

= Pusher (The X @-@ Files) =

" Pusher " is the seventeenth episode of the third season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It originally aired on the Fox network on February 23 , 1996 , and was written by Vince Gilligan and directed by Rob Bowman . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology , or overarching fictional history of The X @-@ Files . " Pusher " earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @.@ 8 , being watched by 16 @.@ 2 million viewers in its initial broadcast . " Pusher " received overwhelmingly positive 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 . In this episode , Mulder and Scully ? s assistance is requested for a case involving a man , who goes by the pseudonym " Pusher " , seemingly capable of bending people to his will . The suspect uses his mysterious abilities to manipulate Mulder into a dangerous end game .

" Pusher " was crafted by Gilligan with the intention to feature a tense cat and mouse game between Mulder and Pusher . The final scene , featuring a game of Russian roulette , was met with some resistance from the network . The standards and practices department argued that , because the game had never been featured on a television series before , it was unsuitable for broadcast . Several actors were considered for the role of Modell , even Lance Henriksen , who went on to play the lead role in Millennium , but Robert Wisden eventually won the role .

= = Plot = =

Robert Patrick Modell (Robert Wisden) walks through a supermarket , buying a large supply of energy drinks . Before he can leave , Modell is surrounded and arrested by FBI agents led by Frank Burst (Vic Polizos) . While being escorted away in a police car , he repeatedly talks about the color cerulean blue . Modell 's talking seemingly causes the driver to not see an approaching big rig of that color , causing a collision . Modell escapes after the driver unlocks his handcuffs before dying .

Burst , the only surviving agent of the crash , tells Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) about his pursuit of Modell ? nicknamed " Pusher " ? who has committed a series of contract killings over the past two years , making the acts appear to be suicide . Mulder spots the word " ronin " written at the crime scene , and tracks down Modell 's classified ad in a mercenary magazine . Mulder believes that Modell has the psychic ability to " push " people to do his will . Using the phone number in the ad , the agents track down Modell to a golf course in Falls Church , Virginia , where he makes a SWAT lieutenant douse himself in gasoline and light himself on fire . Mulder finds Modell exhausted in a car nearby , arresting him .

During his arraignment , Modell uses his skills to make the judge let him go . The agents look into Modell 's past and find that he failed to enter the FBI after a psychological examination deemed him to be grossly egocentric and sociopathic . Meanwhile , after writing the word " pass " on a piece of paper and putting it in his shirt pocket , Modell is able to pass security and enter FBI headquarters . He " pushes " an agent , Holly (Julia Arkos) , into pulling up Mulder 's file for him . When Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) intervenes , Modell convinces Holly that he was a man who mugged her , causing her to spray Skinner with mace and beat him . Scully is unable to explain how Modell has his power , but now agrees with Mulder 's theory that he can push people into doing whatever he wants .

Agents raid Modell 's apartment , but find it empty . They find cans of protein drinks in the refrigerator and medicine for epilepsy . Mulder suspects that a brain tumor has given Modell his psychokinetic ability , but that using his power is physically exhausting , forcing him to constantly consume the energy drinks . Mulder believes that he is dying and wants to go out in a blaze of glory . Modell makes a taunting phone call to Agent Burst and causes him to have a fatal heart attack while they try to trace him . The agents track Modell down to a hospital , where he has compelled a guard to shoot an MRI technician and kill himself . Mulder ventures inside the hospital and is captured by Modell .

Scully finds the two sitting at a table with the dead guard 's revolver . Modell forces Mulder to play Russian roulette with him . Despite Scully 's pleading , Mulder pulls the trigger first at Modell and then himself , the hammer falling on an empty chamber both times . Modell then makes him aim the gun at Scully . At the last instant , Scully sees a fire alarm in a mirror and pulls it in desperation , breaking Modell 's concentration . Mulder instantly switches his aim to Modell and pulls the trigger ; the bullet is fired and Modell is severely wounded .

Later , Mulder and Scully visit Modell in the hospital , where he is lying in a coma that Scully predicts he will not awaken from before his brain tumor kills him . Mulder surprises her by revealing that Modell 's brain tumor was operable at all times , but he refused to have it removed , even as his health deteriorated . Scully asks why , and Mulder repeats her earlier assessment of Modell : that he was always a " little man " , and his psychic ability made him feel big .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

" Pusher " was written by Vince Gilligan and directed by Rob Bowman . Gilligan crafted the episode with the intention to feature a tense cat and mouse game between Mulder and Modell . He later explained , " the only conscious thing I wanted to do from the start was get them together as much as I could " . When Gilligan turned in his script , he told series creator Chris Carter that the episode was " the best work I 'm ever gonna [sic] do for you . " Carter retorted that the writers for the show should always " better yourself " by trying to out @-@ do their last scripting effort . The character of Modell would later return in the fifth season episode " Kitsunegari " .

The final scene , featuring a Russian roulette game , was met with resistance from the network . The standards and practices department argued that , because the game had never been featured in a television series before , it was unsuitable for broadcast . Furthermore , they argued that the scene could be harmful to impressionable young children . After tense negotiations , the scene was included in the episode largely uncut ; Gilligan later noted that he could not " believe we got away with it " .

The episode contains several inside jokes and references to previously established canon in The X @-@ Files universe . The Flukeman , from the episode " The Host " , appears on a tabloid in the opening scene . When Mulder is being fitted for a camera , the script originally had him ask if it received the Discovery Channel . Duchovny , knowing that his character had an interest in pornography , changed the line to " the Playboy Channel " . Several members of the show 's cast and crew make appearances on the various magazine featured in the episode . The tabloid that featured the Flukeman also had a small image of props master Ken Hawryliw and the American Ronin magazine that Mulder flips through contained a " blink @-@ and @-@ you 'll miss @-@ it " shot of production assistant Danielle Faith .

= = = Casting = = =

Several actors were considered for the role of Robert Modell , even Lance Henriksen , who went on to play the lead role in Millennium . Initially , Gilligan considered Harvey Fierstein for the role of Modell , but Robert Wisden read the script and " blew us away " . Rob Bowman was pleased with Wisden 's performance and said , " I thought Robert Wisden was great as Pusher . He is a very energized kind of confident actor with lots of ideas of his own . It took me about a day and a half to get him into it , and then I never had to speak to him again , because he had that look in his eyes . I would walk up to talk to him about the scene and I could see that he was already there .

Mitch Pileggi was disappointed in the fact that the episode featured his character , Walter Skinner , getting beat up , something which had occurred in multiple episodes already by this point : " I was feeling a little uncomfortable with him getting his ass kicked so much , and I think the fans were , too . " Dave Grohl , the lead singer and guitarist of the Foo Fighters and former drummer for Nirvana ,

made a small cameo , along with his then @-@ wife Jennifer Youngblood , in the episode during the scene wherein Modell sneaks into the FBI building . Grohl , who has an active interest in UFO lore , called the episode " his acting debut " .

= = Themes = =

Robert Shearman and Lars Pearson , in their book *Wanting to Believe : A Critical Guide to The X @-@ Files , Millennium & The Lone Gunmen* , wrote that the episode helps to illustrate the idea that " evil [is] a mundane and human and somewhat pathetic thing " , a conceit that they note is rooted in many third season episodes of *The X @-@ Files* . The two reason that , despite Modell 's ability , he is ultimately , " something of a loser " who wishes to " be special " rather than be cured of his brain disease . Furthermore , they argue that Modell 's boasting of being a samurai " is just a fantasy " that he plays up ; he really is a " little man " who yearns " to be big " .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Pusher " premiered on the Fox network in the United States on February 23 , 1996 . The episode earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @. @ 8 , with an 18 share , meaning that roughly 10 @. @ 8 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 18 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . The episode was watched by a total of 16 @. @ 2 million viewers .

" Pusher " received overwhelmingly positive reviews from television critics . Zack Handlen of *The A.V. Club* gave it an A ? , describing it as " smart , well @-@ paced , and exciting , and Modell is memorable for being a very human monster who manages to be both well @-@ drawn and unsympathetic " . Though he praised Modell and the climax , he felt that Holly was a stereotype and " the implication that Modell is able to get through to her because of her fear walks that weird line between plausible and not entirely necessary " . Handlen also felt that it was " an excellent starting point " for someone who wanted to get into the series . *Entertainment Weekly* gave " Pusher " a B + , writing , " Much inscrutable warmth between Mulder and Scully parallels some inscrutable detective work . But the climactic mental tug @-@ of @-@ war between Mulder and Pusher makes up for any lapses in logic " . Robert Shearman and Lars Pearson gave the episode a glowing review and rated it five stars out of five . The two called Gilligan 's script " witty and clever " and noted that it was " a triumph " . Furthermore , Shearman and Pearson praised Wisden 's performance as Robert Modell , calling his portrayal " spot on " . Paula Vitaris of *Cinefantastique* gave the episode a positive review and awarded it a rare four stars out of four . She called it an " intense nail biter " that " ranks with the best of *The X @-@ Files* " .

Since its airing , many reviewers list the episode as one of the best episodes of *The X @-@ Files* . IGN named it the third best standalone episode of *The X @-@ Files* , writing " [t] hough the episode is loaded with memorable scenes of terror [...] it 's the emotional bond between our two leads that really resonates . " *Den of Geek* listed " Pusher " as their seventh best episode of the series , and called it " a good game of cat and mouse " . Tom Kessenich , in his book *Examination : An Unauthorized Look at Seasons 6 ? 9 of the X @-@ Files* , named the episode the third best episode of *The X @-@ Files* and called it the " best MOTW [" monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ week "] in the series history " . *Xposé* magazine named the Russian roulette scene one of the " 20 Coolest Moments in *The X @-@ Files* " , ranking it at number eight ; the magazine called the sequence " completely gripping " .