

▶ LABORS OF LOVE

He'll Pilot Your Way to Success

VIVIAN ZINK/NBC

There are few sure things in Hollywood — unless your name is David Nutter.

Over the past fifteen years, Nutter has directed sixteen TV pilots, all of which have been ordered to series, an unparalleled run that led *Variety* to dub him the Pilot Whisperer. In a town where rejection is as common as liposuction, it's an astonishing achievement.

Nutter has no magic formula for success, but he has an uncanny eye for material that audiences connect to emotionally — the same connection he requires before he'll take on a project.

"It can't just feel like a job," Nutter says. "It has to be something I need to do. I have to fall in love with the script, feel like it's something I've never seen before.

"Pilots," he adds, "are like my mini-movies."

Pilot number sixteen is *Chase*, Jerry Bruckheimer's action series about U.S. marshals, which premieres this fall on NBC. For Nutter, who is also an executive producer on the series, the show's appeal was its twist on a standard format.

"So often in procedurals, we're trying to figure out who's the bad guy — it doesn't allow for as much emotional investment. With this show, you don't spend a whole hour finding out who did it. You know who did it at the beginning, and it's all about catching him. You're going to connect not only with the protagonist, but also with the antagonist."

Nutter's streak kicked off in 1995 with the Fox show *Space: Above and Beyond*, which led to the pilot for the acclaimed Chris Carter series *Millennium*.

Suddenly, Nutter was the go-to sci-fi guy. But after a disappointing dip into the feature world with *Disturbing Behavior* ("It didn't turn out the way I wanted," he recalls), he returned triumphantly to television with *Roswell* and hasn't looked back since, helming the pilots for *Smallville*, *The Mentalist*, *Without a Trace* and a dozen others.

With such an impressive track record, Nutter also gets his pick of A-list series to work on: his résumé includes multiple episodes of *Entourage*, *The Sopranos*, *The West Wing*, and an Emmy Award-winning turn for the HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*.

"I get to work on projects I'm a fan of," he says. "It's not my baby, but I become the adoptive parent — I get as attached as the show's creator."

At some point, Nutter's amazing streak will likely end, but it's not something he worries about. "If I can do something I can fall in love with, I've done my job. I'm not worried about failing — just making something as good as it can be." —Graham Flashner