

= The Equation =

" The Equation " is the eighth episode of the first season of the American science fiction drama television series *Fringe* . The episode follows the *Fringe* team 's investigation into the kidnapping of a young musical prodigy (Charlie Tahan) who has become obsessed with finishing one piece of music . Dr. Walter Bishop (John Noble) returns to St. Claire 's Hospital in an effort to find the boy 's whereabouts .

The episode was written by supervising producer J. R. Orci and co @-@ executive producer David H. Goodman , and was directed by Gwyneth Horder @-@ Payton . Actress Gillian Jacobs guest starred as the boy 's kidnapper . The episode featured her character in a " pretty violent and quite messy " fight with Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) , Torv 's first for the series . The two actresses spent several weeks practicing the fight 's choreography .

" The Equation " first aired in the United States on November 18 , 2008 , garnering an estimated 9 @.@ 175 million viewers . The episode was the Fox network 's fifth ranked show for the week , and helped Fox win the night among adults aged 18 to 49 . Critical reception to " The Equation " ranged from mixed to positive , with most reviewers praising the asylum storyline .

= = Plot = =

While helping fix a woman 's car engine on the side of a Middletown , Connecticut road , Andrew Stockton (Adam Grupper) sees a sequence of red and green flashing lights and is hypnotized into a suggestive state . Upon ' waking up ' , he does not have any memory of what happened while hypnotized , but sees that the woman and his son Ben (Charlie Tahan) , a young musical prodigy , are missing . Phillip Broyles (Lance Reddick) reveals that similar cases have ended with the victims being returned , but left insane from the trauma of the incident . All the victims were academics and accomplished in their respective fields .

When interviewing Andrew , Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) learns that nine months previously , Ben survived a car accident with a new , extraordinary ability to play the piano , despite never taking lessons . Dr. Walter Bishop (John Noble) recalls memories of red and green lights but is unable to remember more . While trying to dredge up the old memories , Walter recounts a previous unsuccessful mind control experiment he had worked on for an advertising agency , who wished to compel customers to buy their products using flashing lights . He deduces that someone succeeded in producing the lights using wavelengths , and these caused Andrew to sustain a " hypnagogic trance " that allowed his son to be abducted . He successfully tests an experiment on Peter Bishop (Joshua Jackson) .

Andrew 's sketch leads to the identification of the kidnapper as Joanne Ostler (Gillian Jacobs) , a MIT neurologist who was previously believed deceased . Joanne tricks Ben into helping her complete an unfinished equation by using the image of his mother , who died in the car accident . Meanwhile , Walter suddenly remembers that he heard about the lights from former mathematician Dashiell Kim (Randall Duk Kim) , an old bunkmate at St. Claire 's Hospital who disappeared under similar circumstances . To discover the child 's whereabouts , Olivia encourages Walter to return to St. Claire 's . The visit does not go well , and Walter is held by hospital administrator Dr. Bruce Sumner (William Sadler) , who remains unconvinced of Walter 's sanity .

Peter figures out Joanne 's assumed name using a FBI database , while Walter manages to convince Kim into giving up a vague description of Joanne 's whereabouts by telling him there is a little boy who needs their help . Kim says he was kept in " a dungeon in a red castle . " Olivia and Peter use the information to find the boy once they arrange for Walter 's release . However , Joanne escapes with the completed formula , which she gives to Mitchell Loeb (Chance Kelly) . Loeb kills her , but not before using the equation to allow him to pass through solid matter .

= = Production = =

" The Equation " was written by supervising producer J. R. Orci and co @-@ executive producer

David H. Goodman . Both would go on to separately write other first season episodes , including Orci 's " The Transformation " and Goodman 's " Safe " , which resolved the fate of the eponymous equation . " The Equation " was directed by filmmaker Gwyneth Horder @-@ Payton , her first and only credit for the series to date .

The episode featured guest actress Gillian Jacobs as the kidnapper Joanne Ostler . Jacobs explained her character 's motivations , " I 'm a very mysterious figure , and at the beginning of the episode you see that I have taken this boy , have kidnapped him . I have taken him to this room and have him hooked him up to these EKG machines . I 'm trying to get him to finish writing this piano piece which I need to help solve an equation ... It 's very important to me . "

Horder @-@ Payton considered the confrontation between Olivia and Joanne to be the former 's " first big fight scene . " She added , " It 's been well choreographed and they 've been practicing for several weeks . " According to Torv , she and Jacobs broke the moves down " really simply " and then " put them together into really small little bits . " The director called it a " pretty violent and quite messy " fight , to which first assistant director Colin MacLellan added , " It 's a pretty phenomenal brawl actually to have two women kick the crap out of each other . "

The first season DVD includes several scenes that were omitted from the final cut of the episode . The first centers on Walter waking up in the middle of the night , explaining to a disgruntled Peter that he 's attempting to " shift my circadian rhythm to the nocturnal cycle . " The other scene shows Olivia and Peter playing poker , which leads her to realize an important part of the episode 's case .

= = Themes and analysis = =

Flashing multicolored lights , specifically red and green , are a consistent theme of the first season , with Into the Looking Glass : Exploring the Worlds of Fringe author Sarah Clarke Stuart calling them " noteworthy recurring images . " They can also be seen in the computer graphics of the Observer 's binoculars , as well as during the second and third seasons as a way to distinguish the two universes .

The character of Walter goes through much development during the first season . Stuart believed that he changes the most out of the main cast , and his return to St. Claire 's reflects this progression . Actor John Noble explained his character 's evolution in a November 2008 interview , " We see Walter from a different angle , very vulnerable . He goes back to the asylum again , and we see the very , very fearful man return for a while . Although he does have some wonderful moments earlier in the episode , when he goes back inside he turns into this incredibly fearful , stuttering fellow that we saw when we first met him . It 's a very interesting journey we see Walter go through . "

In the episode , Walter sees himself several times while staying in the mental institution . Many reviewers expressed curiosity about this " Visitor " or " Second Walter " . After looking through " Walter 's Lab Notes , " released by Fox after each episode , Ramsey Isler of IGN speculated that Walter suffered from a multiple personality disorder , while AOL TV 's Jane Boursaw thought it was either an hallucination or his alternate universe counterpart .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" The Equation " first broadcast on the Fox network in the United States on November 18 , 2008 . It was watched by an estimated 9 @. @ 18 million viewers , earning a 4 @. @ 1 / 10 ratings share among adults aged 18 to 49 , meaning that it was seen by 4 @. @ 4 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds , and 11 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of broadcast . The episode also received a 5 @. @ 6 / 8 ratings share among all households . Fringe and its lead @-@ in show , House M.D. , helped Fox win the night in the adult demographic , as it was Fringe 's highest rating since the season 's second episode . It was Fox 's fifth ranked show for

the week .

= = = Reviews = = =

The episode received mixed to positive reviews from television critics . Fearnert columnist Alyse Wax called it a " pretty good episode " , and believed it to be " far more enjoyable than last week 's " , as it lacked that episode 's " conspiracy nonsense " and John Scott storyline . However , Wax continued that " The Equation " " seemed rather pedestrian " because " nothing too freaky " happened , and wished that Walter and Peter had been used more . Jane Boursaw of AOL TV considered Walter 's return to the asylum " heartbreaking " .

IGN 's Travis Fickett rated " The Equation " 7 @. @ 5 / 10 , and called it a " solid episode " despite a few perceived plot holes . He liked Walter and Peter 's actions in the asylum , and concluded " At this point , whether a solid single episode is enough to keep you watching Fringe likely has to do with your overall patience with the series and whatever its ultimate goals might be . " Erin Dougherty of Cinema Blend called it the best episode since " The Same Old Story " since it contained " suspense and drama and a minimal amount of conspiracy theories " , making her feel " seriously giddy " . While still calling it " entertaining " , she disliked Walter seeing himself in the asylum , believing it " was really strange and didn ' t go with the flow of the story " .

The A.V. Club writer Noel Murray graded the episode with a B + , explaining that he believed it to be mainly an original story ; what kept him from promoting it to the " elusive ' A ' level ? something no Fringe episode has yet done for me " was the ending , which was " like something out of dozens of mediocre cop shows " . Despite this , Murray found it and the asylum storyline to be " compelling " . Conversely , UGO Networks was critical of the episode , writing " Fringe continues to wobble in story quality . Last night 's episode was a perfectly good way to waste an hour , but far off the track of last week 's episodes . The episode featured some plot conveniences that were a bit hard to swallow " .