Actor Robert Knepper has a long résumé; though he may be best-remembered from TV’s PRISON BREAK, he has also done solid work in horror, science fiction and fantasy. However, Knepper has never had a gig like the new series CULT before. Then again, few if any other actors have, either.

Knepper’s credits in the fantastic genres include the late-’80s revival of THE TWILIGHT ZONE, George R.R. Martin’s DOORWAYS, PHANTOMS, HARSH REALM, BRIMSTONE, STRANGE WORLD, HAUNTED, SPECIES III, CARNIVÀLE, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, SGU: STARGATE UNIVERSE and as the earth-moving telekinetic carnival boss in HEROES. Then, of course, there was the pansexual serial killer “T-Bag” he played in four seasons of PRISON BREAK. In CULT, which was created by genre TV vet Rockne S. O’Bannon, premiered last night and airs Tuesdays at 9/8 Central on the CW, Knepper has a dual role. One is actor Roger Reeves, and the other is Billy Grimm, the character Roger plays on CULT, the TV series within the show we’re watching.

If that sounds a bit trippy, just wait until you see the bloody, creepy goings-on in the show-within-the-show, and the equally unnerving fates that befall viewers who become overly enmeshed in what they’re watching. Other series regulars include SUPERNATURAL’s Alona Tal as Roger’s leading lady and the character trying to bring down Billy Grimm, THE VAMPIRE DIARIES’ Matt Davis as Jeff Sefton, a man trying to find out how CULT led to his brother’s death, and Jessica Lucas (from CLOVERFIELD, and soon to be seen in the EVIL DEAD

remake) as a production assistant who gets caught up in the craziness.

Since Knepper has already had experience in his own life playing a scary guy in a TV series—he tells Fango that during his run as T-Bag, some strangers screamed at the sight of him in an elevator—he empathizes with Roger. “He’s not always a hero,” Knepper explains. “You’ll see—he’s got his foibles as well. But you get to see what it’s like playing an iconic television character in a show that is a huge hit. And we’re hoping, of course, that it rubs off to people thinking CULT is becoming a big hit. It is, I believe, the best gig I’ve ever had.”

It turns out that Knepper has been through a twice-removed experience with an actual sect. “I had a relative or a friend, when I was a kid,” he recalls. “Her dad got her out of some cult—went in and kidnapped her. It was this big, dramatic thing.”

However, the cult in CULT is different, Knepper observes. “What is this cult? It’s a metaphor for something else; I’m not going to tell you what, you’re going to find that out,” the actor laughs. “Why would I want to give you a present too early? I’m not going to open it for you.”

Given that T-Bag had no compunctions about wreaking havoc, and that he would have loved to wield the type of power that Billy Grimm has, this writer wonders out loud whether it’s possible that Knepper’s old character would admire his new one. Knepper thinks this over before replying, “I don’t know. I mean, I suppose T-Bag would watch CULT in prison and go, ‘Yeah, that’s me. I would play that part.’ I look at it as a great role to play. I don’t know why I’m good at [playing mercurial killers], but I do know that I turn on a dime frequently, and once they know they can write like that for me… Writers are generally pretty smart people, so they like to show off their wares, and in me, they’ve got an actor who does that for them.”

As far as playing the less overtly sinister Roger is concerned, Knepper notes, “Like I just said, it lets the audience have a little glimpse of what my life is like when I’m not acting. I was kicking around for 20-some years. Roger, though, as you’ll see with the backstory, had quite a little thing going on before CULT, which is what led him to be able to play that part. But yeah, it’s like saying, ‘This is what I go through, warts and all.’ ”

[redacted]