

X-FILES

CHRIS OWENS

From bartender to "Son of a Cigarette-Smoking Man," Agent Spender rocks Mulder's world.

By Debra Warlick

Chris Owens believes.

Well, at least in serendipity. After supporting himself for 15 years as a bartender, the Toronto native landed a couple of gigs on **THE X-FILES**. The show's creator, Chris Carter, pegged him as the Young Cigarette Smoking Man and then as the dancing Mutato.

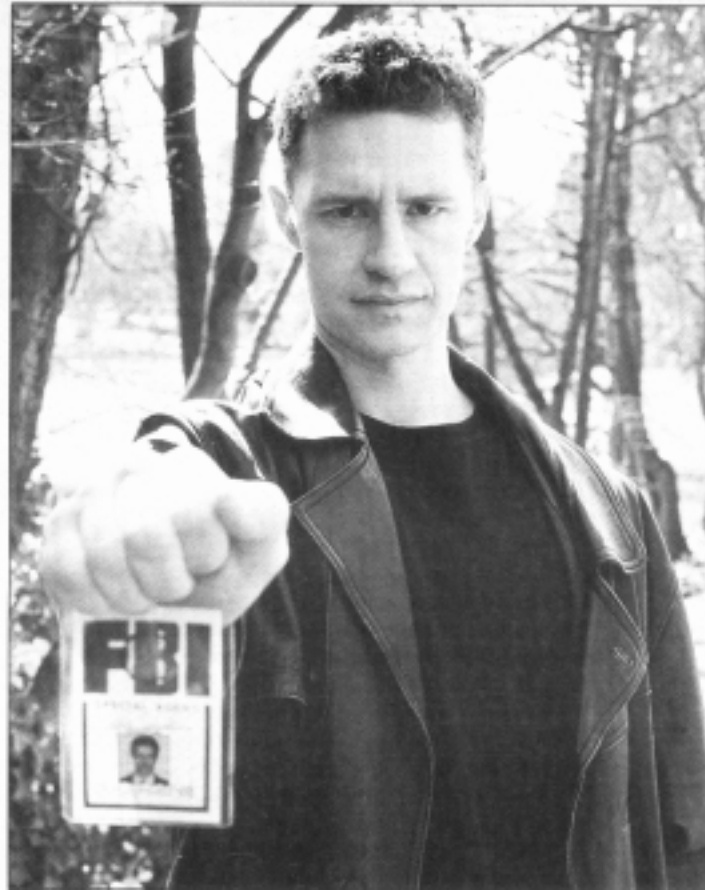
Nice work, but nothing steady. Until one night, after seeing a movie with a friend, Owens found himself on the other side of a bar, drinking a martini. "I didn't know they served guys with two heads," said a voice belonging to Carter, who just happened to be hanging out at that same Vancouver bar. He then said, "Have you heard the good news?"

"That's how I found out I officially had the job as an FBI agent on **THE X-FILES**," said Owens in a telephone interview from Los Angeles. "I had heard rumors that Chris was interested in hiring me to play a new agent on the show and I was thrilled to hear it from him."

So the much-maligned and often-vilified Agent Spender (aka Weasel Boy) was born. Owens, 37, moved from Vancouver with **THE X-FILES** when the decision was made last year to start shooting in Los Angeles. He now has a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend—a law student of several years.

Read his **X-FILES** resume and it is apparent that Owens has played rather unattractive and even downright creepy roles. Just look at this history:

His **X-FILES** experience began in 1996 in an episode as the Young Cigarette Smoking Man (definitely not a good guy role geared to win the hearts of fans) and reap



Former bartender Owens as Spender, a thorn in Mulder and Scully's side, won the role after being cast by Carter as the young Cigarette Smoking Man.

appearing in that role the next year in "Demons." In the part of the Great Mutato, he turned heads as the musically-challenged (big fan of Cher's) mutant. Carter must have liked what he saw. Soon after, Agent Jeffrey Spender began showing up regularly as a likely nemesis to Agents Minder and Scully.

To further cement his penchant for portraying bad boys, Owens donned a Nazi uniform in the critically-acclaimed "Triangle" episode late last year.

His past acting work includes relatively small parts in the films **DISTURBING BEHAVIOR** and **COCKTAIL**, as well as

television roles in **ALMOST GOLDEN: THE JESSICA SAVITCH STORY**, Carter's other creation, **MILLENNIUM** and, **STARGATE SG-1**. He also appeared in the 1997 television movie **THEIR SECOND CHANCE**, along with fellow **X-FILES** bad guy Nicholas Lea (Alex Krycek, AKA Rat Boy). Much of Owens' steady work came from the theater, including playing the role of the Gentleman Caller in "The Glass Menagerie."

For many, to know Spender is to loathe him. The young agent comes on board, only to block the heroes at most every turn. Spender has no respect for Minder and appears to take an active part in the conspiracy. And to top it off—he's a son of a Cigarette Smoking Man.

But he's not all that bad, noted Owens. "I like the ambiguity of someone who has gray areas because they are the most interesting characters to play. It's also closer to real life for me. I know that fans view Spender as a darker character, but I really feel that he's doing his job in trying to survive in a

very strange world," he said. "Sometimes you have to make compromises or sacrifices. I think the reason most people label him a bad guy is because he opposes Minder, and Minder and Scully are the heroes of the show. But you have to realize Spender's background is completely different from Minder's. He's a believer in the paranormal and I am not, so I don't respect his work. Sensitive guy that he is, he takes it personally."

Although Owens' character is almost universally despised, there are some diehard Spender Defender's out there—and one fan has a web page with that very name.