

= Earthling ( Fringe ) =

" Earthling " is the sixth episode of the American science fiction drama television series Fringe 's second season . The episode followed the Fringe team 's investigation into random people mysteriously disintegrating into ash , a case which Agent Broyles had become deeply obsessed with in the past .

It was co @-@ written by J.H. Wyman and Jeff Vlaming , while Jon Cassar served as the director . The episode first aired on November 5 , 2009 in the United States on the Fox network . An estimated 4 @.@ 86 million viewers tuned in , contributing to a new ratings low for the series . The episode received generally mixed reviews , though multiple reviewers highlighted the episode 's special effects . The VFX production team received a nomination at the 8th Annual Visual Effects Society Awards .

= = Plot = =

A Boston man ( Joe Towne ) is attacked by a shadowy , ghost @-@ like figure ; his wife ( Michelle Harrison ) returns home to find he disintegrates into ash upon being touched . After learning all of the victims had recently visited a hospital before dying , Agent Broyles ( Lance Reddick ) explains the case is similar to one he had trouble with in the past , in which his obsessive behavior effectively ended his marriage to his wife Diane . The suspect , an Eastern European man , had contacted him four years ago sounding distraught and asked him to figure out a special formula , which Broyles was unable to solve . Walter ( John Noble ) and Peter ( Joshua Jackson ) study the victim 's remains at their lab and begin studying the formula given to Broyles .

Several more people are attacked and reduced to ash . A search of Eastern European employees leads them to Russian night nurse Tomas ( Ravil Isyanov ) , but he is gone when they search his apartment . Despite being ordered to end the investigation and that the suspect is wanted by the Russian government and the CIA , Broyles tells Olivia ( Anna Torv ) to continue the case . Walter posits the entity needs radiation , and chooses its victims based on their exposure levels . They learn that Tomas stole his comatose brother , a former cosmonaut , and has been moving him around to both protect him and contain the entity . Fearing capture , Tomas removes his brother from the hospital ; Walter speculates that the cosmonaut brought the entity back with him upon returning from space . Walter is finally able to solve the formula , and Broyles sadly tells Tomas over the phone that his brother and the entity cannot be separated . However , during their conversation , the entity escapes his brother 's body and kills Tomas . The Fringe team is able to trace the call , and Broyles shoots the host ( Tomas ' brother ) in the head to stop the entity from attacking another victim .

At the end of the episode , a mysterious CIA agent ( J. R. Bourne ) approaches Broyles and tells him to not report the case . He reveals the cosmonaut resurrected itself , and it is implied to have been sent into space , " wherever it came from " .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing and filming = = =

The episode was co @-@ written by executive producer J.H. Wyman and supervising producer Jeff Vlaming , while 24 veteran , Jon Cassar , directed the hour . On August 14 , 2009 , he posted " rough drawn " storyboards of the episode on Twitter . The episode remains Cassar 's first and only directional credit for the series to date .

The episode was filmed in mid @-@ September 2009 in Vancouver . Due to the Russian lettering on many of the episode props , director Cassar joked during shooting , " Can we get a translator and find out what this writing means , specifically ? Maybe it says ' Do not open until Christmas ' or ' Watch The Simpsons on Sunday night , ' knowing Fox . " To create the episode 's auditory effects ,

sound editor Bruce Tanis explained his production steps in an interview with *Designing Sound* , " ' Earthling ' was a really good episode for strange sounds . It starts out with the appearance of a smoke monster that kills its victims by enveloping them and leaving behind an exact life @-@ like looking corpse only the body is made of ash which crumbles horribly when touched . The smoke creature moved rapidly as opposed to gently drifting so I had some movement to play off of in creating a sound for him . I came up with some stuttering , fluttery whooshes that kind of vibrated which made him more dangerous than if he sounded like a puff of steam moving along the hall . The smoke monster requires a host body to live in when he 's not vibrating around killing people . The only way to recall the smoke monster to the host body , or to keep him there in the first place , is by severe electrical shock . "

Visual effects supervisor Jay Worth found inspiration for the ash storyline from holding his grandmother @-@ in @-@ law 's hands while at her funeral . He noted during production , " The Ash Man definitely had its own set of challenges , because we wanted to utilize a lot of real elements , and because we didn 't have the time to do all the simulation and particle work needed to make it look real . The thing that sold The Ash Man more than anything was the aftermath shot : This half @-@ disintegrated body with a pile of ash for the head on the ground . It ended up being a layering , compositing , tweaking challenge beyond belief . I got to shoot the elements myself and had more control over them . "

Another VFX supervisor from Zoic Studios , Andrew Orloff , believed the episode 's special effects were possibly the most difficult of the season . He wrote , " Originally , it was supposed to be a practical effect but they couldn 't get it to fall in a natural way , so what we had to do was shoot the practical elements in pieces and we put them all together and timed all those plates and ended up rebuilding a significant part of it and tying it all together in CG . So we took a cyberscan of the guy 's body , and on top of all the practical elements we used as a base , we had a matte painting , a reveal matte painting of the cracks that ran through the body , 3D particles of large chunks of ash falling out , 3D particles of small ash bits floating down , residual dust flying off of it and , at one point , his head falls off and crashes to the ground as ash . So we had to do a full @-@ CG head and tumble it down the body . That was pretty complicated and entailed lots of R & D : there was 2D work in After Effects , tracking , retiming , we did a lot of CG lighting for the body parts in Maya / mental ray and all of the particles were a combination of Maya software , and rendered in Maya / mental ray . "

== = Casting and audio == =

Guest actor Gerard Plunkett made the first of two appearances as Senator James Van Horn ( the second would be a season three episode ) . Other guest stars included Ravil Isyanov , J. R. Bourne , Joe Towne , Michelle Harrison , and Yaroslav Poverlo . Karen Holness made her first guest appearance of the series playing Broyles ' ex @-@ wife Diane .

In addition to its original score , " Earthling " featured musical content from several outside artists . These songs included " Freezing " by American singer MoZella , " Straighten Up and Fly Right " by American musician Nat King Cole , and " Una Furtiva Lagrima " by American tenor Mario Lanza .

== = Reception == =

== = Ratings == =

The episode was first broadcast on November 5 , 2009 after a two @-@ week hiatus . " Earthling " was watched by an estimated 4 @. @ 86 million viewers in the United States . It earned a 3 @. @ 0 / 5 household rating and a 1 @. @ 7 / 4 ratings share for adults aged 18 ? 49 . With a 23 percent ratings decline from the previous episode and a 40 percent decline from the first season , this was a new series low for *Fringe* , which some media outlets attributed to the unexpected early end of the 2009 World Series .

## == Reviews ==

MTV columnist Josh Wigler was disappointed with the presumed alien storyline and believed it to be a " weak episode " . Despite liking actor Lance Reddick , Wigler was displeased with his character 's increased screentime , believing Broyles works better as an " enigmatic figure " . Wigler did however praise the villain 's " murderous method of choice " , writing " Those who 've read my Fringe reviews know that I 'm not big on the mystery @-@ of @-@ the @-@ week element , but I have to give this episode some credit for at least making it look good . " IGN 's Ramsey Isler rated the episode 8 @. @ 0 / 10 , noting the " great work " done with the CGI and props while at the same time acknowledging the opening was not " particularly exciting " . Isler praised Reddick 's performance , but continued " besides the Broyles characterization , this episode kind of fell flat . The plot unfolds slowly , and the first sixty percent of this episode is kind of a yawner . The only things that really spice up the story are Walter 's antics ( which are very amusing , as usual ) . The monster of the week , an alien stowing away in a Russian cosmonaut 's body , isn 't all that scary or even malevolent ( it 's just trying to stay alive by feeding on radiation ) . "

Writing for The A.V. Club , Noel Murray graded " Earthling " with a B. Unlike Isler , the A.V. Club reviewer loved the opening , calling it " one of Fringe 's most effective freak @-@ meets " . Murray continued that he believed the episode to be " an efficient action / adventure / horror hour , heavy on suspenseful moments and neat effects , light on character development and progress on the master @-@ plot . When all is said and done and Fringe eventually ends its run , I 'm betting that a newcomer will be able to skip ' Earthling ' without putting a dent in their overall understanding of the show . But that doesn 't mean it wasn 't still cool to see people get reduced to dust right in front of our eyes . Jane Boursaw from AOL TV responded negatively to the episode , wishing it had not been yet another " stand @-@ alone creature feature " . While praising the special effects , Boursaw expressed disinterest in learning more about Broyles and compared the Fringe case to something already done in The X @-@ Files . She concluded , " Take the creepy alien factor out of it , and this could have been any other police procedural " . UGO Networks reviewer Alex Zalben also noted similarities to The X @-@ Files , writing that " the reason [ the episode ] is weird for Fringe is that , aforementioned evidence aside , they ? ve been very careful to avoid the overarching alien mythology X @-@ Files is famous for . Oops . "

## == Awards and nominations ==

The crew responsible for the episode 's visual effects , VFX supervisors Jay Worth , Robert Habros , and Andrew Orlaff , and Visual Effects Artist Eric Hance , succeeded in gaining a nomination for their work . " Earthling " was nominated in the " Visual effects in a broadcast series " category at the 8th Annual Visual Effects Society Awards , but lost to the fourth season finale of the science fiction series Battlestar Galactica .