

= Signs and Wonders (The X @-@ Files) =

" Signs and Wonders " is the ninth episode of the seventh season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files . It premiered on the Fox network in the United States on January 23 , 2000 . It was written by Jeffrey Bell , directed by Kim Manners . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " Signs and Wonders " earned a Nielsen household rating of 8 @. @ 5 , being watched by 13 @. @ 86 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mixed reviews from television 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 the Church of God with Signs and Wonders , a church where the Bible is read literally , and punishment is dealt deftly , after a small town church is the site of a number of ritualistic @-@ like murders . But soon the agents realize that the difference between the peaceful religious and the fanatics may not be very much at all .

Bell wished to write a " down @-@ and @-@ dirty " horror story about a snake @-@ handling church . Furthermore , Bell wanted the true antagonist of the episode to remain hidden until the very end . In order to do this , the script was written so that Mulder suspected the wrong individual . According to executive producer Frank Spotnitz , the theme of the episode was " intolerance can be good " , in some cases . The episode used live rattlesnakes ; at any one time , there were between six and fifty snakes on the set .

= = Plot = =

In Blessing , Tennessee , Jared Chirp , while attempting to flee his home , is attacked by rattlesnakes inside his car and killed . Federal agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) , after conferring with the completely ordinary Reverend Mackey , go to Reverend Enoch O 'Connor 's church , Church of God with Signs and Wonders , where Biblical literalism is stressed and snakes are used during his services . As such , O 'Connor becomes the prime suspect . Later , a woman named Iris , tells Reverend Mackey that she feels guilty because Jared called her on the night he died in order to talk to his girlfriend , Gracie . Iris , however , refused because Gracie was in bed . Later that night , Iris is bitten when her staple remover turns into a snake ; she promptly goes into the bathroom to clean up but is killed when snakes appear everywhere in the bathroom .

Gracie is questioned by Mulder and Scully about O 'Connor because she is a former member of his church . The two agents discover that she is , in fact , O 'Connor 's daughter and was kicked out of his congregation and home when she became pregnant . The agents go back to O 'Connor 's church and Scully is attacked by O 'Connor , who attempts to stick her head in a box of snakes . He is promptly arrested . Later , while in his cell , he is attacked by snakes in his cell , but is not killed . O 'Connor later wakes up in the hospital and is visited by Gracie . O 'Connor then takes Gracie and leaves the hospital . Reverend Mackey tells Mulder and Scully that Enoch O 'Connor is the father of Gracie 's child .

Meanwhile , O 'Connor takes Gracie back to his church and baptizes her . Suddenly , she goes into labor and gives birth to live snakes . O 'Connor goes to Mackey 's church and attempts to kill him , but Mulder intervenes and saves Mackey . In the ambulance , Gracie tells Scully that Mackey was the real murderer , and the father of Gracie 's baby . He killed everyone to keep the fact that he was the father a secret and in order to destroy O 'Connor . Back at the church , Mulder realizes O 'Connor was innocent all along , but Mackey summons snakes who promptly attack Mulder . Luckily , Scully is able to break down the door and save Mulder . Mackey , unfortunately , disappears to Connecticut , changes his name to Reverend Wells , and starts another church . The episode ends with a snake coming out of Mackey 's mouth and eating a mouse .

= = Production = =

== Writing ==

" Signs and Wonders " was written by The X-Files staff writer Jeffrey Bell . Bell had long desired to write a " down @-@ and @-@ dirty " horror story for the series . In addition , he had informally studied the practice of snake handling , concluding that " anything involving snakes would be scary and I saw the church stuff as something that would be really fascinating . " However , unlike most stories featuring the radical religious , the theme of the episode was that in certain circumstances , " intolerance can be good " , according to executive producer Frank Spotnitz .

Bell " wanted the snake church people to end up being the good guys . " However , the trick would be to disguise the real bad guys in plain sight . According to Bell , " The way the shows usually work out , Mulder is the one to figure out who the bad guys are . So I went into the story meeting with the idea of having Mulder being wrong . Because Mulder believes so strong it 's the other guy , it helped hide the true identity of the bad guy from the audience . "

During the snake handling scene at the Church of God with Signs and Wonders , the song being sung by the congregation is called " May Glory Protect Us " . The song was written by executive producer Paul Rabwin , who was heavily involved in the episode 's music production . Rabwin later noted , " I auditioned a bunch of gospel songs [to episode director Kim Manners] . I told him I could write one that was better and he told me to go for it . And I did . [?] Kim loved it . [?] It was a great tribute that he was able to ask me and accept my opinion on it . "

== Casting and filming ==

The casting for " Signs & Wonders " was " rather unorthodox " . In order to prevent ophidiophobia from hitting the actors on the day of filming , live rattlesnakes were brought in during the casting sessions . Strangely enough , many of the actors were " thrilled " about holding the snakes , according to Kim Manners . He later noted that " the funny thing was that the actors couldn 't wait to hold the rattlesnakes [?] but we were still nervous . " In addition , Michael Childers , who portrayed Reverend O 'Connor , was actually the son of a real life snake preacher . Manners later noted that " he had gone to church as a child and handled snakes . "

A series of safety meetings were scheduled in order to prevent accidents on the set . One of the items on the agenda was finding the closest hospital to the set , according to make @-@ up effects coordinator John Vulich . Furthermore , several of the cast and crew members had a fear of snakes , including Manners , David Duchovny , and John Shiban . During one of the days that the show was being prepped , a snake wrangler brought several live rattlesnakes to the set , but one escaped . It was eventually found behind Manners ' desk . In order to prevent future accidents , the mouths of the snakes were sutured shut .

== Special effects ==

At any one time , there were between six and fifty snakes on the set . During the scene where Mulder is attacked , fifteen live snakes were used . However , Duchovny was " not within blocks " of the shot and a stunt double was used . Several faux @-@ body parts were used to simulate snake bites . One of the fake arms , which was used for Mulder , was recycled from the sixth season episode " Dreamland " . A false stomach was created for Tracy Middendorf , who portrayed Gracie , to give the illusion that live snakes were wriggling inside of her .

At one point in the episode , Expulsion from the Garden of Eden , a famous painting by Italian Early Renaissance artist Masaccio appears in the background . Because the painting contains nudity , Fox 's network executives took issue with the scene , forcing the show to edit out the genitalia on the painting . Paul Rabwin later noted that " the network executive censors didn 't feel it was appropriate for us to show all the details [...] course , they could see people giving birth to hundreds of snakes , but that 's OK . " On the seventh season DVD special features , the painting is erroneously attributed

to the famed Michelangelo .

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" Signs and Wonders " first aired in the United States on January 23 , 2000 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 5 , with a 12 share , meaning that roughly 8 @. @ 5 percent of all television @- @ equipped households , and 12 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 13 @. @ 86 million viewers . The episode aired in the United Kingdom and Ireland on Sky1 on April 30 , 2000 and received 0 @. @ 61 million viewers , making it the eighth most watched episode that week .

The episode received mixed reviews from critics . Kenneth Silber from Space.com wrote a very positive review of the episode , writing , " ' Signs and Wonders ' is a clever episode whose serpentine plot twists will leave many viewers genuinely surprised . Although a bit overly reliant on the alleged shock value of snakes , the episode establishes , more firmly than any before it , the demonic nature of some of the powers at work in The X @- @ Files . " Rich Rosell from Digitally Obsessed awarded the episode 5 out of 5 stars and called the episode , " one of the scariest episodes of season 7 " before noting that the episode " really creeped me out . " However , other reviews were more mixed . Robert Shearman and Lars Pearson , in their book *Wanting to Believe : A Critical Guide to The X @- @ Files , Millennium & The Lone Gunmen* , rated it two @- @ and @- @ a @- @ half stars out of five . The two noted that , despite several very " cool " images ? such as Gracie birthing snakes and a man oozing reptile venom ? the episode " doesn 't really seem to stand for anything . " Shearman and Pearson further criticized putting " religion in the crosshair " and concluded that the episode was " just your everyday sliver of supernatural hokum . "

Paula Vitaris from Cinefantastique gave the episode a mixed review and awarded it two stars out of four . Vitaris criticized the polarization of religion viewed in the episode , noting that " although ' Signs and Wonder 's purports to be an examination of different modes of faith , it offers a pessimistic ? and distorted view of religion . " Tom Kessenich , in his book *Examinations* , gave the episode a mixed review , writing " I have always been the type of person who admires the creative attempt , even if the attempt isn 't a complete success . [?] This is precisely the mindset I 'm feeling after watching ' Signs and Wonders ' . I admire the attempt to spook me , to offer up conflicting views of religion and righteousness , even if I 'm not completely sure what the point of it all was . " Nevertheless , Kessenich praised the snake attack scenes and the episode 's occasional quips of humor . Todd VanDerWerff of The A.V. Club awarded the episode a " C + " . Despite writing that the snake attack scenes were " surprisingly horrifying " and that the episode contained " plenty [of elements] to recommend " , he was critical about the lack of explanation behind Mackey . Although he had a positive opinion of the first 30 minutes , he wrote that the " last 10 minutes just sink everything good the episode has going , and in a way that hurts everything that came before . "