

= Our Town ( The X @-@ Files ) =

" Our Town " is the twenty @-@ fourth episode of the second season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network in the United States on May 12 , 1995 . It was written by Frank Spotnitz and directed by Rob Bowman . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " Our Town " received a Nielsen rating of 9 @. @ 4 and was watched by 9 @. @ 0 million households . The episode received mixed reviews from critics .

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 . Mulder is a believer in the paranormal , while the skeptical Scully has been assigned to debunk his work . In this episode , Dudley , Arkansas is the site of the latest investigation for Mulder and Scully , who are sent to find a missing poultry inspector . The case takes a twist when another poultry worker is shot after she goes insane , giving Mulder a hunch that the townsfolk really are what they eat .

" Our Town " was future executive producer Spotnitz 's first stand @-@ alone episode for the show . Spotnitz was inspired to write the episode after thinking of cannibalism occurring at a chicken processing plant , an idea that he thought was one of the most despicable and vile things . Spotnitz later named the characters after real life cannibals .

= = Plot = =

In Dudley , Arkansas , government health inspector George Kearns follows his seemingly young lover , Paula Gray , into the woods . However , after losing track of Paula , Kearns soon finds himself surrounded by approaching lights in the woods . He is then killed by an axe @-@ wielding assailant wearing a tribal mask .

When Kearns is reported missing ten weeks later and a witness claims to have seen foxtire near Dudley , Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) and Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) investigate . At the site of the alleged foxtire , the agents find the ground burnt and a witch 's peg staked into the ground . Arens , the local sheriff , arrives and disclaims anything unusual occurring in Dudley . After visiting Kearns ' wife , Doris , the agents discover that he was about to recommend a local chicken plant , Chaco Chicken , to be closed down for several health violations . While giving the agents a tour of the plant , floor manager Jess Harold claims that Kearns held a vendetta against Chaco Chicken . After hearing this , a hallucinatory Paula , who works at the plant , grabs and holds Harold at knife point . Mulder and Scully attempt to reason with Paula until she is shot and killed by Sheriff Arens . The plant 's physician , Dr. Vance Randolph , later claims that Paula was suffering from consistent headaches , which Kearns had also reported .

The agents later see Walter Chaco , Paula 's grandfather and the plant 's owner , who while shaken over Paula 's death gives the agents permission to perform an autopsy . The agents find that while Paula 's personnel file gives her age as 47 , she appears no older than her mid @-@ 20 's . They also discover that Paula suffered from Creutzfeldt ? Jakob disease , a rare and fatal illness that causes dementia . When the agents nearly collide with a Chaco Chicken truck , they learn that the driver also suffered from the disease . Noticing the plant 's blood @-@ red runoff in a nearby stream , Mulder orders a reluctant Sheriff Arens to dredge it . They quickly find the bones of nine people , including Kearns . While inspecting the skeletal remains , the agents notice that the skeletons are all missing their skulls , and that the bones appear to have been boiled . Meanwhile , Randolph and Harold discuss the uncovered bones and increase of Creutzfeldt @-@ Jakob cases . While Randolph complains about Chaco 's inaction , Harold assures him that he will talk to Chaco .

Using FBI records , Mulder and Scully find that eighty @-@ seven people have vanished within a two @-@ hundred mile radius of Dudley over the past half @-@ century . Mulder suspects that the town 's residents are practicing cannibalism in order to prolong life , possibly explaining Paula 's youthful appearance . Mulder also realizes that Kearns originally had Creutzfeldt @-@ Jakob disease , and that the other residents caught the illness after consuming his body . The agents try to search the town 's birth records for confirmation of Paula 's age , but find that they have been

destroyed . At Chaco 's mansion , Chaco and Harold meet with Doris , who tearfully implies that she " helped " Chaco kill her husband ; Chaco instructs her to obstruct the FBI 's investigation .

Doris calls Mulder , believing that Chaco wants to kill her ; after she hangs up , she is attacked by the masked figure . Scully goes to help Doris while Mulder searches for Chaco at his mansion . There , he finds the shrunk heads of Kearns and other victims in a cabinet . Mulder calls Scully on the phone and hears her being knocked out by Chaco . She is taken to a secluded field , where Harold has started a bonfire and led the townsfolk in consuming Doris . Chaco berates them for killing one of their own , but Harold chastises him for allowing the Creutzfeldt @-@ Jakob epidemic to occur and has Chaco executed by the masked figure . Scully herself is about to be killed when Mulder arrives and shoots the figure ; he is revealed to be Sheriff Arens . Harold tries to shoot Mulder , but is trampled to death by the fleeing townsfolk .

In narration , Scully explains that Chaco 's plant has been closed down by the Department of Agriculture , and that twenty @-@ seven Dudley residents have died from Creutzfeldt @-@ Jakob disease . She reveals that Chaco was ninety @-@ three years old at the time of his death , and had spent time with the allegedly cannibalistic " Jale tribe " after his transport plane was shot down over New Guinea during World War II . She also states that his remains have never been found ; the final scene suggests that Chaco 's remains are being fed to chickens at his plant .

= = Production = =

" Our Town " was written by future executive producer Frank Spotnitz and directed by Rob Bowman . The episode was Spotnitz 's first stand @-@ alone episode for the show . He had wanted to do an episode about cannibalism occurring at a chicken processing plant , thinking it was one of the most despicable and vile things he could imagine . Spotnitz was inspired by the Spencer Tracy movie *Bad Day at Black Rock* , which is about a town holding a terrible secret . He was also inspired by an article he read at UCLA about salamanders getting sick from eating other salamanders ; Spotnitz 's brother later suggested him to include the theme in the episode .

The concept of discovering human bones that had been boiled in pots was inspired by research done for the episode " *Anasazi* " . Despite having trouble locating books on cannibalism , Spotniz even named the characters after real life cannibals . Chaco Chicken was based on Chaco Canyon , New Mexico , which is where bones consumed by the Anasazi were found . The idea of cannibals being afflicted by a degenerative neurological disease was inspired by Kuru , a Creutzfeld @-@ Jakob @-@ like prion disease that afflicted the Fore people of Papua New Guinea through cannibalism . Howard Gordon came up with the idea to start the episode with a love affair between George Kearns and Paula Gray . Gary Grubbs , the actor who played the sheriff , was later cast as the fire captain in the 1998 X @-@ Files film .

Of the end result , Spotnitz said " I was very pleased with the way it was executed , and I think it was a good mystery . He later wrote that he " liked [ it ] more as time has gone on . " Director Rob Bowman admitted to being tired and not inspired by the time this episode ? the second to last of the season ? was produced . This lack of interest later resulted in the episode taking extra time to finish . Bowman later recalled that the most difficult aspect of the episode was filming the climactic human sacrifice scene , if only because of the ceremonial mask featured . He explained , " the mask scared the hell out of me only because I thought , ' Boy , if I don 't shoot this right , it 's going to be silly . "

= = Reception = =

" Our Town " was first broadcast in the United States on May 12 , 1995 , on the Fox Broadcasting Company . In its original broadcast , it was watched by 9 million households , according to the Nielsen ratings system . It received a 9 @.@ 4 rating and a 17 share among viewers , meaning that 9 @.@ 4 percent of all households in the United States and 17 percent of all people watching television at the time , viewed the episode .

The episode received mostly mixed reviews from television critics . In a retrospective review of the second season , *Entertainment Weekly* gave " Our Town " a C + , describing it as " scary ? but

mostly because of what transpires in a chicken processing plant . " Writing for The A.V. Club , Zack Handlen rated the episode a B ? , criticizing the clichéd opening sequence ? " Haven 't we seen this before ? Like , a million times , in dozens of horror movies , and even on this very series " ? the bland characters and lack of humor . However , he did compliment the fact that the plot explained enough of the villain 's motives and that the episode had " some sense of a community behind everything " . Furthermore , he wrote that the resolution worked well despite again resorting to Scully in danger .

Television Without Pity ranked " Our Town " the fifth most nightmare @-@ inducing episode of the show . Robert Shearman and Lars Pearson , in their book Wanting to Believe : A Critical Guide to The X @-@ Files , Millennium & The Lone Gunmen , rated the episode two stars out of five . The two wrote positively of Spotnitz juxtapositions , praising the idea to frame the themes around cannibalism . However , they wrote that " Spotnitz pushes the metaphor too far " , citing the ending scene as evidence . Shearman and Pearson also criticized both Bowman 's directing , noting it lacked the flourishes to make " Spotnitz ' strange black comedy work " , and Mark Snow 's score . They noted that Snow was on " autopilot " and that his soundtrack was " the same horn anthem he gives any character who 's taken a little too much from a tribal culture . " The two further criticized the series ' use of the capture of Scully as a mechanism for Mulder to spring into action .