

= Letters of Transit =

" Letters of Transit " is the nineteenth episode of the fourth season of the Fox science @-@ fiction drama television series , Fringe , and the series ' 84th episode overall . It is set in the future , where the Observers have taken control of human society . In 2036 , two FBI agents fight to free their world of the Observers by finding the amber @-@ encased bodies of the original Fringe team . The episode 's premise is subsequently built upon as the key setting of the show 's fifth and final season .

The episode was co @-@ written by showrunners J.H. Wyman and Jeff Pinkner , and consulting producer Akiva Goldsman . Executive producer Joe Chappelle served as director . While some critics wondered how the episode related to the overall series , actor John Noble has explained that " Letters of Transit " established the template for the fifth season . It featured guest appearances by actress Georgina Haig and Lost veteran Henry Ian Cusick .

The episode first aired on April 20 , 2012 in the United States , and was watched by an estimated 3 @.@ 03 million viewers . Television critics praised the riskiness of the episode premise and the actors ' performances while also expressing doubt about its place during the season . The episode has been nominated for the 2013 Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form)

= = Plot = =

The episode begins with on @-@ screen text describing how , in 2015 , the Observers , no longer content with observing history , took over human society . They killed many in an event called " The Purge " , and transformed the remaining into a totalitarian culture ; though members of the Fringe division attempted to fight the takeover , they were easily defeated , and the remaining Fringe division were allowed to remain to police the human " Natives " . The Observers are aided by the ability to read most human minds , able to sense motives before they can be acted on .

In 2036 , FBI Agents Simon Foster (Henry Ian Cusick) and Henrietta ' Etta ' Bishop (Georgina Haig) recover the body of Walter Bishop (John Noble) , Walter having purposefully encased himself and his team in amber shortly after the Observer takeover . Though they are able to release him from the amber , they find that he has suffered memory damage and lacks the mental capacity to build a strange device of his own design . Simon and Etta talk to Nina Sharp (Blair Brown) , learning that Walter had William Bell remove a piece of his brain some time in the past , which she postulates could be used to heal Walter 's brain now . However , the piece is still in storage in the old Massive Dynamic facility on the main island of New York City , tightly controlled by Observers who can read their thoughts , making its recovery difficult . They are able to make it to the vault in Massive Dynamic , in part due to the inability of the Observers to read Etta 's mind , and successfully restore Walter 's memories . They are , however , unaware that they have alerted Fringe division ? still led by Agent Broyles (Lance Reddick) ? and the Observers to their presence ; a coordinated team , instructed to shoot on sight , is dispatched .

A more coherent Walter explains that , according to the Observer September , the Observers made the Earth uninhabitable by 2609 , and so traveled back in time to take over the planet themselves . As forces corner the three , Walter sets up an antimatter device to wipe out the Massive Dynamic building and their pursuers . Walter is able to lead Simon and Etta to where Peter Bishop (Joshua Jackson) , Astrid Farnsworth (Jasika Nicole) and William Bell have been encased in amber . They are able to free Astrid , but as Fringe forces approach they find the equipment to free the others has malfunctioned . Simon sacrifices himself to the amber in order to push Peter free , while Walter severs Bell 's hand for an unknown purpose . They escape the area as Broyles and his team arrive , though Broyles finds a piece of licorice , a telltale sign of Walter 's presence . As the group travels away from the city , Walter , in an ominous manner , reminds Astrid of what Bell did to Olivia (Anna Torv) . Peter then comes to recognize Etta as his daughter , Henrietta , wearing a fired bullet as a necklace .

= = Production = =

" Letters of Transit " was co -@-@ written by consulting producer Akiva Goldsman and executive producers / co -@-@ showrunners Jeff Pinkner and J.H. Wyman . Although it was previously reported Goldsman would be directing , executive producer Joe Chappelle ultimately directed the installment . The Observers are prominently featured in the episode , a mythos that has been visible since the pilot . Previously a mysterious background presence , according to Noble , they have now become " incredibly centrally important " to the series ' storyline . " Letters of Transit " was written and shot before the series ' renewal for a fifth season , but it was always envisioned as a genesis of the season . During this time , Wyman confirmed that a majority of the fifth season would be set in 2036 , following the events of this episode , a time period depicting the Observers as oppressors rather than as passive witnesses .

Leading up to its broadcast , journalists noted that the nineteenth episode of each season of Fringe has generally been its " craziest hour " , and anticipated that " Letters of Transit " would be similarly strange . The Fox network promoted the episode with a series of four teaser videos , each containing a clue to a fifth video revealing the special opening credits for this episode . The episode contained a new opening credit sequence that helped set the tone , with " fringe " terms including community , joy , imagination , and free will .

Actor Henry Ian Cusick and actress Georgina Haig guest starred in the episode as a pair of Federal agents . Cusick had worked with co -@-@ creator J.J. Abrams and executive producer Pinkner on the ABC series , Lost . Cusick stated that most of his scenes were filmed with Haig and John Noble (Walter Bishop) , and that the story leaves a possibility for the return of their characters in the future . Noble found it unusual to film an episode that did not involve the lead actors . He explained , " That was Walter with two really big , important guest stars , Henry Ian Cusick and Georgina Haig . It felt , to me , like it was a really strong episode . The two guest actors did a fantastic job , which is not easy to do , to step into an established company . It is out of the box and is somewhere else completely . I think that the fans will love it . Some fans of this type of material will like it anyway because Henry Ian Cusick was such a big star in Lost , but also , this new girl is just full of wonderful energy , too . "

According to Noble , " Letters of Transit " features his ninth version of Walter Bishop at that point in the series . He remarked , " It ? s a lot of fun as an actor because it keeps me trying to refine and to finish small parts [of Walter] . " In a June 2012 interview with Entertainment Weekly , Noble called " Letters of Transit " one of his favorites of the series , explaining that he " thought that was really a beautiful looking episode , beautifully told . "

= = Cultural references = =

Given guest star Henry Ian Cusick 's prominence in Lost , " Letters of Transit " refers to both " The Purge " and " natives " , two key elements of that show . The episode also contains references to The Prisoner , where Walter exclaims " I am not a number ! I am a free man ! " The episode also references Star Wars when Walter states " these are not the droids you ? re looking for " and " Move along " . Jeff Jensen of Entertainment Weekly believed these helped set the tone of the episode : " Fringe in 2036 was The Village writ global and under Imperial rule . " Matt Roush of TV Guide noted that the episode title , " Letters of Transit " , alludes to a key element of the film Casablanca . The episode opens with scrolling text that has been compared to the start of the film Blade Runner .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" Letters of Transit " first aired in the United States on April 20 , 2012 . An estimated 3 @. @ 03 million viewers watched the episode . It earned a 1 @. @ 0 ratings share among adults 18 ? 49 , a 10 percent increase from the series low of the previous week . Fringe finished third in its timeslot

behind NBC 's Grimm and ABC 's Primetime : What Would You Do ? .

= = = Reviews = = =

IGN 's Ramsey Isler gave the episode a mixed review , noting that " its concept is intriguing , bold , and extremely risky . I 'm just not sure if it works . It 's such a drastic change of scenery and tone it 's hard to say whether this is genius or madness . " Isler observed that he would have " absolutely loved " the episode if he had been " given appropriate context through a suitable setup ... But the approach we got feels an awful lot like a gimmick , and this show does not need to gamble with gimmicks at this point . " Isler did find positive elements of the episode however , and rated it 8 out of 10 , an indication of a " great " episode . He praised Walter 's return " to a much more confident , focused man who 's a bit scary in his determination and resolve , " as well as the events that followed . Isler concluded that " the core ideas are really good , but the way the new concepts were introduced seems haphazard , and a huge gamble that could turn off all but the most hardcore viewers . "

Like Isler , Entertainment Weekly columnist Ken Tucker enjoyed Walter 's transition " from happy , babbling , ' I love LSD ! ' licorice @-@ licking Walter to a Walter who yelled at the others when escaping " , calling it " one of the night 's great pleasures . " Tucker 's Entertainment Weekly colleague Jeff Jensen commented that he was able to " roll " with some of the less plausible plot details (such as a still existing Massive Dynamic) out of praise for guest stars Cusick and Haig , believing they " worked well in this world . " Jensen also reserved attention for Noble 's scenes , calling them variously " frisky and poignant " , " hilarious " , and " touching . " Lastly , Jensen was happy to find more details about the Observers , but wondered at the lack of the parallel universe 's mention . MTV 's Alex Zalben was more critical . He wondered how the episode fit into the rest of the season , and wrote " It ? s a curious step , and could likely drive even more viewers away from a show that can ? t afford to lose them . " While disliking the " clunky , explainy " dialogue , Zalben still commented that , " for a die hard FRINGE fan like myself , this episode was crack . Huge emotion , crazy science , and epic set pieces . The end of the episode had me dying to watch the next one , even if it isn ? t a direct continuation . That ? s good television right there . "

Jeff Jensen of Entertainment Weekly named " Letters of Transit " the seventeenth best episode of the series , stating " What at first seemed to be one of Fringe 's nutty number 19s turned out to be the episode that helped earn the series a fifth and final year . Of course , some may now question the merits of ringing out the series with a season @-@ long story set entirely in this future dystopia ruled by oppressive Observers . But the single episode that introduced this premise was a cool jolt that opened a new front of Fringe mythology and gave us a character that would have a lasting impact , Etta . " The episode has been nominated for the 2013 Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form) .

= = Olivia Dunham = =

Of the 100 episodes in the five seasons , this is the only one where Olivia Dunham does not appear .