



In the midst of the most brutal war in the history of the US military, the 58th Squadron, a group of young marines sent into space to fight an alien force intent on attacking earth, is commanded by the mysterious Colonel McQueen in *Space: Above and Beyond*.

**A**CCORDING to James Morrison, who plays McQueen: "When the show first began, we knew very little about this character. And that really appealed to me because the possibilities of discovering more and more about this guy as the show progressed seemed amazingly endless. 'Keep the audience wanting more' is an old adage which I learned a long time ago — a lesson which definitely comes to light in the episode, *Mutiny*, in which a mutiny is started by the In Vitro Crew of a cargo hauler. Cooper Hawkes [another In Vitro, played by Rodney Rowland] and McQueen learn that they were both hatched at age eighteen — something which obviously prevents us from coming up with past lives. These characters have no past lives, upbringing or role models — so they're discovering life on a day to day basis."

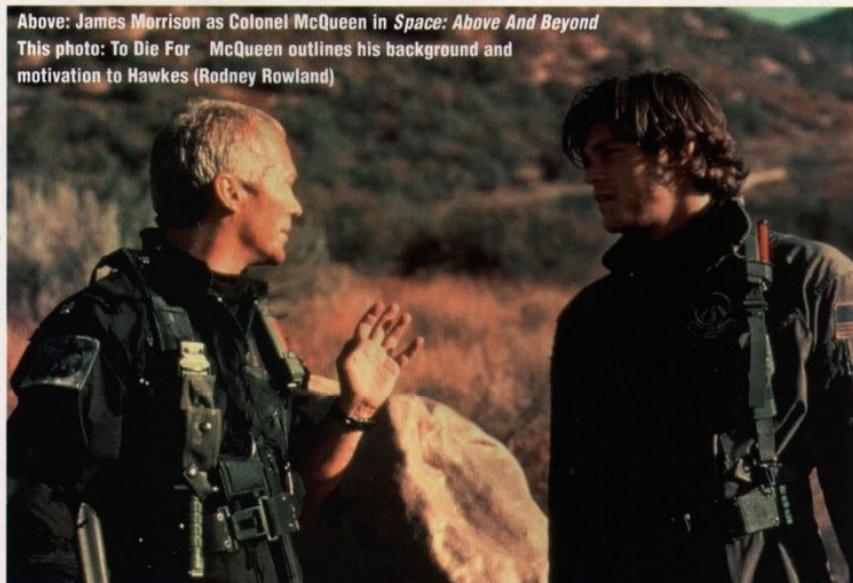
All Space photos © Fox TV

A *Starburst* interview by Simon Bacal

# MCQUEEN'S WAR

Above: James Morrison as Colonel McQueen in *Space: Above and Beyond*

This photo: To Die For — McQueen outlines his background and motivation to Hawkes (Rodney Rowland)



## A Mysterious Stranger

That's why Morrison wanted to make sure that McQueen shared no similarities with any character previously seen on the big and small screen.

"David Nutter, who directed the pilot, wanted to loosely base McQueen on a mysterious and nameless Clint Eastwood-type stranger who rides out of the mists, but I stopped him from doing that because my character is an archetype in itself — so I didn't think there was any need to actually base him on an archetype from past movies.

"You know, that whole idea reminds me of an incident that occurred while I was playing Casca during a production of *Julius Caesar*. The director wanted me to play the character more like Oscar Levant [star of the 1951 film *An American in Paris*], a caustic actor who usually played



"Space is, for all intents and purposes, an anti-war story," says James Morrison

the piano with a cigarette dangling from his mouth.

"When I heard that I was absolutely stunned, so I said 'If you want Oscar Levant, you've cast the wrong person because I'm no more Oscar Levant than I am Groucho Marx.' Asking an actor to be another actor is doing a tremendous disservice to his talent, the script and the overall production."

As a result, Morrison created a character who has only known life in the military and who is constantly fighting prejudice and racial scorn from those natural born humans who refer to In Vitros as 'Tanks'.

"Because of the racism fired at him, the character harbours obvious resentments," he muses. "Though he's trying to combat this bitterness and resentment day after day after day, he's obviously doing his utmost to remain positive productive — especially in the two-part episode *To Die For*. During the episode [in which the 58th crash land on enemy territory] McQueen and Hawkes are having a conversation about the reasons behind McQueen's decisions and desires to serve his country and his determination to prove that, despite all the racial scorn, In Vitros are not lazy and without purpose."

Though Morrison perceives his futuristic and battle-hardened alter-ego to be a warm and loving person at heart, he also believes the character's personal feelings should be guarded.

"If you exhibit concern for yourself and your feelings under the circumstances of battle you will die, so you have to focus on the greater good — namely the ability to get through the battle in one piece.

### Keep Your Distance!

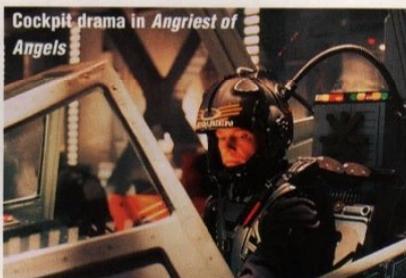
"When it comes to his relationship with the 58th Squadron, there is definitely a difference between himself and the marines which should never be lost. In my conversations with [creators] Glen [Morgan] and Jim [Wong], I've expressed concern that the 58th perceive McQueen as little more than a peer and therefore

invoke a strong and very definite feeling of insubordination.

"I mean, he can fraternise with them to a certain degree — but there also has to be a strong sense of military rank and protocol between himself and members of the 58th. He has a deep love, admiration, respect and pride for them — but, considering their circumstances and the overall military protocol, he understands that there are lines that one just don't think about crossing. 'You can only know me so much, so don't assume too much, otherwise the chain of command could be destroyed and lives could be lost' is his message to them."

The distance between McQueen and the other members of the 58th squadron was, to some extent, set in motion in Queensland Australia — the pilot's shooting ground. "I didn't hang out with the other cast members too much because my character was supposed to be this mysterious unpredictable stranger — so if I had hung out with them all the time, we would have lost that special edge."

Meanwhile, the actor has received a positive response from the show's fans — many of whom include real-life military personnel. Most are happy with the manner in which his character is evolving, but, according to an amazed and





While shooting the pilot episode of *Space: Above and Beyond*, Morrison "didn't hang out" with his co-stars so that he could protect Colonel McQueen's persona as a mysterious stranger

astounded Morrison, some complain about the style in which the marines' shoelaces are tied!

"I suspect they are being a little bit picky and are missing the overall picture which the show is painting," he laughs. "Our military advisors make sure that we follow the correct protocol and some of the marines, who serve as extras during scenes which involve ceremonies, always have good things to say. So, hopefully, we're getting it right."

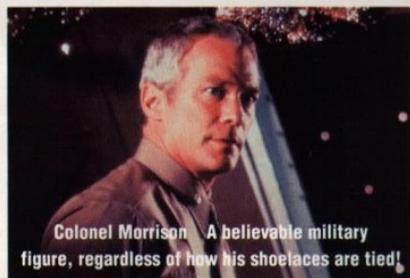
As he reflects over his role on the show, Morrison proudly reveals that his character hearkens back to a lifelong desire and determination to create a world of fantasy and make believe.

"My uncle was a pilot in the Air Force during the Korean War," recalls Morrison, who spent his childhood in a town in Alaska with a population of 150. "And whenever he came home on leave I would always pretend to shoot myself in the head and act out this incredibly dramatic death scene. He would usually react by asking 'What the hell's wrong with this kid?' and my aunt would usually reply 'Well, I think he just likes you' — so I guess I needed his attention and approval."

Dramatic death scenes were only the beginning. The acting bug remained with

Morrison throughout his high school days in Anchorage, pursued him while he attended the University of Alaska and played a major role in his decision to head for the Big Apple. An intensive year of studying and acting in New York led to a tour with Carson and Barnes Wild Animal Circus and, later, a return to Alaska, where he served an apprenticeship with the Alaska Repertory Theatre.

Two seasons later, Morrison moved out to Los Angeles, landed the role as a photojournalist in the stage play *El Salvador* and won the Dramalogue and Los Angeles Drama Critics Awards for his performance. After garnering another Dramalogue Award for his intense portrayal of a serial killer in the stage play *Down The Road*, Morrison returned to the world of theatre for *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, *Twelfth Night*, *Rich-*



Colonel Morrison. A believable military figure, regardless of how his shoelaces are tied!

*ard II* and the previously discussed *Julius Caesar*.

Making his feature debut in the Michael Douglas/Robert Duvall starrer *Falling Down*, the actor guest starred on a two-part episode of television's *Frasier*, appeared in *Quantum Leap*, *LA Law* and the American Playhouse production of *Enemy of The People*. *Space: Above and Beyond* marked his first regular role on a television series.

Sadly, it was recently announced that *Space: Above & Beyond* would not be renewed for a second season. Morrison nevertheless believes that the cast and crew did their "very best" working on the series and blames other factors, namely money and ratings, for sealing the show's fate. The actor is also quick to credit Glen Morgan and James Wong for creating a show which, he believes, presents warfare in a gritty and realistic light.

"*Space* is, for all intents and purposes, an anti-war story because it deals with the way in which war affects the human psyche, our responsibilities to those who have fallen and our feelings about those people who we may die with. War is not a jingoistic experience. It's hell, pure and simple. And that's exactly what we're striving to bring across in the show."