

## = War of the Coprophages =

" War of the Coprophages " is the twelfth episode of the third season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on January 5 , 1996 . It was written by Darin Morgan , and directed by Kim Manners . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , a stand @-@ alone plot which is unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " War of the Coprophages " earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @.@ 1 , being watched by 16 @.@ 32 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mostly positive reviews from critics , who praised its humorous tone .

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 , Mulder investigates a small town plagued by deaths in which the bodies are found covered in cockroaches . Working from home , Scully has scientific explanations for all of them , but Mulder ? at the crime scene with an attractive bug expert ? suspects the insects may not be organic , or earthly .

" War of the Coprophages " was Darin Morgan 's third episode , after the second season episode " Humbug " and season three 's " Clyde Bruckman 's Final Repose " . In order to achieve the effect of a cockroach infestation , the show used around three hundred cockroaches for the episode in addition to extremely detailed rubber cockroach props and " piles and piles " of faux @-@ dung . The episode 's title is a reference to the famous novel The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells , as well as its 1938 radio adaptation by Orson Welles . The character Dr. Berenbaum is named for entomologist May Berenbaum .

## = = Plot = =

In Miller 's Grove , Massachusetts , an exterminator inspects the basement of Dr. Jeff Eckerle , having been hired to eradicate a cockroach infestation . The exterminator sprays a roach , knocks it down to the ground , and attempts to crush it underfoot . However , upon doing so , he begins to succumb to anaphylaxis , clutching his heart and collapsing against a wall , while the roach crawls out from under his boot , unscathed . When Eckerle returns , he finds the exterminator 's body covered with roaches .

Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) is coincidentally nearby , investigating reported UFO sightings in Miller 's Grove . While on the phone with Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) , Mulder is approached by the local sheriff , Frass , who reveals that a series of " roach attacks " have taken place in the town . Frass allows Mulder onto the scene at Eckerle 's residence .

Elsewhere in town , a trio of teenagers drink beer and huff fumes generated from heated manure . One of them sees a roach crawl into an open wound on his wrist , and in an attempt to extricate the insect , he begins to frantically slice his skin with a razor , leading him to sever an artery and ultimately bleed to death . At the scene , Mulder talks over the phone with Scully , who explains that it is likely a case of drug @-@ induced delusional parasitosis , though Mulder finds a cockroach on the underside of a piece of furniture , indicating that roaches were at least present . When he attempts to capture it for analysis , the insect crumbles in his hand and the sharp pieces cut his fingers in the process , leading him to believe that the brittle casing was made of metal . Sheriff Frass purports that the government , under the guise of the USDA , has been breeding killer cockroaches in a nearby facility . Immediately afterwards , the medical examiner is found dead in a bathroom stall , initially covered with cockroaches that disappear from the scene before more than one person can witness them . Scully attributes the medical examiner 's death to a cerebral aneurysm induced by overstraining while defecating . Mulder and Sheriff Frass find a seemingly dead cockroach on a sink in the bathroom , and Mulder again attempts to capture it ( albeit more gingerly this time ) , but it proves to be alive and escapes down the drain .

Mulder goes to investigate the facility Sheriff Frass mentioned . Before breaking in , he and Scully discuss the odd behavior of the roaches , with Scully hypothesizing that the roaches could be an invasive species . Inside the facility , which resembles a typical house , Mulder sees the walls

rippling and is quickly surrounded by roaches . He is then confronted by Dr. Bambi Berenbaum ( Bobbie Phillips ) , a researcher from the Department of Agriculture who is studying cockroaches to develop more effective methods of pest control . Berenbaum has great interest in insects and , incidentally , believes that some UFOs are actually insect swarms flying through electrically charged airspaces . Yet another death occurs in Mulder 's hotel , with the individual being found covered in roaches that quickly flee . At this point , Mulder believes that the individual simply died of fright , though Scully begins to wonder what is going on and decides to head up there herself .

Mulder brings a cockroach from the hotel room to Berenbaum , who thinks it may be mechanical . Mulder then visits the nearby Dr. Ivanov , a wheelchair @-@ bound scientist who works on insect @-@ like robots . The two discuss the possibility that extraterrestrial intelligences could send robotic probes to study other planets . After inspecting the Mulder 's specimen , Ivanov is rendered speechless ; he informs Mulder that the specimen is , technology @-@ wise , vastly superior to anything he 's ever seen . Scully arrives in the town at a convenience store , finding the residents succumbing to panic over the roaches . She attempts to calm the people down , however the store @-@ goes frantically flee after two scuffling patrons knock over a display of chocolate candies , believing them to be more roaches . Meanwhile , Mulder , while departing Ivanov 's lab , catches another roach to bring to Berenbaum , but this time , she concludes that it is a seemingly normal cockroach . Scully finds out that Eckerle was researching dung @-@ derived methane as an alternative fuel source , and had been importing animal dung that may have introduced the roaches to the area . Upon hearing this , Mulder speculates that the roaches are actually extraterrestrial robotic probes that are capable of consuming dung ? an abundant resource already exploited by some species of roaches ? to generate methane as a source of fuel .

Mulder goes with Berenbaum to see Eckerle at his facility. He finds Eckerle in a hysterical , paranoid state , having been unable to escape the roaches that he feels are following him . Eckerle pulls a gun on Mulder , thinking that even he may somehow be a cockroach . Scully arrives on the scene and meets Berenbaum . She calls Mulder , and when Mulder 's phone rings , Eckerle believes it to be Mulder making a tone like the rest of the unusual roaches . Eckerle fires at Mulder , and his shots rupture and ignite pipes containing methane gas . The agents flee , and the facility explodes with Eckerle still inside . The next day , Dr. Ivanov arrives to talk with Mulder at the scene of the explosion and meets Berenbaum . The two leave with one another , discussing their interests in insects and robots . That night Mulder writes his report on the case , wondering how humanity would react if insect @-@ like robots visited Earth . Mulder finds a bizarre looking bug by his food , and crushes it with an X @-@ File .

= = Production = =

Writer Darin Morgan was inspired to write the episode when he saw a cover of a magazine featuring insect like robots created by roboticist Rodney Brooks . Mass hysteria was also a key element to the episode , with many references to Orson Welles 's famous radio play of War of the Worlds . Most notably , the episode 's title is a reference to The War of the Worlds and the town this episode takes place in ? Miller 's Grove ? is a play on Grover 's Mill , the setting of Orson Welles 's 1938 radio adaptation . Originally , a scene featuring the sheriff discussing a noted case of hysteria from the 1930s was planned to be included in the final episode , but was cut due to time . The episode , like Morgan 's previous effort , the second season 's " Humbug , " used a great deal of humor , including an in @-@ joke where Scully reads Breakfast at Tiffany 's , referencing David Duchovny 's Final Jeopardy ! question when he appeared on Jeopardy ! . The last part of the episode 's title , coprophages , refers to a dung eater .

The show 's animal trainer , Debbie Cove , used around three hundred cockroaches for this episode . Cove later noted that only one of the cockroaches died during the filming , due to old age . Director Kim Manners was very pleased with the way the cockroaches behaved , noting that " every shot I wanted to get , they got . " Cast and crew members later recalled that Manners began giving orders to the roaches . Cinematographer John Bartley explained , " when I saw Kim Manners talking to a bucket of cockroaches , that was a highlight for me . " Several " incredibly detailed " rubber

cockroaches were created for the episode . These props were extremely detailed : prop master Ken Hawryliw explained that , " you could put one next to a real roach and no one would know the difference . " In addition , the " piles and piles " of faux @-@ dung were created for the show by using an organic , feces @-@ free substance .

The episode came under heavy criticism by the standards and practices department at parent network Fox , who took exception to the initial script 's heavy use of words such as " crap " to refer to the excrement that episode 's cockroaches fed upon . Darin Morgan later attacked and parodied this approach in the twenty @-@ first episode of the second season of the American crime @-@ thriller television series Millennium called " Somehow , Satan Got Behind Me " . In the episode , a network censor again targets the use of the word " crap " and storms onto the set of a show resembling The X @-@ Files being taped , featuring lookalikes of Mulder and Scully with those series ' theme music playing in the background .

The episode marks a rare occasion in the series in which the fourth wall is broken : Although no character addresses the audience , a cockroach is made to appear to " walk across the viewer 's screen " during one scene .

= = Reception = =

" War of the Coprophages " premiered on the Fox network on January 5 , 1996 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 10 @. @ 1 , with a 16 share , meaning that roughly 10 @. @ 1 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 16 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 16 @. @ 32 million viewers .

The episode received positive reviews from critics . Entertainment Weekly gave " War of the Coprophages " an A- , and wrote , " Irreverent camp that 's infested with laughs ( and creepy @-@ crawlies ) but throws credibility out the window . " Reviewer Zack Handlen of The A.V. Club gave the episode an A and compared it to the previously Morgan @-@ penned " Clyde Bruckman 's Final Repose " , writing , " So ! This is the second Darin Morgan episode I 've had to write about , and once again , I 'm not sure I 've done it justice . [ ... ] The comedy here can be broad , but there 's always enough self @-@ aware commentary buried in it that it never becomes simplistic . While " Bruckman " dealt with the misery of knowing all the answers , " Coprophages " looks at how easy it is to convince yourself you know what 's going on , even when you don 't . It 'd be better to believe in a bunch of bugs from outer space coming down to earth to mess with our minds , than it would be to accept the more likely truth that bugs like shit ? and around here , there 's always plenty to go around . " Critical Myth 's John Keegan gave the episode an 8 / 10 and praised the episode 's self @-@ parodying style , saying , " Overall , this episode was a rare self @-@ contained parody , well written by Darin Morgan . By standing on its own outside of continuity , the episode gives itself plenty of room to send @-@ up the series premise and its early internet fandom . There ? s no real sense of resolution , but that ? s really incidental to the point of the parody . " Author Phil Farrand rated the episode as his second favorite episode of the first four seasons in his book The Nitpickers Guide to the X @-@ Files .

The cast and the crew of the show enjoyed the episode , for the most part . Co @-@ producer Paul Rabwin said that the episode had some of the funniest material in The X @-@ Files as well as some of the most horrific , such as the scene where a cockroach crawled into someone 's arm . Gillian Anderson rated the episode one of her favorite episodes of the third season . On a more negative note , writer Darin Morgan ended up being unhappy with the final product , saying " The other day , my girlfriend was saying , ' I never understood that episode , ' and I guess I don 't either . It was an episode that had a lot of what I thought were really good ideas and never quite got it to work . I was really disappointed with that episode . Some people love it . "