

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE™

A novel by **Les Martin**

Based on the television series

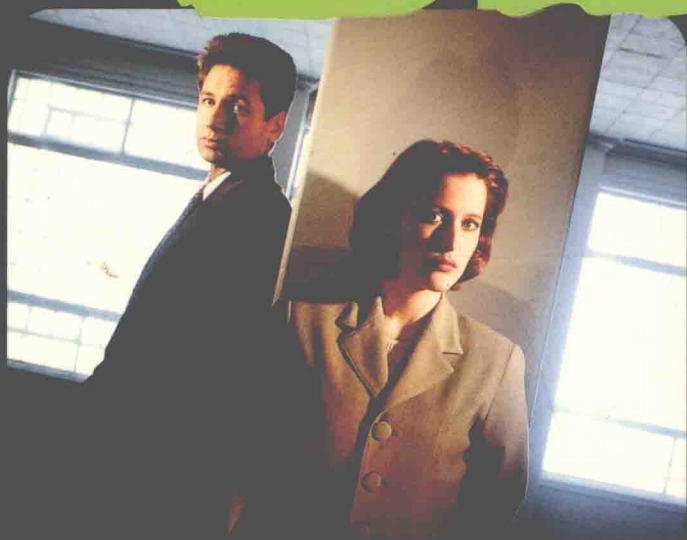
THE X FILES™

created by **Chris Carter**

Based on the teleplay written

by **Glen Morgan** and

James Wong



#9 E.B.E.

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 **HarperTrophy**
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To Tamar,
the gray ghost

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Dangerous Cargo

The driver heard a crash.

He shined his flashlight on the rear of the truck and saw that the panel of the cargo compartment was open.

"I was sure I fastened that —" His breath caught in his throat.

In the flashlight beam was a pair of eyes.

Yellow eyes.

Inhuman eyes.

The driver dropped the flashlight.

He aimed his gun and fired. Again and again and again.

Other X-Files books

#1 X Marks the Spot

#2 Darkness Falls

#3 Tiger, Tiger

#4 Squeeze

#5 Humbug

#6 Shapes

#7 Fear

#8 Voltage

Chapter ONE

Stars filled the night sky over Iraq. They were dazzling as diamonds above the dark desert. There were no clouds or moon or haze of pollution to blur their brilliance. The drifting smoke from oil fires in nearby Kuwait was history. The Gulf War that had set the region ablaze had ended years ago. Only one thing disturbed the peaceful scene—the vapor trail of a jet plane streaking across the sky.

The plane was a Tupelov TV-22 “Blinder” attack jet—one of Russia’s most advanced fighters, given to Iraq before the Gulf War. It had been one of the few to survive the crushing defeat at the hands of America and her allies.

Its pilot could thank his lucky stars that he had survived as well. Sadoun Janadi had still been in training when the war ended. By the time he had won his wings, the sky was safe again. He could fly patrols with little worry of attack. He could relax behind his air mask and enjoy the beauty of the night.

At heart, Janadi was a poet. He gazed at the stars, some shining alone, others in thick clusters.

He tried to think of words to capture their splendor, as Arab poets had for thousands of years.

Suddenly Janadi stopped being a poet.

He was all fighter pilot, with a job to do.

His job was to protect Iraq from air intruders. He spotted one now.

It was still far away, as small as the stars around it. But it was swiftly getting bigger and brighter. Seconds later he could make out its shape, like a cigar. Its lights were strobing different colors, red, green, and blue.

Janadi looked at his radar screen to confirm his sighting.

The screen showed nothing.

Janadi shot a look at the object again.

It was moving across the sky in a razor-sharp straight line. As Janadi watched, it stopped and hung motionless. But its lights continued their strobing.

Janadi's brow furrowed. His radar must be on the blink. He wasn't surprised. The air force was short of parts, not to mention mechanics. He'd have to depend on his eyes.

He squinted at the object. He was trained to identify every known kind of aircraft, both hostile and friendly. But this one was new to him.

He snapped on his radio and contacted his home base.

"Al-Hadithi here," a voice answered in Arabic.

Good, Janadi thought. He knew Al-Hadithi. A very reliable radar technician. Not like some of the new ones, pressed into service to replace those killed in the war.

"Base, this is Patrol Six," Janadi said. "Request ID on object twenty-five miles from my position bearing three-forty."

There was a pause.

Then, over crackling static, Al-Hadithi responded, "Negative on object. No sign of anything in that area. Are you sure your bearings are correct?"

Janadi rechecked his instruments.

"Absolutely correct," he said. "That is, if my instruments are working. Please take another radar reading."

Again there was a pause. Again Al-Hadithi reported, "Negative. No object sighted."

Janadi bit his lip. He never did trust Russian radar. He looked out his window again.

The object was gone.

"Hello, hello," Al-Hadithi said. "Do you still have visual contact with unknown object?"

"No. I have lost it," Janadi said. "But I am positive it was there a moment ago. I—"

That was as far as he got.

Blinding light exploded almost on top of his plane. A deafening *whoosh* drowned out the radio.

Janadi's heart seemed to stop. He sat frozen at his controls.

Suddenly the light and sound vanished.

Janadi realized he had been holding his breath. He was letting out a sigh of relief when he heard Al-Hadithi screaming over the radio, "Radar shows you are under attack! Objects swarming around you at high speed. Incredibly high speed. Take evasive action and go into attack mode."

Janadi needed no prompting. He was already zooming upward and zigzagging. His eyes narrowed as he peeled off into an attack on whatever was flying below.

He couldn't see it. But he had an electronic weapons guidance system to do his seeing for him. Its light began flashing.

"I'm locked in on target!" he announced over the radio.

"You are cleared to commence firing," Al-Hadithi told him.

Janadi pressed his right wing weapon release button. He watched a heat-seeking missile shoot from his plane.

Seconds later the sky was lit by a tremendous yellow-and-orange fireball.

"It's a hit!" Janadi exulted as he banked his craft up and away from the flames. "I got him."

“Good work,” Al-Hadithi told him. “Please return to base and give full report.”

Only then did Janadi realize that the night’s work was far from over. He had no idea whom or what he had hit. He wouldn’t have a clue until someone found the pieces below. He could only pray it turned out to be an enemy.

Janadi sighed. He braced himself for a long session of questions without answers back at the base. He could think of only one thing he had going for him. He couldn’t be blamed for a mistaken kill when nobody knew the victim.

“Wha—” mumbled Sergeant Eustace Miller. A loud bang woke him from a pleasant dream of home.

“Some kind of sonic boom,” Specialist First Class Horace Keller said from a nearby cot. His voice was groggy with sleep.

“Never heard no boom like that before,” Miller said. “We better take a look.”

“And you was just complaining today how dull it was around here,” Keller said as he pulled on a pair of fatigue pants.

Neither of the two American soldiers wasted time putting on their boots before they headed out of their hut. They belonged to NATO forces in Turkey keeping watch on the Iraqi border, in case

the Iraqis hadn't learned their lesson. This was the first sign of trouble since they had arrived four months earlier.

They stopped as soon as they were out the door. In the woods a few hundred feet away was the wreck of something burning.

"Looks like a crashed jet," Miller said.

"I'll get the fire extinguisher," said Keller.

"You know our orders. First we have to report it, without delay," said Miller. "Anyway, not much chance anything's still alive in it."

"Yeah," said Keller. "Besides, dollars to doughnuts the pilot ejected."

They went back into the hut. Their hut was primitive, but their radio was state-of-the-art. A touch of a button, and Miller was in contact with headquarters.

"Southern Crescent to Red Crescent," he said. "We got a downed aircraft at the edge of camp. Maybe one of ours."

The voice on the radio replied, "Southern Crescent, that's a negative. We have nothing in the sky at this time."

"Well, we got something burning here on the ground," Miller said. "Advise Medivac unit to be on the alert. They may have to handle injured personnel. We're checking out the wreck and the surrounding area now."

"Report immediately on your findings," the voice commanded.

"Yes, sir," Miller said, and turned off the set.

"I've got the extinguisher," said Keller.

"I'll take the first aid kit—in case we find anyone alive anywhere," said Miller.

Outside the hut, Miller stared up at the sky.

"What the devil is that?" he asked.

Above them a bright, strobing light flashed red, green, and blue.

"Maybe a shooting star," Keller guessed.

"Shooting stars don't just hang there like that," Miller said.

"Who knows?" said Keller with a shrug. "All kinds of weird things in this part of the world."

"Yeah," Miller agreed. "Anyway, we can't stand around digging the light show. We got orders to check out the wreck."

"Well, remember what they told us in special training," said Keller. "Expect the unexpected—and be ready for it."

"Right," said Miller, as they warily approached the wreck in the woods. "Except how can you be ready for something you can't even guess?"

Meanwhile, above them the light still hung, strobing a coded message no human could decipher.

Chapter TWO

A few nights later and half a world away, the stars shined bright over Tennessee. But the driver of the eighteen-wheeler roaring down Route 100 wasn't looking at them. His eyes were glued to the road stretching empty as far as he could see. Now and then he rubbed his eyes to keep them open and ran his hand along the two-day stubble on his cheek to keep himself alert.

He had been driving a long, long time, and the pills he had popped to keep awake were wearing off. He would have liked to stop for some shut-eye by the side of the road. But orders were orders, and his were to deliver his cargo without delay. He had his job because he knew how to take orders, whatever they were. And it might cost him more than his job if he didn't carry them out.

He read a road sign as he roared by it. REAGAN, TENNESSEE. 40 MILES.

Over a half-hour drive, he thought, even ignoring the speed limit. He turned up the volume on his AM radio to keep himself from nodding off. The blast of sound drowned out the boring conversations crackling over his CB receiver.

Loud applause thundered through the driver's cabin. A hearty voice announced, "From Opryland, it's the Grand Ole Opry on WSM radio 650. Brought to you by Goody's Headache Powder . . ."

"Come on, cut the talking," the driver said, his finger tapping impatiently on the wheel. "Start the music—I need a real good foot-stomper."

But suddenly the program faded into static.

"What the—?" The driver fiddled with the dial. Anger flushed his cheeks. He didn't like things going wrong. Not on this job.

At the same time he glanced at the seat beside him, his eyes like a nervous cat's. That space was called the shotgun seat. Right now it lived up to its name. A Mossberg 500 12-gauge pump shotgun with an assault grip rode beside him, in quick and easy reach.

The static would not go away. It rubbed against his brain like sandpaper. Grimacing, he gave up playing with the dial. He jabbed the radio off.

In its place, he heard the babble of voices coming over the CB.

Usually this time of night those voices were relaxed, rambling, as if they were talking to each other in a dream.

Tonight they had the pitch of panic, as if that dream were a nightmare.

The first one he heard gasped, "It was . . . it

was . . . cigar-shaped . . . red and green lights . . . and traveling fast as the devil . . .”

A second voice cut in, “I seen three of them flying over Chester County! Sure as I’m sitting here shaking in my boots!”

A third caller announced, “Right! Right! Six troopers were chasing them down Twenty-two!”

Then the voices were drowned out by a siren howling outside. The driver’s head swiveled toward the ear-splitting noise. A state police car shot by the truck as if the eighteen-wheeler were standing still.

The siren faded as the cop car sped out of sight down the road. The first voice came over the CB again. It was screaming, “I see one now! It’s over the water tower!”

“What the blue blazes is going down?” the driver wondered, waiting for the next report.

Then the CB went dead.

So did the truck lights. And the engine. The giant vehicle rolled gently to a stop.

Frantically, the driver tried the ignition. It was dead. He flicked his CB off and on again. No luck there, either.

His eyes narrowed. He made up his mind. With one hand he took a flashlight out of a front compartment. With the other he picked up the shotgun.

Cautiously he climbed down from the driver’s

cabin. He stood under the stars on the dark and empty highway, looking in every direction.

He stiffened. A humming came from above.

It was loud. But not loud enough to keep the driver from hearing his own panting breath and the pounding of his heart.

Shotgun at the ready, he whirled around, hunting a target, to the left, to the right, in front, behind, down, and up.

Then he saw it—whatever it was. A shape blotting out a multitude of stars. But all he could tell for sure was that it was big, very big, and black as the night.

The driver pumped his weapon with the hand that held the flashlight.

Then he heard a crash.

He shined his flashlight on the rear of the truck and saw that the panel of the cargo compartment was open.

“I was sure I fastened that—” His breath caught in his throat.

In the flashlight beam was a pair of eyes.

Yellow eyes.

Inhuman eyes.

The driver dropped the flashlight.

He aimed his gun and fired. Again and again and again.

Chapter THREE

Special Agent Fox Mulder stooped down. He picked up a shotgun shell casing from the road.

Straightening, he glanced at it. Then he silently passed it to his partner, Special Agent Dana Scully.

It was a chilly day in Tennessee. A late-autumn wind chased billowing clouds across a deep blue sky. The sun played peekaboo, flooding Route 100 with bright light one moment, sweeping it into shadow the next. The leaves rustled in the trees lining the highway where the two FBI agents stood.

Mulder and Scully had flown in from Washington, D.C., before dawn. A phone call from FBI Headquarters had roused Mulder from sleep in the middle of the night. He'd instantly called Scully. Sometimes it took time to decide if a case belonged in the X-files. But this case left no doubts. Too many weird things had happened that night in Tennessee.

Scully made sure she was the one to get behind the steering wheel of the rental car they picked up in Memphis. One of them had to keep cool, and, as usual, she was the one.

Now she cast a cold eye on the cartridge Mulder handed her.