



Monsters of the Week: The Complete Critical Companion to The X-Files

Zack Handlen , Todd VanDerWerff , Patrick Leger (Illustrations) , Chris Carter (Foreward)

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In 1993, Fox debuted a strange new television show called The X-Files. Little did anyone suspect that the series would become one of the network's biggest hits—and change the landscape of television in the process. Now, on the occasion of the show's 25th anniversary, TV critics Zack Handlen and Todd VanDerWerff unpack exactly what made this haunting show so groundbreaking. Witty and insightful reviews of every episode of the series, revised and updated from the authors' popular A.V. Club recaps, leave no mystery unsolved and no monster unexplained. This crucial collection even includes exclusive interviews with some of the stars and screenwriters, as well as an original foreword by X-Files creator and showrunner Chris Carter. This complete critical companion is the book about The X-Files, the definitive guide whether you're a lifelong viewer wanting to relive memories of watching the show when it first aired or a new fan uncovering the conspiracy for the first time.

Monsters of the Week: The Complete Critical Companion to The X-Files Details

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Author : Zack Handlen , Todd VanDerWerff , Patrick Leger (Illustrations) , Chris Carter (Foreward)

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From Reader Review Monsters of the Week: The Complete Critical Companion to The X-Files for online ebook

Robert Rich says

I love The X-Files. It scared me to death as a kid, provided a nice couple of summers of bonding with my mom as an adult as we re-watched it, and filled in for my years of missing Lost when they decided to bring it back in 2016. So when Kumail Nanjiani tweeted about a book full of reviews of every episode and movie ever, I was sold.

The result is a nice collection of the history of the show, with some pretty good reviewing. Just like with the episodes of the show itself, there are flaws in this collection as well. Namely, for the authors to say they are huge fans of the show, there is a LOT of “this episode is terrible” commentary abounding. Sure, plenty episodes didn’t work, but come on guys. There’s also several reviews that hinge on “this plot is just not realistic” theses, which again, is ludicrous considering the show is ostensibly about ALIENS AND MONSTERS. Finally, the authors also find themselves seemingly forced to point out every sexist, insensitive, and borderline racist comment and story that happened during the show’s run, which definitely exist, but get bogged down in the argument about whether or not it’s okay for them to have happened because of the time period when they were written, but rather than take that approach, the authors simply point these instances out to make sure the book has “woke” cred and move on.

Despite all that, you do get the sense the authors were and are fans of the show, and the book is a labor of love. Maybe it’s fitting that the result is something that is both beautiful and flawed, just like The X-Files itself.

Lisa Ks Book Reviews says

Excellent, detailed information on The X-Files. My sister is a huge fan of the show, but I taught here some new things that I learned from this book! MONSTERS OF THE WEEK will thrill X-File fans!

Melinda M says

Monsters of the Week: The Complete Critical Companion to The X-Files by Zack Handlen reviews every episode of the tv series. It is detailed and witty. My only complaint is that they look at the episodes thru a 2018 eye using the PC and cultural of the day instead of viewing thru the lens of the time it was made. As a person who loves history, I have found it to be a common problem. This does not take away from the fact that this is a great book to have if you like the X-Files or have just found the X-Files to find out more about the series. It also was interesting to find out details about the show. This book tells about the monsters and gives details that will make seeing the episode again interesting.

I received a copy thru a Goodreads Giveaway.

Kelly says

Your very own aftershow in a Kindle!

(Full disclosure: I received a free e-ARC for review through NetGalley/Edelweiss.)

"I went back, as I often do, to read some contemporaneous reviews of 'Pilot' (S1E1) from TV critics, and what struck me was how many of them insisted that UFOs were 'played out' as the subject matter for TV series. Even the positive ones - and there were many - were worried about *The X-Files* becoming just another UFO series."

- Todd, "Things That Go Bump"

I feel kind of silly reviewing a book I haven't read cover-to-cover but, since I plan on devouring *Monsters of the Week: The Complete Critical Companion to The X-Files* as part of an upcoming X-Files rewatch, it will likely be months before I actually finish it. So here goes nothing.

Monsters of the Week is a collection of the AV Club's X-Files recaps - originally published well after the original airing of the show - revised and updated for modern viewers, and with all the spoilery bits removed so that newbies can enjoy it too.

What you won't find here: point-by-point episode recaps. (If you're anything like me, you already purchased those books, in print form, as they were released in the late '90s and early aughts, well before e-readers were a thing.)

Instead, you'll find critical analyses and reviews of each episode, as well as interviews with the actors and writers. Again, I've only read a selection of the essays, but overall they seem insightful and engaging, and certainly amped up my excitement to rewatch the show. I guess my only complaint so far is that I wish each essay was a little longer, but at 480 pages that might be a little unreasonable. (Or not, because X-Philes gonna phile.)

Based on some other reviews - either praising or criticizing the authors' social justice bent - I have high hopes for this compendium.

[http://www.easyvegan.info/2018/10/26/...](http://www.easyvegan.info/2018/10/26/)

Robert Morganbesser says

Terrible

I'm of the belief that if one is going to critique anything, they should at least like it. One can do this without being slavishly positive about it (like some Star Trek fans who believe all Star Trek is good. I'm a fan and I don't believe that), but the authors of this book are so hard on the X-Files, as to make me believe they hated it. There's a lot of missing information - no synopses, cast listings, just page after page of what seemed to me is negative criticism. A real downer of a book that I wish I hadn't purchased.

Audrey Adamson says

I mostly enjoyed Monsters of the Week. I love the X-Files and it was great fun reliving the series. The reviews are honest and many times spot on about the issues with each episode. I do admit there are times when I absolutely did not agree with their assessment (Dreamland should just have been one part? As if!) but that was to be expected.

I dropped a star for two reasons. The first was because of the unevenness of the nerdy facts and information. I actually doubted one of the reviewers true fandom. (How had he not seen From Outer Space before doing it for a review! A travesty!). And the reviewers seemed to know a lot of info about what was going on behind the scenes and culturally but then left some questions unanswered (If Duchovny wanted to leave so badly and sue the company, then why did he come back to direct in Season 9?) I was also surprised that they left out Supernatural from the discussion at all. It both figurately and literally had X-Files to thank for its success.

The second biggest problem is that they reviewed everything through the 2018 Social Justice lens (only Seasons 10 & 11 should be treated to this kind of scrutiny; it was made in that time frame). While I understand pointing out what did not age well, the obsession with being PC takes away from some of the accomplishments. Yes, white men ran it. This was the '90s. Were cultures sometimes portrayed stereotypically? Yes, but at the same time, the myths and legends of these cultures were completely ignored by network tv. Often groundbreaking isn't always done right, but you need those to get to the truthful portrayal. The authors even make the "apology" of being two white guys writing the book trying to be self-aware. But a dozen pages later, they make a big deal of two episodes to be the first written by a woman and then go on to tell you how much they sucked.

I love The X-Files and I know its strengths and weaknesses. I loved reading about the episodes and learning new tidbits. I did not enjoy the tone about being PC when the two men did not understand what they are talking about. (Criminal Minds is bad because it has an unbalanced portrayal of violence against women? Please tell that to the real life serial killers whose biggest pool are the vulnerable especially women!) I have the desire to read any of their other work, but I do thank them for a great nostalgic trip through a show I love.

I received an ARC from the publisher; all opinions are my own.

Todd Vanderwerff says

Propriety keeps me from writing a review of this, but I DID read it three times in 2018 (very closely!), so I want to make sure it gets added to my woefully-behind "reading challenge."

Lindsey says

Review to come.

Bill says

Compiles and reworks the episode recaps Handlen and VanDerWerff did for the AV Club, covering the

original nine seasons, both movies, and the two revival seasons. Mixed in with the recaps are interviews with Chris Carter, many of the show writers/directors, and a few of the actors (sadly not Anderson or Duchovny).

Worth reading if you're a fan of the show, but also if you're new to the show and want to read along. I might quibble with some of their criticisms but in general I think they offer good insight and also tie together some of the larger themes within the show, as well as making as much sense of the mythology as anyone is capable of. They've even made me reconsider the quality of season 8.

Chris Worthy says

(Full disclosure: I haven't completely finished this, but that's not how this book works. It's a compendium of sorts. Enjoy bits at a time.) The X-Files is my all-time favorite show, so there was really no doubt that I was going to love this. It is wonderfully nostalgic, but doesn't cut corners on calling out the show (and its creator and writers) for some of its obvious problems (rape in one form or another as a recurring theme, for one). If you've stuck around for the 25 years of highest highs and lowest lows, I think you will enjoy coming back to this book time and again. The illustrations leading into each chapter are really superb! (I was able to read an advance copy through Netgalley. This book publishes Oct. 16, 2018.)

Schizanthus says

The first X-Files episode I clearly remember watching was *Squeeze*. I was wedged into a beanbag on the floor of a darkened lounge room. Behind me was an open door leading to the kitchen which, like the rest of the house, was dark and Eugene Tooms creeped me out enough that several times he had me looking over my shoulder. My love of the weird and the wonderful and all things spooky began that night and I've been an X-Phile ever since, collecting episodes on VHS and then DVD and an assortment of books and memorabilia.

As soon as I saw *Monsters of the Week* I knew I had to have it. I loved the picture of Mulder and Scully on the cover and the title called to me. I suspected immediately that reading this book would lead to an overwhelming urge to binge watch the entire series (again!) but the reason why I need to surprised me. I'd expected to binge read this book and then slowly reread it as I reread each episode but in my rush to get my hands on this book I somehow missed the *critical* part of the subtitle.

There was always going to be some disagreement between myself and the authors; you can't be this invested in a series for so long and not have strong opinions about it. While the writers shredded some episodes that I count amongst my favourites, most of their comments were a fair balance of the good, the bad and the creepy. However, sometimes the criticism was so critical that it had me wondering at times if this pair even liked *The X-Files*. My stubborn has kicked in so my upcoming binge will now be about confirming to myself that the episodes I always loved are still worthy of my adoration.

I adored Patrick Leger's cover artwork and the illustrations accompanying each section of the book. There

are several of these that I'd love to have framed. I do appreciate how much time and effort has gone into this book. Besides watching or rewatching 11 series of TV and two movies between them, Zack Handlen and Todd VanDerWerff have tackled all of the monsters and mythology in a fair amount of detail; ranging from half a page to over three pages of commentary per episode. The authors also really like footnotes; most pages have several, ranging from really interesting extra information to seemingly random.

As a huge fan I wanted this read to feel as passionate about the series as I am and it was to a point. There were some quotes I **loved**:

Mulder's defining trait is his willingness to charge headlong into danger if he thinks he will find the answers he seeks, and Scully's defining trait is her willingness to ultimately trust her partner, even when she doesn't *believe* him.

The X-Files is a cop show, yes, but it's also one in which you could wake up in a safe, standard reality, then turn the wrong corner and end up becoming a thing that goes bump in the night. No one is safe, and any given door could lead to madness.

this isn't a show about aliens as much as it is about our need to believe in something, lest the night become too dark and terrifying. There's so much darkness in the night sky, but there are also so many stars. And maybe one of them is looking back at us.

If Deep Throat was a cheat code to the quest for the truth, X is a walkthrough written by somebody who doesn't want to share his secrets, doesn't like you, and might not even be playing the same game.

While I loved most of their take on the first few seasons I found the book became a bit of a slog to get through towards the end as it became more focused on the negative when discussing the later seasons:

The mythology episodes would come to feel more and more poorly motivated, and eventually, you'd start to wonder how Mulder could believe in *any* of this bullshit.

you won't just be wondering why you decided to watch this episode; you'll be wondering why you decided to watch a show that could produce an episode this bad at all.

Other people die, but those deaths don't have any weight, and the point the episode tries to make is too unwelcome and backward to really care about.

Like nearly everything else in the episode, there's no real joke here, just a joke-shaped hole where comedy could have theoretically existed.

The X-Files has been reheating its leftovers for several seasons now

The X-Files is frantically trying to find a new reason to justify its own existence as it circles the drain.

But then I'd find sentences like these and know they understood after all:

we wouldn't still be talking about the series if it didn't hit more than it missed.

“The Sixth Extinction,” parts one and two, are ridiculous television, but dammit, they’re *our*

ridiculous television.

I acknowledge that had I written this book most reviewers would be commenting on how annoying it was to keep reading, “This is one of my favourite episodes!” almost every time they turned the page. It was a really nice trip down memory lane and it reminded me of so many episodes that shocked, horrified, intrigued and amazed me. I’d forgotten or maybe never realised that the Lone Gunmen made their appearance before Skinner did. I did keep waiting for the commentary about how each time Mulder pulls his gun on someone he loses it but sadly it never happened.

I had some objections when criticisms were made based on what is or isn’t acceptable today without consideration for the time that the majority of this series was made, when we thought computers were going to do some really scary things once the clock struck midnight at the end of 1999. In particular the embarrassment the writers supposedly felt by being two white men critiquing a TV show written predominantly by white men irked me. By focusing so much on the gender, racial and cultural inequalities of the show they missed the obvious; Scully, being such a strong lead, inspired so many women to study and go on to work in STEM.

If you’re not already a fan you probably won’t pick this book up anyway but if you are just beginning your journey to find the truth out there I’d definitely recommend watching each episode prior to reading the commentary about them to avoid spoilers.

Thank you so much to NetGalley and Abrams Press for the opportunity to read this book.

Samantha Nowatzke says

Fun to rehash every episode of the X-files in this form. I don't agree with all of the authors thoughts on it but it's just that, their thoughts & it was fun to read as a super-fan.

Andrew Ford says

An incredible overview of the series that inspired me to revisit dozens of episodes. Effectively places this show on the level of its forbears such as The Twilight Zone and The Outer Limits, which is where it belongs.
