

## = How the Ghosts Stole Christmas =

" How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " is the sixth episode of the sixth season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on December 13 , 1998 . It was written and directed by series creator Chris Carter , and featured guest appearances by Edward Asner and Lily Tomlin . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @.@ 6 , being watched by 17 @.@ 3 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mostly positive reviews from critics , although some reviews criticized the episode for over @-@ simplifying the characters .

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 Christmas @-@ themed episode , Mulder and Scully stake out a reputed haunted house . The duo soon discover a pair of lovelorn spectres living inside the house who are determined to prove how lonely the holidays can be .

Carter based the episode around an idea he and fellow writer Frank Spotnitz had been working on , featuring a haunted house . Featuring the smallest cast of an X @-@ Files episode ? with only four actors ? and a single set , " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " was the cheapest sixth season episode . The drastic reduction in the budget , however , put more strain on the main actors .

## = = Plot = =

Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) calls Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) on Christmas Eve to investigate a haunted house in Maryland . He explains that during Christmas of 1917 , a young couple living in the house agreed to a lover 's pact , one killing the other and the remaining one committing suicide . He explains that they could not stand the thought of being alone after the other died and during the afterlife ; they wanted to experience it all together . Now , Mulder claims , they want to make couples who venture into their mansion have the same fate .

Scully , who is busy wrapping presents , ultimately relents to Mulder 's request . Inside the house , the agents experience strange phenomena : the door to the mansion slams shut , creaks are heard in the ceiling from the upper floor , and the shadow in the form of an old woman in a nightgown is seen , among other occurrences . Mulder and Scully reluctantly decide to investigate the floor above them . There , they find a massive library storing two corpses that have the same clothes and hairstyles as the agents , along with two gunshot wounds . They decide to go search other rooms , only to find that every door they walk through is the same library room they first entered . They then decide to split up , hoping to find a way out of the room .

While separated , they meet the inhabitants of the mansion ? Maurice ( Ed Asner ) and Lyda ( Lily Tomlin ) . The ghosts soon turn the agents against each other . Scully is told that Mulder will kill her . Scully meets back up with Mulder , only for him to pull out a gun and shoot her . Scully , completely confused , loses consciousness , and the perspective shifts . It is revealed that Lyda is actually the one carrying out these actions and , through her ghostly ability to create apparitions , causes Scully to see Mulder instead . Meanwhile , Mulder comes upon a bleeding Scully lying on the floor . When he leans over her to try to help her , she shoots Mulder in the stomach . Again , the audience sees that it is Lyda pretending to be Scully , manipulating Mulder .

Both Mulder and Scully stumble down the stairs in hope of just getting outside to die . They meet up by the door , both crawling on the floor , covered in massive amounts of blood . Scully claims he shot her , while Mulder claims she shot him . Mulder realizes that that could not have happened and stands up . The illusion is broken , and the two leave the house . Maurice and Lyda sit by the fire , holding hands , saying that they almost had the two agents . Meanwhile , at Mulder 's apartment , Mulder and Scully exchange gifts , even though they told each other they would not .

## = = Production = =

### == = Conception and writing == =

Writer , director , and series creator Chris Carter based the episode around an idea he and fellow writer Frank Spotnitz had been working on , featuring a haunted house . The only scene that the two had completely planned out was the climax , which features Mulder and Scully pulling themselves across the floor , bleeding profusely . Carter wanted to keep all the action on one set , with the episode featuring only one location . To do this , production designer Corey Kaplan proposed that the episode be filmed in Scully 's apartment , a set that the crew had not used for season six . Carter , however , wanting to keep the haunted house motif , asked Kaplan if she could design a mansion set . Kaplan was tasked with designing a set that was " bleak , but not too bleak [ ... ] decrepit , but not too decrepit , " and " deserted , but not too deserted . "

### == = Casting and filming == =

" How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " features the smallest cast in X @-@ Files history , with only David Duchovny , Gillian Anderson , and the two guest stars present in the episode . Lily Tomlin , who played the part of Lyda , had originally approached the casting agents for The X @-@ Files several seasons prior to season six . Her agent expressed her interest in a part . Carter agreed to meet her and the two discussed possible ideas for futures episodes . After several years of thinking , Carter decided to write " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " as a vehicle for her . Originally , Carter wanted Bob Newhart to play the part of Maurice . However , Newhart was not interested . The crew , instead , approached veteran actor Ed Asner , who readily agreed to take part in the episode .

The episode was filmed without multiple sets , out @-@ of @-@ studio locations , or a large amount of extras . In addition , the budget for the episode was kept to a minimum . Because of this , " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " was the cheapest episode filmed for the sixth season . Carter readily admits that making the episode was a challenge . The drastic reduction in the budget put more strain on the main actors and several key individuals involved in the production . The outside scenes were filmed in front of the Piru Mansion in Piru , California , where the sixth season episode " The Rain King " was filmed . The day before filming was slated to begin , a brush fire ignited on the hill behind the mansion . Location manager Ilt Jones rushed to the scene in the middle of the inferno , but after an hour , the local firemen were able to bring the blaze under control by digging a fire break . The fire stopped a mere 300 feet from the house .

### == = Effects and music == =

The gunshot wounds that Scully , and later Mulder , discover on Maurice and Lyda were created on a computer . Special effects editor Bill Millar was tasked with designing the " bloodless bullet holes " that were on Asner 's head and Tomlin 's stomach . To create this effect , Millar attached orange fluorescent cloth to the places that would become the bullet wounds . An ultraviolet light was then added to the set lighting so that the invisible reflected light would function as tracking data . The orange cloth was then excised during post @-@ production and the computerized bullet wounds were inserted in their place . Millar admits that the technique was borrowed from the 1992 movie *Death Becomes Her* , although he sarcastically admitted that , " we did it better and with less money . " Gillian Anderson was later critical of the fake blood used for the episode because the sheer quantity soon coagulated and formed a " gummy mess . "

Mark Snow , the composer for the episode , admitted to " ripping off " Joseph Haydn 's " Toy " Symphony to create the eerie Baroque @-@ inspired harpsichord score . Snow also admits that another major influence for the episode was Johnny Mandel 's " brilliant " score for the 1982 movie *Deathtrap* .

### == = Broadcast and reception == =

" How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " first aired in the United States on December 13 , 1998 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 10 @. @ 6 , with a 16 share , meaning that roughly 10 @. @ 6 percent of all television @- @ equipped households , and 16 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 17 @. @ 30 million viewers . The episode aired in the United Kingdom and Ireland on Sky1 on April 11 , 1999 and received 0 @. @ 70 million viewers and was the fourth most watched episode that week . Fox promoted the episode with the tagline " This holiday season ... share the gift of terror . " Corey Kaplan later won an award of excellence from the Society of Motion Picture and Television Art Directors for his work on " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas . "

The episode received mostly positive reviews from critics , with some detractors . Sight on Sound called the episode " one of the best Christmas episodes of any series . " The review called ? How the Ghosts Stole Christmas , ? " an extremely creative , arguably bitter Holiday treat , perfect for [ Christmas ] with its blend of horror , comedy and hints of romance . " Static Mass writer Patrick Samuel awarded the episode five stars and said , " As [ Mulder and Scully ] gleefully unwrap their presents at the end , this episode is something that really makes my own Christmases feel that little bit more complete . " Den of Geek writer Juliette Harrisson , in a review of " Monday , " said , " Season six included some more excellent episodes [ and ] classic comedy episodes including , " How The Ghosts Stole Christmas . " DVD.net called " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " a " classic " standalone episode . SFX named the episode the sixth best " SF [ Sci @- @ Fi ] & Fantasy Christmas Episodes " and noted that it was full of " classic lines , some neat tricks " .

Zack Handlen from The A.V. Club gave the episode a largely positive review and awarded it a grade of an A. He noted that the episode was written in a similar manner to the earlier , Carter @- @ penned " The Post @- @ Modern Prometheus " . Handlen wrote that both entries " have a gleeful , everybody @- @ gets @- @ out @- @ okay @- @ in @- @ the @- @ end vibe " . He , however , concluded that the " episode lives and dies on the strength of its two guest stars " before writing that " Asner and Tomlin are more than up to the task . " Earl Cressey from DVD Talk called " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " one of the " highlights of season six . " 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 five stars out of five . Tom Kessenich , in his book Examination : An Unauthorized Look at Seasons 6 ? 9 of the X @- @ Files gave the episode more of a mixed to positive review , noting the lack of darkness in the episode . He wrote , " OK , I liked a lot of this episode . [ ? ] But while I 've enjoyed the sheer entertainment value of the past three shows , I really am longing for something a bit sinister and darker . "

Not all reviews were so positive . Paula Vitaris from Cinefantastique gave the episode a largely negative review and awarded it one @- @ and @- @ a @- @ half stars out of four . Vitaris was unhappy with the way Maurice and Lyda were characterized , noting that their method of trying to get Mulder and Scully to kill each other resulted in " endless psychobabble dialogue " . Michigan Daily writer Melissa Runstrom , in a review of the sixth season , described " How the Ghosts Stole Christmas " as " hokey " and " over @- @ the @- @ top . " She identified it as the weakest episode of the sixth season .