

= Paper Hearts =

" Paper Hearts " is the tenth episode of the fourth season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on December 15 , 1996 . It was written by Vince Gilligan , directed by Rob Bowman , and featured guest appearances by Tom Noonan , Rebecca Toolan and Vanessa Morley . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to , but conversant with , the series ' wider mythology . " Paper Hearts " was viewed by 16 @. @ 59 million people in its initial broadcast , and received positive reviews , with critics praising Noonan 's guest role .

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 , and the skeptical Scully has been assigned to debunk his work . In this episode , Mulder and Scully find that a child killer (Tom Noonan) who Mulder had helped to apprehend several years earlier had claimed more victims than he had confessed to ; and in the resulting investigation , learn that the killer is now claiming to have killed Mulder 's sister Samantha .

Gilligan came up with the concept for " Paper Hearts " when thinking about the series ' longest running storyline , the abduction of Samantha Mulder ; he came up with a story questioning whether Samantha had not been abducted by aliens , but was rather murdered by a child killer instead . " Paper Hearts " was written specifically with Tom Noonan in mind for the role of Roche , and was amongst the first television work the actor had done .

= = Plot = =

Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) dreams of a red light that leads him to the corpse of a young girl buried in a park in Manassas , Virginia . When he awakens , he heads to the park and finds the girl 's skeleton . The girl was determined to have been murdered by John Lee Roche (Tom Noonan) , a serial killer who murdered thirteen girls throughout the 1980s ; his modus operandi was cutting a heart out of the clothes of each victim . Mulder had captured Roche by deducing that he committed the murders while traveling as a vacuum cleaner salesman . Roche 's hearts were never found , although he confessed to all of the murders .

Dana Scully 's (Gillian Anderson) autopsy of the skeleton finds that the victim died in 1975 , suggesting that Roche 's killing spree started much earlier than the FBI had previously thought . The agents search Roche 's old car , where they discover sixteen cut @-@ out hearts . Mulder and Scully subsequently visit Roche in prison , hoping to learn the identities of the remaining two victims . Roche , however , tries to play mind games with Mulder . That night Mulder dreams of the night of Samantha 's abduction , seemingly showing that his sister was abducted by Roche rather than aliens .

The next day , Mulder asks Roche where he was the night Samantha was abducted . Roche claims he was on Martha 's Vineyard and had sold a vacuum cleaner to Mulder 's father . Mulder later finds the vacuum in his mother 's house . After convincing Walter Skinner to grant them further access to Roche , the agents question the killer and are told the location of one of his remaining victims . He also claims exactly what happened the night of Samantha 's abduction . An autopsy of the body reveals it does not belong to Samantha . Roche tells Mulder the final body is Samantha 's , but says that he will only reveal where it is if Mulder takes him to the scene of her abduction . Mulder secretly releases Roche from prison and brings him to Martha 's Vineyard .

Upon arriving at his family 's old summer house , Roche explains exactly what happened the night of Samantha 's abduction . However , Mulder tells him that the house was bought by his father after Samantha 's abduction , convincing him that Roche is not telling the truth . Mulder plans to bring Roche back to prison , but ? following another dream about Samantha ? awakens to find Roche gone , with his badge , gun , and phone stolen .

Using Mulder 's credentials , Roche kidnaps a girl in Swampscott , Massachusetts whom he met on his flight with Mulder to Boston . Scully and Skinner arrive the next day and the agents head to the site of Roche 's old apartment in Revere . They find him with the girl in an abandoned bus nearby .

Roche holds the gun on the girl and tells Mulder that he 'll never know for sure whether the last victim is Samantha or not if he kills him . Mulder is then forced to shoot Roche , as he starts to pull on the trigger of the stolen gun . In his office Mulder stares at the final cloth heart and puts it away , unsure of whether it belonged to Samantha or not .

= = Production = =

" Paper Hearts " was written specifically with Tom Noonan in mind for the role of Roche , and was amongst the first television work the actor had done . Writer Vince Gilligan came up with the concept for the episode when thinking about the series ' longest running storyline , the abduction of Samantha Mulder . Gilligan came up with a story questioning whether Samantha had not been abducted by aliens , but was rather murdered by a child killer instead . He decided to help convince Fox Mulder of this through a series of prophetic dreams . The laser lights in Mulder 's dreams were influenced by Gilligan 's experience with laser holograms while he was a film student . The laser was supposed to be the color blue , but was changed to red in production to reduce costs . Wanting to include some kind of fetish for the killer , Gilligan settled on having Roche cut heart shaped fragments from his victim 's clothing , thinking that having him mutilate his victims ' bodies would be going too far .

Guest actor Tom Noonan , who played the killer John Lee Roche , recalled filming the scene in which his character is introduced , playing basketball in prison . Noonan , a capable basketball player , was asked to " downplay " how well he could play ; although he regretted not being able to play against David Duchovny , who had played basketball for Princeton University . Episode writer Vince Gilligan and director Rob Bowman assert that Duchovny 's successful basketball shot in this scene was filmed in just one take , without special effects . While the episode was the eighth produced in the season , it was the tenth aired , having been delayed to free up production resources for the two part episodes " Tunguska " and " Terma " . The episode 's climactic scene was filmed in a " bus graveyard " in Surrey , British Columbia , a location which had been scouted months previously with the intention of eventually including it in an episode of the series ; although filming at the location did not even last a full day despite the long wait to use it .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Paper Hearts " premiered on the Fox network on December 15 , 1996 , and was first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC Two on November 12 , 1997 . The episode 's initial broadcast was viewed by approximately 16 @.@ 59 million people , which represented 16 % of the viewing audience during that time .

Both Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny consider this among the best episodes of the fourth season . Composer Mark Snow was nominated for an Emmy Award for the music he produced for this episode . He said of the episode 's music , " It was a different kind of texture for the show . Light , magic , nothing terribly threatening " . Snow received many requests for a recording of the music used at the end of the episode .

Website IGN named " Paper Hearts " their sixth favorite " standalone " episode of the show , calling it " creepy and unsettling " , and claiming Noonan 's character was " one of the most disturbing villains to make an appearance in the series " . Noonan 's acting has also been praised by Vince Gilligan , who says the " understated " manner in which Roche is portrayed " sends chills down [his] spine every time " . The A.V. Club 's Todd VanDerWerff reviewed the episode positively , rating it an A. He felt that Noonan 's performance was " terrific " , noting that the actor " makes Roche into one of the series ' great human monsters " ; and believed that the episode 's premise was important to developing the character of Mulder further . The website later named the episode the sixth best example of a television dream sequence , noting that it " suggest [s] how this methodical man [Mulder] might puzzle over cold cases in his subconscious " . The article also complimented the entry 's metaphor that laser pointers were Mulder 's mind that pointed " out bits of evidence his conscious brain missed all those many years ago . " Starpulse named it the second best episode of

the series .