

= Piper Maru =

" Piper Maru " is episode 15 of season 3 of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on February 9 , 1996 . The episode was written by executive producer Chris Carter and Frank Spotnitz , and directed by Rob Bowman . " Piper Maru " is one of those which helped to explore the series ' overarching mythology . Its introduction of the black oil became a storyline milestone for the series . The black oil would later go on to play a much larger role in the series , including playing a pivotal role in the 1998 X @-@ Files movie . " Piper Maru " earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @.@ 6 , being watched by 16 @.@ 44 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mostly positive 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 . In this episode , a French salvage ship sends a diving crew to recover a mysterious wreckage from World War II , but the crew falls prey to a bizarre illness forcing FBI special agents Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) and Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) to investigate the source . Their investigation brings them face @-@ to @-@ face with Alex Krycek ( Nicholas Lea ) .

" Piper Maru " was written to showcase two visual images Chris Carter had wanted to include in a script " since the beginning of the show " . The first of these was that of a deep @-@ sea diver finding a still @-@ living pilot trapped in the wreckage of a World War II @-@ era fighter plane and the second was that of a black @-@ and @-@ white flashback taking place in a submarine . The title of the episode is a reference to the first and middle name of Gillian Anderson 's daughter , who had been born during the production of the second season .

= = Plot = =

Piper Maru , a French salvage vessel , is exploring the Pacific Ocean . Gauthier , a member of the ship 's crew , dives down into the sea and finds a sunken fighter plane from World War II . He is shocked to find a man alive in the plane 's cockpit , with what looks like black oil in his eyes . When Gauthier returns to the surface , he has become possessed by the black oil .

In Washington , Walter Skinner tells agent Dana Scully that the FBI 's investigation into her sister 's murder has been made inactive , despite the evidence that had been recovered . Fox Mulder tells Scully about the Piper Maru , which had laid anchor at the same coordinates as another ship believed to have salvaged a UFO ; when the Piper Maru came to port in San Diego , her crew was found suffering from radiation burns . Aboard the ship , the agents find traces of the black oil on Gauthier 's diving suit . Upon viewing a video of the dive , Scully identifies the sunken plane as a P @-@ 51 Mustang . Meanwhile , Gauthier returns home and searches for something . When his wife Joan arrives , the black oil passes itself along to her .

Scully visits an old friend of her father 's , Commander Christopher Johanson , seeking information about the plane . Johanson admits that he had been sent to find a sunken bomber aboard the submarine Zeus Faber , and recalls how many aboard the sub suffered from radiation burns while he joined a mutiny against his commanding officer , who succumbed to the black oil . Meanwhile , Mulder visits Gauthier 's home and finds him passed out , covered in the black oil ; he has no memory of his experience . Mulder finds a letter from a salvage broker , and visits the broker 's " secretary " Jeraldine . Mulder follows Jeraldine after her office is invaded by several armed men .

Both Mulder and Joan follow Jeraldine to Hong Kong , where Mulder learns that she is a middleman selling government secrets . Mulder tracks down Jeraldine and handcuffs himself to her . Arriving at her office , Mulder finds Alex Krycek ( Nicholas Lea ) waiting inside , having been selling the contents of the digital tape . Krycek escapes through a window while Jeraldine is shot by a group of men coming down the hallway . Mulder unlocks the handcuffs and escapes . Meanwhile , Joan walks down the hall and encounters the men , creating a flash that causes them all to suffer from the radiation burns .

Meanwhile , Skinner is initially confronted by several men , including the Gray @-@ Haired Man , and is told not to pursue Melissa Scully 's case any further . Skinner is later shot by Luis Cardinal .

After Mulder catches Krycek in an airport , he tells him the tape is in a locker back in Washington and that he 'll give it to him in exchange for letting him go . Mulder lets Krycek go to the bathroom , where he is confronted by Joan . As he departs the bathroom to leave with Mulder , Krycek 's eyes show he is now infected with the black oil .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception and writing = = =

Conception of the episode originated in two visual images series creator Chris Carter had wanted to include in a script " since the beginning of the show " . The first of these was that of a deep @-@ sea diver finding a still @-@ living pilot trapped in the wreckage of a World War II @-@ era fighter plane ; and the second was that of a black @-@ and @-@ white flashback taking place in a submarine . Director Rob Bowman shared with Carter his experiences diving , feeling that an episode based on finding " something creepy " underwater would be a good idea . Carter also wanted the episode to feature the re @-@ emergence of the " MJ documents " last seen in the earlier " Paper Clip " .

Frank Spotnitz began working on the episode immediately after writing the earlier third season episode " 731 " , fleshing out the rest of the concept while on a flight out of Minneapolis . Spotnitz ended up writing his ideas on a magazine , not having brought paper with him , and included in his outline the investigation of Scully 's sister 's murder and the reintroduction of Alex Krycek . The title of the episode is a reference to the first and middle name of Gillian Anderson 's daughter , who had been born during the production of the second season . The name Gauthier , used for the French diver and his wife , was a reference to special effects producer David Gauthier .

= = = Filming and post @-@ production = = =

The episode 's cold open was filmed in a water tank , using a replica P @-@ 51 Mustang plane which had been designed by the art director . Bowman also needed to direct a scene in which Gillian Anderson would react to a memory of playing with her sister as a child ; the scene involved digitally compositing the children playing into Anderson 's footage . Bowman asked Anderson to act towards a tree as though it were her sister , later telling her " I 'm going to tell everybody I can that you just did that great reaction to a tree " . Bowman also reshot the episode 's ending , as originally Duchovny and Lea were to walk past the camera and continue off @-@ screen . Feeling this was not effective , he replaced this with a walking shot which continued straight towards and into the camera , noting that " Nick will jump in front of a truck if he think it will make a scene better " .

The on @-@ screen appearances of the black oil were achieved through visual effects , with the shimmering oil effect being digitally placed over the actors ' corneas in post @-@ production . The crew went through various iterations to find the two " right " types of fluids . According to physical effects crewman David Gauthier , they used a mix of oil and acetone , which he believed gave the substance a more globular look . Special effects technician Mat Beck was able to digitally bend the oil effect around the shape of the actors ' eyes .

The man in the plane in the teaser , Robert Maier , worked as a construction coordinator on the show , and felt that his part in the episode fulfilled a " life @-@ long dream " of working as a stuntman . Nicholas Lea 's name was purposely left until the ending credits in order to preserve the sense of surprise .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" Piper Maru " premiered on the Fox network on February 9 , 1996 , and was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC Two on November 27 , 1996 . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @. @ 6 with an 18 share , meaning that roughly 10 @. @ 6 percent of all television @- @ equipped households , and 18 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . A total of 16 @. @ 44 million viewers watched this episode during its original airing .

= = = Reviews = = =

" Piper Maru " received positive reviews from critics . In an overview of the third season in Entertainment Weekly , the episode was rated an A. The review described " Piper Maru " as featuring " a tough and sentimental Scully " , noting that " action @- @ packed detective work by Mulder enhance [ s ] an already crackling scenario . " Reviewer Todd VanDerWerff of The A.V. Club gave the episode an A and wrote positively of the unfolding mythology , noting that the " great thing about " Piper Maru " is that it still belongs to the period of time when the mythology episodes were exposing us to more pieces of the puzzle , fitting in various things that we were meant to incorporate into the whole . This is the first time we meet the black oil , but it 's obvious that others know all about it " . Critical Myth 's John Keegan gave the episode eight out of ten , and complimented the introduction of the black oil , writing " this episode is a good introduction to the black oil virus , providing a bridge from the mythology elements earlier in the season to the larger scope of the conspiracy to be revealed . " Nick De Semlyen and James White of Empire named it the sixth " greatest " episode of the series , describing it as " thrilling " , " pacey " and " balanced " .

The introduction of the sentient black oil in this episode has also been met with positive criticism . The oil has been described as " the most original and frightening creation of The X @- @ Files ' mythology " , as " one of the best parts of the show " and has been listed as number two on Den of Geek 's " Top 10 X @- @ Files Baddies " countdown , where it was described as " a central part " of the series ' mythology .

Gillian Anderson considered the episode an emotionally difficult one , saying " Piper Maru was challenging . There was something about it ? having to pull from the past ... how it brought the present and the past together . It was just good to play . " Director Kim Manners complimented Anderson 's performance , stating " you look at season one and look at season three and that girl exploded as an actress in terms of talent and capability . " The 2004 film Alien vs. Predator featured an icebreaker named the Piper Maru , the naming of the ship being a nod to this episode .