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Location: [Mothership](#) -> [UFO](#) -> [Updates](#) -> [1999](#) -> [Sep](#) -> WB's 'Roswell' Mixes Aliens, Teen Angst

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WB's 'Roswell' Mixes Aliens, Teen Angst

From: Stig Agermose <stig.agermose@get2net.dk>
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Stig

Wednesday, 29 September 1999

WB's 'Roswell' mixes aliens, teen angst

By Chris Roberts
The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE - Imagine you're a teen-ager and you don't know who your parents are or where you came from. That's a ton of teen angst.

It wasn't enough for the creators of "Roswell," who have upped the ante. So imagine all the above plus one more thing - you're an alien.

But, rather than relying on the "Star Wars" approach of fantastic creatures and cutting-edge special effects, "Roswell" (premiering at 8 p.m. Oct. 6 on KWBA, Channel 58) is a star-crossed teen-age love story with an otherworldly twist.

The show is scheduled in the slot that follows the popular "Dawson's Creek" and matches the teen appeal of WB shows like "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

"It is a wonderful metaphor for teen-age alienation," said executive producer and script writer Jason Katims ("My So-Called Life"). "As teen-agers, we all feel like aliens and some of us as adults (feel that way) too."

While the show may be saving money on special effects, it is spending some on the music. Tunes from such alternative bands as Eagle Eye Cherry, Dave Matthews, Garbage and Sarah McLachlan are strategically placed in the pilot to accent the emotion of the moment.

Set in Roswell, N.M., but filmed near Los Angeles with Roswell Daily Record newspapers in the racks, "Roswell" borrows heavily from the fabled high-desert crash of a UFO. It is sure to attract, at least for a while, the hard-core believers who think

the U.S. government is still covering up the details of that crash.

Three alien teens - who look human, but later reveal they can "change molecular structures" - came from an incubator onboard the spacecraft. Two of them, Max Evans (Jason Behr, who has appeared on "Dawson's Creek") and Isabel Evans (Katherine Heigl), were found walking naked along the road as small children and adopted by a loving family.

The third, Michael Guerin (Brendan Fehr), was adopted by a man who "just keeps me around for the monthly check."

The story begins with the apparent death of teen-ager Liz Parker (Shiri Appleby).

Liz, a waitress at her father's diner, the Crashdown Cafe, is accidentally shot in the stomach when an argument between two patrons erupts into a struggle over a gun.

Max risks revealing himself and his friends when he heals the gunshot wound with a touch that leaves a silver palm print. He breaks a bottle of ketchup, smears it on Parker and tells her not to tell anyone what happened.

It's the beginning of an impossible relationship.

As Max reveals more of himself to Liz, an act of trust the alien teens believe could have deadly consequences, he performs a mind meld that allows Liz to see the world through his eyes.

She sees herself as well.

"I could feel everything he felt, I could feel his loneliness," Liz says. "In his eyes I was beautiful."

Some of the lines are cutely corny, and the incubator birth is never fully explained, but enjoying science fiction normally takes a suspension of disbelief.

Tongue-in-cheek humor that includes a few low-key special effects is intended to keep sci-fi fans from slipping into love-story ennui.

Michael and Isabel chastise Max for risking everything by saving Liz. "You use your powers all the time," Max says to Isabel. "Recreationally," Isabel responds as she melts the cheese on her taco.

Appleby says the new episodes will focus more on the threat of capture. The alien teens establish in the first episode that they believe they are in a life-and-death situation, avoiding government agents who will spirit them to a lab and dissect them.

The suspicious sheriff (William Sadler of "The Shawshank Redemption") has personal reasons for digging out the truth. His father was a law enforcement officer in 1959 when a body was found bearing a similar silver hand print.

When he tries to report the incident at the cafe to a federal agent, he is met with skepticism and the warning, "Do you know what everyone at the agency called your father? Sgt. Martian."

The earnestly delivered lines help give the wrong-side-of-the-Milky-Way love story and other plot twists a veneer of realism.

"We don't want it to turn into 'My Favorite Martian,'" said executive producer Jonathan Frakes ("Star Trek: The Next Generation"), who makes a cameo appearance in the pilot. "We're taking it seriously."

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