

= The Amazing Maleeni =

" The Amazing Maleeni " is the eighth episode of the seventh season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network in the United States on January 16 , 2000 . It was written by Vince Gilligan , John Shiban , and Frank Spotnitz and directed by Thomas J. Wright . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " The Amazing Maleeni " earned a Nielsen household rating of 9 @. @ 4 , being watched by 16 @. @ 18 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mixed reviews .

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 , The Amazing Maleeni , a small @-@ time magician , performs an amazing feat to impress a heckler ? he turns his head 360 degrees . So when he is later found without a head at all , Mulder and Scully arrive on the case and discover an angry ex @-@ con , an unimpressed rival , and Maleeni ? s twin brother . All seem to have something to do with a plan to rob a major bank .

Although written by Gilligan , Shiban , and Spotnitz , the story for " The Amazing Maleeni " was conceived largely by executive producer Frank Spotnitz , who had wanted to do an episode dealing with " magic and illusion " since the show 's second season . Real @-@ life magician Ricky Jay , who also was Spotnitz 's favorite , was brought in to play the part of the titular Maleeni .

= = Plot = =

In Santa Monica , California , a magician , The Amazing Maleeni , twists his head completely around at a carnival , while Billy LaBonge , another magician , heckles Maleeni during the event . As he 's leaving , his severed head falls completely off . Billy LaBonge is later questioned by Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) and Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) ; he tells the agents that he thought Maleeni was a ripoff . During the autopsy , Scully finds that , although Maleeni 's head was cleanly cut off , he died of a heart attack . She also finds that he was dead for at least a month and refrigerated , even though the carnival manager spoke to him mere moments leading up to his head falling off .

Meanwhile , LaBonge finds a man named Cissy Alvarez whom Maleeni owed money . LaBonge admits that he caused Maleeni 's head to fall off , and says that he will give Alvarez the money he is owed if he helps him with his magic . Mulder and Scully learn that Maleeni has an identical twin brother , Albert . Albert , interestingly enough is even wearing a neckbrace , which he says he got in a car accident in Mexico . Mulder tells him he thinks he did the magic act , but the man shows that he has no legs , which he also lost in Mexico in the car accident . Back at work , Alvarez threatens Pinchbeck that he will kill him if he does not get his money . LaBonge then frames Alvarez for a robbery by attacking a security truck disguised as Alvarez . Mulder soon finds out that Pinchbeck is the real Maleeni and that he faked having no legs . After confronting Pinchbeck , he admits that he faked his own death in order to get out of Alvarez 's debt . Pinchbeck admits that he found his brother dead of a heart attack at home and used his body as a double . Pinchbeck is promptly arrested , as is LaBonge , who brings a gun to a bar , in an attempt to purposely get arrested . In addition , Alvarez is arrested because of the attempted robbery LaBonge did earlier .

The vault at Pinchbeck 's work is emptied and the money is found above Alvarez ' bar . Later Mulder and Scully confront LaBonge and Maleeni as they are released on bail , where Mulder explains that he figured out their plan - LaBonge and Pinchbeck were not , in fact , enemies , and that they had been working together to put Alvarez in prison for making LaBonge 's life miserable in prison 8 years prior , and that , as masters of sleight of hand and escape tricks , the two of them easily escaped , performed the robbery , and returned to their cells before being noticed .

After the two magicians make their exit , confident in the lack of evidence against them , Mulder reveals to Scully the true trick being performed ? that everything involving Alvarez was purely misdirection . Earlier , when checking whether Pinchbeck had stolen funds from the bank , the

manager had told Mulder they would need his badge number and thumb print to gain access to the Electronic Fund Transfer ( EFT ) system . Mulder shows Scully Maleeni 's wallet , which he had collected from evidence before confronting him and LaBonge . When the agents first met LaBonge , he had surreptitiously pickpocketed their badges as an example of his skill with sleight of hand , which gave him Mulder 's badge number . Upon their first meeting with Pinchbeck impersonating his brother , Pinchbeck did a card trick with Mulder , leaving Mulder 's prints on the card , which as Mulder displays , is securely in Maleeni 's wallet . Mulder explains that the pair purposely acted in a high profile manner to draw the attention of the FBI , and that if they had collected the badge number and thumbprint , they would have been able to perform EFTs . As Mulder and Scully leave the jail , Scully shows that she , too , has learned a trick , and turns her hand around 360 degrees in a similar fashion as LaBonge had done with his hand before . Mulder asks Scully to explain how , and she brushes him off , saying simply " magic " .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

The idea behind " The Amazing Maleeni " started with executive producer Frank Spotnitz . When pitching ideas for the seventh season episodes , Spotnitz wanted an episode to deal solely on " magic and illusion " and have nothing to do with the paranormal . Spotnitz had been petitioning the writers of The X @-@ Files for a magic @-@ based episode since season two , but nothing ever came to light . Eventually , during the seventh season , Vince Gilligan was assigned to write the episode , something he described as " agony " . Gilligan explained , " The episode started with Frank , because he ? for several years ? had wanted to write an episode about magicians . Frank was a fan of the TV show The Magician with Bill Bixby so I believe that was part of it , but Frank was interested in the idea of magic and the idea of fooling people who wished to be fooled . "

Spotnitz 's favorite magician was Ricky Jay , and so , for the episode , Jay was brought in to play the part of The Amazing Maleeni . Initially , however , the episode hit a snag . The production crew discovered that Jay 's production agency had not been informed and that he would be unable to guest star in the episode . The staff 's back @-@ up magician , David Blaine , was unavailable for shooting as well . Series creator Chris Carter , however , later stated that the show would not take no for an answer : " We got on the phone with him . He agreed to come to our offices to talk about the script and ended up doing some card tricks for us that reduced Frank and I to being six @-@ year @-@ olds again . " Jay eventually agreed to do the part , but requested that he only do the tricks he was accustomed to doing . Thus , many of Jay 's trademark tricks were included in the episode 's script . Gilligan , in retrospect , later noted , " There was no choice other than Ricky Jay as far as we were concerned . He was not looking forward to the idea of playing a magician because I think he felt that magicians were never portrayed very realistically in movies or television shows . "

The cast and crew of the episode enjoyed the " amusement park " feel of the story . Gillian Anderson later noted , " Because of all the magic , I was constantly being entertained . The difficulty with something like this is you have tendency to forget that people are still having bad things happen to them . " Anderson later stated that , because many of the lines were written in a tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek style , she and David Duchovny said them in a humorous style ; the two had to keep reminding themselves that the story revolved around a murder .

= = = Special effects = = =

The episode used several special effects . However , in order to ensure that the episode felt " camera @-@ real " to preserve the theme of magic and illusions , many of the more intense effects were replaced with more conventional effects . For instance , the scene wherein Bill LaBonge 's hand erupted into flames was created through the use of stunt man , rather than through expensive and , ultimately , " less convincing " CGI effects . The scene featuring The Amazing Maleeni turning

his head 360 degrees was created using a prosthetic head , courtesy of John Vulich 's Optic Nerve Studios .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" The Amazing Maleeni " first aired in the United States on January 16 , 2000 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 9 @. @ 4 , with a 14 share , meaning that roughly 9 @. @ 4 percent of all television @- @ equipped households , and 14 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 16 @. @ 18 million viewers . The episode aired in the United Kingdom and Ireland on Sky1 on May 7 , 2000 and received 0 @. @ 79 million viewers , making it the fourth most watched episode that week .

The episode received mixed reviews from critics . Kenneth Silber from Space.com was critical of the episode 's intricacy , writing , " ' The Amazing Maleeni ' is a convoluted episode that ultimately lacks verve and excitement . Even if one can figure out what is going on , there remains the question of how much , or even whether , to care . " Robert Shearman and Lars Pearson , in their book *Wanting to Believe : A Critical Guide to The X @- @ Files , Millennium & The Lone Gunmen* , rated it two stars out of five . The two noted that , had the episode used real magic tricks instead of " resort [ ing ] to CGI , the episode would have been much more than a simple " cheat " . Furthermore , Shearman and Pearson criticized the fact that the explanation behind Maleeni turning his head around 360 degrees was never satisfactorily explained . Paula Vitaris from Cinefantastique gave the episode a mixed review and awarded it two stars out of four . Vitaris compared the episode 's plot to the 1999 movie *Arlington Road* , noting that while " the scheme is fun to watch while it unfolds , [ ? ] in the end , it 's not credible ; too much is left open to chance for it really to happen . "

Not all reviews were so critical . Rich Rosell from *Digitally Obsessed* awarded the episode 4 out of 5 stars . Although he noted that the episode was " not Gilligan 's best work " and that the writing was " a little spotty " , he said " the vibe [ of ' The Amazing Maleeni ' ] is very well done . " Tom Kessenich , in his book *Examinations* , gave the episode a moderately positive review , writing " My heart wasn 't racing and I wasn 't sitting on the edge of my seat as Mulder and Scully unmasked our two magicians [ ? ] But it was fun to put the clues together to see what it all added up to . " Zack Handlen of *The A.V. Club* awarded the episode a " B + " and wrote that he " love [ d ] it " . He praised the episode 's " good @- @ naturedness " , which he felt was due to Mulder and Scully 's interaction . Handlen also enjoyed the writing , noting that the " script also does a good job at doling out its secrets in a way that never makes either the magicians or our heroes come off as idiots " . Paul Spragg of *Xposé* wrote positively of the episode , describing it as a " rather fun tale " .