

= Via Negativa (The X @-@ Files) =

" Via Negativa " is the seventh episode of the eighth season and the 168th episode overall of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . The episode first aired in the United States and Canada on December 17 , 2000 on Fox and subsequently aired in the United Kingdom . It was written by executive producer Frank Spotnitz and directed by Tony Wharmby . It is a Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week episode , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 7 @. @ 3 and was viewed by 12 @. @ 37 million viewers . It was generally well received by television critics , with many positively commenting on the " eerie " atmosphere of the dream sequences ; one critic referred to it as a " superb X @-@ Files episode . "

The series centers on FBI special agents Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) and her new partner John Doggett (Robert Patrick) ? following the alien abduction of her former partner , Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) ? who work on cases linked to the paranormal , called X @-@ Files . In this episode , Scully takes time off to deal with the early stages of her pregnancy , and Doggett and Walter Skinner attempt to avert the mysterious murder spree of a religious cult leader who kills his victims in their sleep . Eventually , the cult leader 's essence of evil possesses Doggett , who is urged to murder Scully while he sleeps .

Spotnitz was inspired to write the episode after being intrigued by the mental image of a tube of toothpaste that , when opened , oozed blood . Because Gillian Anderson was not available for the majority of filming , the recurring characters of Walter Skinner and The Lone Gunmen were brought in . The episode 's title , " Via Negativa " ? which means " Negative Way " in Latin ? is a theology that attempts to describe God by characterizing what God is not .

= = Plot = =

In Pittsburgh , two FBI agents , Angus Stedman (Lawrence LeJohn) and James Leeds (Kevin McClatchy) , are observing a house when Leeds falls asleep . When he awakes , he discovers that the front door of the house is open . The two agents investigate and stumble upon a room filled with dead bodies . Suddenly , a man wielding an axe and possessing a third eye murders both agents with a blow to the head .

The following day , Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) calls John Doggett (Robert Patrick) to inform him about the case and says she will not be joining him , due to personal matters . Doggett visits the crime scene , where he meets up with his boss , Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) . Skinner tells him about the cult and how the victims died . Leeds ' body is found in his car , but his partner , Stedman , is missing , along with cult leader Anthony Tipet (Keith Szarabajka) : the man with the third eye . The FBI later finds Stedman at his locked @-@ up condo with a fatal blow to the head . Meanwhile , Tipet is searching for a pharmacist and stumbles into a phone booth to call an unnamed person . When a tramp asks him for change , Tipet attacks the tramp , trapping him in the pavement and axing his forehead .

At the FBI , Skinner briefs Alvin Kersh (James Pickens , Jr .) , and other agents about the case . He tells them that Tipet used a hallucinogen Tabernanthe iboga to bring himself closer to God using a combination of Christian and Eastern religious practices called the via negativa , meaning the " negative way " in Latin . Tracing Tipet 's earlier call leads Doggett and Skinner to Andre Bormanis (Grant Heslov) , a drug dealer . Bormanis is arrested , and put in a cell at the local police department . At the jail , Doggett has a vision of him holding Scully 's severed head in his hands . After waking , Doggett realizes his vision was a bad dream . Meanwhile , in his cell , Bormanis has fallen asleep , and is dreaming of being attacked by rats . Doggett and the other officers find Bormanis ' gnawed up @-@ body .

Doggett returns to the X @-@ Files office , where , to his surprise , he meets The Lone Gunmen . They tell him about the history of the third eye . While coming to the same conclusion , they are convinced that Tipet is projecting himself into peoples dreams and killing them there . Returning to the warehouse where they found Bormanis , Skinner and Doggett meet Tipet , who is trying to take his own life by pushing his head through a table saw . They rush him to the hospital , where Doggett

by surprise finds Scully 's name on the register . With Tipet in a coma , Kersh decides to pull the plug on the case , saying they 've found the main suspect . But Doggett and Skinner are not satisfied , saying there are no explanations for the various murders and events surrounding the case .

The next day , Doggett wakes up and discovers that he now has a third eye in the middle of his forehead . Suddenly , it vanishes . At the FBI building , he talks to Skinner , hoping for reassurance . He expresses his fear that , despite Tipet being in a coma , Tipet may still be able to enter into his dreams . Skinner , however , dismisses his concerns and sends him home . While leaving , Doggett has a hallucination of Tipet , ordering him to kill Scully . Suddenly , Doggett finds himself in front of Scully . Rather than kill his partner , he turns the axe upon himself . Doggett is immediately awakened from his dark reverie and finds himself in his bedroom , with Scully standing over his bed . He begins to thank her for saving his life , but she informs him that Tipet died due to his coma .

= = Production = =

Frank Spotnitz , the writer of the episode , was inspired to write the episode after a rafting trip . During the trip , Spotnitz met a " friend of a friend , " who constantly mentioned an " image that freaked him out . " The man explained that the image was a tube of toothpaste that , when opened , would have " blood come out . " The mental image intrigued Spotnitz , who later postulated , " How could you create a story where blood comes out of a tube of toothpaste ? " Due to the strangeness of the idea , Spotnitz was unable to think of any real @-@ world scenarios having likeness to the image , so he began to look into " dreams and nightmares . " He eventually came up with the idea of a cult trying to reach a higher plane of existence , but instead stumbling into a " lower place , a darker plane . " Spotnitz later explained : " What if the higher plane is a darker plane , what if we think we 're reaching up but we 're reaching down . " Complementarily , the episode 's title , " Via Negativa , " means " Negative Way " in Latin . This type of theology , more commonly referred to as apophatic theology , attempts to describe God by expanding upon what God is not .

Gillian Anderson 's character Dana Scully would not be available , since the writing staff had decided before the episode was written that she would spend most of her time in the hospital . As the writing staff had a hard time coming up with a story , Spotnitz saw this as an opportunity to further evolve Doggett , the new character introduced at the beginning of the eighth season . In order to fill Anderson 's void , two recurring groups of characters were brought in : Walter Skinner and The Lone Gunmen . Spotnitz noted that , " we were eager to get Skinner out from behind the desk , and we were always looking for opportunities to get him out of that office and get him into the field . " Mitch Pileggi , who portrayed Walter Skinner , was pleased with the final product . He later complimented the work of Robert Patrick , who played Doggett , saying , " It was a big hole when Mulder was gone , but I thought that Robert came in and did a wonderful job . He brought a really good energy to the set , and it was a lot of fun getting to know and work with him . " In addition , Spotnitz was also eager to use The Lone Gunmen in the episode , since this the episode would mark their first scene together with Doggett . Robert Patrick called the episode his " favorite episode , " because the writers saw a chance to really create a " vulnerable " moment for the his character , John Doggett .

The character of Andre Bormanis was named after one of Spotnitz 's childhood friends , who went on to become one of the science consultants for both Star Trek : Voyager and Star Trek : Deep Space Nine . In preparing the character 's death scene the director , Tony Wharmby spent a whole day shooting inserts of rats . In total , the film crew used 500 rats . Initially , Wharmby had an issue getting the rats in the middle of the room being shot . In order to fix this , animal trainers continuously released more rats until the middle part of the room was finally covered . The crew later spent many hours " painting out rat droppings in that shot . "

= = Reception = =

=== Ratings ===

" Via Negativa " premiered on December 17 , 2000 on American television on Fox . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 7 @. @ 3 , meaning that it was seen by 7 @. @ 3 % of the nation 's estimated households . The episode was watched by 7 @. @ 36 million households and 12 @. @ 37 million viewers . Fox promoted the episode with the tagline " They say if you die in a dream ... you will never wake up . "

=== Reviews ===

" Via Negativa " received mostly positive reviews from critics . Michael Roffman of Time named it the " best post @-@ Mulder " episode , stating that " episodes like this proved there were just enough thrills to get by without Spooky " . Zack Handlen of The A.V. Club awarded the episode an " A ? " and noted that the episode had an " undeniable power that took me almost entirely off @-@ guard " . Although cautioning that " Via Negativa " is not " some kind of lost classic " and that the story itself was not " all that impressive " , he praised the atmosphere of the episode , describing it as " heavy , doom @-@ laden , and frequently bizarre " . In fact , he argued that it largely " makes up for any shortcomings in the script " . 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 five stars out of five and called it " one of the best standalone X @-@ Files in years . "

George Avaros and Michael Liedtke from the Contra Costa Times were overall positive towards the episode , saying it had all the features which created a " superb X @-@ Files episode " . They further stated that it had an " eerie , almost surreal quality sprinkled with pithy dialogue , comic relief and cryptic insights into key characters that left us wondering what sort of trouble might be around the bend " . Avaros and Liedtke also reacted positively to the numerous references to Fox Mulder . Finally , the episode was compared to the work of David Lynch in his series , Twin Peaks . Paula Vitaris from Cinefantastique gave the episode a moderately positive review and awarded it two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half stars out of four . She noted that , " ' Via Negativa ' is short on plot but makes up for it by being long on atmosphere and mood , conjuring up a number of disgusting , eerie images " .