

= X @-@ Cops (The X @-@ Files) =

" X @-@ Cops " is the twelfth episode of the seventh season of the American science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . Directed by Michael Watkins and written by Vince Gilligan , the installment serves as a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story ? a stand @-@ alone plot unconnected to the overarching mythology of The X @-@ Files . Originally aired in the United States by the Fox network on February 20 , 2000 , " X @-@ Cops " received a Nielsen rating of 9 @. @ 7 and was seen by 16 @. @ 56 million viewers . The episode earned positive reviews from critics , largely due to its unique presentation , as well as its use of humor . Since its airing , the episode has been named among the best episodes of The X @-@ Files by several reviewers .

The X @-@ Files centers on Federal Bureau of Investigation (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 ; the skeptical Scully was initially assigned to debunk his work , but the two have developed a deep friendship . In this episode , Mulder and Scully are interviewed for the Fox reality television program Cops during an X @-@ Files investigation . Mulder , hunting what he believes to be a werewolf , discovers that the monster terrorizing people instead feeds on fear . While Mulder embraces the publicity of Cops , Scully is more uncomfortable about appearing on national television .

" X @-@ Cops " serves as a fictional crossover with Cops and is one of only two X @-@ Files episodes to be shot in real time , in which events are presented at the same rate that the audience experiences them . Gilligan , who was inspired to write the script because he enjoyed Cops , pitched the idea several times to series creator Chris Carter and the series writing staff , receiving a mixed reception ; when the crew felt that the show was nearing its end with the conclusion of the seventh season , Gilligan was given the green light because it was seen as an experiment . In the tradition of the real @-@ life Cops program , the entire episode was shot on videotape and featured several members of the crew of Cops . The episode has been thematically analyzed for its use of postmodernism and its presentation as reality television .

= = Plot = =

The episode begins with the standard opening credit sequence of the reality television program Cops and its theme song " Bad Boys " . Keith Wetzel (Judson Mills) , a deputy with the Los Angeles County Sheriff 's Department , is accompanied by a Cops film crew at Willow Park , California , a fictional high @-@ crime district of Los Angeles . Wetzel visits the home of Mrs. Guererro (Perla Walter) , who has reported a monster in the neighborhood . Wetzel , expecting to find a dog , follows the creature around a corner but runs back screaming for the crew to flee . They return to Wetzel 's police car , but before they can escape , it is overturned by an unseen entity .

When backup arrives on the scene , an injured Wetzel claims that he encountered gang members . The police soon discover and surround Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) , believing them to be criminals , before they realize that the pair are FBI agents . Mulder and Scully claim that they are investigating an alleged werewolf that killed a man in the area during the last full moon . According to Mulder , the entity that they are tracking only comes out at night . Scully is irritated by the constant presence of the Cops crew , but Mulder is enthused at the prospect of paranormal proof being presented to a national television audience . The agents and the police interview Mrs. Guerrero , who describes the monster to Ricky (Solomon Eversol) , a sketch artist . To Mulder 's surprise , Mrs. Guerrero describes not a werewolf , but the horror movie villain Freddy Krueger . Ricky expresses a fear of being alone in the dangerous neighborhood , and is found a short time later with serious slashes in his chest . Mulder and Scully find a pink fingernail at the scene . The group also meets Steve and Edy (J. W. Smith and Curtis C.) , a couple who witnessed the incident but did not see Ricky 's attacker , saying that it appeared he was being attacked by nothing . Scully shows the couple the fingernail , which they identify as belonging to Chantara Gomez (Maria Celedonio) , a prostitute .

When the agents track down Chantara , whose face is pixelated , she claims that her pimp attacked

Ricky and fears that he will kill her . She pleads with the agents for protection . Mulder and Scully have Wetzel guard Chantara while they assist the police in the raid of a crack house . However , the two are drawn back outside when Wetzel encounters the entity , wildly shooting at it . Inside a police car , the agents find Chantara with her neck broken . When Mulder questions Wetzel , he admits that he thought he saw the " wasp man " , a monster his older brother told him about when he was a kid . Mulder formulates a theory that the entity changes its form to correspond with its victims ' worst fears . Wetzel , Ricky , and Chantara all expressed fear shortly before their run @-@ ins with the entity ; it was visible to them , but not to others . The agents think that Steve and Edy may be the entity 's next target because they were in the vicinity of Ricky 's attack . They head to their house , only to find the couple in the middle of an argument . After Edy expresses fear of a separation from Steve , the couple reconciles . Based on this situation , Mulder proposes that the entity ignored Steve and Edy because they did not exhibit mortal fear .

Mulder believes that the entity travels from victim to victim like a contagion . At his request , Scully performs an autopsy on Chantara 's body at the morgue . During the procedure , a conversation between Scully and the coroner 's assistant (Tara Karsian) causes the latter to panic about a Hantavirus outbreak . The entity suddenly kills her with the disease . When Mulder discusses the death with Scully , he realizes that Wetzel is in danger of being revisited by the entity . The agents and police return to the crack house , where the entity has trapped an injured Wetzel in an upstairs room . The agents are unable to enter the room until dawn comes , when the entity disappears and spares Wetzel 's life . After the incident is over , Scully expresses her sympathies to Mulder that being filmed by a national television crew did not provide the public exposure to paranormal phenomena that he had hoped . However , Mulder remains hopeful , noting that it all comes down to how the production crew edits the footage together .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception and writing = = =

Vince Gilligan , who wrote the episode , was inspired by Cops , which he describes as a " great slice of Americana . " Gilligan first pitched the idea to the X @-@ Files writing staff and to series creator Chris Carter during the show 's fourth season . Carter was concerned that the concept was too " goofy " . Fellow writer and producer Frank Spotnitz concurred ; however , he was more uncomfortable with Gilligan 's idea of using videotape instead of film to shoot the episode . The show 's production crew liked to use film to create " effective scares " , and Spotnitz worried that shooting exclusively on videotape would be too challenging as the series would be unable to cut and edit the final product . However , during the show 's seventh season , Carter relented . Many critics and fans believed , erroneously , that the seventh season of The X @-@ Files would be the show 's last . Similarly , Carter felt that the show had nearly run its course . Seeing the potential in Gilligan 's idea , he decided to green @-@ light the episode . Gilligan noted that " the longer we 've been on the air , the more chances we 've taken . We try to keep the show fresh ... I think [Carter] appreciates that " . " X @-@ Cops " was not Gilligan 's first attempt at writing a cross @-@ over . Almost three years before , he had been working on a script that would involve a story being presented by Robert Stack of Unsolved Mysteries , with unknown actors playing Mulder and Scully . This script was later aborted , and re @-@ written as the fifth season episode " Bad Blood " .

Gilligan reasoned that , because Mulder and Scully would appear on a nationally syndicated television series , the episode 's main monster could not be shown , only " hinted at " . Gilligan and the writing staff applied methods previously used in the 1999 psychological horror film The Blair Witch Project to show as little of the monster as possible while still making the episode scary . Michael Watkins , who directed the episode , had a good rapport with the Los Angeles police department . As such , he secured real Sheriff 's deputies as extras . Casting director Rick Milikan later explained that the group needed " actors who could pull off the believability in just normal off @-@ the @-@ cuff conversation of cops on the job . " During the crack house scene , real SWAT

team members were hired to break down the doors . Actor Judson Mills later explained that , because there were few cameramen and owing to the manner in which the episode was filmed , " people just behaved as if we were [real] cops . I had other cops waving and giving their signals or heads @-@ up the way they do amongst themselves . It was quite funny " .

= = = Filming and post @-@ production = = =

" X @-@ Cops " was filmed in Venice and Long Beach , California . When members of The X @-@ Files staff asked Cops producer John Langley about a potential cross @-@ over , the crew of Cops liked the idea and offered their complete cooperation . Gilligan was even invited to the shooting of an episode . Inspired by Cops , Watkins ' directing style was unique for this episode . Watkins filmed some of the scenes himself , in addition to the shots caught by the usual camera operators of The X @-@ Files . However , he also brought in Bertram van Munster , a cameraman for Cops , to shoot scenes to give the finished product an authentic feel . In an attempt at realism , other staff members from Cops participated in the production : Daniel Emmet and John Michael Vaughn , two Cops crew members , were featured during the episode 's climax . During rehearsals , Watkins kept the cameras away from the set , so that when filming commenced , the cameramen 's unfamiliarity would create the " unscripted " reality feel of a documentary . In addition , a Cops editor was brought in to insert the blur over the faces of bystanders .

The episode was one of two X @-@ Files episodes to take place in real time ? wherein events are presented at the same rate that the audience experiences them ? the other being the sixth season episode " Triangle " . Due to the nature of the shooting schedule , the episode was relatively cheap to film and production moved at a quick pace . Initially , the actors struggled with the new cinéma vérité style of the episode , and several takes were needed for scenes during the first few days , but these problems receded as filming progressed . On one night , three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half pages of script were shot in only two hours ; the normal rate for The X @-@ Files was three to four pages a day . Both Watkins and Mills likened the filming of the episode to live theater . The former noted , " In a sense we were doing theater : we were doing an act , or half of a whole act in one take . " Anderson called the performance " fun " to shoot , and highlighted " Scully getting pissed off at the camera crew " as her favorite part to play . She further noted that " it was interesting to make the adjustment to playing something more real than you might play for television . "

Although filmed to create the illusion that events occurred in real time , the episode employed several camera tricks and effects . For the opening shot , a " surreptitious cut " helped to replace actor Judson Mills with a stunt person when the cop car is overturned by the monster . Usually , an episode of the series required 800 to 1 @,@ 200 film cuts , but " X @-@ Cops " only required 45 . During post @-@ production , a minor argument broke out between Vince Gilligan and the network . Originally , Gilligan did not want the X @-@ Files logo to appear at any time during the episode . He stressed that he wanted " X @-@ Cops " to feel like an " episode of Cops that happened to involve Mulder and Scully . " The network , fearing that people would not understand that " X @-@ Cops " was actually an episode of The X @-@ Files , vetoed this idea . A compromise was reached wherein the episode would open with the Cops theme song , but the normal X @-@ Files credits would scroll after an opening scene . In addition , the commercial bumpers would feature red and blue lights flashing across The X @-@ Files logo while dialogue is heard in the background , in a similar fashion to the Cops logo . The episode also features a disclaimer at the beginning informing viewers that the episode is a special installment of The X @-@ Files to prevent watchers from thinking that the show " has been preempted this week by Cops " .

= = Themes = =

Several critics , such as M. Keith Booker , have argued that " X @-@ Cops " is an example of The X @-@ Files delving into the postmodern school of thought . Postmodernism has been described as a " style and concept in the arts [that] is characterized by the self @-@ conscious use of earlier styles and conventions [and the] mixing of different artistic styles and media " . According to

Booker , the episode helps to " identify the series as postmodern [due to its] cumulative summary of modern American culture " , or , in this case , the show 's merging with another popular television series . The episode also serves as an example of the series ' " self @-@ consciousness in terms of its status as a (fictional) television " show . M. Keith Booker , in the book *Strange TV* , notes that " allu [sion] to films and works of literature " present in " X @-@ Cops " suggests " its role as a kind of cumulative summary of modern American culture " .

According to Jeremy Butler in the book *Television Style* , the episode , along with many other found footage @-@ type movies and shows , helps to suggest that what is being promoted as " live TV " , is actually a series of events that have already unfolded in the past . Furthermore , while the episode is written and performed in a self @-@ reflexive and humorous tone , the real @-@ time aspects of " X @-@ Cops " " heighten [s] s the sense of realism within the episode " , and makes the result come across as hyper @-@ realistic . This sense of realism is further heightened by the near lack of music in the episode ; aside from the title theme , Mark Snow 's soundtrack is not to be heard .

Sarah Stegall proposed that the episode works on two separate layers . On the top @-@ most superficial layer , it functions as an outright parody , mimicking both the stylings of *The X @-@ Files* as well as *Cops* . However , on the other layer , she notes that " it 's a serious look at validation . " Throughout the episode , Mulder is attempting to capture the monster on camera and expose it to a national audience . However , all of the witnesses to monster function as unreliable narrators : a Hispanic woman with " a history of medications " , a homosexual " Drama Queen " , a prostitute , a " terrified morgue attendant , and Deputy Wetzel . Stegall argues that all of these characters are from " the wrong side of the tracks " and would not be accepted , let alone believed , by " a placid , middle @-@ class society " . In the end , the only reliable witness is the camera , but Stegall points out that " the camera , suspiciously , never quite manages to find [the monster] . " Furthermore , she reasons that Mulder 's biggest fear is not finding the monster . To back this idea up , she points out that Mulder not only fails to find what he is looking for , but he also fails before a live audience .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" X @-@ Cops " was first broadcast in the United States on the Fox network on February 20 , 2000 . Watched by 16 @.@ 56 million viewers , according to the Nielsen ratings system , it was the second @-@ highest rated episode of the season , after " *The Sixth Extinction* " . It received a Nielsen rating of 9 @.@ 7 , with a 14 share among viewers , meaning that 9 @.@ 7 percent of all households in the United States , and 14 percent of people watching television at that time , tuned into the episode . It originally aired in the United Kingdom on Sky1 on June 4 , 2000 , receiving 850 @, @ 000 viewers , making it the channel 's third @-@ most watched program for that week . On May 13 , 2003 , " X @-@ Cops " was released on DVD as part of the complete seventh @-@ season box set .

Initial critical reaction to the episode was generally positive , although a few reviewers felt that the episode was a gimmick . Eric Mink of the *Daily News* described it as " nifty " and " exceptionally clever . " While noting that " *The X @-@ Files* hasn 't exactly smoked this season " , Kinney Littlefield from the *Orange County Register* called " X @-@ Cops " a stand @-@ out episode from the seventh season . Stegall praised the episode and likened the episode 's monster to the Boggart from the *Harry Potter* series . Stegall wrote of Vince Gilligan : " top honors must go to Vince Gilligan , whose work on *The X @-@ Files* is consistently the sharpest and most consistent . " Tom Kessenich , in his book *Examinations* , gave the episode a largely positive review . He called the entry " one of the most entertaining episodes of the season " and " 60 minutes of pure fun " . Rich Rosell from *Digitally Obsessed* awarded the episode 5 out of 5 stars and wrote that " some might view it as a stunt , but having Mulder and Scully be part of a spot @-@ on *Cops* ! parody (complete with full " *Bad Boys* , bad boys " intro) is just brilliant stuff " . Not all reviews were positive . Kenneth Silber from *Space.com* gave the episode a negative review and wrote , " ' X @-@ Cops ' is a wearisome episode . Watching the agents and police repeatedly run through the darkened streets of Los Angeles after an unseen ? and uninteresting ? foe evokes merely a sense of futility . The use of the format of the Fox TV show *Cops* provides some transient novelty but little drama or humor . "

Contemporary reviews have praised the episode as one of the show 's best installments . 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 four stars out of five . The two wrote that the episode was " funny , it 's clever , and it 's actually quite frightening " . Shearman and Pearson also wrote positively of the faux documentary style , likening it to *The Blair Witch Project* . Zack Handlen of *The A.V. Club* awarded the episode an " A ? " and called it " witty , inventive , and intermittently spooky " . He argued that the episode was a late @-@ series " gimmick episode " and compared it the last few seasons of *House* ; although he reasoned that *House* relied on gimmicks to prop itself up , " *X @-@ Cops* " is " the work of a creative team which may be running out of ideas , but still has enough gas in the tank to get us where we need to go . " Furthermore , Handlen felt that the show used the *Cops* format to the best of its ability , and that many of the scenes were humorous , startling , or a combination of both .

Since its airing , " *X @-@ Cops* " has appeared on several best @-@ of lists . *Montreal 's The Gazette* named it the eighth best *X @-@ Files* episode , writing that it " pushed the show to new post @-@ modern heights . " Rob Bricken from *Topless Robot* named it the fifth funniest *X @-@ Files* episode , and *Starpulse* described it as the funniest *X @-@ Files* episode , writing that when the series " did comedy , it was probably the funniest drama ever on television " . *UGO* named the episode 's main antagonist as one of the greatest " Top 11 *X @-@ Files* Monsters , " noting that the creature is a " perfect [Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week] if only because the monster in question is a living , breathing metaphor , a never @-@ seen specter that shifts to fit the fears of the person witnessing it . " *Narin Bahar* from *SFX* named the episode one of the " Best Sci @-@ Fi TV Mockumentaries " and wrote , " Whether you see this as a brilliantly post @-@ modern merging of fact and fiction or shameless cross @-@ promotion of two of the Fox Network 's biggest TV shows , there 's lots of nods to the real *Cops* show in this episode " . Bahar praised the scene featuring the terrified lady telling Mulder that Freddy Krueger attacked her ? calling the scene the " best in @-@ joke " ? and applauded the two series ' cohesion .