

# RODNEY ROWLAND: TAMING SPACE'S WILD WOLF

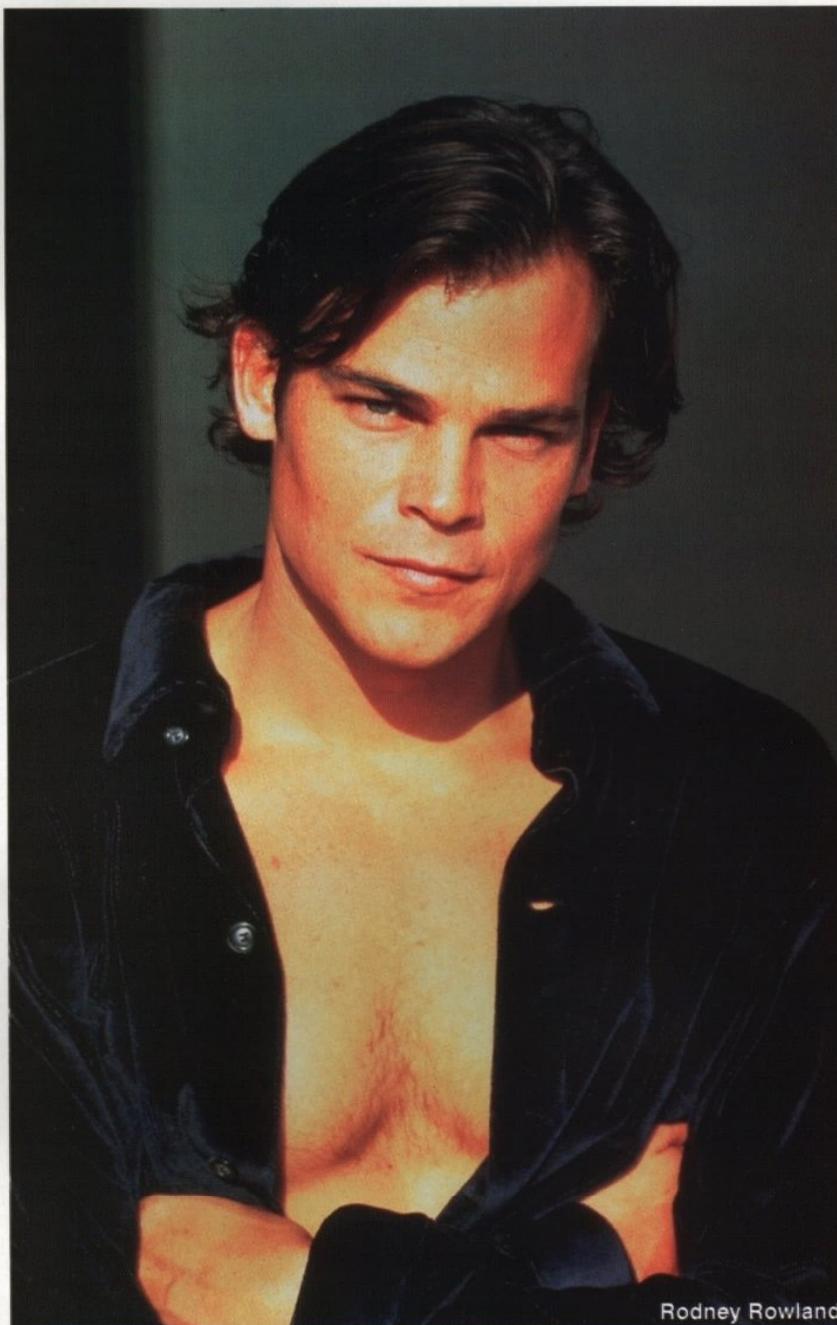
**A**CTOR Rodney Rowland says, "I think the two types of characters I play the best are those who are a bit dangerous and crazy, and ones who are innocent. My father's a preacher and I grew up in a very closed-off world until I was about eighteen. When I was a kid, foul language and cuss words were never used in our house. I never visited a big city or knew what the world was really all about. I wasn't exposed to anything but purity and goodness, so that was a part of me. When I became a teenager I started to rebel, which most kids at that age do, and I turned into the maniac of the world, so I've always lived within those two extremes."

## Against the Aliens

Rowland's current television assignment has provided him with the perfect niche in which to put his early life experiences to good use. The actor appears as Cooper Hawkes, one of a diverse group of young Marine Corps cadets responsible for defending the Earth against an unknown alien aggressor in Fox Television's new Science Fiction series **Space: Above and Beyond**.

As explained in the programme's pilot, Hawkes is one of the few surviving members of a race known as 'In Vitros' or 'tanks', artificially bred humans originally raised to be soldiers. The futuristic version of test tube babies, distinguishable from humans by a navel on the back of their necks, are the new focus of racial prejudice, as seen in the attempted lynching that introduces Hawkes to viewers.

"My character went through so many metamorphoses before we actually started shooting the pilot," explains Rowland. "He started out as this typically cool rebel. As time went on the part was fleshed out



Rodney Rowland

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more and more and, in the end, Cooper became this childlike guy who's born at the age of eighteen. Almost everybody he meets has this intense prejudice towards him because he's an "In-Vitro," so all he knows is pain and hurt. He's never been dealt a kind hand and is constantly being shot down. It's turned into this very interesting and incredible part."

Rowland's acting career has been a long time in the making. At the age of nineteen he began working as a model, first in Europe where his brother was already a successful model, and then with major campaigns in the United States for such clients as J Crew and Calvin Klein. After posing in front of a camera for three years he decided to put modelling on the back burner and pursue acting.

"Once I started getting work in commercials I thought I was on the road to fame and fortune," he laughs. "Little did I know that it would take ten years of going to acting classes three times a week and doing tons of small plays in New York before I got my big break. It was when I began to understand acting and realize what was underneath it that I became really impressed with it. I was so in awe of someone who could convey strong human emotions with a camera staring them in the face.

"Sometimes as an actor you get so locked into what the character wants that, to a large degree, you end up losing your self-consciousness once you step in front of the camera. As a model you never lose that. Some models stand there staring into the lens and thinking, 'Look at me — I'm good looking.' It's sort of a superiority stance. I've never felt comfortable with that. I'd always act and try to somehow lose myself during a shoot, so the pictures taken of me always tended to come out as me trying to do something. This gave me a much longer modelling career as opposed to someone who just stood there feeling like a million dollars and sharing it with the world."

### One of 500

The actor admits that his resume was somewhat thin when he went up for the part of Cooper Hawkes in **Space: Above and Beyond**. His photo, along with those of five hundred other actors from both the East and West coasts, was submitted to casting directors for their consideration. "I didn't have many professional credits," says Rowland. "I'd done a lot of off-off-Broadway stuff in New York and small

parts in movies-of-the-week, but nothing to really convince people to take a risk and give me a job like this."

It was Randy Stone, vice-president of talent at 20th Century Fox Television that saw something special in the young actor. He persuaded Glen Morgan and James Wong, the programme's creators and producers and the team behind some of **The X-Files**' most memorable episodes, to give Rowland a chance. Unfortunately, a bizarre chain of events including a major auto accident involving three of the actor's close friends — killing one and leaving another paralyzed — along with a severe case of

strep throat and high fever that he was suffering from, resulted in Rowland giving a less-than-memorable audition.

"I made some ridiculous and amateurish mistakes," recalls the actor. "I mean really foolish things like forgetting all the words in the middle of this big monologue. Both Glen and Jim were saying to Randy, 'He's not the guy. It's just not him.' Randy kept telling them, 'He's the guy. Trust me.'

"After five auditions they eventually went with another actor," continues Rowland. "When it came time to present the final group of actors to the executives at the network, Randy convinced them to let me go



Rodney Rowland as Cooper Hawkes in the pilot episode of *Space: Above and Beyond*

Hawkes and his comrades find themselves marooned in enemy territory in *To Die For*



along and audition one last time. I don't know what happened but I went from repeatedly blowing things to doing the best work I'd ever done in my life. It was like God said, 'OK, I'm going to let you have it. You've paid your dues and it's time.'

"Once I was given the job the network was then forced to do some juggling. Not only did they have to tell the guy that they had already chosen that they were giving me the job, they also had to recast some of the other parts. I had to wait another month-and-a-half before I actually got the job. It ended up being about a three month ordeal but then it finally came to fruition."

### Sexual Presence

Once casting for the pilot had been completed, Rowland and his fellow cast members boarded a plane and flew down to Australia to begin filming. Even though producers had chosen him for the role of Cooper Hawkes, Rowland still felt as if he had to further prove himself. He recalls his first moments in front of the camera as particularly nerve-racking.

"On the first day they kind of put me into a really difficult scene to see if I had, I guess, sexual presence on film. I had to do a scene where Cooper has to kiss Shane [Vansen, played by Kristen Cloake]. They wanted to see if I knew what I was doing and how I looked on the dailies. Although I'd done a lot of theatre work I still wasn't exactly sure how to pace myself in front of a camera. When we shot Kristen's close-ups I gave it everything I had, but,

because I wasn't pacing myself, when it came time to do my close-ups I was pretty exhausted. I managed to get through it OK but I figured I'd pretty much blown it.

"Everyone, including Glen Morgan, was watching the scene on the monitor, and the only thing that kept going through my mind was how bad I must have looked. After we did the scene Glen, who's a very low-key kind of guy, came up to me and said, very calmly and quietly, 'I'm so ex-

cited,' and just walked away. I asked myself, 'What does he mean by that?'

"Over the next couple of days I still thought that I'd blown it. I got a call from Randy Stone in Los Angeles and he told me that everyone there were very, very pleased with the dailies. When the pilot was finished and all edited together I looked at it and said to myself, 'You did it.' It's amazing and kind of frightening just how much your head messes with you when, in reality, you're doing an OK job."

Veteran film and television director David Nutter, who has also worked on several *X-Files* episodes, took on the task of directing Rowland and his fellow cast members in the pilot episode. "David was great," says the actor enthusiastically. "He was never too busy to help you out. I grilled him all the time about everything. He has a certain sensibility and caring about him and he really helped make the character of Cooper very clear for me."

It took almost six weeks to film the two-hour pilot for *Space: Above and Beyond*. With the programme now being permanently shot in California the cast and crew are on a more rigid filming schedule, often working up to fourteen hours a day and shooting a one hour episode in eight days. "I got used to David Nutter and the cameraman taking me aside and saying, 'OK, Rodney, this is what we're going to do.' Now we're working with a different

Rowland holds his fellow *Space: Above and Beyond* performers in high regard



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director for every episode and they really don't have the time to become familiar with the subtleties of your character. You have to really look out for yourself and sort of help direct yourself."

### Cast Praise

The actor has nothing but good things to say about his fellow cast members including Morgan Weisser (Nathan West) and Kristen Cloake (Shane Vansen). "They're the best. I have so much fun with them — too much sometimes," admits the actor with a laugh. "Morgan's one of those people who doesn't have to work at acting. He tends to go more on instinct. Morgan can look at his lines, memorize them, and then walk out onto the set and just nail the scene. The same with Kristen. Memorizing doesn't come easily for me so it's a bit more work. I watch both Morgan and Kristen and just envy their style."

Having almost reached the halfway point in filming the programme's first season, Rowland is very enthusiastic about his work on an episode he recently completed entitled *Who Monitors the Birds*. Stranded and practically defenceless on an alien world, Hawkes accepts an assassination assignment that's supposed to buy him an immediate Honourable Discharge from the Marines.

"They had an article about this episode

*Who Monitors the Birds* is a pivotal episode for the character of Hawkes



in yesterday's *USA Today* and *The Los Angeles Times*. It's supposed to be the most expensive episode of a television series shot this year. The episode has virtually no dialogue. It's a very unsettling and strange story that delves into Cooper's past and the birthing of his race. It's Glen Morgan and Jim Wong doing what they do best. It was really gruelling and the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. It took ten days to shoot and I wound up

getting hurt and going to the hospital twice, but it came out great," he says.

"In the pilot episode, Cooper has this bad-ass attitude but no experience with emotions. He's never loved anything or been loved. All he's known is pain. As the show progresses he ends up being the most vulnerable of the crew. He begins to experience different emotions and it freaks him out. As soon as he starts to get an inkling of caring about something or missing someone it scares him. He's started to open up and ask funny questions or do strange things under certain circumstances just because of his naiveté. In *Who Monitors the Birds* you really get to see what makes him tick. It's an incredible story."

Rowland would eventually like the opportunity to work in films, as well as get back to the stage from time to time, but, for the moment, he's content to be learning more about acting through his character of Cooper Hawkes. "I'm proud of our show," he proclaims. "A lot of television shows are made so that people can turn their sets on, walk away and get a glass of milk or talk on the telephone for five minutes, and then come back in and know exactly what is going on. **Space: Above and Beyond** is not one of those types of shows. It's made like a feature film. You've got to sit and watch the little things that add up and make it all interesting. Sometimes, I wish it was simpler because then perhaps more people would watch it, but it is what it is. It's great stuff and it's doing good," he says confidently.

Steven Eramo

Rowland was once a professional model for the likes of J Crew and Calvin Klein

