

= Tunguska (The X @-@ Files) =

" Tunguska " is the eighth episode of the fourth season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premièred on the Fox network on November 24 , 1996 . It was directed by Kim Manners , and written by Frank Spotnitz and series creator Chris Carter . " Tunguska " featured guest appearances by John Neville , Nicholas Lea and Fritz Weaver . The episode helped explore the series ' overarching mythology . " Tunguska " earned a Nielsen household rating of 12 @. @ 2 , being watched by 18 @. @ 85 million people in its initial broadcast .

In the episode , FBI special agent Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) travels to Russia to investigate the source of a black oil contamination . His partner Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) and assistant director Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) are summoned to attend a United States Senate hearing on Mulder 's whereabouts . " Tunguska " is a two @-@ part episode , with the plot continuing in the next episode , " Terma " .

" Tunguska " was inspired by reports of evidence of extraterrestrial life possibly being found in the Allan Hills 84001 meteorite , while the gulag setting was inspired by the works of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn . The story offered the writers a chance to expand the scale of the series ' mythology globally , although production of the episode was described as troublesome and expensive .

= = Plot = =

The episode opens in medias res to Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) as she is brought before a Senate select committee to be questioned about the whereabouts of Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) . Scully refuses to answer the committee 's questions and attempts to read a statement denouncing the conspiracy within the government . Senator Sorenson threatens to hold Scully in contempt of Congress .

Ten days earlier , at Honolulu Airport , a courier returning from the Republic of Georgia (David Bloom) is searched by customs officers . One of the officers (Andy Thompson) removes a glass canister from the courier 's briefcase and accidentally shatters it , exposing both men to the black oil . Meanwhile , in New York City , Mulder and Scully take part in an FBI raid against a domestic terrorist group . Mulder 's tipster within the group is revealed to be Alex Krycek (Nicholas Lea) , whom the terrorists released from the missile silo where he had been trapped . Krycek has turned against The Smoking Man (William B. Davis) , and tells the distrustful agents that he can help expose him .

Krycek leads the agents to Dulles International Airport , where they try to apprehend a second courier carrying a diplomatic pouch from Russia . The courier leads the agents on a pursuit through the airport , but drops the pouch before escaping . The pouch is revealed to carry a seemingly unremarkable rock . Mulder has Krycek confined at the high rise apartment of Assistant Director Walter Skinner before having the rock analyzed at NASA 's Goddard Space Flight Center . Dr. Sacks , a NASA scientist , tells Mulder and Scully that the rock is a prehistoric meteorite fragment that might contain fossilized alien bacteria .

Skinner is approached by the Smoking Man , who demands that the pouch be returned . The courier breaks into Skinner 's apartment and searches for the pouch , only to be thrown off Skinner 's patio by Krycek . Meanwhile , Dr. Sacks cuts into the fragment , but inadvertently releases the black oil inside ; the organism penetrates the scientist 's hazmat suit and puts him in a coma @-@ like state . Mulder travels to New York to visit Marita Covarrubias (Laurie Holden) , who reveals that the fragment originated from the Russian province of Krasnoyarsk and provides the documents needed to travel there . Mulder reluctantly brings along Krycek , who is fluent in Russian .

In Charlottesville , Virginia , the Smoking Man is admonished by the Well @-@ Manicured Man (John Neville) when the latter learns about Mulder 's travels . Skinner and the agents are subpoenaed to appear before Senator Sorenson 's panel over the missing pouch ; when Skinner questions Scully about Mulder 's whereabouts , she is not forthcoming . Meanwhile , as Mulder and Krycek hike through the forests of Krasnoyarsk , the former theorizes that the fragment may be tied to the Tunguska event , a mysterious cosmic impact that occurred in the area in 1908 . The two men

come across a slave labor camp , but are captured by the taskmasters and thrown into a gulag .

Skinner and Scully meet with Senator Sorenson who questions them on the death of the courier and the location of Agent Mulder . Mulder talks with a fellow prisoner who tells him that innocent people have been captured and brought here to be subjected to experiments . Immediately afterwards guards burst into the room and inject Mulder with a syringe . When Mulder awakens he is in a large room bound with chicken wire along with many other prisoners . Black material is dumped onto his face , infecting him with the black oil .

= = Production = =

" Tunguska " and its follow @-@ up " Terma " were conceived by the writers when they were trying to conceive a " big and fun canvas " to tell stories . They decided to create a story connected to the Russian gulags , which led to the " natural " idea that the Russians were experimenting separately from the Syndicate to create a vaccine for the black oil . Series writer John Shiban felt it was natural to create an arms race @-@ like story between the United States and Russia , being that the Cold War had ended a few years earlier . The writers desired to expand the series ' mythology globally , a concept that continued into the fifth season and the series ' 1998 feature film adaptation . The idea of a conspiracy with a global reach was first broached in the series ' second season , and it was felt that this two @-@ part story was a good place to expand upon this , allowing the production crew to " stretch the limits " of their resources and imagination . The inspiration for the oil @-@ containing rocks was NASA 's announcement of possible evidence of extraterrestrial life in the Allan Hills 84001 meteorite ; while the gulag scenes were based on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn 's books The Gulag Archipelago and One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich .

The scenes featuring the SWAT raid on a terrorist cell found to be harbouring Alex Krycek were filmed in a single night , requiring sixty individual film setups split between three camera crews working simultaneously . By dawn , only four of the sixty required shots had not been filmed , and these were later completed on a sound stage . Additional scenes shot for the episode featuring The Smoking Man and the Well @-@ Manicured Man were cut due to time constraints . A scene featuring Scully briefing Skinner on the events of the episode was also cut , as it was felt that it was " redundant " within the narrative , repeating information that had already been shown to the audience . David Duchovny 's father was present during production of the episode , leaving the actor to enjoy the shoot ; although the crew described production as expensive and " stubbornly trouble @-@ plagued " . " Tunguska " marked the fourth appearance in the series by Malcolm Stewart , who had previously appeared in " Pilot " , " 3 " and " Avatar " .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" Tunguska " premiered on the Fox network on November 24 , 1996 , and was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC Two on October 28 , 1997 . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 12 @. @ 2 with an 18 share , meaning that roughly 12 @. @ 2 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 18 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . A total of 18 @. @ 85 million viewers watched this episode during its original airing .

= = = Reviews = = =

" Tunguska " received mostly positive reviews from critics . Based on an advance viewing of the episode 's script , Entertainment Weekly rated " Tunguska " an A- , praising the " arms race " plotline . Sarah Stegall , in The Munchkyn Zone , wrote positively of the entry and gave it a 5 out of 5 rating . Stegall highlighted the " taut storyline " and the " excellent direction " . John Keegan , writing for Critical Myth , gave the episode a favorable review and rated it a 9 out of 10 . Keegan described it

as " another strong mythology episode for the season " and added that it " never loses momentum " . Writing for The A.V. Club , Todd VanDerWerff rated the episode a B , noting that the move to a global scale detracted from the series ' overall relevance . VanDerWerff felt that " the action setpieces in this episode and the next one are really terrific " , and praised William B. Davis ' portrayal of The Smoking Man . However , he described " Tunguska " as being " one of the first really unfocused mythology episodes in the show 's run " , and found the plot of the episode to not be moving the series forward enough , noting that " for the first time , Mulder feels less like he 's driving the action and more like he 's a messenger boy " . David Duchovny described this episode , along with " Terma " , as being action @-@ heavy and " lots of fun " .

= = = Awards = = =

" Tunguska " received a nomination for a CAS Award by the Cinema Audio Society for Outstanding Achievement in Sound Mixing - Television Series .