

= Alpha (The X @-@ Files) =

" Alpha " is the sixteenth episode of the sixth season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network on March 28 , 1999 in the United States . The episode was written by Jeffrey Bell , and directed by Peter Markle . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " Alpha " earned a Nielsen household rating of 10 @.@ 1 , being watched by 17 @.@ 7 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mostly negative reviews from critics .

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 , Mulder and Scully investigate several killings blamed on an Asian dog called the Wanshang Dhole , thought to be extinct . Mulder and Scully join an obstinate Sheriff , a seemingly eccentric hunter , and a reclusive canine expert to find it . However , there is more mystery to the expert than meets the eye .

" Alpha " was based on a single motif ? " Scary dogs in the City " ? written by Jeffrey Bell onto a notecard . The episode went through several drafts before being readied right before filming began . Several of the scenes featuring the Chinese freighter were created either through digital technology or through the combination of matte paintings and actual filmed footage .

= = Plot = =

On a freighter in the South Pacific , two Chinese men inspect a crate with an animal inside . When the ship reaches the Port of Los Angeles , the authorities find the two men in the crate and the animal missing . After Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) receives word of the attack from the mysterious Karin Berquist (Melinda Culea) , an expert on canine behavior , he and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) investigate the incident on the ship with the help of San Pedro officer Jeffrey Cahn (Thomas F. Duffy) . Meanwhile , in Bellflower , California , a man hears his dog barking in the backyard and lets it in the house . He hears another dog in his backyard and chases it off . After returning to his house he finds his pet dead and is attacked by the mystery dog , who is seen to have glowing red eyes .

Mulder and Scully arrive at the port and talk to the owner of the dog Dr. Ian Detweiler (Andrew Robinson) , a cryptozoologist . Detweiler says the dog is a Wanshang Dhole , a species thought to be extinct . The two agents soon receive news of the other attack and , after investigating , Mulder believes the Dhole has near @-@ human intelligence . Mulder and Scully visit Berquist , who tells them that the breed they are looking for is extinct . Meanwhile a dog catcher is chasing a stray through a warehouse when a man enters the building . He promptly transforms into the murderous dhole and attacks the catcher . Mulder and Scully soon arrive at the scene , followed by Berquist . She finds a paw print with five toes , one more than regular canines .

Later that night , Detweiler arrives at a vet 's office to get tranquilizers and leaves . The vet goes to the back and is attacked by the Dhole but he locks the room before it can cause any harm . The dog catchers arrive and open fire on the wrong dog . While the vet tries to operate on the hurt dog Scully enters the building and begins to hear screaming in the back room . She discovers that the vet has been attacked . After Scully leaves , the hurt animal transforms into the dhole , revealing that the dog can mimic any shape .

Scully begins to question Berquist 's motives , noting that she was the reason Mulder decided to look into this investigation . Mulder , however , begins to suspect Detweiler after learning that he had been at the vet 's office ; Mulder believes that he is the dhole and is tranquilizing himself in an attempt to stop murdering . Mulder asks Cahn to confront Detweiler , but Cahn is attacked and severely injured by the Dhole and placed in the hospital . Mulder then visits Berquist and says he thinks she has not been honest with him . Berquist reveals that she first suspected Detweiler when she saw him and that he will try to kill her . Mulder worriedly tells Scully , who remains skeptical .

Later Berquist , while locking one of the outside kennels at her house , hears something in the

woods . She goes upstairs and gets a tranquilizer gun , although when Detweiler , in the guise of a dhole , enters Berquist 's bedroom and attacks her , she sets it aside and challenges the dhole . He attacks , causing them to both fall out the window behind her . Mulder and Scully arrive and find Detweiler 's and Berquist 's bodies , the former impaled on a fence spike . Back at the office , Mulder receives a package from Berquist ; it is her " I Want to Believe " poster , a replacement for the one he lost in a fire and last seen hanging on her home office wall .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

" Alpha " was based on a notecard , penned by first year writer Jeffrey Bell , that read " Scary dogs in the City . " Bell explained that he got the inspiration for the story after seeing a pack of wild dogs : " Nobody owns [wild] dogs , " he noted , " yet these dogs are somehow surviving . " After pitching the idea , it was later chosen as the sixteenth episode of The X @-@ Files sixth season . Bell had several discarded ideas before he settled on the Dhole storyline . Initially , the story was going to be a " reversal " of 1963 movie The Incredible Journey , featuring " a desperate family [that] moves three thousand miles to get away from their killer pet ? who 's waiting for them at their new house , really pissed . " The second story idea would feature a child who released his anger through the dogs at a local animal shelter . In this version , the dogs functioned as a manifestation of the child 's id . Bell scrapped both of these ideas because they lacked " really cool visuals . "

After discarding two drafts , Bell approached producer Frank Spotnitz for help . Spotnitz suggested that the dog could escape from a ship and go on a killing spree . In addition , Spotnitz also came up with the idea for Mulder and Berquist to develop a quasi @-@ romance before the latter is killed at the end of the episode . Bell began to write the script on January 2 , 1999 , a mere three weeks before pre @-@ production was scheduled to begin . The episode ended up being re @-@ written right up to the start of shooting on February 2 .

= = = Casting and filming = = =

In order to successfully bring the episode to life , dozens of trained dogs were auditioned to play the part of the Wanshang Dhole , a process executive producer Michael Watkins later called " a nightmare . " Casting director Rick Millikan noted that he auditioned " many , many women " for the part of Karin Berquist . Melinda Culea , the wife of Peter Markle ? who happened to direct the episode ? was later cast in the role . Although Culea was chosen because she was affiliated with Markle , a majority of the cast and crew " deemed [her] to have done a fine job . " Two Cantonese Chinese @-@ speaking immigrant actors were cast to play the parts of Woo and Yee , the sailors who are killed by the Wanshang Dhole in the beginning of the episode .

Due to the fact that the show was operating on a strict budget , shots of the Chinese freighter were almost entirely created by digital technology or other special effects . For the opening scene of the ship at sea , a matte painting of a boat based on a toy model was superimposed onto a film strip of an empty ocean . Several scenes featuring the boat in port were created by filming an empty harbor and then superimposing a ship via digital technology . Special effects makeup supervisor John Vulich created a latex appliance that enabled the veterinarian to have his throat bitten out .

= = = Alternate ending = = =

On the season six DVD , an alternate ending to " Alpha " is included . In this version , Mulder receives Berquist 's " I Want to Believe " poster and hangs it on his wall . The scene then cuts to Officer Cahn who is recuperating in a hospital bed . When the attending nurse closes the curtains around him , his eyes flash red , insinuating that he now possesses the Wanshang Dhole 's morphing abilities .

= = Broadcast = =

" Alpha " first aired in the United States on March 28 , 1999 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 10 @. @ 1 , with a 15 share , meaning that roughly 10 @. @ 1 percent of all television @- @ equipped households , and 15 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 17 @. @ 7 million viewers . The episode aired in the United Kingdom and Ireland on Sky1 on June 20 , 1999 and received 1 @. @ 02 million viewers , making it the most watched episode that week . Fox promoted the episode with the tagline " Sit . Stay . Kill . "

Critical reception to the episode was mostly negative . Zack Handlen of The A.V. Club awarded the episode a " C " and called it a " muddled , tepid bit of television that never really seems to know what story it ? s trying to tell " . He noted , that while the episode is built around a distinctly " old structure " that harkens back to the show 's earlier seasons , the plot becomes predictable quickly . Ultimately , however , he concluded that the episode is compromised by its story which " would ? ve been a dud even if it had aired back in 1993 " . He did , however , compliment the character of Karin Berquist , but wished the episode would have focused more on her and Mulder 's relationship . 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 one star out of five , and noted that " no matter how good the effects , there 's a limit to the number of times a dog with glowing red eyes pouncing on a human can be interesting . " The two also were critical of the romantic connection between Mulder and Karin Berquist , calling the sub @- @ plot " an attempt to instill a bit of emotion into this repetitive and formulaic tale [that] fails utterly . "

Paula Vitaris from Cinefantastique gave the episode a negative review and awarded it one @- @ and @- @ a @- @ half stars out of four . Vitaris called the episode a " run @- @ of @- @ the @- @ mill monster @- @ of @- @ the @- @ week episode " and noted that David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson had " very little energy " . Furthermore , she noted that several of the secondary characters were only in the plot " to be killed , nothing more " . Cyriaque Lamar from i09 sarcastically labeled the dhole as the " The Were @- @ St. Bernard " and called the episode one of " The 10 Most Ridiculous X @- @ Files Monsters " .

Not all reviews were negative , however . Tom Kessenich , in his book Examination : An Unauthorized Look at Seasons 6 ? 9 of the X @- @ Files gave the episode a more positive review , writing " Perhaps I am alone in sensing the off @- @ beat love story I found to be at the heart of ' Alpha ' . But it reached out and grabbed me and I found it to be touching , interesting and worthy of analysis . "