

= And the Rockets ' Dead Glare =

" And the Rockets Dead Glare " is the seventh episode of the first season of the American police drama television series Homicide : Life on the Street . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on March 17 , 1993 . In the episode , Howard testifies in a murder trial , Pembleton is offered a promotion , and Lewis and Crosetti go to the Chinese Embassy in Washington , D.C. to investigate a political refugee 's murder .

The teleplay was written by Jorge Zamacona based on a story by executive producer Tom Fontana , and the episode was directed by Peter Markle . It marked the first appearances of two recurring characters : defense attorney Darin Russom (Michael Willis) and Detective Frank Pembleton 's wife Mary , who was played by actor Andre Braugher 's real @-@ life wife Ami Brabson . The episode also featured a guest performance by actress and future model Bai Ling .

The murder trial portrayed in the episode is based on a trial featured in David Simon 's 1991 non @-@ fiction book , Homicide : A Year on the Killing Streets , on which the series was based . Howard 's procedural missteps , and her subsequent recovery , was based on that real @-@ life trial . The writers sought to realistically portray the trial scenes by focusing on less dramatic courtroom elements . Some of the detectives in " And the Rockets ' Dead Glare " make arguments for drug liberalization , particularly John Munch , whose arguments were inspired by actor Richard Belzer 's real @-@ life personal history with drug abuse .

Since ratings for Homicide had gradually declined throughout the season , NBC announced a decision about whether the series would be renewed would depend on the Nielsen ratings of the final four episodes , including " And the Rockets ' Dead Glare " . Nevertheless , it was seen by a relatively low 6 @.@ 61 million household viewers , a decline from the previous week 's " A Dog and Pony Show " .

= = Plot summary = =

Lewis (Clark Johnson) and Crosetti investigate the execution @-@ style shooting death of a Chinese college student . A friend in his dormitory (Bai Ling) says the victim was a student leader at the Tiananmen Square protest and had been hunted ever since . The detectives go to Washington , D.C. to talk to the Chinese embassy about the murder , but they deny any knowledge of the incident . Secret Service agent Gruszynski (Ed Lauter) confronts Lewis and Crosetti and tells them not to waste the embassy 's time , but agrees to give the detectives a tour of Washington before they go . Crosetti is excited to see the landmarks but Lewis , who believes the Secret Service agent knows who committed the murder , remains confrontational with Gruszynski . When Gruszynski still refuses to help , Crosetti and a frustrated Lewis leave Washington .

Felton (Daniel Baldwin) and Howard (Melissa Leo) prepare to testify in the murder trial of " Pony " Johnson (Geoffrey C. Ewing) . State prosecutor Danvers (?eljko Ivanek) tells an anxious Howard that the case depends entirely on her testimony . Felton , who in contrast to Howard is very relaxed , claims Howard is in love with Danvers , which she vehemently denies . Howard testifies , but nervously fumbles facts and allows defense attorney Darin Russom (Michael Willis) to create reasonable doubt to the jury . After receiving reassurance from Danvers , however , Howard is recalled and performs much better , seriously damaging Russom 's case . Johnson is found guilty of murder and Danvers offers to buy Howard dinner , which she accepts much to Felton 's amusement .

Munch (Richard Belzer) and Bolander (Ned Beatty) respond to a corpse found in the woods , next to a van full of low @-@ quality marijuana . Munch proves to be an expert on hemp , and discusses how the plant was grown by founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and George Washington . The detectives eventually identify the victim as a middle man for a drug dealer , and Bolander finds a neighbor who saw Jones holding a gun to the victim 's head the night before the murder . Munch , Bayliss (Kyle Secor) and narcotics detective Russ DeSilva (Steven Marcus) debate whether drugs should be illegal ; the homicide detectives claim legalization would reduce violent crime and that drug revenue could go to good causes . Bolander asks Munch if he smokes pot , but he refuses to

answer . That night , Munch and Bolander arrest the drug dealer at home .

Captain Barnfather (Clayton LeBouef) and Colonel Granger (Gerald F. Gough) offer Pembleton (Andre Braugher) a promotion to lieutenant and the vacant shift commander position working alongside Gee (Yaphet Kotto) . Pembleton asks for time to consider it , and the duo ask him not to mention the offer to Gee . Gee is inquisitive and immediately senses Pembleton is lying when he says the discussion was nothing . After discussing the offer with his wife Mary (Ami Brabson) , Pembleton decides not to take the job and confesses to Gee , who has already learned the truth and is disappointed Pembleton did not tell him sooner . The episode ends with Pembleton going to the bar with his fellow detectives , which he seldom does .

= = Production = =

" And the Rockets Dead Glare " was written by Jorge Zamacona based on a story by executive producer Tom Fontana , and was directed by Peter Markle . It marked the first appearances of defense attorney Darin Russom (Michael Willis) and Frank Pembleton 's wife Mary , both of whom became recurring characters throughout the rest of the series . Mary Pembleton is played by Ami Brabson , who is married to actor Andre Braugher in real life . Brabson auditioned for the role shortly after Braugher was cast in the series , and Braugher said of their on @-@ screen pairing , " We have an instant rapport that we don 't have to create . " Willis , in real life , has a low opinion of trial lawyers , and did little to research for his role as Russom . " And the Rockets ' Dead Glare " also featured a guest appearance by actress and model Bai Ling , a student and apparent friend to the Chinese refugee murdered in the episode . Although relatively unknown at the time , Ling went on to star in such films as Red Corner (1997) and Anna and the King (1999) , and was named one of People Magazine 's " 50 Most Beautiful People in the World " in 1998 .

The " Pony " Johnson murder trial is based on a real @-@ life trial featured in Homicide : A Year on the Killing Streets , the 1991 David Simon non @-@ fiction book about a Baltimore Police Department , which was adapted into the Homicide series . In that real @-@ life trial , a Baltimore detective misspeaks during his testimony and nearly jeopardizes the outcome of the case . This is mirrored by the actions of Kay Howard , who accidentally says the victim was dead at least 24 hours when she meant to say 12 hours , leaving an opening for defense attorney Darin Russom to question her recollection and expertise . The defense attorney in the real @-@ life trial lost the case for himself with a procedural misstep similar to the one portrayed in " And the Rockets Dead Glare " . In the episode , Russom asks Howard whether she had ever seen a murder victim killed by both a knife and a gun . This allows Howard to mention a second victim police suspect " Pony " Johnson murdered , which she would not have been allowed to mention had Russom not asked her . Homicide filmmakers sought to portray the trial scenes in a far more realistic light than most police drama shows , particularly with the inclusion of less dramatic courtroom elements such as Howard 's waiting anxiously to testify and the awkward pauses during her testimony .

" And the Rockets ' Dead Glare " presents a case for drug liberalization , arguing from the perspectives of homicide detectives Tim Bayliss and , particularly , John Munch that legalizing drugs would help curb violent crime . Munch 's pro @-@ drug liberalization comments in the episode were inspired by actor Richard Belzer 's real @-@ life personal history with drug abuse and drug dealing , which would go on to inspire further development of Munch 's druggie and hippie past in future episodes . An arrangement of Frédéric Chopin 's Fantaisie @-@ Impromptu in C Minor , conducted by Louis Knatchvull , appears in " And the Rockets Dead Glare " , as does the song " Rhythm and Blues " by Benjamin Antin .

= = Release and reception = =

Ratings for Homicide : Life on the Street gradually declined since the series first premiered . In response , NBC announced to fans that a decision about whether Homicide would be renewed or canceled would depend on how the last four episodes of the season fared in the ratings , including " And the Rockets ' Dead Glare " . In its original American broadcast on March 17 , 1993 , the episode

was watched by 6 @. @ 61 million households , according to Nielsen Media Research , earning the episode a 7 @. @ 1 rating . This constituted a decline in viewership compared to the previous week 's episode , " A Dog and Pony Show " , which was seen by 8 @. @ 47 million viewers and received a 9 @. @ 1 rating . Homicide ranked low in the Nielsen ratings compared to other shows the week of " And the Rockets ' Dead Glare " , ranking 78th for the week of March 15 to 21 , with its timeslot competitor , the ABC comedy series Home Improvement , ranking number one with 22 @. @ 3 million household viewers .

Harold Schindler of The Salt Lake Tribune praised the episode , making it one of his weekly recommendations and declaring Homicide " one of the better police procedural dramas to reach television " . " And the Rockets Dead Glare " and the rest of the first and second season episodes were included in the four @- @ DVD box @- @ set " Homicide : Life on the Street : The Complete Seasons 1 & 2 " , which was released by A & E Home Video on May 27 , 2003 for \$ 69 @. @ 95 .