

= Avatar (The X @-@ Files) =

" Avatar " is the twenty @-@ first episode of the third season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network in the United States on April 26 , 1996 . The story for the episode was developed by David Duchovny and Howard Gordon , the teleplay was written by Gordon , and it was directed by James Charleston . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " Avatar " earned a Nielsen household rating of 9 @.@ 3 , being watched by 14 @.@ 62 million viewers in its initial broadcast . The episode received mixed reviews from television critics .

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 , when Assistant Director Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) is accused of murdering a prostitute , Mulder and Scully investigate to determine the truth behind what happened .

" Avatar " was developed after Duchovny initially suggested having a Skinner @-@ centric episode as a way to give himself a break . Skinner 's popularity amongst fans had risen with his increased role in the episodes " The Blessing Way " and " Paper Clip " and these episodes helped re @-@ establish the ground rules regarding where Skinner stood in regards to the X @-@ Files . The episode title means the incarnation of a deity in Sanskrit .

= = Plot = =

FBI assistant director Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) is given divorce papers from his wife , Sharon , after seventeen years of marriage . At a bar , he meets an attractive woman named Carina Sayles (Amanda Tapping) ; the two engage in a one night stand . However , after the tryst , Skinner has a nightmare of an old woman in bed with him . He awakens to find Sayles dead , her head twisted completely around .

As the murder investigation unfolds , Skinner tells agent Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) not to get involved . He refuses to take a polygraph test and is viewed as a suspect . Agent Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) examines Sayles ' corpse , finding a phosphorescent glow around her lips . Mulder finds out that Sayles was a prostitute and interviews her madam , who claims that Skinner 's credit card number was collected the previous night .

Skinner sees the old woman looking at him on a city street . However , when he pursues the old woman , he instead finds Sharon . The agents talk to Sharon , who says that the marriage failed because of Skinner 's emotional distance . Scully learns that Skinner had been receiving treatment for a sleep disorder , in which he apparently had dreams about being suffocated in bed by an old woman . She fears that Skinner may have unwittingly killed Sayles in his sleep . However , Mulder believes that Skinner may be having visions of a succubus , a female demon , with the mention of similar symptoms of people 's bad dreams they 've experienced .

Sharon visits Skinner at his home . After she leaves he falls asleep , seeing the old woman again . He awakens as detectives enter the house , telling him Sharon has been run off the road and severely injured . Skinner admits to Mulder that he saw the woman during his experience in Vietnam , but passed it off as being due to drugs . It is revealed that The Smoking Man is observing their conversation through the one @-@ way mirror of the interrogation room .

Mulder investigates the airbag on Skinner 's car , which was the one used to hit Sharon . Scully defends Skinner to the Office of Professional Responsibility , but it does no good and he is fired . Mulder believes this was done to weaken the X @-@ Files . Mulder , with the help of Agent Pendrell finds a face imprint in the airbag which is not Skinner 's . He goes to see the prostitute 's boss again but discovers that she has been murdered . The agents hope to use Judy , an employee who saw the man who actually hired the prostitute and use her to set up another meeting with him . They agree to meet at the Ambassador Hotel in an hour . Skinner goes to see his wife , telling her why he could not sign the divorce papers , and witnesses the old woman again as she awakens from the coma .

Mulder waits in the hotel bar while Scully guards Judy in a hotel room . The assassin enters the room to attack them but is quickly killed by Skinner , who was also there . The dead man 's identity is unknown . Skinner returns to work , declining to say to Mulder how he knew to be at the hotel . After Mulder leaves , he reaches into his drawer and puts his wedding ring back on .

= = Production = =

David Duchovny initially suggested having a Walter Skinner @-@ centric episode as a way to give himself a break , although ultimately he still ended up having a large part in the episode . Duchovny felt that Skinner was a good character who was not utilized to his full extent on the show . Duchovny 's idea , which was written in collaboration with writer Howard Gordon , also surrounded the conceit that what Mulder and Skinner do comes with a tremendous price . Skinner 's popularity amongst fans had risen with his increased role in the episodes " The Blessing Way " and " Paper Clip " and these episodes helped re @-@ establish the ground rules regarding where Skinner stood in regards to the X @-@ Files . Writer Vince Gilligan noted that Skinner was originally intended to be a bad guy , but because Mitch Pileggi was such a good actor the writers decided to not take his character in that direction .

A scene between Skinner and The Smoking Man was removed from the final cut due to time considerations , reducing his role in the episode to a very short dialogue @-@ less appearance . Another scene where Mulder questions Skinner 's allegiance was also removed when it was viewed as too combative . The episode title means the incarnation of a deity in Sanskrit .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Avatar " premiered on the Fox network in the United States on April 26 , 1996 . The episode earned a Nielsen rating of 9 @. @ 3 , with a 16 share , meaning that roughly 9 @. @ 3 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 16 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . The episode was watched by a total of 14 @. @ 62 million viewers . The episode later aired in the United Kingdom on January 30 , 1997 on BBC One .

The episode received mostly mixed reviews from critics . Todd VanDerWerff of The A.V. Club gave the episode a B + . He praised the storytelling , positively commenting on how it revolved around Skinner and his past life . In addition he wrote that the episode possessed some " good scares " . However , he felt that the " central paranormal mystery of the episode is handled in a fashion that feels a bit muddled " . John Keegan from Critical Myth gave the episode a moderately negative review and awarded it a 4 out of 10 . He wrote , " Overall , this episode fails to capitalize on the idea of delving into the world of Walter Skinner . The conspiracy elements seem a bit redundant , and the paranormal side of the episode is a forced and inconsistent mess . Instead of developing something unique about Skinner , the episode dwells on what is already known or suggested , leaving the character in the same emotional place at the end as in the beginning . " Entertainment Weekly gave " Avatar " a D + , describing it as " ridiculous " and saying , " The clench @-@ toothed Skinner deserves more air time , but not this USA Network reject " .

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 three stars out of five . The two were critical of the storyline , noting that it " doesn 't really work as either a Don 't Look Now ghost story or as a conspiracy piece " , but praised the acting of Pileggi and the dialogue written by Gordon ; the two called the former " great " and the latter " so terse and so real " . Paula Vitaris of Cinefantastique gave the episode a mixed review and awarded it two stars out of four . She referred to the scenes between Skinner and Sharon as " contrived " and derided Skinner 's bedside confession as " simply poor writing " . Vitaris was positive of Duchovny and Hetrick 's acting , and wrote that Pileggi gave " his best " despite the fact that there was little chemistry between the characters to make it effective . David Duchovny , on the other hand , was very pleased with the episode and Mitch Pileggi 's performance ; he later noted , " It was nice for Mitch , and I think he deserved an episode after two years . He did a great job " .

