

= Tithonus ( The X @-@ Files ) =

" Tithonus " is the tenth episode of the sixth season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on January 24 , 1999 . The episode was written by Vince Gilligan , and directed by Michael W. Watkins . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " Tithonus " earned a Nielsen household rating of 9 @.@ 2 , being watched by 15 @.@ 90 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received positive reviews .

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 . Mulder is a believer in the paranormal , while the skeptical Scully has been assigned to debunk his work . In this episode , Scully learns that she , but not Mulder , is being given a chance to prove her worth at the FBI , and ? paired with a new partner ? she investigates a crime scene photographer with an uncanny knack for arriving just in time to see his victims ' final moments . What she does not expect , however , is for Death to play a role himself .

Vince Gilligan wrote " Tithonus " in an attempt to create a story wherein immortality is portrayed as scary . The episode was based on three real aspects of history : Arthur Fellig , the Greek myth of Tithonus , and the yellow fever epidemic . In addition , several of the scenes were filmed on the sets from NYPD Blue , whose sets were located just across from The X @-@ Files studios . The character of Alfred Fellig in " Tithonus " has thematically been compared to the Tithonus in Alfred , Lord Tennyson 's dramatic monologue of the same name . In addition , themes of immortality and escaping death were revisited in the eighth season episode " The Gift " .

= = Plot = =

In New York City , a man with a camera follows a woman from an elevator through a corridor to another elevator , where all the people appear to be gray . He gets off on a floor before the woman 's and runs down the stairs . Lights flicker and the elevator cable snaps . As the man reaches the basement , the cab crashes and its door spills open to reveal the woman 's wrist , covered with blood . The man begins to snap photos . Later , in Washington , D.C. , FBI Assistant Director Alvin Kersh ( James Pickens , Jr . ) assigns Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) , along with Agent Peyton Ritter from New York , to the case . Scully 's partner Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) looks at the material on Scully 's desk and points out that the case looks like an X @-@ file ? and that Kersh is obviously splitting them up .

Scully and Ritter soon discover that their prime suspect , Alfred Fellig , who has worked as a police photographer since 1964 , has not aged at all in any of his official photos on his renewal applications . Elsewhere in the city , Fellig watches a criminal kill a youth for his sneakers . When he approaches to take photos of the dying young man , the murderer returns and repeatedly stabs Fellig , but he pulls the knife out of his back and walks away . Scully and Ritter learn of the crime and of the fact that Fellig 's prints are on the knife . Ritter demands to know how Fellig always seems to be around when people die , but Scully realizes that the man is in pain and asks whether he was wounded in the attack which Fellig says he merely observed . When she sees the wounds on his back she sends him to the hospital , much to Ritter 's chagrin . Ritter reminds Scully that they are trying to charge Fellig with murder , not let him go .

Ritter leaves Scully staking out Fellig 's apartment , but Scully is unnerved when she sees Fellig shooting photos of her out his window and bangs on his door , demanding to know how he took photos at a crime scene before the police even knew the crime had been committed . He invites her to take a ride with him so he can show her . After driving , he sees a prostitute who appears to be gray to him . Fellig tells Scully that the woman will be dead very soon . A pimp approaches the woman and begins to harass her . Scully leaps out of the car with her gun , announcing that she is an FBI agent and handcuffing the pimp , but when the prostitute tries to flee , she is hit by a truck and killed .

Scully goes to warn Fellig that he is about to be charged for murder , and accuses him of profiting

from people 's deaths . In his darkroom , Fellig shows Scully a photo of a dead woman with an odd fuzzy shape around her head , which the photographer claims is Death . When asked why he bothers to try to photograph Death , Fellig says that it is so he can look Death in the face and finally die . He claims to be 149 years old , and says he cannot kill himself . Scully points out that most people would like to live forever , but Fellig says that he has experienced everything , and that even love does not last forever . Suddenly , he notices that Scully is gray , and says , " Count your blessings . " When she asks about the science of his immortality , he says he was meant to die of yellow fever , but he refused to look Death in the face , so instead Death took the kind nurse who had taken care of him . Fellig takes a photo just as Ritter enters and shoots . The bullet passes right through the camera and through Fellig into Scully , who collapses . While Ritter rushes to call an ambulance , Fellig asks Scully whether she saw Death and begs her to close her eyes . He covers her hand with his own . The color returns to Scully 's hand as Fellig 's turns gray . Looking up , he dies .

At the hospital , Mulder watches through a window as Ritter apologizes to Scully , then tells Ritter that he 's a lucky man ( because Scully survived ) . Going inside the room , Mulder reports to Scully that Fellig died of a single gunshot wound , while the doctors are amazed at her own rapid recovery .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

" Tithonus " was written by Vince Gilligan , who based aspects of it on three real aspects of history . The name Alfred Fellig is a reference to famous photographer Arthur Fellig , better known as Weegee . The title of the episode is a reference to the Greek myth of Tithonus . Tithonus was the son the king of Troy and a favorite of the Titan goddess Eos . She later kidnapped him to be her lover and asked Zeus to make Tithonus immortal . Eos , however , forgot to ask for eternal youth and Tithonus indeed lived forever but prayed every sunrise for death . The final aspect of history used by Gilligan was the yellow fever epidemic in the 19th century .

A story about explicit immortality had been discussed for several years . However , the writers found it hard to make immortality seem scary . Frank Spotnitz , the show 's executive producer , noted that after making the immortal character a photographer who was trying to catch Death so that he could die , the problem was solved . The episode was not the first to make a reference to immortality , however . The season three episode " Clyde Bruckman 's Final Repose " featured Scully being told by the titular character that she would not die . This episode was the inception of a lesser @-@ known story arc that was originally supposed to reveal that Scully was immortal . The sub @-@ plot , popular with fans on the internet , was verified by Spotnitz . However , Spotnitz later admitted that this sub @-@ plot was bookended by " Tithonus " , a solution that Spotnitz later called " very satisfying " .

= = = Filming and effects = = =

The first five seasons of the series were mainly filmed in Vancouver , British Columbia ; production of the show 's sixth season , however , was based in Los Angeles , California . Several of the scenes were filmed on the sets from NYPD Blue , whose sets were located just across from The X @-@ Files studios . All of Fellig 's cameras were borrowed from the University of California 's Museum of Photography . Many of the photographs were used courtesy of Corbis . The production staff of The X @-@ Files were tasked with not only creating the photographs that Fellig was supposed to have taken , but also with crafting each so that they would appear as if they had been taken from different times . Tom Day , the episodes property master , had to research popular government typefaces and printing technologies to make the pictures appear as historically accurate as possible . Geoffrey Lewis , who portrayed Fellig , was photographed several times and each

photo was edited to give the photographs the appearance of coming from different eras .

The episode featured several special effects . The stab wounds that were on Fellig 's back were constructed in " precisely graduated sizes " to show Fellig 's healing powers . The faux @-@ wounds were then applied to Lewis ' back by make @-@ up department head Cheri Montesanto @-@ Mecalf . The hardest digital effect to create was the transformation of select figures from color into black @-@ and @-@ white . Visual effects producer Bill Millar noted that the process , was " very similar to the one used to wreck all those old movies by colorizing them . In fact , it 's basically the same , only in reverse " . The " painstaking " process involved outlining the portion of the frame to be de @-@ colorized . A computer program was then used to complete the job . Millar , who had previously used the technique on the NBC series Nightmare Cafe in 1992 , had used it in the 1998 movie Pleasantville .

= = Themes = =

Besides a direct reference to the titular mythological character , Matthew VanWinkle , in the chapter " Tennyson 's ' Tithonus ' and the Exhaustion of Survival in The X @-@ Files " , of the book The X @-@ Files and Literature : Unweaving the Story , Unraveling the Lie to Find the Truth , argues that the episode bears a striking resemblance to Alfred , Lord Tennyson 's dramatic monologue " Tithonus " . In the poem , one line reads " Alas ! For this gray shadow , once a man . " VanWinkle argues that in The X @-@ Files episode , this line is paralleled by Alfred Fellig 's tendency to see those about to die in a monochromatic vision . Furthermore , both the poem and the episode stress that death is not appealing because it is simply " a means to an end " . Rather , it is to be sought because it " is the event that most fully unites us with other humans . "

VanWinkle compared and contrasted Fellig with Eugene Victor Tooms , from the first season episodes " Squeeze " and " Tooms " , and John Barnett , from the first season entry " Young at Heart " . While all three are similar in that they have obtained , to a varying degree , elements of immortality , Tooms is different from Fellig because he is a " monstrous predator " , and Barnett is unlike Fellig because he is a mere sociopath . Fellig , however , is the only character , out of the three , to possess true immortality . Furthermore , he is separated from Tooms and Barnett due to his distinct hatred for his ability ; he did not want to be immortal ; rather , it was forced upon him . VanWinkle also notes that Fellig is , furthermore , different from Tennyson 's Tithonus because the latter actively sought immortality , due to the flaw of hubris or extreme pride , in order to become more like a god .

In the episode , VanWinkle draws parallels between Scully and Tithonus ' lover Aurora . In the end , both will " continue [ their ] ending and invariable office " ? in the former 's case , investigating crimes , and in the latter 's case , raising the dawn . The themes of immortality and escaping death were later revisited in the eight season episode " The Gift " . In the episode , Agent John Doggett , played by Robert Patrick , is looking for clues following Mulder 's abduction . Without Scully , he travels to Pennsylvania and seeks out a soul eater : a being that can consume another person 's injuries . In the end , Doggett is fatally shot , and the soul eater , wishing to die , consumes Doggett 's death . VanWinkle argues that this episode serves as a direct parallel to " Tithonus " , although it switches the perspective significantly .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Tithonus " first aired in the United States on January 24 , 1999 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 9 @. @ 2 , with a 13 share , meaning that roughly 9 @. @ 2 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 13 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 15 @. @ 90 million viewers . The episode aired in the United Kingdom and Ireland on Sky1 on May 9 , 1999 and received 0 @. @ 79 million viewers , making it the third most watched episode that week . Fox promoted the episode with the tagline " When death looks you in the face ... you 're dead . Tonight , Scully gets a good hard look . "

The episode was met with largely positive reviews . Zack Handlen of The A.V. Club wrote positively

of the episode and awarded it an " A " grade . He noted the entries ' similarities with " Clyde Bruckman 's Final Repose " , noting that both deal with men " who [ know ] too much about death for [ their ] own good " . He also praised the characterization of Scully and Fellig ; he noted that the former is " no @-@ nonsense " and optimistic , whereas the latter is a " creepy man " who is jealous of those who are capable of dying . Handlen concluded that the episode " doesn ' t play out like a classic monster episode , it feels like one " . Tom Kessenich , in his book *Examination : An Unauthorized Look at Seasons 6 ? 9 of the X @-@ Files* wrote positively of the episode , comparing it favorably to " Clyde Bruckman 's Final Repose " . He wrote , " If imitation is the highest form of flattery , what is a fascinating offshoot of a previous incarnation ? I 'd say it looks a lot like the latest entry into Season 6 of The X @-@ Files . The engaging ' Tithonus ' . "

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 , drawing comparisons to " Clyde Bruckman 's Final Repose " , but noting that the former has " a flavour all of its own " . Shearman and Pearson praised Geoffrey Lewis ' portrayal of Fellig , and described " Tithonus " as " bizarre , chilling , and yet strangely life @-@ affirming " . Paula Vitaris from *Cinefantastique* gave the episode a mixed @-@ to @-@ positive review and awarded it two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half stars out of four . Vitaris wrote that the episode had a " terrific ' feel ' " . In addition , Vitaris , despite slightly criticizing Gillian Anderson 's " tired " performance through most of the episode , called Anderson 's acting in the scene wherein Scully is shot " excellent " , citing her " amazement and near @-@ paralysis " as reasons why the scene was a success . The character of Alfred Fellig has also attracted positive critical acclaim . UGO Networks listed him amongst the greatest monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ week characters in The X @-@ Files .