?"

Mulder shrugged. "Not the stuff that's wrong."

"Who cares?"

*I do.*

Mulder was sick of people feeding him lies. He had to choke them down at home, but he refused to do it at school, too.

"Will your dad be pissed about your grade?"

Mulder snorted. "He doesn't even know I had a test."

"You're lucky. The Major is always asking me questions. I wouldn't be surprised if he had a copy of the class syllabus."

Mulder had never met Gimble's dad, but from what his friend had told him, the man sounded intense. Not many fathers made their sons call them "the Major."

"Your dad can't be that bad," Mulder said. "Not many people have a wide-field reflecting telescope at home."

Gimble grinned. "Okay . . . the telescope *is* pretty rad. A friend of the Major's from the Air Force got ahold of

it for him. It's nothing like the amateur-grade models they sell in stores."

"Seriously? I had no idea." Mulder laid on the sarcasm. "I'm completely unfamiliar with Newtonian infinite-axis telescopes."

"Show-off."

Mulder laughed. "Are you sure your dad won't mind if I try it out?"

"I told you he said it was cool."

"Did he actually use the word *cool*?" Mulder asked with a straight face. "Because if he didn't, I might need some clarification."

"Has anyone ever told you that you have a weird sense of humor?" Gimble cracked a smile. The guy had no poker face.

"All the time." That part was true.

Gimble flicked his head to the side just enough to get the long hair out of his eyes—something he did at least fifty times a day. "Let's go see a guy about a telescope."

Mulder picked up his pace. As a kid, he wanted to be an astronaut when he grew up. He was ten years old when his dad told him that it would never happen. Astronauts had to pass a vision test that included an assessment for color blindness, and Mulder couldn't distinguish between red and green. It didn't stop him from wanting to go into space.

"There's a bunch of other stuff I want to show you, too." Gimble scrambled ahead and turned around to walk backward, facing Mulder. "I've got forty-eight *Star Trek* cards, not including doubles. No one counts doubles, you know? And I have the Dr. Bones McCoy card that came out three years ago, in mint condition."

"That's cool." Mulder was used to epic levels of *Star Trek* devotion. Phoebe, his best friend back home in Martha's Vineyard, collected the trading cards, too, along with everything else related to the TV show or the movie.

"I've got something even cooler." Gimble stumbled on a crack in the pavement, but managed to catch himself. "Well, maybe not *cooler*, but almost as cool. Or equally as cool," he said, as if the *Star Trek* gods had tripped him for making the comment.

"Like what?"

Gimble turned onto a residential street lined with brownstones. Instead of answering the question, he stopped in front of the second house. "This is it."

"I hope you have good junk food." Mulder followed his friend up the steps. "All we have at home is sunflower seeds."

Gimble hesitated at the door. "My dad is kind of strange. I told you that, right?"

"At least a hundred times," Mulder said. "Including thirty seconds ago. Whose dad isn't?"

"*Kind of* is probably an understatement. And all the news reports about that missing kid are making him worse."

Billy Christian—that was the little boy's name.

For a moment, Mulder couldn't catch his breath. It felt like someone was squeezing all the air out of his lungs, and then the feeling passed like it always did. Mulder realized Gimble was still talking.

"The military really screwed him up, you know?"

"I get it." Mulder's mom was never the same after his younger sister, Samantha, disappeared almost five and half years ago. Every night she would put on her apron and prepare one of her specialties—meatloaf or a casserole—in an attempt to make it feel as if their family wasn't falling apart. She would sit at the kitchen table

and read a magazine or clip coupons while she waited for the oven timer to go off. After the third time he found his mom sitting at the table, staring into space, while the timer buzzed and a casserole burned to a crisp in the oven ten feet away from her, Mulder learned to listen for the buzzer. But one night, he made the mistake of taking a shower before it went off. By the time he made it to the kitchen, the smoke alarm was blaring and a veil of black smoke had filled the kitchen. His mom sat in the midst of it all, her cheeks smudged with smoke.

Mulder swallowed hard and pushed away the memory. "Are we going inside or what?"

"I guess." Gimble took out his keys and started unlocking the five deadbolts on the door.

Mulder followed him inside, but he stopped cold just past the front hallway. It opened up into what Mulder assumed was a supposed to be the living room, but he wasn't sure because every square inch of the space—except for a sofa, a recliner, and a small patch of shag carpet in the center—was covered with junk.

No wonder Gimble hadn't invited him over before. Most people would've taken off the moment they walked in, but Mulder found it oddly fascinating.

"The Major saves everything." Gimble walked over to the television set and picked up a two-way radio sitting on top. He pressed the button on the side and spoke into it. "It's me. I'm home."

Static crackled through the speaker, followed by a man's gravely voice. "This is a secure line. Code words?"

Gimble rolled his eyes. "Eternal champion."

"Meet me at the extraction point at 1600."

"He means four o'clock," Gimble explained to Mulder before returning the two-way radio to its original location on top of the TV set. "Sorry about all that. If I don't 'report in' when I get home, the Major gets extreme."

Mulder wanted to know more, like what the eternal champion stuff was about, but Gimble sounded embarrassed. No big deal. Mulder wanted to check out everything in the crazy living room, anyway. A row of bookshelves held dozens of small cardboard boxes with masking tape labels, numbered VHS tapes, two shortwave radios, some kind of handheld transceiver or CB, a sextant, bowls of rocks, and dozens of boxes of cream-filled snack cakes. Mulder picked up a gray rock the size of his fist, examined it, and tossed it in his hand like a baseball. Nothing notable about it, as far as he could tell.

He moved on to the books, scanning the titles in some of the stacks: *The Encyclopedia of Unexplained Phenomenon*, *Breaking the Crop Circle Code*, *Evolution and the Human Brain*, *The Truth About Abraham Lincoln's Assassination*, *Secrets of the Solar System*, and *Applied Astrophysics*. There were a few titles Fox recognized—like *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, 1984*, and *The Martian Chronicles*—and at least half a dozen paperback copies of a book Mulder had never heard of called *Stormbringer*. Based on the long-haired albino warrior on the cover, it was probably a fantasy novel.

The room was packed, but Mulder realized the stuff was actually organized. Towers of newspapers and magazines were stacked against the walls according to publication and year, and a quick glance at other book stacks revealed that the texts were sorted by category, like physics, space exploration, natural disasters, American presidents, and . . . aliens?

But what interested Mulder more than anything else in the room were the walls. Every inch of wallpaper was covered with newspaper clippings; maps marked with colored pushpins, connected by pieces of yellow string; and photos of what resembled crop circles and UFOs.

"What *is* all this?" Mulder stared at the wall, transfixed.

"The Major is always tracking something—natural disasters, meteors, unusual weather patterns, short wave radio transmissions. You name it." Gimble's cheeks turned red and he looked away. "Let's head to my room before

the Major comes up from the basement. That's where he keeps his files."

"What kind of files?" Mulder genuinely wanted to know, but Gimble ignored the question and led him through the kitchen to a back staircase. Mulder pretended he didn't notice the bicycle lock wrapped around the refrigerator doors.

Gimble's bedroom was at the top of the steps.

"This is it," his friend said proudly as he opened the door.

When Mulder walked in, his first thought was how much Gimble's bedroom reminded him of Phoebe's. Books overflowed on the shelves and a miniature model of the *Star Trek Enterprise* hung above a small desk. Handwritten lists and charts were taped on a wall next to a *Star Wars* movie poster that still had fold marks on it.

Another poster covered the back of Gimble's door—Farrah Fawcett, wearing the red bathing suit that sent every girl at school to the mall to buy a red one-piece. Mulder had the same poster on his bedroom wall back home.

He pointed to Farrah. "Now I know why we get along."

"You think she's a Trekkie?" Gimble asked hopefully.

"Doubt it." Fox took a closer look at the miniature *Enterprise*. The model was meticulously hand-painted just like Phoebe's, though Gimble had added a white G on the back of his ship.

Gimble sighed, still checking out Farrah. "You're probably right. Nobody is perfect."

*Farrah Fawcett is pretty close.*

"Wait 'til you see this." Gimble rushed to his nightstand and opened the drawer. He turned around slowly with one hand behind his back, and then made a dramatic show of revealing what he was holding.

A pamphlet. "It's an original zine from Lord Manhammer."

Mulder shrugged. "Am I supposed to know who that is?"

"Have I taught you *nothing* in the past three months? Lord Manhammer . . . the king of D and D?"

"Dungeons and Dragons?" Mulder asked. Most of what he knew about the role-playing game he'd learned from listening to Gimble talk about it. Even Gimble's nickname—which everyone, including the teachers called him—came straight out of the game.

"There's only one D and D."

"Not true," Mulder said. "There's drunk and disorderly and deuterium deuterium."

"How could I forget deuterium deuterium?" Gimble groaned with an exaggerated head smack. "When most people hear 'D and D,' their minds *definitely* go straight to nuclear fusion." He held up the pamphlet, undeterred. "This is a copy of *Lord Manhammer's Underground EP Guide*. It outlines Manhammer's strategy for accumulating experience points. He only printed four hundred copies, and I have one of them."

"Can I take a look?" Mulder asked. Gimble was his only real friend in DC. The least he could do was fake a little interest in what seemed like his prize possession.

Gimble handed him the newsprint pamphlet. "Be careful. The paper isn't thick."

Mulder took it and thumbed through the pages. Lots of references to *armor class* and *adventure goals*. Serious geek stuff. Phoebe would love it.

"Interesting, huh?" Gimble craned his neck to see which page Mulder was reading. "We have an empty spot in our party."

"D and D isn't really my thing. I played once, and I sucked." Mulder handed him back the pamphlet.

"At least give it some thought. Our dungeon master, Theo, likes new blood and you've got me. I'm the best

teacher around.”

“I’ll think about it.” *Then I’ll say no.*

Gimble returned Lord Manhammer’s sacred text to the nightstand. “Wanna take a look at my *Star Trek* cards before we check out the telescope? It’ll give you something to talk about if you get stuck meeting him later—which you probably will—since he watches *Project UFO* in the living room, every day at four.”

“The show about aliens?” Mulder had watched a few episodes with Phoebe.

“More like the people who believe in them.”

“I didn’t know it was on every day.”

“It’s not,” Gimble said. “We have it on VHS. The Major tapes the episodes and watches one every day at four, even on Christmas Day. He usually makes me watch it with him.”

Mulder tried to imagine his dad videotaping a show for them to watch together. But it was too hard, because it would never happen.

“It’s actually a decent show if you want to watch a little,” Gimble offered. “Some of the UFO footage looks real.”

“Maybe it is,” Fox offered. “NASA’s Ames Research Center still hasn’t found a way to explain the WOW signal!”

“Funny.” Gimble flicked his head to the side to get the hair out of his eyes. “Don’t say anything like that around the Major. He’s crazy enough without any encouragement.”

“Has he always been like that?”

“No. It started right after my mom died.” Gimble stared at a stain on the carpet. “She lost control of her car and went off the side of a bridge. The Major couldn’t handle it. He started acting crazy—talking about government conspiracies and collateral damage. Someone on the base must have found out about it because he was discharged right after that.”

“Sorry, man. I didn’t know.”

Gimble shrugged. “Nobody does. It’s the kind of thing you keep to yourself.”

Mulder knew how it felt to keep secrets about your life. He hadn’t told Gimble about his sister—or even mentioned that he had one. Transferring to a new school for his senior year gave Mulder a chance to walk through the halls with people who didn’t know the story that plagued him back home.

When Samantha disappeared, everyone on the island heard the same version of events. One minute his sister was watching television in the living room with Mulder . . . and the next minute she was gone. Mulder was there the whole time, so why couldn’t he remember anything? That was the first question people asked. Overnight, Fox Mulder became the poor kid who froze when his little sister needed him.

The police and the FBI never recovered any evidence to explain Samantha’s disappearance. Mulder believed she had been kidnapped, but no one took him seriously. Why should they when Mulder’s father refused to acknowledge the possibility? Instead, Bill Mulder sent his son to a shrink. Mulder’s parents never used the word *kidnapped*, at least not around him. They saved it for the never-ending arguments they had in their bedroom at night, when they thought he was asleep. But Mulder rarely slept. He spent his nights laying awake, making a silent vow. If the authorities refused to figure out what happened to his sister, Mulder would do it himself.

“Mulder? You okay?” Gimble was waving his hand in front of Mulder’s face.

“Yeah. Sorry. I didn’t sleep much last night.” He fake-yawned.

"Gary? Are you coming down?" the Major called from downstairs. "It's almost 1600."

"I'll be down in a minute," Gimble yelled, red-faced.

"Gary?" Mulder grinned. "That's your real name?"

"No one calls me that except my father. Gimble is my true name. And I don't make fun of your name, *Fox*."

"Hey, I'm not judging." Mulder held up his hands in surrender. "But it's better than Lord Manhammer."

When they reached the staircase, the Major was stationed at the bottom staring up at them. He had the tired look of a man who had fought too many battles. Deep lines were etched into his face, and his standard military-style buzz cut was uneven, as if it had been trimmed by a shaky hand. The Major was dressed in freshly ironed olive-green pants and a matching button-down shirt, or maybe it was a jacket. It hung from his tall frame, too tight in some places and too loose in others. It looked like a real military uniform—complete with a blue Air Force patch sewn above one pocket and Winchester, his last name, sewn above the other pocket. There were other patches too, stars and a fancy crest with gold wings on the sides.

Gimble leaned toward Mulder and whispered, "Whatever you do, just don't tell him that your dad works for the government."

"Why not?" Fox glanced at the intimidating man staring up at him.

"You don't want to know."

## Winchester Residence

4:18 PM

The Major extended his hand before Mulder made it down the steps. "Major William Wyatt Winchester, United States Air Force, 127th Reconnaissance Squadron."

Mulder stuck out his sweaty palm. "Fox Mulder. Gim—I mean, Gary's friend from school."

The Major clasped his hand in a death grip and shook it. "Gary tells me you have security clearance?"

*Security clearance? Really?*

Mulder's dad tossed around the term all the time in an attempt to make his boring job at the State Department sound interesting. He wasn't sure the Major had enough clearance to get into his own bank account.

Gimble did a facepalm, Mulder's cue to play along. "Of course, sir."

The Major nodded and headed for the living room, motioning for the boys to follow him. "Glad to hear it. I can never be too careful. My work is highly classified, and the government would kill to get their hands on it." He gestured at the sofa and turned on the TV set and the VHS player. "Have a seat."

"If you don't mind me asking, what's *your* clearance level?" Mulder asked. After seeing the house, he was curious.

Gimble's eyes bugged out and he mouthed, *What the hell?*

The Major laughed. "This is a black op, son, and it's my operation. Clearance doesn't get much higher clearance than that. Every move I make is classified." He tapped on an AM radio on the shelf above the VHS player. "All of my communications are encrypted and information is supplied on a need-to-know basis."

"Which means no one knows anything," Gimble said under his breath.

"How many people are in your unit?"

*And are they real?*

If the Major knew that he was humoring him, he didn't let on. "I keep my unit small—three people, including myself. The members of my unit are true patriots, willing to risk their lives to expose a government conspiracy of epic proportions."

"I'm going to show Mulder the telescope," Gimble said.

"You aren't going to watch the transmission?" the Major asked.

"I'll watch *Project UFO* with you tomorrow. Mulder wants to see the telescope. He's into space stuff."

"We can check it out after the episode," Mulder offered, sitting on the shag carpet. "I don't mind."

The Major nodded his approval. "That's what I like to hear."

"Can we just watch the show and get it over with?" Gimble asked.

The Major crossed his arms. "I don't think I heard you correctly."

Gimble stood and saluted his father. "Can we just watch the show now, *sir?*"

As if on cue, the opening sequence filled the TV screen and the Major sat down in his recliner. Mulder was sucked in the moment the opening montage started. Diagrams of schematics of flying saucers straight out of a sci-fi novel filled the screen, while a narrator explained that Ezekiel "saw the wheel"—a UFO—and other people have seen them, too. So the US Air Force created a team to investigate.

"Of course they chose *our* boys," the Major said, touching the US Air Force patch on his chest. "But they never wanted them to actually find anything."

The episode dramatized a scout leader's encounter with a UFO, outside of a small Mississippi town. "I saw

a flash of light in the sky, and I went to check it out.”

A fake UFO that looked like a spaceship in a comic book zapped the guy with lasers that left his arm covered in burns.

“It was probably swamp gas playing tricks on the guy, like they said at the beginning,” Gimble said.

“That’s what the government wants you to believe.” The Major was glued to the television, and Mulder couldn’t blame him.

On screen, the scout leader dragged a hand over his face. “I never should’ve gotten close to their ship.”

“Whose ship?” one of the Air Force investigators asked.

Mulder knew what was coming.

After a dramatic pause, the scout leader finally spoke. “Aliens.”

The Major said the word along with him.

“I bet he burned himself while he was building a campfire,” Gimble said. “And he didn’t want to lose his job.”

“Being a scout leader isn’t really a job,” Mulder pointed out. “They don’t get paid.”

“Gary is a skeptic.” The Major rose from his chair and turned off the VHS player. “He doesn’t know the truth.”

“I’m not a skeptic.” Gimble leaned forward and dropped his head in his hands, exasperated. “Do you think President Carter would let anyone put a show like that on the air if aliens really existed?”

The Major spun around. “By telling everyone that aliens and UFOs exist, the government is proving they don’t.”

Mulder nodded. The argument made a certain kind of sense. People expected the government to keep secrets. “Your dad has a point.”

“You don’t actually believe any of this alien stuff, do you?” Gimble gave Fox an incredulous look.

“Anything is possible. It wouldn’t be the first time the government lied. Look what happened with Watergate.” The first time Mulder heard about the Watergate scandal on the news, it felt like the moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy pulled back the curtain on the wizard.

Mulder had witnessed firsthand how easily people accepted the explanations they were given. After his sister vanished, the authorities had conducted a massive search. When it turned up nothing, they decided Samantha’s disappearance was an isolated incident—and overnight everyone on the island did, too. Except Mulder.

The Major snorted. “Watergate will look like a bunch of children arguing on the playground compared to what our so-called government is involved in this time. They think they’re in control, but they aren’t the architects behind the design.”

Gimble blew out a loud breath and slumped against the sofa. He seemed to have heard this before.

The Major rushed over to the map. “The world is in chaos. War, famine.” He tapped an article taped on the map. “And crime. But chaos can’t exist without law.”

Chaos can’t exist without *order* was probably what the Major meant, but Mulder wasn’t about to correct him. “Mind if I take a look?”

The Major stood taller. “Go ahead, son.”

Mulder moved closer to the gigantic map of the Washington, DC, metro area taped to the wall. Colored pushpins marked specific locations, and the Major had drawn a web of lines between them—the waterfront in southwest DC; a condo complex in Annapolis, Maryland; a stretch of forest in Craiger, Maryland. Articles and grainy newspaper photos were taped next to each pin. A mug shot of a woman with mascara and blood smeared down

her face, above a headline ripped from the *Washington Post*, PROSTITUTE FOUND DEAD IN WATERFRONT DUMPSTER. Under the Annapolis pushpin, the Major had saved a longer article with the headline, FATAL OVERDOSE EXPOSES ANNAPOLIS DOCTOR'S REAL PROFESSION. The Major had circled the phrase "opiate-dealing physician discovered dead" in the article. Mulder's gaze followed the black line from the Annapolis pin to the Craiger pin, where the Major had taped a newspaper clipping about a man who was killed in the woods by wild animals.

"What is all this?" Mulder asked, without taking his eyes off the map.

"You don't want to hear about it," Gimble said from his spot on the sofa.

"Actually, I do."

The Major glanced around the room before he answered. "I'm tracking murders in the metro area."

"But it says the doctor overdosed."

The Major frowned. "Do you believe everything you read, Mulder?"

*Of course not.*

"There's only one book you need." The Major sorted through a stack of books under the map and slid a thin green paperback from the middle.

"Tell me when it's over," Gimble called out from the other room.

The Major handed the book to Mulder. On the cover, a warrior held a black sword above his head below the title—*Stormbringer*. It was the same book he had seen multiple copies of around the living room.

"Moorcock figured out what was happening before the rest of us," the Major said, tapping on the author Michael Moorcock's name. "He realized mankind had upset the cosmic balance and thrown the world into chaos."

Fox wasn't sure what an old fantasy novel had to do with it, but the Major was right about one thing. The world was out of control. People were killing each other in wars and on the streets, with drugs and violence.

"I have proof," the Major continued. "I was tracking deaths in the DC metropolitan area, and I discovered a pattern. These are not random murders and accidents, like the press reported." The Major gestured at the map. "These people were all murdered, and their deaths are connected."

"How do you figure? The guy in Virginia killed himself." Mulder pointed out a second time that the doctor ODed. He moved closer to the map. Maybe he had missed something. "How are their deaths connected? Did the victims know each other?" He felt guilty for encouraging the Major's delusions, but he wanted to hear the Major's theory.

"No. But they did have one important thing in common."

"Dad!" Gimble bolted off the sofa. It was the first time Fox had ever heard Gimble refer to his father as anything other than the Major. "Mulder doesn't need to hear your theory. We talked about this."

"Your friend wants to know the truth, Gary. He doesn't want to live in the dark like *you* do."

Mulder felt the tension ratchet up in the room. Not good. It reminded him of the heated interactions he had with his father. Mulder didn't want to put Gimble in that position, but if he didn't hear the Major out now, it might cause more drama.

"It's okay." Mulder gave Gimble a bored look, as if he was throwing the Major a bone.

Gimble nodded, giving him the go-ahead.

"What did the victims have in common?" Mulder asked.

After a long, uncomfortable silence, the Major cleared his throat. "All four of them were abducted by aliens."

Mulder almost laughed, but the look on the Major's face made it clear that the man was serious.

"The clues are here if you know what to look for," the Major added. "I can show you."

"He has to get home," Gimble said, signaling Mulder.

"Yeah. My dad is probably back from work by now."

"What about the telescope?" the Major asked.

"I'll check it out next time."

"We'll talk more then." The Major turned suddenly and ducked into the kitchen.

"I'm sorry," Gimble whispered. "I should've known he would go all *Close Encounters* on you. You'd better go before he comes back and tells you his theory about why Abraham Lincoln was assassinated."

Mulder was halfway to the door when the Major returned, carrying a cereal box.

"Wait." He reached into the box and tossed a few handfuls of sugar-coated cornflakes on the floor. "I have something for you."

"That's okay, sir. I had a big lunch."

For a moment, the Major seemed confused, but he shook it off. He reached into the box again and pulled out a book—a green paperback exactly like the one tucked under his arm. "Take this." He offered it to Mulder.

"I wouldn't want to take one of your books."

"Just take it," Gimble said in a low voice, heading for the front door. "He probably has fifty or sixty copies in here."

The Major shoved the book into Fox's hand. "There are no coincidences. You and Gary meeting, and him bringing you here today, it was all part of a bigger plan, and we are not the architects of this one either. *Stormbringer* has answers. Moorcock understood *their* ways."

Mulder knew he was referring to aliens again. He held up the copy of *Stormbringer* as Gimble pushed him toward the door. "Thanks, sir. I'll read it."

"Or burn it," Gimble muttered under his breath, as Mulder slipped past him to leave.

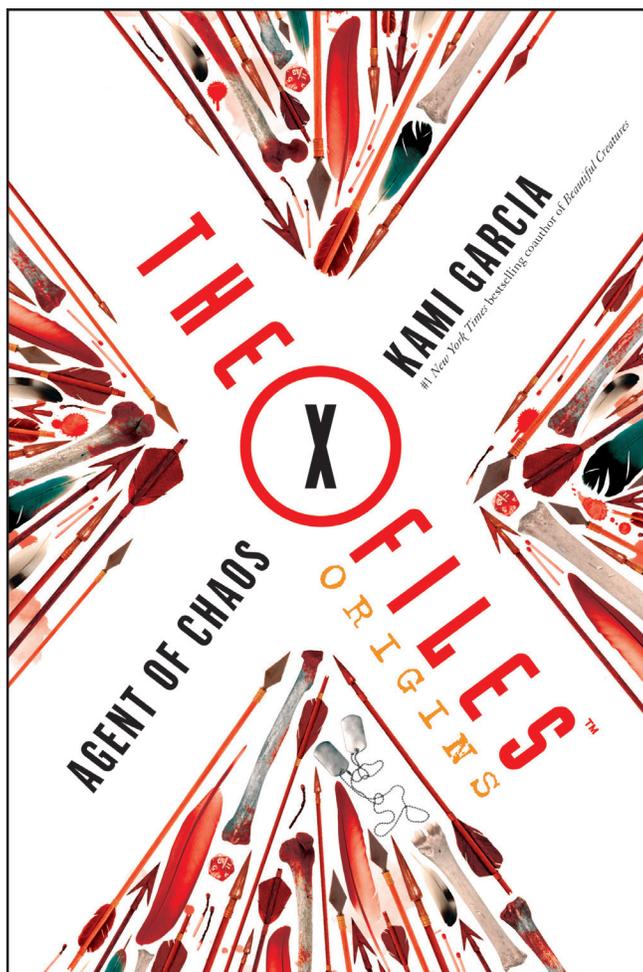
"Keep your eyes open, Fox Mulder," the Major called after him.

Before Gimble shut the door, Fox heard the Major say one last thing. "The truth is out there."

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