

= The Goldberg Variation (The X @-@ Files) =

" The Goldberg Variation " is the sixth 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 December 12 , 1999 . It was written by Jeffrey Bell , directed by Thomas J. Wright , and featured guest appearances by Willie Garson and Shia LaBeouf . The episode is a " Monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Week " story , unconnected to the series ' wider mythology . " The Goldberg Variation " earned a Nielsen household rating of 8 @. @ 8 , being watched by 14 @. @ 49 million people in its initial broadcast . The episode received mixed @-@ to @-@ positive reviews .

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 a mysterious man named Henry Weems , who appears to be the luckiest man in the world . The title is a dual reference to Rube Goldberg machines and the Goldberg Variations by Johann Sebastian Bach .

Bell 's original draft of the episode opened with a man falling thirty @-@ thousand feet from an airplane and walking away unharmed . Due to budgetary reasons , the intro was later changed to a man falling out of a building . Willie Garson ? who had appeared in the third season episode " The Walk " ? was cast as Henry Weems , breaking a " long @-@ standing rule " on the show to not recast previous actors . The first cut of the episode was four minutes under @-@ time , and so various insert shots and new scenes had to be filmed in order to compensate .

= = Plot = =

In Chicago , a man by the name of Henry Weems wins \$ 100 @, @ 000 playing poker against a mobster named Joe Cutrona , though Weems appears ignorant of the basic rules of poker . Suspecting that Weems cheated , Cutrona attempts to kill him by throwing him off the 29th story of the building they are in . After Weems lands in an access hatch to a basement , he stands right back up and walks away , completely uninjured . Two agents in a car stationed outside witness the event and eventually tell Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) , who promptly take the case . Mulder initially believes the man has the ability to cure himself , but Scully thinks he may just be very lucky by landing in a pile of laundry that was right under the access hatch .

The agents track down Weems , a handyman at an apartment building . He refuses to testify against Cutrona . Weems has a fascination with Rube Goldberg machines . As such , his apartment is filled with them . After meeting with Weems , Scully concludes that there is no X @-@ File , but Mulder believes that his luck is the X @-@ File in question . As the agents begin to leave the complex , one of Cutrona 's enforcers comes to kill Weems . However , the assassin dies in an improbable cascade of events reminiscent of a Rube Goldberg machine : after being distracted when Mulder buzzes the intercom (when he forgot the car keys) , he accidentally shoots a lamp that knocks over an ironing board , then trips over the ironing board and ends up getting strangled in a fan . The two agents rush back up stairs and find Weems unscathed . Weems notes he was also the sole survivor of a commuter jet crash that killed 20 people in December 1989 , where he was placed in Seat 13 of Flight 7 : lucky numbers .

Weems picks up a lottery ticket and wins \$ 100 @, @ 000 but learns that it would take 12 months to get the money , so he throws the ticket away . A man picks the ticket out of the trash and is then hit by a truck after Weems warned him (to no avail) that " something bad will happen . " Later , Mulder comes to question Weems again and another one of Cutrona 's enforcers comes to kill Weems but his bullet ricochets off Weems ' pocket knife , barely grazes Mulder 's arm , and hits and kills the enforcer . Weems confesses that he 's been trying to find a way to get \$ 100 @, @ 000 to pay for an expensive medical treatment for the serious illness of a boy in his apartment building named Richie (Shia LaBeouf) . Weems attempts at getting the money , however , have brought him above the radar . Later , after Weems is hit by a car , it appears that Henry 's lucky streak has reached its end .

Cutrona kidnaps Richie 's mom , Maggie , to stop Henry from testifying against him . Weems turns himself in to Cutrona so he would let Maggie go ; instead , they plan to kill him . As they are about to execute Weems in the basement (where Maggie is also being held) , Cutrona and his mobster partner , Dominic , are killed in a bizarre turn of events , whereas Weems and Maggie are unharmed as Mulder arrives with backup . In the end , it turns out by surprise that Cutrona is an organ donor and a perfect match for Richie , who gets the treatment and lives . Weems then activates a toy Goldberg machine that he made for Richie earlier .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

The episode 's title is a pun . It refers to both cartoonist Rube Goldberg , who was famous for his drawings of incredibly complex machines made out of everyday objects that performed rudimentary tasks , as well as the harpsichord piece , the " Goldberg Variations " , by Johann Sebastian Bach . The elaborate contraptions Henry Weems created are physical examples of such machines . Episode writer Jeffrey Bell noted that he wanted the episode to function " as a Rube Goldberg device " and so he wrote the story to revolve around the ideas of good luck and bad luck . Originally , the episode 's opening scene was to have featured Weems falling thirty thousand feet from an airplane and walking away unscathed . Although Bell 's pitch was met with enthusiasm , many writers and producers for the show were cautious , because they realized the episode would have several humorous moments . Executive producer Frank Spotnitz explained : " The episode had a lot of humorous moments that we were afraid of doing because as many people who like the funny ones hate the funny ones . " Eventually , the episode was green @-@ lighted , but pushed to later in the season because , according to Spotnitz , " we wanted to scare the hell out of everybody during the first few episodes . "

Bell began crafting his script , adding a mafia @-@ related sub @-@ plot and replacing the airplane drop with a fall from a building , for budgetary reasons . The biggest hurdle for the episode , however , was crafting the Rube Goldberg machine . However , because Bell had " extra time " to write his script , the art department was given a head start on crafting the contraption . Gillian Anderson later explained that working with the machines required a lot of patience , because multiple takes had to be filmed in order to make sure everything went as planned . Rick Millikan , the show 's casting director , broke a " long @-@ standing rule " on the show and re @-@ cast Willie Garson ? who had appeared in the third season episode " The Walk " ? as Henry Weems . Millikan noted that Garson was " literally the best person for the job . "

= = = Post @-@ production = = =

After the episode was finished filming , the footage entered into a long period of editing . Series creator Chris Carter noted that the episode " wasn 't cutting together well and that there were things that just didn 't work . " Once the resultant footage was reworked into an acceptable episode , it was four minutes under time . In order to compensate for this , additional inserts of the Rube Goldberg Machine were filmed as well as a scene featuring Mulder and Scully discussing the episode 's back @-@ story . The latter , which was filmed several months after the rest of the episode , required Anderson to wear a wig because her hair style had substantially changed .

When the episode was finally finished and aired , it was highly enjoyed by The X @-@ Files cast and crew . Carter called the entry " tight , funny , touching , and quirky . " Series writer Vince Gilligan was impressed with the episode , and noted that the episode represented the seventh season of the show as whole . He explained : " The seventh season , for my money , was one of our best because we took more storytelling risks than in previous years . "

= = Broadcast and reception = =

" The Goldberg Variation " first aired in the United States on December 12 , 1999 . This episode earned a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 8 , with a 13 share , meaning that roughly 8 @. @ 8 percent of all television @- @ equipped households , and 13 percent of households watching television , were tuned in to the episode . It was viewed by 14 @. @ 49 million viewers . The episode aired in the United Kingdom and Ireland on Sky1 on April 23 , 2000 and received 0 @. @ 78 million viewers , making it the fifth most watched episode that week .

The episode received mixed @- @ to @- @ positive reviews . Tom Kessenich , in his book *Examinations* , gave the episode a largely positive review . He favorably compared the episode to the sixth season episode " The Rain King " and noted that " ' The Rain King ' [written by Jeff Bell] was quite simply one of the joys of season six . So it hardly came as a surprise to me that I enjoyed Bell 's ' The Goldberg Variation " entry for [season seven] . It was cute , light @- @ hearted , and a little kooky , with a happy ending to boot . " Den of Geek writer Juliette Harrison named the episode the " finest stand @- @ alone episode " of Season Seven and wrote , " Since ' The X @- @ Files ? roots are in horror , feel @- @ good episodes are few and far between , and something to be treasured when they appear . The Goldberg Variation is the perfect feel @- @ good X @- @ Files episode ; not too soppy , not too harsh , but just the right mix of ludicrous gangster deaths and saving the cute kid . " Paula Vitaris from *Cinefantastique* gave the episode a moderately positive review and awarded it three stars out of four . She called the episode a " charmer " and praised Willie Garson 's characterization of Harry Weems . Kenneth Silber from *Space.com* wrote positively of the episode , writing , " ' The Goldberg Variation ' is a clever , witty standout from the recent middling run of X @- @ Files episodes . " Todd VanDerWerff of *The A.V. Club* awarded the episode a " B + " and called it a " fun " entry that shows off the series ' " emotional palette " . He felt that the episode successfully managed to convey a " clever and whimsical " feel , but that the conceit of a " good man " as the monster of the episode does not make it particularly scary . All @- @ in @- @ all , he felt that it " all works out in the end " .

Other reviews were more mixed . Rich Rosell from *Digitally Obsessed* awarded the episode 3 @. @ 5 out of 5 stars and noted that despite the episode being " Funny stuff , " it was ultimately " a little uneven overall . " 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 three stars out of five . Despite calling the episode " a likeable piece of work " , the two explained that the story itself was fine , but that the episode 's set piece did not work with the plot . Shearman and Pearson , however , ultimately concluded that the premise was " such a well @- @ meaning little bauble that you want to applaud it for its intent if nothing else . "