

= The Thin White Line ( Millennium ) =

" ' The Thin White Line " is the fourteenth episode of the first season of the American crime @-@ thriller television series Millennium . It premiered on the Fox network on February 14 , 1997 . The episode was written by Glen Morgan and James Wong and directed by Thomas J. Wright . " The Thin White Line " featured guest appearances by Jeremy Roberts and Scott Heindl .

When a spate of killings seems to echo that of a man currently incarcerated , Millennium Group consultant Frank Black ( Lance Henriksen ) must confront the specter of his past and face a murderer who nearly took a younger Black 's life .

" The Thin White Line " draws inspiration from real killers Herbert Mullin , Lawrence Bittaker and Roy Norris , and contains several references to Morgan and Wong 's previous series Space : Above and Beyond . The episode was viewed by approximately 6 @.@ 6 million households in its initial broadcast and has received positive reviews from critics .

= = Plot = =

Anne Rothenburg answers a knock on her front door . When she speaks to the man waiting there , he hears something else entirely ; believing that she is giving her consent to be murdered , he attacks her .

Millennium Group consultant Frank Black ( Lance Henriksen ) visits a Seattle hospital to pick up his wife Catherine ( Megan Gallagher ) , who works there as a counsellor . Rothenburg is brought in on a stretcher by paramedics . Black notices a peculiar slash across her palm , and glances down at his own , which bears a scar matching the woman 's cut exactly . Rothenburg then dies of her injuries .

Black contacts Seattle Police Department detective Bob Bletcher ( Bill Smitrovich ) for information on Rothenburg . Her husband found her when he came home , assuming that she had surprised a burglar . Elsewhere , her attacker shoots the clerk in a liquor store , again hearing the victim give permission to be killed . Black and Bletcher review security camera footage of the crime , which leads to them discovering half a playing card ? the Jack of Spades ? at the scene . Rothenburg 's home is searched and the other half is found there .

Black tells Bletcher about Richard Alan Hance ( Jeremy Roberts ) , a serial killer Black had helped to apprehend twenty years before . Hance was a disturbed Vietnam War veteran who marked his kills with half a playing card , a custom he picked up during his tours of duty . Black was one of a number of Federal Bureau of Investigation agents who responded to an anonymous tip , leading them to Hance 's location ? however , the tip was called in by Hance himself and the raid became an ambush . Three agents were killed , and Black was cornered by Hance , who cut open his palm and nearly took Black 's life before the young Black was able to overpower and arrest him .

In the present , Black realizes that the current murderer must be Hance 's former cellmate Jacob Tyler ( Scott Heindl ) . Black visits Hance in prison , and upon speaking to Hance , realizes that Tyler believes himself Hance 's reincarnation , aspiring to follow his methods exactly . Meanwhile , Tyler calls the police and leaves an anonymous tip , telling them that the liquor store murderer is hiding in an abandoned building . Black accompanies a SWAT team encircling the building , but the officers come under sniper fire from a construction site across the street . Black and Bletcher separate as they search for Tyler , who gets the drop on Black . Black disarms Tyler , attempting to talk him into surrendering . Tyler empties a handgun at Black , but misses ; when Bletcher confronts him , Tyler points the gun and Bletcher instinctively shoots and kills him .

= = Production = =

" The Thin White Line " was written by frequent collaborators Glen Morgan and James Wong , and directed by Thomas J. Wright . " The Thin White Line " was the third episode of the series to have been written by Morgan and Wong , after " Dead Letters " and " 522666 " . The duo would go on to pen a further twelve episodes over the series ' run , and would take charge of the second season as co @-@ executive producers . Wright would go on to direct twenty @-@ six episodes across all

three seasons , and would also direct " Millennium " , the series ' crossover episode with its sister show The X @-@ Files . He had also previously worked with Morgan and Wong on their series Space : Above and Beyond .

The relationship between the characters of Jacob Tyler and Richard Allen Hance seems to have been based on that of Lawrence Bittaker and Roy Norris , two convicts whose time in prison together formed the basis of a partnership that saw them torture and kill several young women in 1979 . Tyler 's delusional visions of his victims consenting to be murdered may stem from West German serial killer Waldemar Szczepinski , who chose his victims based on their response to him ringing their doorbells ? those who answered he deemed to have given their permission to be killed and their houses burgled ; those who did not were simply left alone . The character also draws inspiration from American serial killer Herbert Mullin , who likewise felt that his victims had offered him permission to kill them . Mullin claimed that their last words were often " I understand " .

Scott Heindl , who portrayed Jacob Tyler , would later return in an unrelated role in the second season episode " A Room with No View " , and the third season episode " Antipas " . The episode contains several references to Morgan and Wong 's short @-@ lived series Space : Above and Beyond , which had been cancelled prior to the pair joining Millennium . The phrase " expect no mercy " found on the playing cards is the motto of that series ' United States Marine Corps squadron , while the individual cards used ? the Jack of Spades , King of Clubs and Queen of Hearts ? mirror the call signs used by individual marines .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" The Thin White Line " was first broadcast on the Fox Network on February 14 , 1997 . The episode earned a Nielsen rating of 6 @.@ 8 during its original broadcast , meaning that 6 @.@ 8 percent of households in the United States viewed the episode . This represented 6 @.@ 6 million households , and left the episode the seventy @-@ second most @-@ viewed broadcast that week .

The episode received positive reviews from critics . The A.V. Club 's Todd VanDerWerff rated the episode an A ? , finding that it showed the series to be " unafraid to be unapologetically weird " . VanDerWerff felt that " The Thin White Line " introduced elements of mysticism and the supernatural to the character of Frank Black , which " presages the weirder direction Morgan and Wong took the show in season two , while still staying roughly consistent with the first season 's more realistic focus " . Bill Gibron , writing for DVD Talk , rated the episode 4 @.@ 5 out of 5 , comparing it to the 1991 film The Silence of the Lambs . Gibron noted that " with a stellar final act and a closing scene that has a great deal of impact in a very restrained manner , this is an excellent installment [ sic ] " . Robert Shearman and Lars Pearson , in their book Wanting to Believe : A Critical Guide to The X @-@ Files , Millennium & The Lone Gunmen , rated " The Thin White Line " five stars out of five , noting that " it 's a return to the serial killer format , but it 's never been done before with as much verve as it had here " . Shearman compared the episode to both The Silence of the Lambs and the works of film director Quentin Tarantino , and felt that the interrogation scene between Black and Hance was " maybe the single best scene in the whole season " .

Cinematographer Robert McLachlan received an American Society of Cinematographers award nomination in the category Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography in a Regular Series for his work on " The Thin White Line " . McLachlan lost to Marc Reshovsky for the 3rd Rock from the Sun episode " Nightmare on Dick Street " .