

= Dead Letters (Millennium) =

" ' Dead Letters " is the third episode of the first season of the American crime @-@ thriller television series Millennium . It premiered on the Fox network on November 8 , 1996 . The episode was written by Glen Morgan and James Wong , and directed by Thomas J. Wright . " Dead Letters " featured guest appearances by Chris Ellis , Ron Halder and James Morrison .

Millennium Group consultant Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) is sent to evaluate a prospective member of the group , who perform private investigative work and liaise with law enforcement . Meeting this hopeful member , Jim Horn (Morrison) , Black is drawn to investigate a serial killer operating in the area ; while Horn begins to unravel under the strain of the case .

Several of the cast and crew made their first contributions to the series in " Dead Letters " , with Wright , Morgan , Wong and Ellis all returning for future episodes . Production of " Dead Letters " impressed other series regulars ? series writer Chip Johannessen praised the script 's attention to detail , while producer John Peter Kousaskis called positive attention to its physical and make @-@ up effects .

= = Plot = =

Jordan Black (Brittany Tiplady) is awakened by a nightmare , and is comforted by her father Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) . However , Black is soon called to investigate the body of a woman at a dog pound in Portland , Oregon . Black works for the Millennium Group , an organisation which offers private investigation services and consults with law enforcement on certain types of cases . He is asked by Group member Jim Penseyres (Chris Ellis) to help a local detective on the murder case , as he is being considered as prospective member of the Millennium Group . Black believes the murder to be the work of a serial killer , and is convinced there will be a message from him on the bodies .

Black meets up with the detective , Jim Horn (James Morrison) , and sees that he is a competent and experienced investigator , although his recent separation from his wife has left him distracted and on edge .

The killer murders another woman , disposing of the body in a post office 's dead letter office . Investigating , Black finds a human hair with a message etched into it ? " hair today , gone tomorrow " ? which he takes as an indication that the murderer is lashing out at a world that he feels has treated him as insignificant . Horn 's mental condition seems to deteriorate , and he begins to take the case personally , leading Black to doubt his ability .

A third victim turns up , with another message ? " nothing ventured , nothing gained " . A lens from the killer 's glasses is also recovered . Black organises a press release in an attempt to draw out the killer , taunting his intelligence by including a falsified profile describing him as uneducated . Black and Horn feel this will tempt the killer to show up at the latest victim 's memorial service . Horn attacks an innocent man at the service , believing him to be the killer ; although a cross found at the memorial with " ventured " etched upon it proves the killer did attend . Surveillance footage of the service yields two leads ? a local optician recognizes the suspect as a customer having a glasses lens replaced , and the killer 's vehicle is identified .

Black and Horn realize that the killer will have chosen the optician as his next victim , and agree to set another trap with her as the bait . Horn , more and more unhinged throughout the case , begins imagining the killer and his van at every turn . As he and Black wait for the killer to make an attempt on the optician 's life , Horn admits that he cannot trust himself to be there , and is told to go home . However , he parks his car on the route towards the trap , feigning a flat tyre . When the killer 's van attempts to pass , Horn attacks him , but the police arrive in time to stop him beating the killer to death . The attack renders any evidence found in the van inadmissible in court , although Black tells him enough evidence was found at the killer 's home to secure a conviction . Later , Horn asks Black how he can deal with cases like this on a regular basis . Black does not answer , but later comforts his daughter after another bad dream .

= = Production = =

" Dead Letters " is the first episode of Millennium to be written by James Wong and Glen Morgan , who would go on to write another fourteen episodes across the first and second seasons . The episode is also the first not to have been written by series creator Chris Carter , who had penned both of the preceding episodes , " Pilot " and " Gehenna " . " Dead Letters " also marked the first time Thomas J. Wright had directed an episode of the series . Wright would go on to direct twenty @-@ six episodes across all three seasons , as well as directing " Millennium " , the series ' crossover episode with its sister show The X @-@ Files . He had also previously worked with Morgan and Wong on their series Space : Above and Beyond .

The episode marked the second of three appearances by Chris Ellis as Millennium Group member Jim Penseyres ; Ellis had previously appeared in " Gehenna " , and would reappear in the next episode , " The Judge " . Guest star James Morrison , who portrayed the troubled Jim Horn , had also previously appeared as a main character in Morgan and Wong 's Space : Above and Beyond , playing Tyrus Cassius McQueen ; his character 's son in this episode is named TC as a reference to this . Lisa Vultaggio , who played the optician used to bait the killer , had previously worked with Morgan and Wong in The X @-@ Files , appearing in the first season episode " Beyond the Sea " .

Producer and writer Chip Johannessen felt that the scene in this episode in which a human hair is discovered with a message inscribed upon it was a " perfect " moment , in that it " told you everything about this guy [the killer] ... but you had no idea what he was or what he was going to do next ... you know what kind of crazy motherfucker would do that , but where he is or what he 's going to do next , who knows " . The episode 's opening nightmare sequence , in which Jordan Black (Brittany Tiplady) is terrified by a clown crawling along the ceiling , was inspired by the childhood nightmares of Morgan and Wong , and left Tiplady suffering from bad dreams herself for several nights after filming . Producer John Peter Kousakis recalls having visited the episode 's set late during production , having felt that make @-@ up effects supervisor Toby Lindala had been doing " fabulous " work on the series ' prosthetic body parts . Walking on set to find Lindala 's recreation of a quartered corpse , Kousakis remarked " we 're doing something special here , but we 're also doing something really outrageous " . Lance Henriksen also found this scene too graphic to film all at once , taking time between shots to compose himself .

= = Reception = =

" Dead Letters " was first broadcast on the Fox Network on November 8 , 1996 ; and earned a Nielsen rating of 8 , meaning that roughly 8 percent of all television @-@ equipped households were tuned in to the episode .

" Dead Letters " earned positive reviews from critics . Writing for The A.V. Club , Zack Handlen rated the episode a B + . Handlen felt that the episode is " not art , not yet , but it is deeply personal " , and praised the opening dream sequence , describing it as " flat @-@ out Lynchian nightmare territory " . However , he noted that the episode 's dialogue felt too " flat " and " expository " , adding that it serves to draw " attention to themes that were already plastered across the screen in blinding red and black " . Bill Gibron , writing for DVD Talk , rated the episode 4 out of 5 , describing it as being " one of the more horrifying episodes in Season 1 " . Gibron added that " seeing Jim Horn go through his mental breakdown gives us insight into where Frank Black is coming from " , although he felt that the lack of real insight into the killer 's personality let the episode down . 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 , describing it as a " gripping and sincere portrait of human ugliness at its most banal " . Shearman and Pearson praised guest star James Morrison 's acting , noting that he was " the very humanity that the show is crying out for " .