

= 731 (The X @-@ Files) =

" 731 " is the tenth episode of the third season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on December 1 , 1995 . It was directed by Rob Bowman , and written by Frank Spotnitz . " 731 " featured guest appearances by Stephen McHattie , Steven Williams and Don S. Williams . The episode helps explore the series ' overarching mythology . " 731 " earned a Nielsen household rating of 12 , being watched by 17 @.@ 68 million people in its initial broadcast .

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 , Mulder risks his life infiltrating a train carrying a human @-@ alien hybrid . Meanwhile , Scully tries to uncover the truth about her abduction . " 731 " is a two @-@ part episode , continuing the plot from the previous episode , " Nisei " .

The production of " 731 " involved several stunts , including the explosion of a retired railway car . The episode 's production was successful for two members of the crew ? earning director of photography John Bartley an American Society of Cinematographers award nomination for his work , and securing Bowman the job of directing the series ' subsequent film adaptation , The X @-@ Files .

= = Plot = =

In Quinnimont , West Virginia , a team of soldiers arrives at an abandoned leprosy research compound , rounding up most of the patients . One patient , Escalante , hides beneath a trapdoor during the arrival and follows the group to a secluded field nearby . He watches as the soldiers shoot the other patients , including apparent alien @-@ human hybrids , into a mass grave .

Fox Mulder loses his cell phone after jumping on top of the moving train , losing contact with Dana Scully . When questioned by Scully , X tells her to analyze her implant , saying that it will give her answers about the train and her sister Melissa 's murder . Meanwhile , Mulder enters the train and finds that the secret railcar is quarantined and protected by a security system . He searches for Zama , enlisting the train conductor for help . In Zama 's compartment , they find hand @-@ written journals in Japanese . However , elsewhere on the train , the Red @-@ Haired Man intercepts and strangles Zama .

Scully sees Pendrell , who tells her that the implant contains highly advanced technology that can replicate the brain 's memory functions and enable someone to know a person 's very thoughts . The manufacturer of the chip was Zama , who created the implant at the West Virginia compound . Scully travels there , meeting a group of deformed patients who have eluded the " death squads . " Escalante tells her that the patients were experimented on by Zama , who departed long ago ; since then , the death squads have set out to massacre them . Escalante shows her the mass grave but is killed when soldiers arrive to capture Scully . She is brought before the First Elder .

Mulder returns to the railcar , seeing its door ajar ; an alien @-@ human test subject is locked in a room inside . The Red @-@ Haired Man attacks Mulder , causing the conductor to lock them both in the car . The Red @-@ Haired Man claims to work for the NSA , and that a bomb in the car was triggered after he gained entry with Zama 's pass code . Mulder doesn 't believe him , but he is called by Scully on the Red @-@ Haired Man 's cell phone . Scully ? who is with the First Elder in a similar railcar ? tells Mulder that unwitting subjects , including herself , were operated on by Zama in the secret railway , with the alien abduction theory used as a smokescreen . She also confirms that a bomb is in the car and believes that the quarantined patient is infected with hemorrhagic fever . She fears that thousands will die from the disease if the car explodes . Mulder finds the bomb in the ceiling .

After the car is disconnected from the rest of the train on a remote rail siding , Mulder questions the Red @-@ Haired Man , who says that the patient is immune to biological warfare . Zama had tried to sneak the patient out of the country , but the government would rather see it destroyed than let their research fall into Japanese hands ; the Red @-@ Haired Man was sent to kill them both .

Mulder , however , believes that the patient is an alien @-@ human hybrid . With help from Scully , Mulder successfully unlocks the door of the railcar , but he is knocked unconscious by the Red @-@ Haired Man . As the Red @-@ Haired Man is about to leave , X appears and shoots him . Realizing that the bomb is about to explode and that there is not enough time to both save Mulder and secure the patient , X decides to save Mulder . X exits carrying the still unconscious Mulder shortly before the bomb explodes .

After recovering from his injuries , Mulder attempts to find information on the railcar , but he is unable to do so . Scully returns the journal that he found on the car , but Mulder realizes that it is a rewritten substitute . Meanwhile , the real journal is translated in a shadowy room as the Smoking Man watches .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception and writing = = =

Writer Frank Spotnitz has claimed that his inspiration for the episode came from having read a New York Times article on the war crimes committed by Unit 731 of the Imperial Japanese Army , after which the episode is named . The unit was responsible for human subject research on both prisoners of war and civilians . Further inspiration was drawn from the films North by Northwest and The Train , which were the basis for the episode 's train @-@ car setting . Spotnitz also noted that the episode offered the writers the opportunity to " set the counter back " for the series ' premise , allowing the character of Scully to still maintain a skeptical standpoint after the events of " Paper Clip " , an earlier third season episode in which the character witnesses a group of aliens . The tagline for this episode was switched to " Apology is Policy . "

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

The scene at the start of the episode with Duchovny 's character Fox Mulder clinging to the side of the train car was filmed using a harness cabled across the top of the car that was removed digitally during post production . Duchovny performed the stunt himself , without the use of a double . Steven Williams and Duchovny separately recorded the scene in which Williams carries Duchovny from the car before it explodes against a blue screen . The results of this were flipped horizontally to aid the scene 's " composition " , and superimposed over the explosion . Twenty @-@ five masked actors , mostly children , laid over prop bodies for the scene with the mass grave .

The producers built train car interiors for the quarantine car where the patient was being kept and the sleeper cars , and floated the train sets on inner tubes to create the feeling of movement . Seven different cameras were used by director Rob Bowman when filming the train car explosion . Forty @-@ five gallons of gasoline and 120 black @-@ powder bombs were used for the effect . The car used had been obtained cheaply from a Vancouver @-@ based rail company , and had been considered scrap due to being bent . After the explosion was recorded , a bell from the train was recovered some distance from the site by the physical effects supervisor Dave Gauthier , who had it polished and engraved with a message for Bowman .

Bowman made use of a Steadicam for those scenes featured Mulder inside the train , and kept the character away from the centre of the screen , to accentuate his " paranoid " mindset . This was deliberately contrasted with the concurrent scene featuring Scully , who is speaking to Mulder over a telephone . This was shot using a camera dolly and a " graphically balanced " mise @-@ en @-@ scène , intended to leave the character seeming as " balanced , confident , strong " as " the Rock of Gibraltar " . Bowman , who felt that the finished episode " was really like a movie " , has stated that his cut of the episode impressed series creator Chris Carter enough for Carter to offer Bowman the job of directing the series ' film adaptation .

= = Themes = =

Jan Delasara , in her book ' " PopLit , PopCult and The X @-@ Files " argues that episodes such as " 731 " and " Nisei " , or the earlier third season episode " Paper Clip " , show the public 's trust in science " eroding " . Delasara proposes that " arrogated " scientists who are " rework [ing] the fabric of life " are causing the public 's faith in the scientific method to fade drastically , " a concern ... that is directly addressed by X @-@ Files episodes " . Moreover , she notes that almost all of the scientists portrayed in The X @-@ Files are depicted with a " connection to ancient evil , " with the lone exception being Agent Scully . In " 731 , " and earlier in " Nisei , " the scientists are former Japanese scientists who worked for Unit 731 . In their attempts to create a successful human @-@ alien hybrid , they become the archetypical scientists who " [go] too far , " a serious factor that Delasara argues " ' alienates [the public] further from science and its practitioners " .

Critical opinion has also noted that both parts of the story arc offer an alternative explanation for the events of the series so far , a " less romantic " outcome that paints the ongoing plot as an elaborate hoax to defer attention from the government 's experiments , both military and medical . Reviewer Todd VanDerWerff feels that such an explanation would " speak more to the sadness at the core of the X @-@ Files to have Mulder find his answers and be forced to accept they weren 't what he was looking for " , comparing such a realization to the hero of Don Quixote . This " hoax " plot device would later be revisited in both the fourth season finale " Gethsemane " and the fifth season 's opening two @-@ part episodes " Redux and Redux II " , although to a much lesser degree of effectiveness .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" 731 " premiered on the Fox network on December 1 , 1995 , and was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC Two on October 30 , 1996 . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 12 with a 21 share , meaning that roughly 12 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 21 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . A total of 17 @. @ 68 million viewers watched this episode during its original airing .

= = = Reviews = = =

" 731 " received mostly positive reviews from critics . Writing for The A.V. Club , reviewer Zack Handlen rated the episode an A , calling it " terrific " . However , Handlen felt that the version of events told to Scully in this episode was perhaps a better explanation for the series ' mythology than its eventual resolution , noting that it might have offered " a conclusion whose emotional impact would 've lived up to the intensity of early mythology episodes " such as this . In a retrospective of the third season in Entertainment Weekly , " 731 " was rated a B. The review noted that the episode was " strangely tension @-@ free " , though it derided Scully 's stubbornness to believe what the series had established as truth . Nick De Semlyen and James White of Empire named it the second " greatest " episode of the series , stating it is " arguably the greatest of The X @-@ Files ' many mythology episodes " and a " high @-@ octane mix of action and intrigue , with the production values and pacing of a Hollywood blockbuster " .

Director Rob Bowman called the episode one of his all time favorites . Actor Steven Williams felt that his portrayal of X in this episode helped endear him more to the show 's viewers .

= = = Awards = = =

Director of Photography John Bartley earned a nomination for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography in a Regular Series by the American Society of Cinematographers for his work on this episode .

