

## = The Pine Bluff Variant =

" The Pine Bluff Variant " is the eighteenth episode of the fifth season of the American science fiction television series The X-Files . It was written by John Shiban and directed by Rob Bowman . The episode aired in the United States on May 3 , 1998 on the Fox network . The episode is a " Monster of the Week " story , a stand alone plot which is unconnected to the series ' wider mythology , or fictional history . " The Pine Bluff Variant " received a Nielsen household rating of 11 @ 4 and was watched by 18 @ 24 million viewers in its initial broadcast . It received largely positive reviews from television critics as well as fans on the internet .

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 . In this episode , Scully grows suspicious of Mulder when she thinks he may be helping a terrorist organization . Scully begins to wonder if he is now a traitor to the FBI . It is eventually revealed that Mulder is working as a mole in the group , and he is trying to stop them before they are able to use a biological weapon ? that may have been created by members of the US government ? which causes rapid degeneration of human flesh .

" The Pine Bluff Variant " was based on the idea of Mulder going undercover , a topic that Shiban had wanted to work on for a majority of the fifth season . Shiban argued that the conceit worked for the series because the theme of Mulder questioning his beliefs was a major element of the fifth season . The episode was indirectly influenced by the 1963 novel The Spy Who Came in from the Cold , written by John le Carré . The title is also a reference to the Pine Bluff Arsenal , a real United States military base with stockpiles of chemical weapons .

## = = Plot = =

Fox Mulder ( David Duchovny ) , Dana Scully ( Gillian Anderson ) , Walter Skinner ( Mitch Pileggi ) , and several other FBI agents take part in an undercover operation in a Washington park to catch Jacob Haley ( Daniel von Bargen ) , the second in command of an anti government militia called the New Spartans . As Skinner and Scully monitor the operation from a van , Mulder and the other agents slowly close in on Haley . Haley hands an envelope to another man ( Armin Moattar ) before escaping . The agents discover that the man 's flesh has been eaten away by an unknown toxin .

Scully becomes concerned that Mulder let Haley get away , but he dodges her queries . Later , she informs a counter terrorism task force headed by Skinner and U.S. Attorney Leamus ( Sam Anderson ) that the man in the park was killed by a biological agent . Skinner explains that August Bremer ( Michael MacRae ) , the leader of the New Spartans , is involved in an internal power struggle with Haley . Scully follows Mulder and sees him meeting with Haley . When she tries to pursue them , she is surrounded by government agents and brought before Skinner and Leamus , who inform her that Mulder is infiltrating the group as an undercover agent .

Mulder is taken to a New Spartans ' secluded hideout , where Haley accuses him of spying for the government . Mulder is tortured by the Skin Head Man ( Douglas Arthurs ) ? one of his fingers broken in the process ? until he claims that the spy must be somewhere within the New Spartans . Meanwhile , Bremer tests the biological weapon in a movie theatre in Middlefield , Ohio , killing fourteen people inside . Investigating the scene , Scully becomes confused as to how the contagion was spread , as it is not airborne . Mulder and Scully meet at his apartment , where she tends to his finger and discusses the operation . Bremer , however , is secretly recording their conversation .

Mulder meets with Skinner and Leamus , telling them that the New Spartans are planning to rob a bank and that Haley wants copies of surveillance files on the group , in an attempt to discover the spy 's identity . Leamus , expecting the request , hands over a redacted microfilm for Haley to see . Scully discovers that the biological weapon was engineered by the U.S. government , and concludes that someone purposely sent Mulder on a suicide mission . She realizes that the pathogen is spread through touch , and that New Spartans plan to spread it via the money in the bank . Meanwhile , Mulder joins the New Spartans as they infiltrate the bank and spray the money

with the pathogen .

After the fake robbery , Bremer accuses Mulder of being the mole ; Haley , however , intercedes , and claims that Bremer is the real mole . To further his argument , Bremer plays back the tape of Mulder and Scully . The militia group turns against Haley . Bremer offers Haley a set of car keys and tells him he can leave the group unharmed . Haley agrees and drives off . Bremer , along with a thug from the group , marches Mulder into a desolate area and prepares to execute him . However , Bremer instead kills the thug and tells Mulder to run , lest they both be discovered .

Mulder rushes back to the bank to warn people about the contaminated money and finds that Scully has already had the bank quarantined and the money taken away . Scully confronts Leamus about this being a covert government weapons test . Leamus responds that it is their job to protect the public from the truth . Later , we see Haley slumped over in his getaway car , his face eaten away by the pathogen that was sprayed on the car keys .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

" The Pine Bluff Variant " was written by John Shibam . For much of the show 's fifth season , Shibam had an index card that simply read " Mulder Undercover " . He had long wanted to do a story like this , noting , " It always seemed to fit to me ? putting Mulder in a situation [ where we ] don 't know his allegiance . " Shibam argued that the concept also worked because the theme of Mulder questioning his beliefs was a major element of the fifth season . Shibam petitioned Frank Spotnitz several times about the idea until " the right time and the right way " presented itself .

The episode was influenced by the 1963 novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* , written by John le Carré . Both the book and author are favorites of Shibam . Because the Cold War had been over , he used the opportunity to introduce a new " bogeyman " , in this case domestic terrorism . The writing staff used then @-@ recent fears about Saddam Hussein 's alleged production of biological weapons to craft the basic premise of the script . The title is also a reference to the Pine Bluff Arsenal , a real military base with stockpiles of chemical weapons . Shibam also recalled that the 1995 action film *Heat* was an inspiration .

= = = Filming = = =

To play the part of terrorists Jacob Haley and August Bremer , the production staff cast Daniel von Barga and Michael MacRae , respectively . Von Barga was chosen due to his experience in several films , whereas MacRae had previously been cast in the first season episode " The Jersey Devil " . Kate Braidwood , the woman who played the movie theater usherette , is the daughter of first assistant director Tom Braidwood , who portrayed Melvin Frohike in the series . The mother and child that are in the bank during the holdup scene were played by the wife and daughter of Todd Pittson .

Scenes at the movie theater were filmed in a recently closed theater in Dunbar ? Southlands , British Columbia . The location featured the " architectural and design characteristics of a small @-@ town cinema situated within an appropriate neighbourhood " . The movie that is being shown in the Ohio theatre which is attacked is *Die Hard with a Vengeance* , whose storyline of a mission by terrorists involving American banks is broadly mirrored in this episode 's plot . The faux corpses were created by make @-@ up artist Toby Lindala ; when he brought them to the set , however , there was no room to store them , and so he kept them temporarily in the craft services room . A Canadian government money depository filled in for the First Sovereign Bank of Pennsylvania that is robbed in the episode . The production staff assembled more than 15 @,@ 000 dollar bills of various denominations ? which valued somewhere near \$ 40 @,@ 000 ? for use during the scenes at said bank . Production initially had to stop due to the fact that , during the filming of the scene that involved the money , there was only one police guard on duty . Fearful that an actual armed robbery

might have been attempted , back @-@ up was called in and filming continued as planned .

The scene in the teaser is supposed to be set in Folger Park , located in Washington , D.C. It was actually filmed in Vancouver , like the rest of the episode , and the Capitol building in the background was created via CGI . The scene with the biotoxin melting a man 's face in the opening scene was also created with computers .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" The Pine Bluff Variant " premiered on the Fox network in the United States on May 3 , 1998 . The episode later debuted in the United Kingdom on BBC One on March 3 , 1999 . It earned a Nielsen household rating of 11 @. @ 4 , meaning that roughly 11 @. @ 4 percent of all television @-@ equipped households were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 18 @. @ 24 million viewers .

= = = Reviews = = =

" The Pine Bluff Variant " received largely positive reviews from critics . Andy Meisler , in his 1999 book Resist or Serve : The Official Guide to The X @-@ Files , Vol . 4 , noted that the episode was particularly well received by fans on the Internet , due to its realistic conceit . Zack Handlen from The A.V. Club wrote positively of the entry and awarded it an " A " . He called it " an excellent episode " that is " notable for its tension " and the fact that it " seemingly tells a story that has little to do with the X @-@ Files or Mulder and Scully 's search for the truth ? right up until the final twist . " Furthermore , Handlen called Shibani 's script " by far his best " and noted that the melted corpses in the episode provided " a striking , deeply creepy visual " . 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 four stars out of five . The two called the entry " cleverer than most " latter season episodes that feature Mulder or Scully undergoing a psychotic break , due to its " straight @-@ forward thriller " sensibilities . Jonathan Dunn , writing for What Culture , highlighted " The Pine Bluff Variant " for its cinematic appeal and included it in the " 5 Episodes [ of The X @-@ Files ] That Could Be Made Into Movies " list .

Other reviews were more mixed . Paula Vitaris of Cinefantastique gave the episode a moderately positive review and awarded it two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half stars out of four . Vitaris called the episode " an absorbing hour of entertainment . " She did , however , identify the red herring in which Scully suspects Mulder as the weakest part of the story , noting that Mulder " would [ never ] throw in with terrorists " . John Keegan from Critical Myth awarded the episode a 6 out of 10 . He wrote that , while the episode " brings to light some interesting aspects of the latter half of the fifth season " the " internal logic of the story is often suspect . " He concluded that , despite " a number of scenes that presage the feature film and point out important character dynamics " , there are an equal number of " plot contrivances and conveniences " that bog the episode down .