

= Firewalker (The X @-@ Files) =

" Firewalker " is the ninth episode of the second season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on November 18 , 1994 . It was written by Howard Gordon , directed by David Nutter , and featured guest appearances by Bradley Whitford , Leland Orser and Shawnee Smith . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology .

The show centers on FBI special agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) who work on cases linked to the paranormal , called X @-@ Files . In the episode , Mulder and Scully investigate a death in a remote research base and discover that a new silicon @-@ based fungus found in the area may be affecting and killing the researchers .

The plot of the episode was inspired by NASA 's Project Dante . " Firewalker " earned a Nielsen household rating of 9 , being watched by 8 @. @ 6 million households in its initial broadcast . The episode received poor reviews from critics , being noted as repeating material already familiar to the series .

= = Plot = =

Dr. Adam Pierce , a scientist at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena , intercepts a visual transmission from Firewalker , a mobile robot sent by a volcanic research project on Mount Avalon near Bend , Oregon . Firewalker is broadcasting from inside a volcanic cave , where Pierce glimpses the dead body of the chief seismologist , Phil Erickson . He also sees a shadow moving in the cave , an impossibility due to the extremely high temperatures . The figure in the cave then destroys Firewalker 's camera , ending the transmission .

Pierce goes to Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) , showing them a TV interview of the project 's leader , Daniel Trepkos (Bradley Whitford) ; Pierce was with the project until he and Trepkos had a falling out . The agents take the case , but Mulder is reluctant to let Scully come along because of her recent abduction ; Scully , however , insists that she is ready . Upon arriving at Mount Avalon , Pierce goes out in the woods to inspect the project 's equipment while the agents search the laboratory . They meet the seemingly traumatized team : robotics engineer Jason Ludwig (Leland Orser) , systems analyst Peter Tanaka (Hiro Kanagawa) , and graduate student Jessie O 'Neil (Shawnee Smith) . They claim that Trepkos destroyed their lab and disappeared after Firewalker 's first descent . Meanwhile , outside , Trepkos strangles Pierce .

After the team finds and stores Pierce 's body , Mulder reviews Trepkos ' fragmented notes . He finds references to a new silicon @-@ based organism existing inside Mount Avalon ; Scully , however , doubts his conclusions because of his mental state . Tanaka breaks into convulsions and displays a high fever , but refuses any help from Mulder or Scully . When he is put on a stretcher for a medivac pickup , Mulder notices a throbbing bulge in his neck . Tanaka flees into the woods and dies when a tentacle bursts out of his throat . An autopsy by Scully finds sand in his lungs , indicating the existence of a silicon @-@ based spore ; she theorizes that when exposed , the spore infects the nearest hosts or otherwise dies . Mulder contacts the CDC to have them quarantine the site .

Mulder and Ludwig venture into the volcanic caves to find Trepkos . When they find Firewalker , Trepkos shoots Ludwig in the back with a flare gun , killing him . He then burns Ludwig 's body , as he was infected with the spore as well . Trepkos tells Mulder that after Firewalker returned from its first descent , Erickson pulverized a rock in one of its samples , resulting in his death and the infection of all the scientists immediately surrounding him . Trepkos says that the spore is parasitic in nature , making its hosts pass itself on to others . Meanwhile , in the lab , an infected O 'Neil handcuffs herself to Scully to expose her to the spore , but Scully protects herself by throwing O 'Neil into a sealed chamber and closing the door . A protrusion bursts out of O 'Neil 's throat , killing her without spreading the spore to Scully .

Mulder and Trepkos arrive on the scene . Mulder radios the evacuation team but ? knowing that Trepkos will refuse to go ? reports that only he and Scully have survived the ordeal . The agents

enter a month @-@ long quarantine while the Chemical Corps confiscates the lab and cordons off Mount Avalon . Firewalker is salvaged , but is too damaged to yield sufficient data . Trepkos and O 'Neil are officially unaccounted for and presumed dead ; Trepkos is last seen carrying O 'Neil 's body as he disappears into the volcano .

= = Production = =

Howard Gordon was inspired to write the episode after seeing two news reports about Project Dante , a robotic explorer created by NASA that had been sent into a volcano . Chris Carter said of the episode , " I think that 's the first time in our second season that we were telling what 's one of our serial stories rather than our mythological stories . In other words , it was an X @-@ File rather than one of the cosmology shows that explore the characters " . However , Gordon felt that the episode allowed him to explore the possible results of Mulder 's search for the truth , echoing this in the mindset of Daniel Trepkos and the interactions between the two characters . Gordon noted that " the natural endpoint of this quest for the truth is madness " , comparing Mulder 's treatment of Trepkos with the events of the novel Heart of Darkness .

The episode shared themes with previous episodes from the first season such as " Ice " and " Darkness Falls " , which both featured the agents finding new lifeforms in remote locations . James Wong was somewhat negative concerning the episode 's similarities to " Ice " , saying , " If the show starts to cannibalize itself , there 's going to be trouble " . Gordon stated , however , " I know there are some similarities with ' Ice ' , but I think once you get beyond the similarities of a group of people in a confined space going up against a creature , there are enough differences to separate the two " .

As the mountains of the Cascade Range were too far from Vancouver to serve as a location , the film crew settled on a nearby forest that had a partial view of the mountains . The set used for the exterior of the field base camp was later sold to the production company responsible for the TV series The Sentinel , while in the interior was shot inside a British Columbia hydro sub station . A set was built to represent the interior of the volcano , and footage filmed there was achieved through the use of a crane . Hiro Kanagawa , who portrays the character Peter Tanaka , would make two further appearances , in the fourth season episode " Synchrony " and tenth season episode " My Struggle " , as well as making appearances both in the spin @-@ off series The Lone Gunmen and The X @-@ Files ' sister show Millennium .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Firewalker " premiered on the Fox network on November 18 , 1994 , and was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC Two on October 23 , 1995 . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 9 with a 16 share , meaning that roughly 9 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 16 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . A total of 8 @. @ 6 million households watched this episode during its original airing .

In a retrospective of the second season in Entertainment Weekly , the episode was rated a D- . The review described it as " insultingly bad , " noting that it seemed to be " ripping off " both the first season episode " Ice " and the 1979 film Alien . Writing for The A.V. Club , Zack Handlen felt that " Firewalker " represented a " back to basics " approach to the series , following from the previous story arc relating to Scully 's abduction . Handlen noted that the episode would have been " a total waste of time " elsewhere in the season 's schedule , but served as a " competent enough " means of reuniting the main characters . Howard Gordon was praiseful of physical effects supervisor Toby Lindala 's work on this episode , quipping that Lindala 's effects " won the gross @-@ out award " . Gordon also praised Nutter 's job in directing the episode . Carter said that " Firewalker " was a very successful episode . David Nutter added a nice directorial touch ; the guest appearances were very good " .