

= Soft Light (The X @-@ Files) =

" Soft Light " is the twenty @-@ third episode of the second season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It originally aired on the Fox network on May 5 , 1995 . It was written by Vince Gilligan and directed by James A. Contner . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology , or overarching fictional history . " Soft Light " received a Nielsen rating of 8 @.@ 5 and was watched by 8 @.@ 1 million households . The episode generally received mixed to positive reviews from television 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 , an ex @-@ student of Scully 's (Kate Twa) asks the agents to help her with her first investigation concerning a number of disappearances with very few clues . Mulder ponders the idea of spontaneous human combustion but rethinks it when they find a man , Chester Ray Banton (Tony Shalhoub) , who is afraid of his own shadow . Banton is a scientist researching dark matter , and his shadow has somehow developed the ability to disintegrate people who come across it .

" Soft Light " was the first The X @-@ Files episode written by Gilligan , who would go on to write several acclaimed episodes such as " Pusher " , " Bad Blood " and " Memento Mori " . " Soft Light " was one of the first episodes written by someone not on the main writing staff for The X @-@ Files . Originally , the script called for Banton 's shadow to be able to move independently , but it was rewritten to save on animation costs . In addition , the character of X (Steven Williams) was not in the script initially . His character was added to give Banton a legitimate fear of the government .

= = Plot = =

At a hotel in Richmond , Virginia , Chester Ray Banton (Tony Shalhoub) frantically knocks on the door of a room , seeking a person named Morris . Banton 's shouts attract the attention of Patrick Newirth , a guest in the room across the hall . When Newirth looks through his peephole , Banton 's shadow slips beneath the door . Newirth suddenly evaporates , leaving a strange burn mark on the floor . Banton realizes what has happened and flees the scene .

The case of Newirth 's death , the latest in several of its kind , is assigned to local detective Kelly Ryan (Kate Twa) . She seeks help from Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) , her former instructor at the FBI Academy . Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) also takes part in the investigation , believing Newirth died from spontaneous human combustion . While searching the home of an earlier victim , the agents realize that both she and Newirth had recently traveled by train . Meanwhile , Banton sits in a train station , cautiously looking at the floor ; because the room is lit by soft light , his shadow cannot be seen . After he leaves , Banton is confronted by two police officers patrolling the area . Despite Banton 's warnings , the officers step into his shadow and disappear , leaving more burn marks .

The following day , while reviewing the station 's surveillance tapes , Mulder sees footage of Banton staring at the floor . After blowing up the frame , Mulder sees the logo for a company called Polarity Magnetics on Banton 's jacket . The agents visit Polarity Magnetics , where they meet scientist Christopher Davey (Kevin McNulty) . He identifies Banton , a physicist conducting research into dark matter . Davey reveals that Banton disappeared five weeks earlier after an incident in his laboratory in which he was locked in a target room with an active particle accelerator and exposed to a large amount of subatomic particles . His account is enough for Scully to consider spontaneous human combustion , but Mulder is now doubtful of this theory .

The agents find Banton at the train station , but he runs to a poorly lit area . He declares that walking into his shadow will kill the agents , so Mulder shoots out the overhead lights . Banton allows himself to be taken to a mental hospital , where he is put in a room with soft light per his own request . He tells the agents that the accident in his laboratory caused his shadow to behave like a black hole , splitting atoms into component particles and reducing matter into pure energy . Banton claims that the deaths were all accidents , and that the government wants to exploit him . Detective Ryan and her superior officer stop the questioning , declaring the case closed , despite Mulder 's

objections . Mulder contacts X (Steven Williams) , who assures him that the government has no interest in Banton . However , X and two associates later attempt to remove Banton from the hospital by cutting the power . In the process , the two attendants are killed when the emergency lights turn on and Banton 's shadow falls upon them . Banton flees from the hospital .

Banton returns to Polarity Magnetics and is confronted by Ryan , whom he reluctantly kills with his shadow when she tries to arrest him . Banton orders Davey to destroy him with the particle accelerator , but Davey reveals that he has been helping the government hunt him down . Davey locks Banton in with the particle accelerator , but is shot by X. Mulder and Scully arrive soon after , seemingly too late to save Banton from being vaporized by the accelerator ; Mulder realizes that X has betrayed him , and tells X to never contact him again . The case is considered closed , but Mulder notes that Davey disappeared after the incidents . The episode ends as X enters a research facility where experiments are being performed on a despairing Banton .

= = Production = =

" Soft Light " was written by Vince Gilligan and directed by James A. Contner . Gilligan was a fan of The X @-@ Files , and after talking about the show to his agent , who was a relative of series creator Chris Carter , he arranged a meeting between Gilligan and Carter . During it , Gilligan praised the show , and Carter asked if the writer had any ideas for it , to Gilligan 's surprise . His reply was that he had been observing his shadow and thought it would be " creepy " if it began moving independently . Gilligan wrote the episode as a freelancer ; after the episode was finished , Carter asked him to join the staff .

Gilligan inserted a reference to the villain Eugene Victor Tooms from the first season episodes " Squeeze " and " Tooms " in a conversation between Ryan and Mulder . The episode represents one of the first entries in the series to be written by someone from outside the main writing staff of The X @-@ Files . Originally , the script called for Banton 's shadow to be able to move independently ; Carter and writer Howard Gordon rewrote the story to remove this aspect . Gilligan later noted , " they rewrote the episode [?] this saved an enormous amount of money in animation costs . " In addition , the character of X was not in the first draft of the script . However , the series staff realized that Banton 's fear of having the government control him should be " more than just paranoia " . Thus , X was written into the story . Writer Frank Spotnitz later noted , " it had been a long time since X had done anything and the character really needed to grow . "

The episode guest stars Tony Shalhoub as Dr. Banton . Shalhoub , who had a recurring role on the NBC series Wings , was not familiar with The X @-@ Files when he was offered the part because at the time he did not watch much television . Instead , he was sent the script and enjoyed it ? due to the show 's similarities to The Twilight Zone ? and agreed to appear in the episode . When Shalhoub informed people that he was going to Vancouver to film an episode of the series , he claimed that " the response was unbelievable " . Shalhoub was impressed with the on @-@ location filming that the series did ; he noted , " Ninety @-@ nine percent of our filming on Wings is done on a soundstage , while most of their material is shot on location in and around Vancouver . It 's an ideal city because it gives producers so many options . "

The train station was filmed at both Via Rail 's Pacific Central Station and the Pacific Marine Training Institute in Vancouver . The Pacific Marine Training Institute initially only allowed filming after 5 pm , before the persistence of the location managers led the dean of the station to allow the crew to commence filming at 2 pm . During production , Gilligan financed a trip to the show 's filming locations in Vancouver and followed production with a video camera , a feat then unheard of for a writer on The X @-@ Files .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Soft Light " was originally aired in the United States on the Fox Broadcasting Company on May 5 , 1995 , and was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on February 13 , 1996 on BBC One . In its original broadcast , it was watched by 8 @. @ 1 million households , according to the Nielsen ratings

system . It received an 8 @.@ 5 rating and 15 share among viewers , meaning that 8 @.@ 5 percent of all households in the United States and 15 percent of all people watching television at the time , viewed the episode .

" Soft Light " received mixed to positive reviews from television critics . Entertainment Weekly gave the episode a " B ? " and noted that the episode " gains points for the obscure subject matter " but " loses them for the strained conspiratorial element " . Zack Handlen of The A.V. Club also gave it a " B ? " . He praised the cold open for its strangeness and X 's involvement , but thought that the explanation for Banton 's shadow was not satisfactorily fleshed out . 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 four stars out of five . The two wrote positively of the episode 's case , calling it one wherein " Mulder and Scully get to investigate properly , coming up with theories that they later build on or retract . " Shearman and Pearson also wrote positively of the episode 's conclusion , noting that " there 's no better illustration for distrusting the government than the brilliant closing scene " which features Shalhoub " fixed to a chair , bombarded with flashes of light , as one single tear rolls down his terrified face . " Other reviews were decidedly more critical . John Keegan from *Critical Myth* awarded the episode a 5 out of 10 and wrote , " Overall , this episode falls short due to a completely ludicrous central concept , only partially countered by an interesting resolution highlighting the more sinister side of Informant X. Much like last season ? s final few episodes , this season is ending with plenty of hints that Mulder and Scully are pushing the wrong buttons . "