

= Hell Money =

" Hell Money " is the nineteenth episode of the third season of the science fiction television series The X @-@ Files and 68th episode overall . It premiered on the Fox network in the United States on March 29 , 1996 . It was written by Jeffrey Vlaming and directed by Tucker Gates . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " Hell Money " earned a Nielsen household rating of 9 @.@ 9 , being watched by 14 @.@ 86 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mostly mixed to positive 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 . In this episode , Mulder and Scully investigate a murder in San Francisco 's Chinatown involving masked intruders , strange Chinese symbols , a lottery , and the clandestine selling of body parts .

The premise of the episode was based on three major ideas : a pyramid scheme involving body parts , a lottery in a small town , and the corporate beings assembling the destitute in Chinatown . The episode 's writer , Vlaming , developed the latter two ideas and series creator Chris Carter merged all three ideas in the finalized script . The episode contained several elaborate special effects shots , most notably the scene wherein a frog bursts out of a victim 's chest , which was created by using molds to create a fake human torso that was then placed over an actor .

= = Plot = =

In San Francisco 's Chinatown , a Chinese immigrant , Johnny Lo , makes his way to his apartment . There , he is confronted by someone telling him to " pay the price " , and is overtaken by three figures wearing shigong masks . A security guard later finds the three figures near a crematory oven , where Lo is being burned alive .

Fox Mulder and Dana Scully investigate Lo 's death , the latest in a series of fatal incinerations in Chinatown ; Mulder believes that ghost activity is behind the deaths , while Scully suspects a cult . The agents collaborate with Glen Chao , a Chinese @-@ American detective with the San Francisco Police Department . When they find a Chinese character written inside the oven , Chao translates it as meaning " ghost . " Mulder also finds a scrap of burned paper in the ashes , which Chao identifies as " hell money " , a symbolic offering to deceased spirits . The agents locate Lo 's apartment , where they find his collection of charms , as well as bloodstains underneath the recently installed carpet .

Meanwhile , another immigrant , Hsin , tends to his leukemia @-@ stricken daughter , Kim . To pay for her treatments , Hsin attends an underground lottery in which participants either win money or lose an organ , depending on tiles chosen from a pair of vases . One man wins the lottery but selects a bad tile , and his body is found later that day . Scully performs an autopsy and finds that he had been selling body parts , noticing his numerous surgical scars . The agents question Chao , who claims that the local community maintains a code of silence and does not reveal anything to even him .

Chao finds information that leads them to Hsin , who installed the carpet in Lo 's apartment . Hsin has a bandage over his eye , having lost it to the lottery earlier . Returning to his home , Chao is confronted by the three masked figures . The agents visit him at the hospital . Meanwhile , Hsin visits the Hard Faced Man , one of the proprietors of the lottery , wanting to end his participation . The man warns him that ghostly fire will consume him if he leaves the lottery . The agents return to the hospital , finding Chao gone . They trace his blood to that on the carpet in Lo 's apartment , finding a match . This causes the agents to visit Hsin , but find only his daughter at his apartment .

The agents find Chao outside a nearby Chinese restaurant and follow him inside . Hsin wins the lottery , but selects the tile representing his heart . Chao comes in and knocks over the table with the vases , revealing the lottery to be fixed . Mulder and Scully stop the Hard Faced Man seconds before he is about to operate on Hsin . They interrogate him , but because no one who participated will testify against him , it is unlikely he will be prosecuted . Hsin is brought to the hospital and his

daughter is placed on an organ donor list . Chao disappears , awakening in a crematorium oven before he is burned alive .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

" Hell Money " was written by Jeff Vlaming , making it his second and last script for the show after the earlier third season episode " 2Shy " . The episode was directed by Tucker Gates , making it the first of only two episodes of The X @-@ Files ? the other being the show 's fourth season entry " El Mundo Gira " ? to be directed by him . The episode features pre @-@ fame Lucy Liu in a guest star role . Liu would later gain prominence as a cast member of the show Ally McBeal in 1998 .

The premise of the episode originated from an idea that executive producer and series creator Chris Carter had about a pyramid scheme involving body parts . Writer Jeff Vlaming combined two additional concepts that he had developed ; the first involved a lottery in a small town and the other concerned corporate beings assembling the destitute in Chinatown . When the initial script for " Hell Money " was submitted , Carter merged the three stories into one . Entertainment Weekly later noted that " the twisted grotesquery of this story makes you think it must be based on a true story " , but , according to Carter , the story was completely original . Vlaming had originally hoped that the episode would be one of the rare entries where Scully 's version of the events would be vindicated , but in the end Mulder , once again , put everything together .

= = = Filming = = =

The episode 's exterior scenes were shot in Vancouver , Canada 's Chinatown while the crematorium scenes were shot on a soundstage . Interior shots of the gambling parlor were shot at the Welsh Irish Scottish English (W.I.S.E.) Hall , a community building in Vancouver . The production staff created a second balcony in the hall exclusively for the episode , with an agreement to tear it down once the episode was filmed . However , after the filming ended , the W.I.S.E. Hall 's owners requested that the balcony be left in place " for aesthetic reasons " . The vase and tiles used in the episode were created entirely by the show 's production department . The scene where a frog pops out of a victim 's chest was created by using molds to create a fake human torso , which was then placed over the actor . For a close @-@ up shot , the torso was placed on a table with a hole on it , allowing the show 's animal wrangler to push a live frog through the opening in the torso . Actors Michael Yama and Lucy Liu had to redo all of their dialogue in a Cantonese accent in post production . Their re @-@ recorded lines were dubbed over the original soundtrack .

= = Reception = =

" Hell Money " premiered on the Fox network in the United States on March 29 , 1996 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 9 @.@ 9 , with a 17 share , meaning that roughly 9 @.@ 9 percent of all television @-@ equipped households , and 17 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . This totaled 14 @.@ 86 million viewers .

The episode received mixed to positive reviews from critics , ranging from largely positive to negative . Entertainment Weekly gave the episode an A ? , calling it " gorgeously shot " , citing the " lush , smoky gaming sequences " in particular . Television Without Pity ranked " Hell Money " the eleventh most nightmare @-@ inducing episode of the show noting , " If there ? s one thing you don ? t want to mess with , it ? s the Chinese mafia . Especially the branch that dresses up like Slipknot and either a) burns you alive , if you ? re lucky , or b) forces you to participate in a haunted organ @-@ harvesting raffle only to slowly carve you up and sell your vital organs on the black market , whether you like it or not . " 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 , and called it a " hard episode to love [but] sincere and purposeful " . The two praised the conceit of the episode , arguing that by presenting the situation from the Chinese immigrants ? members of an alien culture ? and Chao 's point of view , " Mulder and Scully seem clumsy and arrogant . And by implication , the audience are made to feel just as arrogant . "

Other reviews were more mixed . John Keegan from Critical Myth gave the episode 5 / 10 , noting " Overall , this episode attempted to make a mundane murder case interesting by forcing the agents to interact with an ' alien ' culture . Unfortunately , the structure of the episode gave the audience answers long before the agents discovered them , making the bulk of the episode an exercise . By not taking the theme far enough or deepening the mystery , the writers ultimately fail to reach their goals . " Reviewer Todd VanDerWerff from The A.V. Club gave the entry a C + and wrote that the episode " was also fairly bold for its time , providing a whole subplot that 's mostly told through subtitles [but] it feels like a series of shocks that are strung together along a pretty standard story setup . " Ultimately , VanDerWerff concluded that , " the major problem with ' Hell Money ' is that it feels , at times , like a backdoor pilot for a new series starring B.D. Wong as corrupt detective Glen Chao . " Paula Vitaris from Cinefantastique gave the episode a mixed review and awarded it two stars out of four . She critiqued the fact that the episode lacked a paranormal mystery , noting that the theme of the episode " would fit nicely into any other police drama " . Vitaris described the " three actors in the black suits and ghost masks " as " not very convincing . "

Co @-@ producer Paul Rabwin was not a fan of " Hell Money " : he believed that the premise was not really an X @-@ File due to the fact that nothing paranormal happened during the episode . He claimed that if Mulder and Scully were removed from the story , it would not have changed anything and that the two were not affected personally by the case .