

= Pilot ( The Blacklist ) =

" Pilot " is the pilot episode of the first season of the American crime drama The Blacklist . The episode premiered in the United States on NBC on September 23 , 2013 . It was written by series creator Jon Bokenkamp and was directed by Joe Carnahan .

NBC bought the rights to The Blacklist from Sony Pictures Television in August 2012 and greenlit production in January 2013 . Producers said that the casting process was difficult . They initially offered the male lead to Kiefer Sutherland before James Spader accepted the role three days before filming began . Even though the series is set in Washington , D.C. , the pilot was mainly filmed in the same Manhattan studio where Law & Order was filmed .

In this episode , ex - FBI government agent and FBI Most Wanted fugitive Raymond Reddington ( James Spader ) turns himself in to the FBI and offers to give up information about the criminals he has worked with in exchange for sole communication with FBI profiler Elizabeth Keen ( Megan Boone ) . After Reddington convinces Keen to work with him , they work to capture Ranko Zamani ( Jamie Jackson ) , a terrorist thought to be dead by the FBI .

" Pilot " debuted the series for the 2013 - 14 season . The episode received generally positive reviews , with several critics praising James Spader 's portrayal of Raymond Reddington . In its original airing , " Pilot " received a 3.8 / 10 Nielsen rating with 12.58 million viewers , making it the highest - rated television show in its time slot and the eleventh most - watched television show of the week .

= = Plot = =

One of the FBI 's most wanted men , Raymond Reddington ( James Spader ) , strolls into the bureau headquarters in D.C. and turns himself in . He has information on a crime about to be perpetrated by a Serbian terrorist believed by the bureau to be dead . When the Serbian is recognized at the airport by facial identification software as Ranko Zamani ( Jamie Jackson ) , the division head answers to Reddington 's demands in order to get his help catching Zamani . Reddington insists on working exclusively with Elizabeth Keen ( Megan Boone ) , a profiler who had just been hired . Reddington knows quite a bit about Keen , which convinces her and the SAIC to acquiesce to Reddington 's plan . Zamani plans to kidnap and booby trap the daughter of a general responsible for destroying a chemical weapons factory that poisoned Zamani 's family .

Keen gets to the girl first but loses her in a daring raid by Zamani 's forces . Now aware of Keen , Zamani attacks her husband , Tom , in their home , gravely wounding him . Keen notes a stamp on the man 's hand and deduces the attack will take place at a zoo . Reddington briefly escapes custody to meet with Zamani , revealing that unbeknownst to the FBI , he masterminded the ploy , as well as the attack on Tom . Reddington removes the tracking device and places it with Zamani , which helps the FBI track down and kill the latter . Keen finds the daughter and a bomb in her backpack . Reddington calls in a clandestine bomb tech to disable the bomb , who then escapes with it . Reddington tells Elizabeth that her husband , with whom she is trying to adopt a baby , is not what he appears to be .

Returning to the FBI , Reddington offers to provide information on a number of the world 's dangerous criminals , his ' blacklist , in order to commute sentence and work with Keen . At home , Keen discovers a hidden box of cash , passports , and a gun , all belonging to her husband . She confronts Reddington to find out what he knows and stares at him as the episode ends .

= = Production = =

= = = Background = = =

NBC bought the rights to The Blacklist from Sony Pictures Television in August 2012 and greenlighted the show in January 2013 . During an NBC upfront presentation in May 2013 , it was

announced that The Blacklist was NBC 's highest @-@ testing drama in 10 years .

After showing a screening of " Pilot " at Comic @-@ Con , producers revealed that their inspiration for The Blacklist came from the capture of Whitey Bulger . Recalling the experience in an interview with Collider.com , executive producer John Eisendrath stated :

= = = Casting = = =

Eisendrath said the casting process for " Pilot " was difficult . In February 2013 , Zap2it reported that NBC offered Kiefer Sutherland the lead role of Raymond Reddington . After considering other actors for the role , Einsendrath and Bokenkamp called James Spader to see if he would be interested in it . Feeling confident in Spader 's understanding of the character , they casted him three days before filming began .

Megan Boone took a week to prepare for her audition as FBI profiler Elizabeth Keen . After getting called back for multiple auditions , Boone accepted the role as the female lead in the series in March 2013 .

= = = Filming = = =

The episode debuted the series for the 2013 ? 14 season . Written by series creator Jon Bokenkamp , Eisendrath joined John Davis and John Fox of Davis Entertainment as executive producers , while Joe Carnahan directed the episode .

Despite being set in Washington , D.C. , the series is mainly filmed in the same Manhattan studio where Law & Order was filmed for 20 years . Producer Richard Heus said they chose to film specific Washington , D.C. locations for " Pilot " because they were " iconic American locations " . These locations included the Lincoln Memorial , the Washington Monument , and the National Mall . In March 2013 , NBC filmed the bridge action scene for " Pilot " on the Michael Valente Memorial Bridge in Long Beach . Since it took two days to film that scene , northbound traffic had to be diverted onto one lane of the southbound bridge . NBC covered all overtime costs and permit fees , as the scene involved numerous special effects , such as fire , smoke , and car collisions .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" Pilot " premiered on NBC on September 23 , 2013 in the 10 ? 11 p.m. time slot . The episode garnered a 3 @-@ 8 / 10 Nielsen rating with 12 @-@ 58 million viewers , making it the highest @-@ rated show in its time slot . The series premiere was the eleventh most @-@ watched television show of the week , and was the highest @-@ rated 10 p.m. drama since Revolution on September 17 , 2012 . In addition , the episode added 5 @-@ 696 million DVR viewers within seven days after its original broadcast , bringing a total of 18 @-@ 279 million viewers .

= = = Reviews = = =

Reviews for " Pilot " were generally favorable . Jeff Jensen of Entertainment Weekly gave the episode a B + , calling the show " a slick action @-@ adventure tale with knotty plotting and zeitgeisty villains " . Hank Steuver of The Washington Post praised the episode for being " stylish and swiftly paced " with " intriguing plot twists " , but felt that there was " not a lot of motivation to keep coming back " . Rob Owen of the Pittsburgh Post @-@ Gazette felt that the " tone change " in the episode was " a bit abrupt " , but noted that " viewers who can handle the twists and turns will be intrigued " . James Poniewozik gave a mixed review of the episode , noting that the show is " setting itself up to be largely a bad @-@ guy @-@ of @-@ the @-@ week show " and that its success will " depend on how interesting Reddington and Keen ? s backstories become " . Matthew Gilbert of The

Boston Globe said the episode was " stylish and expertly paced " , saying that " it is never boring " . Dorothy Rabinowitz of The Wall Street Journal gave a positive review of the episode , saying that the episode " reaches undeniably satisfying levels of menace " .

Several critics praised James Spader 's performance as Raymond " Red " Reddington in " Pilot " . Diane Werts of Newsday labeled Spader " TV 's most voracious thespian " , but felt that he was " the only one who actually [ understood ] the gameplay " of the series . Mary McNamara of Los Angeles Times said that Spader was " the ace in the hole " of the episode , noting that " the sheer swoony pleasure of watching James Spader chew through scenes and scenery with epicurean delight " was the " reason to watch " the show . Brian Lowry of Variety said that Spader was the only actor " that lifts The Blacklist above mundane " , saying that Spader did not get enough screen time . Maureen Ryan of The Huffington Post praised Spader 's performance in the episode , stating that Spader " digs into this part with all the relish of Hannibal Lecter tucking into some organic escarole @-@ and @-@ human parts pie " .