

EPISODE GUIDE

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it."
—Well-Manicured Man

THE BLESSING WAY

★★★

9/22/95. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by R.W. Goodwin.

"The Blessing Way" begins where last season's finale, "Anasazi," left off. Fearing Mulder is dead after the Cigarette Smoking Man orders the destruction of the boxcar buried in the New Mexico desert. Scully returns to Washington, D.C., where she is put on suspension pending an investigation. Compounding her distress is the discovery of a computer chip inserted underneath the skin of her neck by her abductors last season.

Back in New Mexico, Mulder is found, near death, by Alfred Hosteen and other members of the Navajo community. The Navajos heal him with a traditional Blessing Way ceremony, during which he experiences a vision in which he sees and talks with his father and Deep Throat. Meanwhile, the Cigarette Smoking Man searches frantically for the missing DAT tape containing the Department of Defense UFO files while staving off the inquiries of his New York-based colleagues, especially the suspicious Well-Manicured Man (John Neville). This devious character has a separate agenda, and secretly contacts Scully at Bill Mulder's funeral to warn her that her own life is in danger. A healed Mulder travels to Greenwich, Connecticut, to quiz his mother about his father's work. The climax comes on furiously when a fearful Scully pulls a gun on Skinner, while back at her apartment, her sister Melissa falls victim to the bullet meant for Scully.



A nearly dead Mulder undergoes a traditional Navajo ceremony, "The Blessing Way," and sees a vision of the dead Deep Throat character.

As a story element, Mulder's vision during the Blessing Way chant makes sense: it's a chance for reconciliation with a dead father and the acceptance of his death. In execution, it's overloaded with too much detail: Mulder spinning through space in his bed of leaves, the ghostly observers, and not one but two father figures, Bill Mulder and Deep Throat. They speak in dialogue so turgid it loses meaning, especially compared to the deceased Bill Scully's spare but deeply moving monologue to his daughter in "One Breath." It's a scene to be accepted intellectually but not emotionally.

In all other aspects, "The Blessing Way" is a solid middle chapter of a three-parter. The introduction of an international consortium to which the Cigarette Smoking Man must answer diminishes his mystery somewhat but also creates new possibilities for his character.

Except for Mulder's vision, it's really Gillian Anderson's episode all the way: Scully's anger, her grief, her tentative stab at exploring her emotions and memories with a hypnotherapist. The scene where she discovers the chip in her neck is spooky,



"The Blessing Way" featured the debut of the Well-Manicured Man (John Neville), leader of an information consortium behind the conspiracy.

to say the least. But her actions toward the end are confusing. If she suspects a killer is on the way to her apartment, why leave and go off with Skinner, when she knows Melissa is about to arrive? And why go to Mulder's apartment, which may be bugged or under observation? These questions fade in the excitement of watching Scully and Skinner pull their guns on each other, but they remain holes in the story.

"You'd be surprised what's not on the map in this country and what our government will do to keep it that way."

—Mulder

PAPER CLIP

★★★★

9/29/95. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Rob Bowman.

A reunited Mulder and Scully probe the mystery behind the New Mexico boxcar and the DAT tape with the help of the Lone Gunmen. Their investigation leads them to Victor Klemper (Walter Modell), a retired German scientist brought to the United States under "Operation Paperclip," the post-World War II project that bypassed required immigration procedures in order to import Nazi scientists and their valuable knowledge to the United States. Klemper sends them to a mine in West Virginia, where, in an extraordinary sequence, they discover a hidden archive: millions of medical records, including one for Scully, and one for Mulder's sister Samantha—but underneath the label on Samantha's folder is an older one for Mulder himself. Skinner, who still has the DAT tape, brokers a deal with the Cigarette Smoking Man; he'll give him the tape, if he promises not to harm Mulder and Scully. But when Krycek beats up Skinner, steals the tape and then goes on the lam after the Cigarette Smoking Man tries to have him assassinated, the Cigarette Smoking Man tells Skinner the deal's off. Skinner plays his trump card and informs him that the contents of the tape have been memorized by members of the Navajo nation. Mulder makes one more upsetting discovery: his mother confesses that his father "chose" Samantha to be abducted.

This barely covers the complicated storyline of "Paper Clip," an episode rich in both plot and theme. "Paper Clip," as stated in the teaser's legend of the White Buffalo Calf, is about choices, trade-offs, and sacrifices. It is also about the people who suffer when others make choices for them without their consent. But Mulder doesn't buy into that game; when Skinner offers them the opportunity to come in from the cold, to let Scully see her sister again, Mulder defers to Scully and willingly abides by her decision.

"Paper Clip," as well as "Anasazi" and "The Blessing Way," is also about the meeting of Western and non-Western cultures, and particularly how they record and remember their history. The Nazis who were brought to the U.S. in the real Operation Paperclip detailed their

horrors meticulously on paper and the medical files in the mine fulfill the same function, and also serve as a contrast to the Navajos' oral tradition of passing down their history. It is that tradition that saves the day for Mulder and Scully, but "Paper Clip" makes no statement against technology. If the answers, as Mulder suggests in the ineffably sad exchange with Scully in the hospital, are truly in the X-Files, perhaps it's because that is where the documented and the undocumented worlds come together.

"Paper Clip" is spectacular to look at, particularly the stunning scene in the deserted mine. An enormous, ruined building constructed as a series of terraces, it possesses the same mythological and psychological resonance as the submarine tower in "End Game." Inside, it looks like an Escher drawing come to life; its staircases seem suspended, as if by magic, in the air. By the time Mulder and Scully enter the endless corridors lined with file cabinets, we are in the realm of the surreal, made even more so by the impossibly huge, bright UFO that rises out of nowhere and the elf-like creatures that scurry past a startled Scully. This scene is overwhelming in concept, execution, and impact, yet the following scene in the diner is a perfect balance, with its intimacy and realism, as Skinner, Scully and Mulder talk around a table.

Mitch Pileggi's performance in this two-parter is outstanding, especially in his wrangles with William B. Davis' Cigarette Smoking Man.

"No man, not the cows again!"

—Zero

D.P.O.

★★1/2

10/6/95. Written by Howard Gordon. Directed by Kim Manners.

An unusually high number of deaths by lightning brings Mulder and Scully to Connerville, Oklahoma, a rural town located near a scientific institute that studies lightning phenomena. They locate a possible witness to the latest death, a strangely inobservant teenager named Darren Peter Oswald (Giovanni Ribisi), who claims he saw nothing unusual at the scene. When Mulder and Scully uncover the information that the emotionally and intellectually stunted Darren is the only surviving victim of the lightning strikes, Mulder begins to suspect a force other than Mother Nature is involved.

"D.P.O." is an underrated episode, coming after the rush of events in "Anasazi," "The Blessing Way," and "Paper Clip." The revelations of those three episodes are barely touched upon in "D.P.O.," and Mulder and Scully appear to be inhumanly unaffected. Some kind of transitional episode was called for, before the story moved on.

On its own, however, "D.P.O." is a slight but touching tale about a damaged, neglected teen who vents his frustration and rage by calling down

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Lightning strikes are guided by an unstable teenager in "D.P.O.," the first stand-alone episode of the season, a let-down after "Paperclip."



again and again the lightning that has given him special powers. Darren and his friend Zero (Jack Black) may be the X-FILES version of Beavis and Butthead (the episode has more than a few moments of dark humor), but Gordon lets us see, in the figure of Darren's verbally abusive mother, the home life that breeds Darren's ignorance. Ribisi's performance is superb, revealing the emptiness in Darren, as well as his anger.

"Pinch me!"

—Mulder

CLYDE BRUCKMAN'S FINAL REPOSE

★★★★

10/13/95. Written by Darin Morgan. Directed by David Nutter.

A grumpy insurance salesman named Clyde Bruckman (Peter Boyle) is drawn, reluctantly, into Mulder and Scully's latest murder investigation when he finds a body stuffed into a dumpster. The murderer is targeting fortune tellers, and as Clyde has the unwanted ability to predict people's deaths, Mulder and Scully take him into protective custody. Soon, Mulder is asking Clyde, who feels it's useless to evade one's fate, to locate bodies and prevent more murders, while Scully uses more traditional methods, although a couple of intuitive leaps of her own actually save the day.

With this second script by resident humorist Darin Morgan, the X-FILES cast and crew have created one of those rare episodes where everything comes together—funny, bizarre, absurd, ironic, and sad. Peter Boyle, whose fatalistic Clyde seems overshadowed by a rain cloud, gives a performance that simply takes over the TV screen. Only actors as strong as Duchovny and Anderson, with their blissfully deadpan delivery, could withstand such a titanic presence, but withstand it they do. This episode is really told from Scully's point of view, and Anderson gives a beautifully nuanced and sensitive performance, especially in her scenes with Boyle. David Nutter, whose close-ups are the best on TV, gives her all the glamour of an old-time movie star.

But acting is just one part of this rewarding episode. The script is a gem, full of hilarious verbal and visual jokes. Each sequence is carefully constructed, with one gag leading naturally to the next, but as in the great comic films, the gags also reveal character. The scene wherein Mulder and Scully first make their appearance and meet celebrity psychic The Stupendous Yappi (an utterly hilarious performance by Duchovny's stand-in, Jaap Broecker) is a delightful illustration. The thematic underpinning, of free will versus fate, is a rich one. That the story ends in tragedy, not comedy, is fitting: the real Clyde Bruckman—a writer and director most notably associated with Buster Keaton (references to Keaton and the other comedy greats with whom Bruckman worked abound here), committed suicide in 1955, and Keaton's own comedies often ended on a melancholy note.

Scully and Mulder search for the soul of an executed murderer, come back for revenge, in Carter-directed "The List," a prison-set drama.



Stuart Charno, husband of former X-FILES scriptwriter Sara Charno, plays the "homicidal maniac" in "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose."

"A woman gets lonely, sometimes she can't wait around for a man to be reincarnated."

—Scully

THE LIST

★★

10/20/95. Written and directed by Chris Carter.

Chris Carter, in his second effort as a director, paints a gorgeous picture with his camera, but in service of one of his most depressing scripts. Neech Manley (Badja Djola), a death row inmate in a Florida penitentiary, vows before his execution to return from the dead to exact revenge on a list of five people who had caused him to suffer. When a prison guard is found dead without explanation—the second of nine deaths, if you count Neech's execution—Mulder and Scully arrive to investigate. Mulder quickly learns about Manley's list from a prisoner and hypothesizes that Manley has indeed begun to carry out his vow; Scully counters there may be a conspiracy among the guards. Pragmatic Warden Brodeur (J.T. Walsh) contends the prisoners have a hand in the murders.

With his jailhouse setting, Carter returns to the themes of control, power, and imprisonment he used so movingly in his first turn as a writer-director in last year's "Duane Barry." "The List" suffers in comparison, giving us little of that first episode's unsettling ambiguity. Mulder and Scully may not know who's doing the killings, but we know it's Neech, avenging himself from beyond the grave, so there's little suspense. Instead, we're reduced to waiting for the next inevitable murder. The maggots and flies infesting the victims are traditional symbols of demons and a nicely repellent way to signal which murders can be attributed to the fiendish Neech, but the shock effect is no substitute for genuine suspense. A scene where one falling maggot clues Mulder and Scully to the location of another victim induces a welcome frisson which an entire swarm cannot.

"The List" is spread out among too large a cast of characters, all of whom seem to come directly from prison films. Walsh's hypocritical, murderous warden is a case in point, although his character serves to remind us that abuse, as so often in this show, flows down from the top. Neech never comes alive as a character, because the viewer's time with him is extremely brief; we see only his fury (which Djola conveys superbly), never his pain. He hovers uncomfortably between this world and the next, failing to engage any real interest. The only human note is struck by Mulder and Scully, whose interaction in the prison is full of warmth. But even this cannot save the story. Rarely has there been an episode in which the two agents have not been able to come to some understanding of what has passed, even if they have no proof to present to the world. At the end

of "The List," although the audience has seen both Manley and Brodeur doing their worst, Mulder and Scully are completely befuddled, leaving them—and the audience—utterly frustrated.

Although Carter's script may not be top-notch, as a director he elicits fine performances, and visually this is an absolutely stunning episode. Carter and director of photography John Bartley film Graeme Murray's set of staircases, catwalks, cells and barred doors in a series of shots so carefully composed they could be paintings. Their choice of hazy, eerie green light turns this lock-up into an altogether unworldly prison. In a series that routinely delivers fabulous images to the screen, this episode is a stand-out.

"From a dried skin sample, you're concluding—what? That he's some kind of fat-sucking vampire?"

—Scully to Mulder

2SHY

★★1/2

11/3/95. Written by Jeff Vlaming. Directed by David Nutter.

Mulder and Scully are called in to work a strange case of murder in Cleveland. Someone or something has sucked all the fatty tissue from a dead woman, leaving her corpse enveloped in an acidic glop. Her roommate mentions her friend's use of computer chat rooms, and that lead sets Mulder, Scully and Detective Alan Cross (James Handy, in a weary but sweet performance) towards finding the man, a mild-mannered translator of Italian literature named Virgil Incanto (Timothy Carhart).



The corpse of a victim in "2Shy," an episode about a mutant killer who feeds on the fatty tissue of women found on computer chat lines.

Virgil is an upscale, articulate version of first season's unforgettable liver-eater Eugene Victor Tooms. He also must kill to survive; however, he takes a nasty pleasure in romancing his insecure, overweight prey, squeezing into their lives much like Tooms squeezed into people's houses. Vlaming's script smoothly combines a number of issues that concern women, such as body image and meeting men via computer. Scully's encounter with sexism in the workplace (Detective Cross suggests that she, as a woman, might not be able to handle the case) is an apt reflection of Incanto's inability to see his victims as people.

Carhart is chilling as Incanto, although he doesn't reach the heights Doug Hutchison achieved as Tooms. Catherine Paolone is excellent as Ellen, the woman who proves his undoing, and Aloka McLean gives a touching performance as Jesse, a blind girl whose would-be poet mother (Glynis Davies) is another victim. The fourth-act battle in Ellen's bathroom between Scully and Incanto raises your pulse, but alas, it's a giveaway, because the camera made darn sure the audience knew Scully left her gun in the bedroom.

Gillian Anderson's confident performance has just the right mix of toughness and sensitivity, thrusting Scully into a number of difficult situations.



"Sometimes the only sane response to an insane world is insanity."

—Mulder

THE WALK

★★★1/2

11/10/95. Written by John Shiban. Directed by Rob Bowman.

The attempted suicide of an Army lieutenant (Don Thompson) catches Mulder's interest when the officer claims a phantom soldier prevented him from killing himself. General Callahan (Thomas Kopache), the base's commander, opposes Mulder and Scully's investigation but gives in when his adjutant and his young son die in mysterious accidents, after which he also sees the phantom soldier. Mulder links the phantom to one of the hospital's chronic patients, an embittered quadruple amputee named Leonard Trimble (Ian Tracey), who Mulder believes has mastered astral projection in order to bring misery to the officers he holds responsible for his condition.

A lot of the military detail in "The Walk" is wrong, and once again Scully, a pathologist, makes a psychological diagnosis when Mulder, a psychologist, should properly be the one to do so. Their characterization is off-balance too; they are either distant from each other and the case at hand or too blatantly angry, in what looks like an attempt to draw emotion from them. Anderson does have one astonishing moment, when Scully observes a murder through a window in a locked door: she conveys, in profile yet, every notch upwards of Scully's mounting horror.



Mulder rescues a young kidnap victim in "Oubliette," an episode which explores his feelings about his own missing sister.

Otherwise, this is a solid episode about responsibility and retribution, and the guest cast is quite fine, particularly Tracey, and Andrea Barclay, as the bereaved Mrs. Callahan. The scene wherein Captain Draper (Nancy Sorel) meets her death in the swimming pool is nicely done, the wavy light recalling the pool scene in Jacques Tourneur's *CAT PEOPLE*.

"I've probably experienced just about everything once or twice. It's all been pretty temporary."

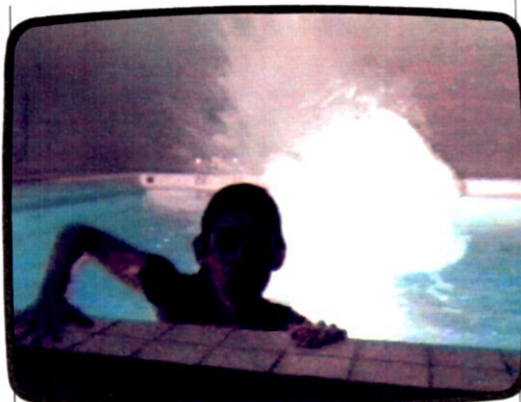
—Lucy Householder

OUBLIETTE

★★★1/2

11/17/95. Written by Charles Grant Craig. Directed by Kim Manners.

A bizarre case of empathy draws Mulder and Scully to Seattle. A woman named Lucy Householder (Tracey Ellis) bled and collapsed at the very moment when a man was kidnapping a teenage girl named Amy Jacobs (Jewel Staite) on the other side of the city; even more stranger, she incoherently babbled the very words the kidnapper was heard to speak. Lucy herself had been a kidnapper victim, and when her kidnapper is identified as the same man who took Amy, Mulder becomes convinced that Lucy is experiencing whatever Amy sees and feels. He soon comes into conflict with the



In "The Walk," Captain Draper (Nancy Sorel) meets her demise in a pool, echoing a scene from Jacques Tourneur's *THE CAT PEOPLE*.

local FBI team and Scully, who feel all the evidence points to Lucy as an accomplice, not an empath.

"Oubliette" recalls "Conduit" from *THE X-FILES*' first season, although this time Mulder's identification is with two victims, not one. "Oubliette" stands on its own, however, without having to make comparisons. The relationship between Mulder and Lucy, tender and prickly at the same time, is completely believable and deeply moving as Lucy slowly grows to trust him. Tracey Ellis, with her hard-life face, her lank hair, and her soft voice, is perfect as the wounded Lucy; she is another in the *X-FILES* portrait gallery of terrific guest stars. Michael Chieffo's kidnapper, in love with photographing his victims, is totally creepy, and the scene where he takes Polaroids of his latest victim is a bone-chilling reversal of the scene in *REAR WINDOW* where Jimmy Stewart tries to fend off Raymond Burr with his flashlight. The foreshadowing of Amy's near-death in the river with Wade's giving her too much water to drink earlier on is a clever revelation of another layer to his character, and just one example of the strength of this script. The pacing seems off at times (too many scenes of people walking) and the writing for Scully is problematic at first; she seems too opposed to Mulder's interest in Lucy, and she is given no viable theory to counter Mulder's. Her decision to side with Mulder and accompany him to the river resolves that problem, but then comes a terrible mistake: the scene where Mulder and Scully administer CPR to Amy. Although Scully's giving up on Amy may make a dramatic point, it is so contrary to real medical procedure that it breaks the spell of the story and leaves the viewer gaping at her stupidity. The script makes up for it, with a melancholy but touching scene at the end between Mulder and Scully, when Scully points out that Mulder is the connection between Lucy and Amy that saved Amy. If director Kim Manners' blocking points to a lack of connection between Scully, sitting on the bed, and Mulder, gazing out the window, like Lucy in the hospital, that is in keeping with the touch-me-not spirit of this episode.

"Oh, look at this—a beacon in the night."
—Mulder, spotting the approaching Skinner

NISEI

★★★

11/24/95. Written by Chris Carter, Howard Gordon, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by David Nutter.

This very serious "mythology" episode starts off (after the opening credits) with a screamingly funny in-joke, when Scully informs Mulder that the \$29.95 alien autopsy tape he bought from some guy in Allentown, Pa., is "even hokier than the one aired on the Fox network!" And this line was delivered a mere minute or two after a commercial for a rerun of Fox's alien autopsy program! Maybe network executives do have a sense of humor after all.

Mulder's tape, however, ends not with Jonathan Frakes' ponderous narration, but the abrupt arrival of a military assassination squad into the autopsy room. A trip to Allentown to talk to the man who taped the footage off a satellite transmission propels Mulder and Scully into another chapter of the government conspiracy. The contents of a Japanese diplomat's briefcase cause them to split up, Mulder to investigate the Talapus, a ship tied up at Newport News, and Scully to interview the people on a list of Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) members. Separately they learn bits and pieces about a project run by Japanese doctors, former members of the notorious Unit 731, the Japanese Army unit that conducted horrific tests on human subjects during World War II. When Scully finds herself recognized by the MUFON members, she realizes she herself was one of the modern-day test subjects: all the MUFON women have had a chip implanted in their necks.

This scene with the MUFON women, at the end of Act II, is the highlight of "Nisei." The setting, a suburban home, is bland and normal, the women are indistinguishable from other women, and the lighting is clear and crisp; but the women talk about abduction, experimentation, implantation, and death. David Nutter's blocking and use of the camera creates a sense of paranoia and fear completely at odds with the everyday setting.

Some of the emotional beats in this episode seem off. Scully tells Mulder the MUFON women are sick and one is dying with the implication she could be in the same situation and he barely seems to hear her, another example of the disconnection between the two this season. The disconnection turns into physical reality when they split up once again to explore separately their own roles in the story. Scully brings the chip removed from her neck to be analyzed by FBI technician Agent Pendrell (Brendan Beiser), whose crush on the oblivious Scully is instantly endearing. Her pleas to Mulder, conveyed via cell phone, to stay away from the train carrying cross-country the Japanese doctors and their subjects fall on deaf ears.

"Nisei" is not an immediate sequel to the last two mythology episodes, "The Blessing Way" and "Paper Clip." The story starts up through sheer happenstance, with Mulder's purchase of the alien autopsy videotape, but it is clearly related through the similarity of the events surrounding the historical Operation Paperclip and Unit 731. *THE X-FILES*'s mythology episodes have a sense of the past rare for television and an awareness that we are who we are, as individuals and a nation, because of the actions taken by our parents and grandparents and their parents before them. It's hard to judge the mythology episodes; they're like chapters in a book, and each ending opens up new possibilities. But they all have a gravity and a weight that compensates for the occasional nagging feeling that no conspiracy this big could ever exist because someone, somewhere, will always talk.

In "Nisei," Scully has FBI technician Pendrell (Brendan Beiser) examine a chip that was implanted in her neck during an abduction.



"But I'm not a very good shot, and when I miss, I tend to miss low."

—Mulder to the Red-Haired Man

731

★★★1/2

12/1/95. Written by Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Rob Bowman.

A scene more disturbing than anything else previously seen on *THE X-FILES* opens the second half of this conspiracy two-parter: soldiers round up, then massacre, helpless, pajama-clad prisoners, stirring our collective memory of photographs and movie footage chronicling the horrors of genocide: the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia. The only teaser to even come close in horror was last season's "The Calusari," which showed us the ultimate TV no-no: killing a child. But there is something different about these prisoners; they look like alien Grays.

Once past the teaser, this is a swiftly-paced installment, cutting back and forth between Mulder, who has made his way into the train he jumped on top of in "Nisei," and Scully, who has traveled to the camp in West Virginia and discovered an open pit filled with the massacre victims. A gripping scenario ensues, with Mulder locking himself and the Red-Haired Man (Stephen McHattie), an assassin first seen in "Nisei," into the train car containing the creature brought on board in "Nisei," while Scully is escorted to a similar car by The Elder, a member of the Consortium, and told this is where she was brought during her abduction.

The dispute over the phone between Mulder and Scully concerning the identity of the creature in the train car (Mulder thinks it is a human/alien hybrid; Scully believes it to be a human deformed by experimentation) form the core of this episode, and exposes the conflict in their belief systems and approach to their experiences. It also re-establishes, for the purpose of the larger drama of *THE X-FILES*, the rationale for Scully's adherence to the completely human origins of her abduction.

There is a more immediate crisis at hand. Not only does the Red-Haired Man want to kill Mulder and the creature confined behind a locked door, but there is a bomb in the train car. The bomb may be a plot contrivance to screw up the tension levels, but it's a very effective one, and it's a neat twist that Mulder, unlike the usual action hero, is unable to disarm it. Not surprisingly, Mulder survives, thanks to a Deus X Machina, but we still get our ration of visceral thrills when that train car blows to kingdom come. Sadly, it takes the innocent little creature with it.

The final scene between Mulder and Scully, as they realize their evidence is gone and they are once more empty-handed, is beautifully written and acted. "Apology is policy" is a line well worth remembering, and a fitting substitute for the show's usual tagline of "The Truth Is Out There."

Michael Berryman (THE HILLS HAVE EYES) is a stand-out in "Revelations," as a handyman whose appearance hides a gentle soul.



Soldiers escort aliens as part of a government cover-up to hide their existence in "731," the conclusion of the previous episode, "Nisei."

"Mulder, would you do me a favor? Would you smell Mr. Jarvis?"

—Scully

REVELATIONS

★★★1/2

12/15/95. Written by Kim Newton. Directed by David Nutter.

Scully and Mulder protect a young Ohio boy named Kevin Kryder (Kevin Zegers) who they fear may be the next victim of a murderer (Kenneth Walsh) who has killed eleven false stigmatics. To Scully's astonishment, Kevin's stigmatic wounds appear to be genuine, and when she observes a series of seeming impossible phenomena, including an incorruptible body accompanied by a floral scent, she begins to consider the possibility that miracles really do happen.

Scully's search to reconcile her religious beliefs and her scientific training makes for powerful drama, and Gillian Anderson is up to the challenge. She gives a terrific performance, letting us see all of Scully's emotions as she is torn between her heart and her head. Her dialogues with Mulder, cast for once as the disbeliever, are particularly fascinating, as they struggle with positions strangely opposite from the ones they usually take. Mulder's skepticism is credible, having been shown in past episodes to disdain organized religion, but his attitude towards Scully is inconsistent, acting sympathetically in some scenes, but in others condescendingly.

Michael Berryman is simply wonderful as Owen Jarvis, the handyman whose frightening appearance conceals a pure and noble soul.

The episode bogs down when it comes to the plot. The killer, an Atlanta businessman named Simon Gates (Kenneth Walsh), has the power to conduct great heat, and when he strangles his victims, he burns his fingerprints right into their flesh. He can also bend the iron window bars. Mulder, who normally would be fascinated by this unexplainable phenomenon, barely seems interested. Kevin is an odd choice for a stigmatic; there's nothing particularly saintly about him. The only trait that distinguishes him from any other child is his ability to spin a tale. Unfortunately, Kevin Zegers gives an extremely self-conscious performance; he is unable to hint at anything beneath the surface of the dialogue. The death of his mother (well played by Hayley Tyson) barely affects this boy. The ending is a real mess: Scully conveniently figures out Gates has taken Kevin to a nearby recycling plant by linking a cryptic message, spoken by Kevin's mentally ill father, to a logo she spots on a conveniently placed recycling bin. She dashes off alone, without backup, and manages to save the day; then asks Mulder to make a statement for her, even though he wasn't even near the recycling plant. But this nonsense sets up a simply wonderful scene: Scully's visit to a church and her confession to a priest of all her fears and doubts. All complaints melt away before Anderson's deeply felt acting. If only the external narrative had matched the trajectory of Scully's

pilgrim's progress. Then we'd have an episode to equal "Beyond the Sea" and "Irresistible." Those episodes, and "Revelations," were directed David Nutter, who always inspires Anderson to her very best. After "Revelations" he moved on to Chris Carter's new show *MILLENNIUM*; with any luck he'll be back directing more *X-FILES* next season.

"...and suddenly you see reality, as it, you know, really exists."

—Dude

THE WAR OF THE COPROPHAGES

★★★1/2

1/5/96. Written by Darin Morgan. Directed by Kim Manners.

What do Mulder and Scully do on the weekend? Mulder escapes the fumigation of his apartment building by observing UFO hot spots in Miller's Grove, Massachusetts (an homage to the Grover's Mill, N.J., locale of Orson Welles' *WAR OF THE WORLDS*). Scully bathes her dog, cleans her gun, eats dinner and chats with Mulder on the phone. But Mulder's idyll is interrupted when his assistance is requested by the local sheriff in the investigation of an unusual death. A witness claims cockroaches are the culprits. Before long, Mulder is theorizing about cockroach robots from outer space, but Scully keeps heading him off at the pass—by phone—with completely logical explanations for each death. It isn't until Mulder meets Dr. Bambi Berenbaum (Bobbie Phillips), a beautiful entomologist working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, that Scully decides she really must pack a bag and head north.



"War of Coprophages": Mulder is seen from the insect-eye-view of killer cockroaches, which he believes to be alien robotic probes.

Writer Darin Morgan and director Kim Manners carefully crank up the comic tension, until the entire town is ready to burst, and burst it does in a convenience store riot that has to be the funniest thing on TV this year, with the sensible Scully utterly ineffectual at putting a stop to the nonsense. And that's only the prelude to an even bigger, and much messier, explosion.

Each gag is driven by a case of comic misperception, whether on the part of the viewer, or by the characters. Often the joke stems from a misperception about oneself, beginning with Dr. Bugger's pronouncement in the teaser that human beings, unlike roaches, are capable of self-illumination. By the end of the episode, that observation is definitely open to debate. The visuals underscore the differing points of view, especially shots like the roach's-eye view of a Mulder multiplied into dozens of Mulders.

This lightest and most farcical of Morgan's scripts does not plumb the emotional depths of his other episodes, and it has a more classically comic ending, with the incipient and incongruous liaison of luscious Dr. Berenbaum (who's barely glanced at Mulder, though he's struck dumb by her) and wheelchair-bound Dr. Newton. Mulder's parting comment to Scully that she smells bad falls flat, however; it's just too mean-spirited to work.



"I am not going to be humiliated by you, in front of you, or by having to bring in a teenage girl on her birthday, of all days, to identify the bones of her dead dog Mr. Tippy!"

—Scully to Mulder

SYZYGY

★1/2

1/26/96. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Rob Bowman.

Reports of cult killings bring Mulder and Scully to Comity, New Hampshire. Their suspicions fall on Margi and Terri, high school cheerleaders whose statements about satanic rituals are suspiciously similar. As the town's panic mounts, Mulder and Scully's partnership turns hostile, and they begin to act strangely, with Scully taking to cigarettes and Mulder to drink. A local astrologer suggests that a rare alignment of the planets may account for the uncharacteristic behavior of the town.



One of the horrific images in "Grotesque," a dark tale about a serial killer who claims to have been possessed by demonic forces.

"Syzygy," yet another comic episode, is a lost opportunity. The best moments, with the exception of the amusing scenes with cheerfully blasé astrologer Madame Zirinka (Denalda Williams), are the genuinely scary ones, especially the scene showing a boy crushed to death underneath the high school gym bleachers. If the rest of the episode had been played straight, then this could have been a horror classic. As it is, the jokes fall flat, because the humor exists in a vacuum. A prime example is the doctor in drag: a man is not funny just because he's in woman's clothing; there has to be some kind of reaction from the other characters. For proof, look no further than David Duchovny, in his pre-X-FILES days, as Denise/Dennis Bryson in TWIN PEAKS. It's the reaction of his colleagues that make Bryson's appearance such a side-splitter.

The relationship of Mulder and Scully is, in a word, ugly. For those who treasure the witty spats of Hepburn and Tracy, the dialogue in "Syzygy" induces cringes. If this had been a serious episode, the sniping might have worked, had Mulder and Scully gained some new knowledge of themselves through this confusing experience. But they're still snapping at each other in the final shot.

The episode's climax, a *melée* in the police station choreographed to Khatchaturian's *Sabre Dance*, could not be more heavy-handed or more obvious. Compare it with the hilarious riot in "The War of the Coprophages"—hilarious because Scully is there to react to it. In fact, much of "Syzygy" can be compared to "Coprophages," to the former's detriment: there are killings in a small town; people panic; Mulder meets a woman; and Scully is jealous—professionally jealous, of course.

Some of the humor works. The scene wherein Scully puffs away on a cigarette and Mulder mixes a truly disgusting screwdriver is amusing, primarily due to Anderson and Duchovny, who are masters of milking the comic deadpan. Duchovny is especially good, with his ever-languid Mulder now on what looks like a seven-second tape delay. A drink in Mulder's hands serves as a reminder of Bill Mulder's drinking in "Anasazi." What would this

scene have been like if played straight?

Wendy Benson and Lisa Robin Kelley are dead on as Margi and Terri, and make their otherwise stereotypical characters work. Again, one can't help imagining how truly frightening their witness statement scene would have been, had this been a different type of episode.

The cinematography from John Bartley, is lovely, particularly in the first act funeral scene, aglow with a golden light unusual for this show.

"I wouldn't want to disappoint you by not disappointing you."

—Mulder to former boss Bill Patterson

GROTESQUE

★★★1/2

2/2/96. Written by Howard Gordon. Directed by Kim Manners.

A three-year hunt for a serial murderer ends with the arrest of John Mostow (Levani), but a disturbing twist threatens to undo the case's closure: a new body is found displaying the same facial mutilations as Mostow's victims. Mostow claims that he was possessed by a demon who has moved on to a new host and that his obsessive drawing and sculpturing of gargoyles was a desperate attempt to ward the demon off. Mulder finds himself on the case when his former boss at the Investigative Service Unit, Bill Patterson (an excellent Kurtwood Smith) requests his assistance from Skinner. Immediately it's like old times: hostility radiates from Patterson, who despises Mulder's methods as much as he needs them. In the middle of this personality clash stands a worried Scully, fearing for Mulder's sanity, as he submerges himself into the murderer's mind, sleeping at Mostow's studio, pouring over his drawings, trying some sculpting of his own. Between his obsessive behavior and some troubling physical evidence that points to Mulder's possible involvement in yet another murder, she begins to doubt his ability to differentiate between himself and his prey.

This episode, one of the darkest ever in tone and visual design, resembles last season's "Irresistible" in the ambiguity of its demon, glimpsed momentarily by Mulder: it's real, all right, but whether its place of origin lies within or without the human heart and imagination remains unanswered. It is also a fascinating look back at how troublesome life must have been for a maverick like Mulder when he joined the FBI, at how truly obsessive and conflicted he is, and at how the dark entices him. His assault on the helpless Mostow is extremely disturbing—a flashback to his loss of control with Duane Barry. Duchovny is superb at communicating each step of Mulder's deterioration; one wishes the episode could have lasted another half hour, to make his descent more gradual and to give Duchovny the opportunity to display even more shades to Mulder's fracturing personality. Anderson is equally good showing Scully at her supportive best.

"Grotesque" is a triumph for director Manners, cinematographer Bartley, and the X-FILES art

The eyes of an alien in "Piper Maru," an effect achieved by mechanical effects supervisor Dave Gauthier and visual effects supervisor Mat Beck.



Under the influence of an unusual alignment of stars and planets, Mulder resorts to some uncharacteristic behavior in "Syzygy."

department. The predominant blue tones, the manipulation of light and dark, the swirling camera, the hundreds of drawings and sculptures of gargoyles—all serve to reveal character, accelerate the tension, and breed an overwhelming sense of dread. Mark Snow's score is also one of his best. Alas, this truly fine episode ends on an intrusive note, a superfluous voice-over from Mulder philosophizing again on the nature of evil. He spells out what the camera is saying a hundred times more effectively with its final shot of a painting of a gargoyle.

"We bury our dead alive, don't we?"

—Commander Johansen

PIPER MARU

★★★

2/9/96. Written by Frank Spotnitz & Chris Carter. Directed by Rob Bowman.

THE X-FILES' conspiracy storyline advances in another two-parter, beginning with Skinner telling an outraged Scully the investigation into Melissa's murder has been suspended for lack of leads. Frustrated but unable to act, Scully plunges into what looks like another Mulder wild goose chase: determining the cause of the strange burns suffered by the crew of the *Piper Maru*. Mulder's attention is caught by the ship's original position, the very spot where the Talapus (from "Nisei") retrieved what he believes to be a UFO. By the end of the hour, Mulder and Scully have learned that something—or someone—indeed was at the bottom of the sea, something that caused the crew of the *Zeus Faber*, a World War II sub, to experience the same fatal burns as the *Piper Maru* crew. Mulder and Scully split up once more: Mulder to follow a woman named Jerri Kallenchuk (Jo Bates) who may know the secret behind the retrieved UFO; Scully to talk with an old family friend, Commander Johansen, who may be guarding the same secrets. Meanwhile, the conspirators focus their attention on Skinner in a most unpleasant way.

This swiftly-moving episode has a number of outstanding action sequences. First is Mulder's encounter with Jerri, a tough-talking, '90s film noir dame, happy to keep a finger on the trigger of the shotgun fastened to the underside of her desk. Their interaction in a Hong Kong restaurant crackles with anticipation, and it's great fun to see Jerri's sarcasm annoy Mulder to the point that he is driven to manhandle her. Jerri meets a bad end a minute later, during an enormously exciting sequence at her Hong Kong office (shot in lurid blues and reds by John Bartley). Mulder's furious confrontation at the airport with Krycek is also a keeper. It's regrettable that the next plot turn hinges on a major writing blunder, when Mulder stupidly allows Krycek to clean up in the bathroom by himself.

Satisfying though Mulder's adventures may be, it is Scully's scenes that lend "Piper Maru" an emotional depth. Her anger over the filing away of Melissa's murder investigation, her flashback to a



In "Apocrypha" Scully visits Skinner in the hospital, where he is recovering from a gunshot wound in the previous episode "Piper Maru."

young Melissa, and her reminisces with Johansen finally give us, after many months, an idea of what she is thinking and feeling about her sister's death.

The conception of the alien is devilishly clever. Those ink-cloud eyes, an effect achieved by mechanical effects supervisor Dave Gauthier and visual effects supervisor Mat Beck, are wonderfully creepy. This alien is different from the morphing aliens of "Colony" and "End Game"—it takes over your body physically, instead of impersonating you—but the effect is the same: the person you think you know may not be who he seems.

"We show talent for these G-man activities."
—Langley

APOCRYPHA ★★

2/2/96. Written by Frank Spotnitz & Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

1953: Three young men are questioning a horribly burned, terrified crewman about the events onboard the *Zeus Faber* seven years ago. By the end of this teaser, we find, to our shock, that two of the men are Bill Mulder and the Cigarette Smoking Man. The identity of the third man—Deep Throat?—is unknown. Through facial expressions and a few words, we see that even this early, Bill Mulder and the Smoking Man are treading different paths, and we begin to understand how they arrived at their final meeting in "Anasazi."

There is much to enjoy in "Apocrypha" when it returns to the present, but nothing quite as startling as that teaser. The plots twist its way through so many alleyways that on first viewing it's a bit confusing. Mulder and Scully are reunited after Mulder returns to the U.S., with the alien-possessed Krycek in tow. The alien-Krycek escapes to find the Cigarette Smoking Man and hands over the still-missing DAT tape in exchange for transport to his ship, now housed at an abandoned missile silo in North Dakota. Skinner is recovering from the gunshot wound inflicted in "Piper Maru" by the Hispanic Man, but when he is abducted out of the hospital by that shady character, Scully not only comes to rescue but finally captures the man who shot her sister. Anderson is terrific in this scene, pounding down the street after the ambulance, shooting the Hispanic Man, and resisting the overwhelming temptation to shoot him dead.

When the story finally lands at that silo in North Dakota, we are treated to spectacular shots of the vault-like interior, dotted by rows of starry lights stretching up into infinity. Of course, Mulder and Scully are hustled away by the Cigarette Smoking Man's soldiers before they get a good look at anything, but that leaves room for a truly alarming ending for Krycek, punctuated by Mark Snow's eerie music. "Apocrypha" is a bit of a let-down from "Piper Maru," neither as exciting (except for Scully's apprehension of the Hispanic Man) nor as moving, but it wraps up neatly the

DAT tape plot thread that began back in "Anasazi," offers Scully some closure for Melissa, and leaves us wondering just what that alien was and what its mission was when it crashed into the sea all those years ago.

"Made you look."
—Mulder to Modell

PUSHER ★★

2/23/96. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Rob Bowman.

When one Robert Patrick Modell, a.k.a. "Pusher" (Robert Wisden), calls the FBI and claims to be behind the apparent suicides of 14 people, he is promptly arrested—and within minutes there is a terrible traffic accident, leaving one agent dead, another injured, and Modell on the lam. The injured agent, Frank Burst (Vic Polizos), brings in Mulder and Scully to assist in recapturing Modell. Mulder surmises that Modell, an otherwise average man, has acquired a suggestive ability to "push" his victims into belief situations that cause their deaths. Scully is dubious as to Modell's supernatural powers, but when they discover Modell is dying from a brain tumor, they agree that he has decided he has nothing to lose and will take his cat and mouse game to the farthest ends. The game takes a vicious turn when Modell focuses in on Mulder as a "worthy adversary" and lures him and Scully into an ultimate test of wills.

An intense nailbiter, "Pusher" ranks with the best of THE X-FILES. Vince Gilligan's script crackles with witty dialogue and smart characterization that advance the story. For instance, Mulder's taunting of Modell, making him look to see if his shoelaces are untied, unleashes Modell's interest in Mulder and leads directly, two acts later, to the climactic showdown in the hospital between Mulder, Scully, and Modell. That remarkable sequence is foreshadowed beautifully throughout with such scenes as Mulder's extreme concentration at the FBI shooting range and Modell's obsession with the idea of "payback." The hospital scene, wherein Modell impels Mulder, through mental suggestion, into a game of Russian roulette that forces Mulder not only to put a gun to his head (and click on an empty chamber) but train the weapon on an unarmed Scully, is one of the memorable scenes of this show. It consists for the most part of a series of close-ups, and each actor makes the most of it. Mulder's struggle, Scully's courage and fear, and Modell's desire for revenge and death are written in the eyes and on the faces of the characters, so much so that the scene could have been done without even its sparse dialogue.

Vic Polizos's determined Burst is notable for creating a memorable FBI agent not in conflict with Mulder and Scully, and the scene in which he suffers an induced heart attack is a true shocker. Julia Arkos as the computer records technician Holly gives a piquant performance, and the scene

Mulder is forced by psychic suggestion into a game of Russian roulette in "Pusher," a nail-biting episode that ranks among the series' best.



when Modell "pushes" her to beat up Skinner is, quite literally, a kick. Pusher is an egotistical, deluded monster, but Wisden makes you feel a bit sorry for him: if only he had had the social and emotional tools to match his psychic ones, his fate might have been very different.

"More rats, Scully. Don't you think that's significant?"
—Mulder

TESO DOS BICHOS ★

3/8/96. Written by John Shiban. Directed by Kim Manners.

Cliches fasten their claws into this tired yarn about the vengeful jaguar spirit of an Ecuadorian shamaness whose remains have been exported to a Boston museum by a U.S. archaeology team. When team members start disappearing, Mulder theorizes the shamaness is responsible; Scully suspects the influence of a native drug on archaeologist Antonio Bilac (Vic Trevino). Before long, the grade-Z horror flick conventions pop up, with everyone acting like they left their brain at home. This nonsense isn't even fun, because it's all so derivative, and Duchovny and Anderson look bored. The purported climax comes when Mulder and Scully traverse through the maze-like



Having our heroes prowling around in the dark while a monster is on the loose is but one of the cliches on view in "Teso Los Bichos," a lesser episode.

museum basement, where they finally meet the enemy: a flock of kittycats presumably possessed by the jaguar spirit. At this point, one starts wondering when the crew from MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 are going to get into the act. Most excruciating to witness is Scully's tussle with an obviously fake kitty, in reality a dummy covered in rabbit fur. Perhaps writer John Shiban was influenced by CAT PEOPLE producer Val Lewton (namesake of the doomed Dr. Lewton?) but, as Lewton proved, true horror often lies in fear of the unseen. Alas, no such subtleties exist here.

Duchovny and Anderson survive this with straight faces but not much more. The scene in which blood drips from a human intestine deposited in a tree is nicely done; Duchovny, by hurriedly wiping away the drop on his face, creates some real feeling. The distorted images from the shamaness' point of view are evocative. Trevino as the drugged Dr. Bilac delivers a terribly mannered performance, but Janne Mortil as Mona, the unfortunate grad student, is believable. Unfortunately, the serious issues of academic politics and misappropriation of cultural artifacts are only afterthoughts in this script.

Director Kim Manners does his best. The episode's lighting is nearly non-existent; for the first time, it really is too dark, maybe to disguise that fake pussycat. Editor Jim Gross deserves combat pay for cutting such impenetrable footage.

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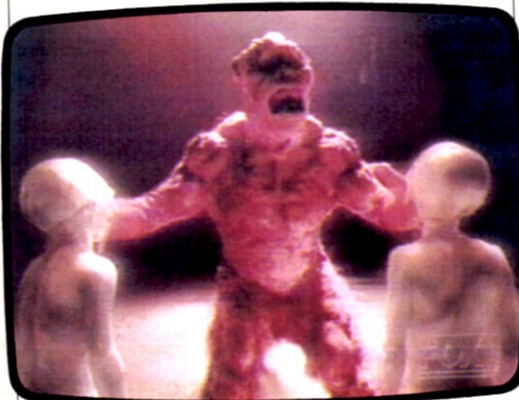
"What good is an interpreter when everyone speaks the language of silence?"
—Detective Glen Chao

HELL MONEY

3/29/96. Written by Jeff Vlaming. Directed by Tucker Gates.

Newly arrived immigrants in San Francisco's Chinese community play a deadly game: they gamble body parts, corneas and kidneys and even hearts, against a chance to win an enormous lottery prize. Mulder and Scully come into the case when a young man is found cremated, a murder that fits the profile of a serial murder case Mulder has been tracking. They team up with Detective Glen Chao (B.D. Wong), a young American detective of Chinese ancestry. Autopsy results, clues, and witness statements lead them, eventually, to Dr. Chin (James Hong), the recipient of the black market organs. An arrogant chain-smoker, he's a Chinese version of the Cigarette Smoking Man.

The story, about the exploitation of the weak by the strong, is a recurring X-FILES theme, but as treated here it would fit nicely into any other police drama. Mulder's initial speculation that Chinese ghosts are to blame is feeble, and even he abandons this theory by mid-episode. The ghost theme then mutates into a symbolic mode, with the notion that the immigrants are haunted by the ghosts of their ancestors, but it's a desperate grab to retain a paranormal aspect. The three actors in the black suits and ghost masks are not very convincing.



The alien Lord Kinbote in "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space,'" writer Darin Morgan's tribute to Ray Harryhausen and Vladimir Nabokov.

The pacing, with much repetition of nearly identical scenes, is glacial. There are nice performances from Michael Yama as a father desperate for money to cure his daughter's leukemia, and from Lucy Alexis Liu as the gentle daughter. And it's wonderful to see a performer of the caliber of Tony-winner B.D. Wong on THE X-FILES. Although not deeply developed in the script, his youthful but jaded detective, caught between two cultures, is altogether appealing.

Despite the failings of the script, the visuals, with their vibrant red tones, are a pleasure, and the lottery scenes are well staged. Best of all, Scully makes such a horribly, wonderfully corny joke about the victim who left his heart in San Francisco that even the dour Mulder cracks a grin.

"Ever see a UFO in these parts? Ever experienced a period of missing time? You ever have the suspicion that you've been abducted by aliens? Have you ever found a metal implant in your body? You checked everywhere?"

—Mulder to Ovaltine Diner cook

JOSE CHUNG'S "FROM OUTER SPACE"

4/12/96. Written by Darin Morgan. Directed by Rob Bowman.

José Chung (Charles Nelson Reilly) is a writer whose publisher thinks there are big bucks to be



The plot of "Hell Money" is about a lottery in which Chinese immigrants gamble their organs in exchange for a chance of a huge cash prize.

made off the UFO abduction phenomenon. The puzzling abduction case of Chrissy Georgio and Harold Lamb, teenagers from Klass County, Washington, proves a suitable subject, and included on Chung's interview list are the two FBI agents who investigated the case. Mulder, fearing ridicule, refuses, but Scully accepts, and as she tells the tale, we are treated to a dazzling display of unreliable narrative piled upon unreliable narrative—flashbacks of flashbacks. To make matters worse, each person not only has an agenda to promote, which may color his or her testimony, but they all—including Scully and Mulder—may have been hypnotized into believing something else happened to them than what really happened. Which means, of course, that it is completely impossible to arrive at any consensus as to the truth.

Even so, the script is so deftly written that each scene, contradictory though it may be to what came before, advances the plot. The baseline story seems to be that the Air Force costumes its pilots to look like alien Grays, sends them out in experimental aircraft to render citizens unconscious and bring them to a secret facility, where they are hypnotized into believing they've been abducted by aliens. The tables are turned on two of the pilots, in the process of kidnapping Chrissy and Harold, when a creature right out of a Ray Harryhausen movie kidnaps them, along with Chrissy and Harold, and brings them all back to his ship for experimentation. Also on Chung's interview list are science fiction fan Blaine, who lives in the hope of being abducted, and Roky, the lineman (CLOSE ENCOUNTERS reference) who witnessed the abduction and has written up his account in screenplay format. And then there are two mysterious Men in Black...

This is a very funny episode—self-referential and in-joke, loaded with verbal and visual allusions to UFO and popular culture, especially sci-fi and horror films, although there are other more obscure references: Harold Lamb is the name of the character played by Harold Lloyd in the silent comedy THE FRESHMAN. But this is also the ultimate expression of Morgan's—and THE X-FILES'—continuing fascination with the nature of truth, and the truth of one's memories. In a way, this episode is a sequel to first season's "Deep Throat," which saw Mulder captured by the Air Force and drugged into losing the memory of the experimental aircraft he witnessed. For all its humor, "Jose Chung's 'From Outer Space'" is a deeply pessimistic episode. If you can't trust yourself, and you can't trust others, how can you form any kind of relationship? No wonder Chung's final thoughts concern human loneliness, rather than a pronouncement on truth and reality.

Director Rob Bowman shows off a deft hand at directing comedy. Duchovny and Anderson are simply priceless at sending themselves up, but even in the midst of insanity they bring poignancy to their characters. And Charles Nelson Reilly is divine; what delightful and unexpected casting.

"I was no choir boy. I inhaled."

—Skinner

AVATAR

4/26/96. Teleplay by Howard Gordon. Story by David Duchovny & Howard Gordon. Directed by James Charleston.

Nearly two years after his first appearance in "Tooms," Mitch Pileggi's Assistant Director Walter Skinner takes center stage. Unfortunately, it's a creaky vehicle—the stern, by-the-book boss accused of a terrible crime. Skinner, on the verge of an unwanted divorce, finds solace in the arms of a woman he meets in a bar. He wakes the next morning to find her murdered. Of course, the D.C. police consider him the prime suspect, and the FBI internal affairs people start poking around for a reason to get rid of him. But Mulder is convinced that Skinner has been framed, and works tirelessly to clear him. A more dubious Scully, wondering why the normally forceful Skinner doesn't defend himself, also searches for proof of his innocence. Add in Skinner's estranged wife Sharon (Jennifer Hetrick), Skinner's sleep disorders, the old woman who haunts him since his near-death experience in Vietnam, and the return of the conspiracy, in the form of the Cigarette Smoking Man and the Gray-Faced Man from "Piper Maru"—and you get a top-heavy story. All the elements come together, more or less, but you can see the stitching.

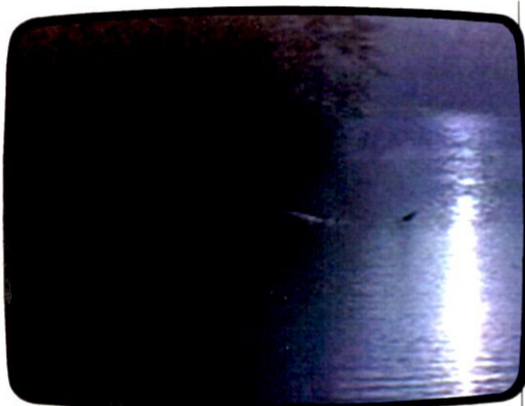
The scenes between Skinner and Sharon are contrived. His bedside confession, where many words say nothing we haven't already gathered, is simply poor writing. Skinner's decision to embrace all his fears, personified in the merged figure of the Old Woman and his critically-injured wife, should be affecting since it finally releases him from his mental paralysis. But his decision is also used as a plot device to get him to the hotel, and the action moves so quickly that it rips all the emotion from the scene. The timing of his movements is off, too. How does he get from the hospital to the hotel room and shoot the bad guy before Mulder, who's in the lobby, reaches the same spot?

Jennifer Hetrick gives a thoughtful performance as Sharon, and Pileggi does his best, but there's little chemistry between them. The shot revealing the Cigarette Smoking Man is too obvious, but a similar one when the camera shifts focus to reveal the Gray-Faced Man spying on Mulder, Scully and Judy Fairly (Stacy Grant) is a true bone-chiller. Bringing back the Gray-Faced Man is a wonderfully unexpected twist.

"Avatar" seems to be the battle for Skinner's soul between good, as personified by female characters, and bad, personified by male characters (except for Mulder, who embodies many qualities traditionally regarded as feminine). Skinner, in the end, chooses to remain somewhere in the middle. Perhaps it's no coincidence, then, that the person whose woe strikes deepest is Mulder, who begs for Skinner to confide in him, but is rebuffed with a cool thank-you. Duchovny is truly moving in this scene.

"Avatar" expanded the character of assistant director Skinner (Mitch Pileggi), but the poorly written episode proved to be unsatisfactory.





The lake monster makes its jokey last-shot appearance in "Quagmire," after Mulder and Scully have given up and left the scene.

"We eat fish and fish eat us."

—Scully

QUAGMIRE

★★★

5/10/96. Written by Kim Newton. Directed by Kim Manners.

Part JAWS, part THE LOST WORLD, and part Buster Keaton, "Quagmire" finally brings a Loch Ness monster story to THE X-FILES. Mulder drags Scully and her little dog Queequeg to investigate sightings in north Georgia of the lake leviathan "Big Blue." Dr. Farraday, a die-hard skeptic, scoffs at the story, but when bodies (or in one case, half a body) start floating to the surface, it becomes apparent that something is turning the local population into lunch meat.

"Quagmire" is a fairly simple story. What makes it memorable is the sheer swampiness of the location (aided by John Bartley's misty blue cinematography); Anderson's perfectly played bereavement over the serio-comic loss of poor little Queequeg to the jaws of whatever is out there; and a colorful cast of characters, including two brain-dead teens from "The War of the Coprophages" still in search of a great high. But it's in the third act that "Quagmire" becomes truly special, when Mulder and Scully are forced to abandon ship and take refuge on a big rock in the middle of a pitch-black night. The stranded Mulder and Scully, unable to get away from each other, finally have that heart-to-heart they've so carefully eluded for three years. Touching, insightful, imaginative, funny, and beautifully acted, it's a major piece of character writing, with Scully analyzing Mulder's Ahab-like tendencies and Mulder resisting her interpretation. This is a unique scene, one of the best of the entire series. Then, in a variation on a gag from Keaton's wonderful 1921 short "The Boat," they realize, when Dr. Farraday comes wading by, that all this time they've been just a few feet from shore.

There is one major misstep: the final shot of Big Blue slipping through the lake waters, after Mulder and Scully have walked away. This shot destroys the story's ambiguity. A large ripple in the water would have been much more clever.

MORE SECRETS OF THE X-FILES

5/10/96. Produced by Bart Montgomery. Narrated by Mitch Pileggi.

No secrets here (but then, the fact that the title misleads us is rather X-FILES-ish). MORE SECRETS OF THE X-FILES is a follow-up to last year's SECRETS OF THE X-FILES. Despite brief appearances by Chris Carter, David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, and narration by Mitch Pileggi, this is basically a Fox edit job recapping the series' complex conspiracy storyline through the use of episode clips. The charitable interpretation is that the network wants to help new fans catch up. Of course, it doesn't hurt to have a program with the name X-FILES airing during May sweeps.

"Bet all you guys were officers in the audio-visual club in high school, huh?"
—Mulder to the Lone Gunmen

WETWIRED

★★★

5/10/96. Written by Mat Beck. Directed by Rob Bowman.

Reminiscent of second season's "Blood," "Wetwired" is another chapter in the conspiracy story, laced with heavy doses of angst and paranoia for Mulder and Scully. When several people with heavy television viewing habits kill friends and loved ones for no explainable reason, Mulder and Scully suspect the influence of a signal coming through the cable wire, especially after Mulder finds a strange device in the switch box near the home of one of the accused. They review the dozens of tapes made by the murderers, and soon Scully falls victim to an imperceptible signal that causes people's most secret fears to flare up into paranoia and delusions. Scully's fear is betrayal by Mulder into the hands of the conspiracy, and before long, she shoots at him and takes off into the night.

Though the evil television concept may not be too original, it gives Mulder and Scully a chance to debate the merits of the medium broadcasting them to millions of homes. The concept also serve as a catalyst for characterization. It's certainly interesting to learn that Scully's biggest fear is betrayal by Mulder, and sickly fascinating to watch her fall apart. Anderson is superb, especially in the scene when Mulder finds her at her mother's house and she nearly kills him before collapsing in tears.

The script loses steam when Scully's collapse, which logically should be the climax of the episode, takes place at the end of the third act. Act Four turns into Mulder's story, as he hunts down the men responsible for the sinister project. Gripping though it may be, it's anti-climatic, despite a tense confrontation between Mulder and X (Steven Williams). An astonishing twist right at the end injects just the needed dash of excitement. Duchovny is excellent, especially in the scene where Mulder has to identify a body he fears may be Scully's.

"You can smoke that? Or you want to smoke on this?"

—Mulder, pressing his gun in the Cigarette Smoking Man's face

TALITHA CUMI

★★★1/2

5/17/96. Teleplay by Chris Carter. Story by David Duchovny & Chris Carter. Directed by R.W. Goodwin.

"Talitha Cumi" is a sequel to last season's two-parter, "Colony" and "End Game." This time, two shapeshifters are on the scene. One is last season's Pilot (Brian Thompson), who is trying to find Jeremiah Smith (THE INVADERS' Roy Thinnes), a shapeshifter who has turned, we learn, against the colonization project. We first meet

Scully helps to uncover a secret about Mulder's past in "Talitha Cumi," putting herself back in danger with the government conspiracy.



Smith when he miraculously heals victims of an Arlington, Virginia, fast-food restaurant shooting. Mulder and Scully arrive and are puzzled by a detective's report that Smith somehow vanished without anyone seeing him leave. Mulder becomes desperate to find him when his mother, after a meeting with the Cigarette Smoking Man at the Mulder family's unused Rhode Island summer house, suffers a massive stroke.

Deliberately paced, "Talitha Cumi" is not as viscerally exciting as last season's finale, "Anasazi." The so-called cliffhanger, with Mulder, Scully, and Jeremiah Smith watching the approaching Pilot, is weak. The big action scene, a fight between Mulder and X, goes on too long. Yet "Talitha Cumi" is a most unusual and fascinating hour of television. Cerebral, cool, and dense, the real struggles are those of opposing wills, not opposing bodies. In the center ring are the Cigarette Smoking Man and his prisoner, Jeremiah Smith. Their debates on good and evil, adapted, as literary Internet fans have noted, from the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of Dostoevsky's THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV, place further into the light the Cigarette Smoking Man's basic motivations, revealing how truly cynical and power-hungry he is. When Jeremiah shapeshifts into the figures of men the Cigarette Smoking Man has destroyed—Deep Throat and Bill Mulder—we grin in satisfaction as we see the first glimmers of fear on the Cigarette Smoking Man's smug face.



"Wetwired" featured a conspiracy involving television sets wired to send subliminal signals that cause viewers to commit murder.

These are not the only memorable scenes. The sequence in which Mulder weeps at his mother's bedside, then loses control and blindly attacks the unwaveringly arrogant Cigarette Smoking Man, is sublimely acted by both Duchovny and William B. Davis. Earlier, Mulder follows a clue from his mother, rooting through the summer house and all the things that represent a happier, vanished life. This emotional scene takes three minutes, and is all the stronger for containing no word of dialogue.

The scariest moment, however, comes in the meeting between Mrs. Mulder and the Cigarette Smoking Man, when his reminder that he was better at other things than her husband Bill suggests a past relationship between the two. Waiting to find out what really occurred between them long ago is a better cliffhanger than the upcoming stiletto fight.

Although this episode is not focused on Scully, her presence is vital, both as a supporter for Mulder and pursuer of clues. Rebecca Toolan, as Mrs. Mulder, finally gets a chance to shine, if briefly. And Roy Thinnes is simply wonderful as the saintly Jeremiah. But is he what he seems to be? Now that THE X-FILES has established the existence of aliens, the uncertainty derives from knowing they can assume any identity, any personality, to accomplish their mysterious goals. Trust no one.