

# REFLECTIONS

*An Oral History of Twin Peaks*

by  
BRAD DUKES





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# AN ORAL HISTORY OF TWIN PEAKS

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Published in the United States by short/Tall Press, Nashville.

Publisher contact and information:

[shorttallpress@gmail.com](mailto:shorttallpress@gmail.com)

Cover, and original page design and typeset by Charles Ramsey  
[charlesville.us](http://charlesville.us)

Kindle programming, page design and typeset by Johnny Walker  
[www.johnnywalkerdesign.com](http://www.johnnywalkerdesign.com)

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Grateful acknowledgment is made to Howard Miller and John Thorne for permission to reprint excerpts where cited from the following articles originally published in *Wrapped in Plastic* magazine.  
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Miller, Craig and Thorne, John.

“1993 Twin Peaks Fan Festival” *Wrapped in Plastic*. October, 1993: 9

Miller, Craig and Thorne, John. “Killer Bob Speaks”  
*Wrapped in Plastic*. December, 1993: 5-6

Complete photo credits and sources at conclusion of text.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Dukes, Brad

Reflections : an oral history of twin peaks /

Brad Dukes

ISBN 978-0-615-96883-4 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-692-28229-8 (ebk)

LCCN: 2014903072

Kindle version 1.0

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To Jessica

To my mother and father

And to Peyton

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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I will always remember a quiet summer night in August of 1990. I was nine years old, playing alone in the upstairs family room with my collection of action figures. I went downstairs for a Coke and noticed my mother was on the edge of her seat, as if she was about to be metaphysically absorbed by the tiny television set on the kitchen counter.

As I inched closer to the screen, I saw a dark figure moving through the woods at night and asked my mom what she was watching. Without taking her eyes off the television, she whispered, "A girl has been killed and they are trying to find the murderer." I didn't dare leave the kitchen until the credits rolled.

In the following weeks, every new episode of *Twin Peaks* enchanted me with conflicted feelings of fear and fascination. I began hiding under the covers as I went to sleep every night, yet at school I covered my journal with drawings of ghostly giants, "Have You Seen This Man?" fliers, and a bespectacled lady cradling a log.

Almost twenty-five years later, *Twin Peaks* continues to fill me with wonder. I am compelled to document and preserve this brief chapter of television history that is unlike any other, before or since. It is my wish that this book brings you a little deeper into the world of *Twin Peaks*, a place that is both wonderful and strange.





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## INTRODUCTION

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Countless television series have come and gone over the last sixty-five years, but few have managed to lead a profound and perplexing life as *Twin Peaks*. Six months before premiering on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in April of 1990, *Twin Peaks* was hyped as “the series that may change it all” on the cover of *Connoisseur Magazine* and a rogue wave of publicity was born.

Defying skeptical ABC executives, thirty-five million viewers tuned in for *Twin Peaks*' broadcast debut. The tale of an enigmatic federal agent investigating the slaying of a small-town homecoming queen bewitched audiences and propelled the catchphrase “Who killed Laura Palmer?” into the national conversation.

A rabid cult of fans was born and a media circus stretched throughout the summer as stars of the show appeared on magazine covers and late-night talk shows with Johnny Carson and David Letterman. The frenzy became intoxicating as *Twin Peaks* received record-breaking Emmy nominations, won three Golden Globes, and spawned a book on the New York Times Best Seller list.

More than a routine crime procedural, *Twin Peaks* was capable of being melodramatic, hilarious, and downright terrifying within the span of minutes. Coffee, doughnuts, and cherry pie were consumed in mass quantities. A middle-aged woman with an eye patch was obsessed with inventing silent drape runners. A ponytailed truck driver attacked his wife with a bar of soap stuffed in a sock. *Twin Peaks* was unclassifiable and undefined, yet still engrossing to both viewers and critics yearning for the next generation of distinguished television.

## VISITOR'S GUIDE

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The world of *Twin Peaks* is full of different people doing different things. Nearly one hundred individual voices are documented in the following text, and it may be challenging to keep it all straight. A brief description of the interviewee's role is included before their first quote, and at the author's discretion. If you require further assistance, please reference the Census of all interview participants at the conclusion of this book.



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# KAMIKAZE PILOT



*This oral history begins in a nameless café in Los Angeles, California, where David Lynch and Mark Frost first met. The two cocreators of Twin Peaks were first paired in the mid-1980s and collaborate on a film adaptation of Goddess, a Marilyn Monroe biography by author Anthony Summers. Lynch was a film director regarded for his midnight-cinema mainstay Eraserhead (1977) and his feature adaptations of The Elephant Man (1980) and Dune (1984). Frost was a seasoned screenwriter who had honed his craft working with television trailblazer Steven Bochco on the lauded police drama Hill Street Blues.*

**Mark Frost** (*series cocreator and executive producer*): David and I were introduced by one of our mutual agents at CAA [Creative Artists Agency]; I believe it was in 1985. I remember it being at a coffee shop or a restaurant in Westwood, but David remembers it as somewhere else. My first impression of him was that he was a guy I felt completely in tune with. He was remarkably easy to go along with and it turned out we just had very compatible sensibilities.

**Ken Scherer** (*former chief operating officer, Lynch/Frost Productions*): Mark is a storyteller and David is an artist, that's really how I saw them perform. Whether it is David's photography, his art, or his films – he's very visual; he's very experiential. He makes you experience things you would not choose necessarily to experience. He sees the world in a very different way than most minds and Mark is a classic storyteller who chose film, TV, and novels to tell his stories. So, the two of them were a perfect combination. David had this vision that Mark could grab a hold of.

**Jules Haimovitz** (*former president and chief operating officer, Spelling Entertainment*): David and Mark are two of the greatest, most talented guys I've met in this business. Their intelligence level is phenomenal. They were not spoiled Hollywood types in any way, shape, or form. This would be a whole different industry if everyone had their demeanor.

David was just a very creative sort who lets things roll off his back; he wasn't temperamental at all. He lives within his own mind and is just an interesting guy. Mark was more of like a college professor. He was very academic, a strong writer with strong story and character.

**Mark Frost**: I think the dynamic that David and I established early on is the one we've always had where we learned we could just sit in a room and start talking and things start to bubble up. It's just like making music, a jam session you could say, and it's just a tremendous amount of fun. A lot of hard work and a lot of laughs and it's been the same ever since.



KEN SCHERER ON SET WITH DAVID LYNCH, 1991

*Although Goddess stalled in development, Lynch and Frost continued their collaboration and co-wrote “One Saliva Bubble,” an unproduced comedy of identity swaps. As Lynch and Frost’s writing partnership progressed, an ambitious Hollywood agent was determined to bring Lynch into the world of television.*

**Tony Krantz** (former television agent, Creative Artists Agency): I met David because I was an agent at CAA and he was a client of the agency and he was my favorite director. I remember the first meeting I ever had with him was a motion picture meeting, even though I was a television agent. He came into the conference room and met with fifteen agents at CAA and he just talked about things that he loved. He said, “Red lips, rubber, radiators, and leather.”

It was like a miracle: my favorite director talking to me about the things he loved the most. My primary agent (Rick Nicita) created an opportunity for me to build a relationship with David and as a television agent I just started talking to him and enticing him into the world of television.

**Jules Haimovitz:** Tony was one of the most fun agents. He was young, he was very aggressive without being obnoxious, he was cocky without being obnoxious, and he delivered.

**Tony Krantz:** David and I would go to lunch all the time. There was a restaurant called Nibblers in Beverly Hills and there was Du-Par’s – he loved going there. I thought being with David Lynch was like a treat; sitting with him and just being with him was the greatest thing in the world.

Because I was in the television business exclusively as an agent, I loved David's directing so much I wanted to see if we could bring David to television and change the face of TV a little bit. It was an extraordinary and interesting idea: David Lynch, who was such an unusual and genius talent in the world as a film director coming into prime time television.

*Lynch struck mainstream feature success in 1986 with Blue Velvet, an explosive portrait of small town crime and sexual masochism. In early 1988, Lynch's box office momentum was mired in legal battles by the surprising bankruptcy of De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, who owned the rights to a number of gestating Lynch films. Lynch soon acquiesced to Krantz and began to pursue ventures in television with Mark Frost.*

**Tony Krantz:** We started to explore the possibilities and, after a variety of different conversations, took David and Mark in to meet with Brandon Tartikoff, the president of NBC [National Broadcasting Company], on a pitch called "The Lemurians." Lemuria was sort of like an Atlantis – it was considered a continent that vanished from the history of earth.

It was a story about a bunch of FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] agents who used Geiger counters and other homemade detection devices to find Lemurians who were intent on rising up and taking over the earth. It was a little bit of a *Ghostbusters* kind of idea and Brandon committed right then and then went to a two-hour movie.

David didn't want to do it as a movie and we then went back and started thinking about a different idea. After having seen *Blue Velvet*, I went to Nibblers with David and I told him, "You should do a show about these people, the customers here in Nibblers," and we started talking about an idea for a soap opera.

**Mark Frost:** The show just came out of us (David and I) sitting in a room until we hit on the idea of the dead girl as a way into the town. That came before we knew who she was or even where the town was, but we thought that would be an interesting way to start to peel back the layers of the onion. That was the entry point.

*As the seeds of Twin Peaks were planted, there was a ripe opportunity at ABC to bring Lynch's quixotic vision coupled with Frost's cerebral storytelling to the network. ABC's audience share had begun to evaporate in the mid-1980s as Brandon Tartikoff led NBC to a ratings monopoly with a prime time lineup led by The Cosby Show and Family Ties. By the end of the decade, ABC was rebuilding its brand through innovation and more diverse programming.*

**Brandon Stoddard** (former president, ABC Entertainment): We were trying to change - not the image - but the programming of ABC and we were trying to make it a little more adult, a little bit more serious and improve the writing and productions, et cetera, and I think to a degree we did.

**Chad Hoffman** (former vice president of drama series development, ABC): When Brandon took over the network he brought in a bunch of us, ostensibly to take the network (which at the time was in this place and probably losing money if memory serves me correct) and to really alter the programming style and really give it a sense of purpose and meaning for a viewer, and most important, an identity. The hope was that if we did that, the audience would follow us.

**Brandon Stoddard:** It's hard to remember exactly what we did and didn't have on the air in the late

eighties. It was *The Wonder Years*, *China Beach*, and *Roseanne*; we put a bunch of stuff on that was different that people hadn't seen before. Some of it worked and some of it didn't.

**Chad Hoffman:** We really kind of kicked down the doors and let in a lot of fresh air and a lot of interesting people that had never come to the network. We really had to go out and sell ourselves and what we were doing because a lot of people had just stopped coming. They were going to NBC or other places where they felt there was more of an adventurous spirit.

Our first go-round led (in the dramatic area) to *Thirtysomething* and *China Beach*. Those were the first two big breakthrough shows that I put on the air and then on the comedy side, Stu Bloomberg came up with things like *The Wonder Years* and *Roseanne*. I think if you take those four shows and group them together, that was our first collective batch of series. They were successful commercially and successful in terms of critical acclaim, appealed to a very different demographic, and most importantly said a whole lot about what we were trying to do. No longer was it just us tooting our own horns saying we want to do this.

**Brandon Stoddard:** Chad was very passionate about his shows. He did *China Beach* as well, which was an excellent show and a number of others. He was a very good developer and worked extremely well with creative people. They liked him, he took risks which they liked, and he had great taste [laughs] which they also responded to. He was really a superior development executive.

**Gary Levine (former director and vice president of drama development, ABC):** Chad absolutely believed in finding the highest quality and the most distinctive programming, and if you build that, the audience will come. "Never pander to the audience and respect the creators who come in." I thought he was terrific.

**Chad Hoffman:** So by the time *Twin Peaks* surfaces, it's very clear two or two-plus years into our mission (if you will) that people clearly understood in the creative community what we were trying to do. We really were trying to break the fourth wall on television and just do stuff nobody else would be doing.

Hopefully it succeeded, but our feeling was that even if it failed - as so much in television does - the failures would be so interesting and memorable that even those could help serve the company in terms of bringing in more interesting people and ideas and (eventually over time) programming that would be successful.

So that kind of a groundswell on that foundation is what ultimately led Tony [Krantz] to call me up one day to say, "You're the only guy brave and crazy enough in town to do this." He said, "I want you to meet with David Lynch and Mark Frost," both of whom I certainly knew creatively and I said, "Sure, bring 'em in. Why not?" That was kind of my whole attitude always: "Why not? Try things that other people won't try."

## THE PITCH

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*The packaged dexterities of David Lynch and Mark Frost were untested in the realm of prime time television, yet tempting to ABC executives eager to continue their programming renaissance. After the resolution of the Writer's Guild of America strike in August of 1988, Lynch and Frost visited the ABC offices in Los Angeles to pitch an embryonic idea of Twin Peaks to Chad Hoffman and his team.*

**Chad Hoffman:** Mark's work I had known from *Hill Street Blues* and other things; I knew his reputation quite well. David I certainly knew from the feature business primarily. Interestingly, I had worked at the Nuart Theatre in West LA [Los Angeles] when I first got to California in the mid-seventies and we were running *Eraserhead* there at midnight, so I was already familiar with David from that, and of course from *The Elephant Man* and *Blue Velvet* and really understood that he was a visionary.

He really took a look at the world and saw things a little differently than everybody else, but also in a very artistic and unique style. And the notion of taking Mark (who had really cut his teeth working on *Hill Street Blues*, in that Steven Bochco mold of television programming) with David Lynch, I thought, "Those are two really talented people who just don't look at the world the way other people do." By putting them together, I thought we might be able to come up with something quite cool.

**Gary Levine:** I remember they came into the pitch meeting and I had seen *Blue Velvet* as David's last movie before the pitch. I was a little afraid [*laughs*] of what David Lynch was going to be about. They came in and I found him to be a very sweet, gentle, soulful person. Mark was a really good partner for him.

**Chad Hoffman:** I remember it like it was yesterday. They came in and talked generally about the kind of show that they wanted to do. They talked about a real sense of mood of this town in the Northwest where everything was pristine and beautiful, but that behind the curtains was a world with the lives of people that were quite opposite of the environment that they lived in. It was all about secrets and I remember David and Mark talking about what you see in the foreground is not what's going on in the background and what's going on in the background is what's going to capture everybody.

**Mark Frost:** I remember Chad as really friendly and receptive. He probably had other people there who I don't recall, taking notes. We didn't have a whole lot to say in that first meeting. Literally the story David has told, "There's this town and this wind..." and he made this gesture with his hand "and then there's a dead girl and then a whole bunch of stuff happens." It wasn't that simplistic [*laughs*] but it wasn't far from that. Chad was caught like a trout on a hook. He thought it was the coolest thing he'd ever heard and no one was more surprised they wanted it than we were.

**Brandon Stoddard:** I think if Chad had come in to tell me about a wonderful new drama with wind blowing through the trees I would ask him for a little more detail than that. But, it was really Chad's baby and he did a phenomenal job of developing that show and the pilot. So I wasn't in that pitch meeting when it first got exposed to ABC, but it was David Lynch and it was a bunch of really good guys and we were trying to get really good creators to come to ABC at that point, so under those circumstances - with those good people - we would be willing to take a risk.

**Chad Hoffman:** We had a great meeting about it and at the end of it I said, "I think you're talking

about something that kind of has the feel - for want of a better TV term - sort of a soap opera, but not in a negative sense. Why don't you go back and take a look at *Peyton Place* (the movie, not the series) and think about that piece with the quaint town and what was going on behind the scenes and just think about how something like that was done; [it] might jive with what you're trying to do and see if there's a connection there. If there is, come back because I'm very interested."

**Mark Frost:** We hated it [*Peyton Place*], we didn't even finish watching. We watched maybe half an hour. It was just a dead piece of work at that point. It said nothing to us of any relevance whatsoever and we looked at each other and said, "Why are we wasting our time with this?"

**Chad Hoffman:** So I got a phone call from Tony a few weeks later and he said, "They're ready to talk." We went to breakfast at the old Café Plaza in what was the Westin Century Plaza (it's now the Hyatt). I was with Gary Levine and it was Mark and David and Tony and we had a great breakfast and they talked about the town and where everybody lived and they talked about how all the stories were interconnected and it was just captivating. The only word for it: captivating.

**Tony Krantz:** David drew a charcoal map of the town of *Twin Peaks* that we unfurled with Chad when we sold the show and gave it to me for my birthday one year. I have it framed in my office. It's a piece of television history.

**Mark Frost:** Tony was a little like Burgess Meredith in *Rocky*. He was the guy who kept slapping us and telling us to get back in the ring: "Come on, you guys can do this!" He put a lot of energy into making the ABC deal happen. I would say from an "agent-ing" side he was clearly the driving force.

**Chad Hoffman:** At the end of the breakfast I said, "Let's do it." So we hired them to go ahead and write the script and I remember talking with Gary as we were walking back from breakfast to the office. I said, "I don't know if this is going to work or not, but it's not going to be boring. It's going to be really interesting. So we'll take the shot."

*Lynch and Frost swiftly delivered a script titled Northwest Passage to ABC within weeks of the agreement. As promised, the script focused on a small town devastated by the death of the local homecoming queen, Laura Palmer, while the eccentric Special Agent Dale Cooper uncovers all the dirty secrets of the town in pursuit of her killer.*

**Mark Frost:** We had been writing together for a few years and this thing just flowed like crazy. We didn't work from much of an outline. We had done a lot of work about who was in the town and what the town was like physically, so we just sat in a room and wrote it in about three weeks.

**Tony Krantz:** It was this perfect synergy of the framing dramatic abilities of television through the *Hill Street Blues* experience that Mark had and the genius of David Lynch in his particular "avant-garde - ness." The two of them came together to create *Twin Peaks*, and the merger of those two things is not to be underestimated.

**Mark Frost:** We [the Frost family] had (still have) a small vacation home on a lake, thirty minutes east of Albany. Very rustic, a lot of cabins, and a lot of strange characters in the area, some of whom found their way into my thinking about the show. One story in particular that had haunted me was one my grandmother told me about a girl who had been murdered and found on the shore of a nearby lake

There was supposedly a ghost in the area of this crime that some people said they had occasionally seen. I went down to the city hall and did some digging and found that a murder had taken place there in either the 1900s or the 1910s. I believe the girl's name was Hazel Grey, but I might be wrong about that. That obviously had a lot to do with how Laura came into our lives.

**Ken Scherer:** Very few people can work with David; I just feel that way. I could be terribly wrong, but he's such a unique visionary that you have to have a comparable mind to stay up with it and Mark does. Mark was really able to take characters and the general development and turn it into dialogue, turn it into a story.

**Mark Frost:** Part of that time he [Lynch] was in New York and I was in LA and I remember I had the second or third edition of the Macintosh and we hooked it up on a modem somehow, so I could type and he could see what I was typing on his computer as we talked on the phone.

We had a few writing sessions like that and both thought, "Welcome to the future." After we finished we were planning to let it sit for a couple of days and then read and revisit it. Turned out we both couldn't help but read it that night and we both said, "I think it's working," and we called each other that night and said, "I think this thing is ready to go."

**Jules Haimovitz:** Tony sent me the script that was done for ABC and it was a great script, one of the best scripts I have ever read. I said immediately that I want to buy the distribution rights to worldwide television, including home video.

**Kyle MacLachlan** (*Special Agent Dale Cooper*): I loved the script, first of all. I recognized right away that the character of Cooper was special and that it was something that I really wanted to do. I thought it presented one of the greatest introductions into a film or television project that I had ever had. Just that long, one single take driving up the mountain, talking into the tape recorder pretty much said everything about the character.

**Michael Ontkean** (*Sheriff Harry S. Truman*): It must have been 'Be Kind to a Canadian Hockey Player Month,' or something like that. The networks sent me a couple of dozen pilot scripts. *Two Peaks* (originally called *Northwest Passage*) was far and away the best of the bunch. Light years ahead of the pack. I didn't really want to do any kind of TV series at all. But quickly figured this might be a chance to work with David on a great little movie and not be obligated beyond the initial two hours. There was just no fucking way any broadcast network in those days would ever give this sublimely mayhem a slot on their schedule.

**Chad Hoffman:** The first draft was almost perfect; I read it and closed it. Gary read it and closed it and we kind of all looked at each other and I said, "This is really cool. We have got to do this." Brandon read it very quickly and said, "You're right. It's really cool; it's different. It's a great tear-jerker but you need to tell me more about the series." I started to and I said, "Wait a little. Let me go talk to the guys. I'll get back to you and give you their vision of it, not just my vision of it."

**Brandon Stoddard:** I know what I was concerned with about that show from the very, very inception of it. That kind of drama is a "peel-back-the-onion" kind of drama which they're very good at doing. The problem is - it's television - it's not a movie. There's next week and when you're doing that kind of storytelling which is "what's underneath this, and what's underneath that?" you eventually get down to the center.

**Chad Hoffman:** I talked to them and within a few days they sent me a document that I now have framed called the “Twin Peaks Gazette,” and it essentially was the town newspaper laying out the whole arc of the series. It was just funny and dramatic and mysterious and I thought, “Anyone that goes to these lengths to show you what they’re doing really deserves a chance.” I showed it to Brandon and he had a great laugh and said, “Absolutely, let’s make the pilot.”



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