

= Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger =

" Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " is the fourth season finale of the American NBC action @-@ comedy television series Chuck . Aired on May 16 , 2011 , it is the season 's 24th episode , and the 78th overall episode of the series . The episode was directed by Robert Duncan McNeill and written by series co @-@ creator Chris Fedak , along with Nicholas Wootton . Despite the episode 's eponymous cliffhanger ending , supposedly leading into a fifth season , it was anticipated that Chuck would be cancelled after the fourth season for declining viewership , making " Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " the de facto series finale . However , a fifth and final season was ordered on May 13 , 2011 .

Chuck revolves around the Intersect , a government database designed by Stephen J. Bartowski . In the pilot episode of the series , Stephen 's son Chuck ( Zachary Levi ) receives the database and accidentally uploads it to his brain . Chuck is then forced from his life as an employee at the big @-@ box store Buy More to the spy world . By the fourth season , Chuck is a Central Intelligence Agency ( CIA ) agent and is engaged to one of his handlers , Sarah Walker ( Yvonne Strahovski ) .

In the season , Chuck and his team fulfill Stephen Bartowski 's last wish to destroy Volkoff Industries , led by international arms dealer Alexei Volkoff ( Timothy Dalton ) . It is then revealed that Volkoff was actually Hartley Winterbottom , an MI6 scientist who worked with Stephen in the 1980s . In preparation for an undercover assignment as an arms dealer named Alexei Volkoff , Winterbottom became the first person to upload the Intersect . However , the upload malfunctioned , overwriting Winterbottom 's personality with that of his cover , and Stephen spent the last 20 years of his life trying to fix his mistake . At the end of " Chuck Versus the Last Details " , Volkoff 's daughter Vivian ( Lauren Cohan ) learns of her father 's true identity , and , holding Chuck responsible , poisons Chuck 's fiancée Sarah with a Volkoff Industries weapon called " the Norseman " . To save Sarah 's life and stop Vivian from destroying his and Sarah 's wedding , Chuck turns to Alexei for help . To keep secret Volkoff 's true identity , the CIA sends its " toughest " agent , Clyde Decker ( Richard Burgi ) , to stop Chuck .

" Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " received overwhelmingly positive reviews from critics . According to the Nielsen ratings system , it drew 4 @.@ 53 million viewers , with a 1 @.@ 5 / 4 rating among those aged 18 ? 49 .

= = Plot = =

Volkoff Industries heiress Vivian Volkoff ( Lauren Cohan ) decides to make Central Intelligence Agency ( CIA ) Agent Chuck Bartowski ( Zachary Levi ) suffer , based on the misconception that the CIA forced her father , MI6 scientist Hartley Winterbottom ( Timothy Dalton ) , to upload a government database called the Intersect to his brain , accidentally overwriting his personality with that of his cover identity , arms dealer Alexei Volkoff . Vivian poisons Chuck 's fiancée Sarah Walker ( Yvonne Strahovski ) with the Volkoff Industries " Norseman " weapon , and Sarah is rushed into the emergency room . Chuck , his mother Mary ( Linda Hamilton ) , and ally John Casey ( Adam Baldwin ) set out to find an antidote to the Norseman 's effects , but when Chuck breaks into the prison holding Alexei , he discovers that elite agent Clyde Decker ( Richard Burgi ) has anticipated his move and relocated Alexei . To protect Alexei 's true identity and conceal the government 's botched experiment , Decker revokes Chuck 's clearance to CIA facilities .

With General Beckman 's ( Bonita Friedericy ) aid , Chuck intercepts the transport carrying Alexei , only to find that Decker has deprogrammed Alexei and restored his previous identity and memories of Hartley Winterbottom . Hartley administers an antidote , but it fails to cure Sarah . Mary then remembers that Alexei had developed a stronger antidote , but it is stored at the Volkoff Industries Headquarters in Moscow , Russia . As they leave the hospital , Chuck , Casey , Mary , and Hartley are captured by Decker and taken to Castle , a government base under the big @-@ box store Buy More , where Decker suppresses the Intersect in Chuck 's mind . Casey helps Chuck and Hartley escape , giving Chuck discs containing clean fabricated identities for him and Sarah .

Chuck and Hartley go to Volkoff Industries , and Hartley reveals to Vivian that he went undercover

voluntarily , resulting in his transformation into the villainous Volkoff . Chuck gives up the discs from Casey so Vivian and her father can start a new life . Chuck returns with the antidote to Burbank , California , where Decker is waiting for him . A standoff occurs , but as Chuck is backed up by a superior force made up of his friends , family , the C.A.T. Squad ( Mini Andén and Mercedes Masöhn ) , and Volkoff 's Spetsnaz paratroopers , Decker is forced to stand down . Using the information about Alexei as leverage against Decker , Chuck delivers the antidote .

The scene then changes to Chuck and Sarah 's wedding , after which they receive a wedding present from Hartley . Two weeks later , Chuck returns from his honeymoon to a deserted Castle , where he learns from Decker that he has been manipulated his entire spy career , leading to him receiving the Intersect and facing Fulcrum , the Ring , Daniel Shaw , and Volkoff . It is then revealed that Hartley 's gift was all of Volkoff Industries ' assets , giving Chuck and Sarah almost a billion dollars . Chuck purchases the Buy More from the government 's front company , and he , Sarah , Casey , and Morgan Grimes ( Joshua Gomez ) set up their own freelance spy operation in Castle to investigate the conspiracy involving Chuck . Morgan then spots a pair of glasses in a box of Chuck 's belongings sent from Beckman . Morgan puts them on and accidentally uploads an Intersect .

= = Production = =

" Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " was one of many episodes to be directed by producer Robert Duncan McNeill , and was written by Chris Fedak , who co -@-@ created the series , and Nicholas Wootton , both of whom serve as executive producers . It originally aired in the United States on May 16 , 2011 , on NBC as the 24th episode of Chuck 's fourth season and the 78th episode overall . The episode was filmed in April 2011 at North Hollywood Medical Center . Guest stars Linda Hamilton , Timothy Dalton , Lauren Cohan , Mekenna Melvin , Mini Andén , and Mercedes Masöhn reprised their recurring roles as Mary Bartowski , Alexei Volkoff , Vivian Volkoff , Alex McHugh , Carina Miller , and Zondra , respectively . The episode also introduced Richard Burgi as Clyde Decker , the CIA 's " toughest " agent .

Michael Ausiello had revealed in March 2011 that the fourth season finale would be titled " Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " . Chris Fedak later confirmed that the episode , as the title suggests , would have a cliffhanger ending leading into a fifth season . Fedak stated that cliffhangers tell " more story " , citing *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Batman Begins* as examples . The season had suffered two major declines in viewership , one before " Chuck Versus the Push Mix " , and another after three weeks of repeated episodes , and it was predicted that NBC would cancel Chuck before the fourth season ended , making " Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " the de facto series finale . However , a fifth and final season was ordered on May 13 , 2011 , and is set to premiere October 21 , 2011 .

" Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " is one of the few episodes since season one 's " Chuck Versus the Helicopter " not to feature the series ' full credits sequence with the instrumental version of Cake 's " Short Skirt / Long Jacket " , instead displaying the main cast credits over action in the episode 's second act . HitFix Senior Editor Alan Sepinwall has called the episode a " tying together of everything the character [ Chuck ] and the show have been about " , including the use of a recurring spy strategy , " The Magnet " , to fool Decker . As Chuck and Sarah walk to their limousine , clips of their budding romance are shown through archive footage from several earlier episodes , including the pilot episode , " Chuck Versus the Intersect " . Fedak stated in an interview that the inspiration for Volkoff 's true identity being a gun @-@ shy British scientist was Dalton 's portrayal of Gregory Tuttle , Volkoff 's guise as Mary Bartowski 's MI6 handler , in " Chuck Versus the First Fight " , his first appearance on the series . Chuck 's quest to save Sarah serves as a reversal of " Chuck Versus Phase Three " .

Yvonne Strahovski is given limited screen time in the episode due to her character , Sarah , being in a coma . However , the episode is augmented with flashbacks taking place five days before the events of the episode , in which Chuck and Sarah deal with pre @-@ wedding jitters by having their own rehearsal in their apartment . Thus , Chuck and Sarah 's wedding vows are given added weight due to Sarah 's being said early in the episode , and Chuck 's being improvised from Sarah 's .

Fedak stated in an interview on the day of the episode 's airing that " Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger

" marks a major transition in the series . As of the episode 's ending , the main characters of the series are no longer government spies and no longer work for General Beckman ; Chuck and Sarah have received an immense wealth ; and Chuck has become the leader of a team to investigate a conspiracy involving his spy career . According to Fedak , the episode institutes a storyline in which the series returns to its roots . Morgan will be portrayed by Joshua Gomez much like Chuck was by Zachary Levi in the early seasons of the series : as a newcomer to the spy world due to the presence of the Intersect in his brain . Meanwhile , Chuck will be portrayed as Morgan 's protector , much like Casey and Sarah were to him in past seasons .

= = Music and cultural references = =

Fedak revealed that the music for the season finale was completed the Wednesday night before the episode aired . The episode 's soundtrack includes the songs " Here With Me " by Battleme when Chuck and Sarah are anxious about their wedding , " Conscience Killer " by Black Rebel Motorcycle Club while Chuck intercepts Alexei 's transport , " Firewood " by Typhoon while Chuck and Sarah practice their vows , " I 'm A Pilot " by Fanfarlo while Chuck rushes to administer the antidote , and " Sinking Friendships " by Jónsi during the wedding .

Multiple references are made to former United States President Ronald Reagan . Upon seeing Casey 's framed photograph of Reagan , Hartley asks , " Is he still in charge ? " , to which Casey replies , " If only ! " Casey later comments , " That 's smart . Real smart . Reagan smart . " Adam Baldwin stated that he established Casey 's habit of referencing Reagan on the series . The CIA 's Nighthawk motorcycle used in the episode alludes to Street Hawk . During Chuck and Sarah 's wedding , Morgan , acting as the minister , claims to be ordained by the Intergalactic Federation of Planets , a reference to Star Trek . When Chuck asks him to close the partition in the limo after the wedding , Morgan responds , " As you wish ! " , referencing The Princess Bride . In archive footage from " Chuck Versus the Balcony " , Sarah tells Chuck that she did not fall in love with James Bond . After Morgan downloads the Intersect , he says " Guys , I know kung fu " , a reference to The Matrix . The series has featured variations on this line before , when Chuck downloaded versions of the Intersect in " Chuck Versus the Ring " and " Chuck Versus the Leftovers " .

When Sarah asks Chuck what was in the letter from Hartley he responds with " Oh boy ! " , a reference to the television show Quantum Leap . Quantum Leap featured Scott Bakula who also played Chuck 's father Stephen J. Bartowski .

= = Reception = =

According to the Nielsen ratings system , " Chuck Versus the Cliffhanger " drew 4 @.@ 53 million viewers , with a 1 @.@ 5 / 4 rating among those aged 18 ? 49 . The episode had the most viewers since " Chuck Versus the A @-@ Team " , making it the sixth least @-@ watched episode in Chuck 's history to that point .

The episode received overwhelmingly positive reviews from critics . Alan Sepinwall of HitFix wrote that " as Chuck began laying out his plan to be freelance spies , and as Morgan took out the Intersect sunglasses General Beckman had so thoughtfully hidden in Chuck 's going @-@ away box , all I could feel was gratitude : I 'm so glad NBC ordered one more season , because that is a show I want to see ! " Sepinwall praised Timothy Dalton 's ability to deliver both a comic and serious performance , writing that , while on other series Volkoff 's back @-@ story " would be an incredibly dark , tragic storyline " , Dalton acted well enough that his emotions were not overwhelming . Sepinwall continued that the storyline " would have sucked every last bit of joy out of the episode " if the character had been portrayed by another Chuck actor . In contrast , Sepinwall wrote that he felt no empathy for Volkoff 's daughter , as " Lauren Cohan has never managed to make a cohesive and interesting character out of a bunch of jarring personality shifts " . Brody Gibson of Boom Tron wrote , " The writers of Chuck sure know how to pull together a great finale . I was floored . " Gibson agreed with Sepinwall on Timothy Dalton 's range of acting skills , praising Zachary Levi and Yvonne Strahovski as well . Gibson wrote that Levi deserved an Emmy nomination for a scene in which

Chuck surrenders himself to Vivian to plead for the antidote to save Sarah 's life . Gibson also praised Levi and Strahovski 's performance in Chuck and Sarah 's " practice wedding " : " These two have always had such great chemistry , you could swear they 're actually in love and not just actors pretending . "

Brittany Frederick of Starpulse.com wrote , " It wasn 't the whiz @-@ bang finale I was expecting after all the hype , but it was one that was true to what the show stands for , and that 's good enough for me . " Like Sepinwall and Gibson , Frederick praised the performance by Levi and Dalton , writing , " Chuck 's heartbreak and desperation were incredibly poignant throughout the bulk of the episode . " Like Gibson , Frederick also praised the scene depicting Chuck 's surrender to Vivian , calling it " sniffle @-@ inducing " . Frederick continued that Dalton " plays Hartley Winterbottom with a great sincerity and vulnerability . " Frederick also called it " a great reward to the fans that the episode didn 't cheat us out of the Chuck / Sarah wedding at all . " Frederick wrote , " While I 'm not blown away by this finale , I still am satisfied with it , because it represents the values we 've come to expect from Chuck : the ideas of hope , family , and sticking together in the face of the most adverse of circumstances . " Ryan McGee of The Onion 's A.V. Club rated the episode a B + on an A + to F scale , although criticizing its " mechanics " . Eric Goldman of IGN gave the episode a rating of 9 @.@ 5 out of 10 , a series high alongside season two 's " Chuck Versus Santa Claus " and " Chuck Versus the Colonel " , season three 's " Chuck Versus the Beard " and " Chuck Versus the Subway " , and season five 's " Chuck Versus the Kept Man " and " Chuck Versus the Goodbye " . Goldman wrote , " Chuck 's had more ups and downs than usual this season , but it ended on a very strong note . With Sarah 's life in danger , Chuck and all his friends and family proved they would risk everything to save her , and it made for a very compelling , involving hour . "