

22 Short Films About Springfield

Subjects: Cultural Studies

Contributor: HandWiki Xu

Template:Infobox Simpsons episode "22 Short Films About Springfield" is the twenty-first episode of The Simpsons' seventh season. It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on April 14, 1996. It was written by Richard Appel, David S. Cohen, Jonathan Collier, Jennifer Crittenden, Greg Daniels, Brent Forrester, Dan Greaney, Rachel Pulido, Steve Tompkins, Josh Weinstein, Bill Oakley, and Matt Groening, with the writing being supervised by Daniels. The episode was directed by Jim Reardon. Phil Hartman guest starred as Lionel Hutz and the hospital board chairman. The episode depicts brief incidents experienced by a wide array of Springfield residents in a series of interconnected stories that take place over a single day. The episode's concept originated from the end segment of the season four episode "The Front", and serves as a loose parody of Pulp Fiction, which gave the staff the idea of a possible spin-off from The Simpsons. The title is a reference to the film Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould. The episode received positive reviews from critics, and is noted for its popularity among fans.

Keywords: springfield ; templateinfobox ; simpsons

1. Plot

The episode is a series of shorts ranging in length from under half a minute to over two and a half minutes, each showing daily life in Springfield after Bart wonders if anything interesting happens to the town's citizens.

1. Bart and Milhouse spit and squirt condiments from a highway overpass onto cars, then go to the Kwik-E-Mart.
2. Apu closes the Kwik-E-Mart for five minutes to attend a party at Sanjay's house, trapping Moleman in the store.
3. Bart unknowingly throws gum in Lisa's hair, and Marge tries to remove the gum by putting peanut butter and mayonnaise on her hair.
4. Lisa's hair attracts a swarm of bees, one of which flies away.
5. While bike riding with Mr. Burns, Smithers suffers an allergic reaction to the bee's sting and rides to the hospital, but the orderlies admit only Burns.
6. Dr. Nick is criticized by the hospital board for his unorthodox medical procedures, only to treat Grampa with an electric light socket, saving his career.
7. Moe gets robbed by Snake after Barney gives him \$2,000 to pay for a portion of his \$14 billion bar tab.
8. While hosting Superintendent Chalmers for lunch, Principal Skinner burns his roast and bluffs his way through the meal.
9. Homer accidentally traps Maggie in a newspaper vending box.
10. Chief Wiggum, Lou, and Eddie compare McDonald's and Krusty Burger.
11. Bumblebee Man arrives home after a horrible day at work and his house is destroyed, causing his wife to leave him.
12. Snake runs Wiggum over, and their ensuing fight ends with Herman capturing them at gunpoint in his store.
13. Reverend Lovejoy urges his pet Old English Sheepdog to use Ned Flanders's lawn as a toilet.
14. Various townspeople advise Marge and Lisa how to remove the gum stuck in Lisa's hair.
15. Cletus offers Brandine some shoes he found on a telephone line.
16. Milhouse tries to use the bathroom in Comic Book Guy's Android's Dungeon, but is forced to leave the store before he can use it.
17. Milhouse goes with his father to use the bathroom in Herman's store and accidentally knocks out Herman with a flail, saving his father, Snake, and Wiggum.
18. Jake the barber cuts the gum out of Lisa's hair, leaving her with a different hairstyle.
19. Nelson laughs at an extremely tall man in a small car, who then publicly humiliates Nelson to teach him a lesson.
20. Bart and Milhouse squirt ketchup and mustard onto Nelson from the overpass, and conclude that life is interesting in their town after all.
21. Professor Frink attempts to tell his story but is cut off by the ending credits.^[1]

2. Production

The episode's principal idea came from the season four episode "The Front", which contained a short sequence entitled *The Adventures of Ned Flanders*, featuring its own title card and theme song, at its conclusion. The scene has no relevance to the main plot of the episode and was designed solely as filler to accommodate the episode's short runtime.^[2] The staff loved the concept and attempted to fit similar scenes into other episodes, but none were short enough to require one. Show runners Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein decided to make an entire episode of linked short scenes involving many of the show's characters, in a similar style to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*.^[2] The title "22 Short Films About Springfield" was decided upon from the start of the episode's production,^[2] even though there are not actually twenty-two stories in it.^[3] Originally there were more scenes, but several of them had to be cut out for time.^[2] To decide who would write each of the segments, all of the writers chose their top three favorite characters and put them into a hat, the names were drawn out and the writers were assigned their parts.^[2] Oakley wrote the Superintendent Chalmers story,^[2] Weinstein did the Comic Book Guy and Milhouse scene,^[3] David Cohen penned the Reverend Lovejoy sketch, as well as the deleted Krusty the Clown scene.^[4] Brent Forrester wrote the Krusty Burger scene,^[3] while Rachel Pulido wrote the Bumblebee Man one.^[2] Richard Appel wrote a deleted "elaborate fantasy segment" revolving around Marge, the only remnant of which is her cleaning the sink during the first Lisa scene, and also did a scene with Lionel Hutz that was dropped as well.^[5]

The episode's first draft was 65 pages long and needed to be cut down to just 42, so numerous scenes were cut for time or because they did not fit into the overall dynamic of the episode.^[2] To solve this problem, a scene before the second act break, where the townspeople go to the Simpson house to provide advice of how Lisa can get the gum out of her hair, was created to include every character that did not appear anywhere else during the course of the episode.^[2] Weinstein and writing supervisor Greg Daniels were responsible for ordering and linking together the episodes, and director Jim Reardon had the challenge of segueing between each section in a way that did not make the change seem abrupt.^[6] Those that were hard to link were put before or after an act break or were given a theme song, one of which was cut from the Apu story, but was included as a deleted scene on *The Complete Seventh Season DVD*.^[3]

Bill Oakley wrote the Chalmers scene because he is his all-time favorite character from the show. The main reason he loved him was that, until Frank Grimes was created for the season eight episode "Homer's Enemy", Chalmers was the only character that "seemed to operate in the normal human universe".^[2] In previous episodes, Skinner and Chalmers' scenes together revolved around one joke: Skinner tells Chalmers an unbelievable lie, but Chalmers believes him anyway. So, their scene in this episode is made up of a string of thirteen interconnected lies.^[2] The dialogue between him and Skinner was something that had never been done before, in that it is just a long relaxed conversation with nothing important being said at all.^[4] The idea behind the scene was to make fun of the classic sitcom trope of taking the boss home for dinner, the boss doubting his employee's lies and ultimately believing them. Oakley wrote all the scene in one afternoon and the finished product resembles almost exactly its first draft. Layout artist Sarge Morton was given the task to storyboard the whole scene, as he had an affinity for scenes featuring both Skinner and Chalmers.^[7]

In the Mr. Burns story, every single word he yells at Smithers is real and used correctly. To maintain accuracy, the writers used a 19th-century slang thesaurus to look up words.^[3] Many of the Spanish words used in Bumblebee Man's segment are easily understood cognates of English and not accurate Spanish; this was done deliberately so that non-Spanish speakers could understand the dialogue without subtitles.^{[3][8]} The very tall man was a caricature of writer Ian Maxtone-Graham,^[3] and the crowd on the street who laugh at Nelson includes caricatures of Matt Groening, Bill Oakley, and Josh Weinstein. Oakley wrote in the script that the street was filled with Springfield's biggest idiots and so the animators drew him, Weinstein, and Groening into the scene.^[2]

3. Cultural References

The episode contains numerous references to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. Like the film, the episode's plot is episodic, though the stories are interconnected. The policemen's conversation about McDonald's parallels the famous "Royale With Cheese" discussion,^{[1][9]} and the music played during the segment's beginning was also taken from the film.^[3] The story involving Chief Wiggum and Snake is a direct parody of the "Gold Watch" segment of the film. Snake runs over Wiggum at a red light, alluding to the segment of the film where the character of Butch Coolidge did the same to Marsellus Wallace, before crashing into a fire hydrant and beginning an on-foot chase.^{[3][9]} The two run into Herman's Military Antique shop, where Herman beats, ties up and gags the two, then waits for "Zed" to arrive, exactly as Maynard does in *Pulp Fiction*.^{[1][9]} The writers were pleased that Herman already existed as otherwise they would have had to create another character just for this scene.^[2] The episode's title is a reference to the film *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*.^[1]

4. Reception

In its original broadcast, "22 Short Films About Springfield" finished tied for 73rd in the weekly ratings for the week of April 8–14, 1996, with a Nielsen rating of 6.9. It was the seventh highest rated show from the Fox network that week.^[10]

On March 12, 2002, the episode was released in the United States on a DVD collection titled *The Simpsons Film Festival*, along with the season eleven episode "Beyond Blunderdome", the season four episode "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie", and the season six episode "A Star is Burns".^[11]

The episode is Bill Oakley's personal favorite episode, but he claimed that it is hated by two prominent (and unnamed) figures within the running of the show.^[2] When *The Simpsons* began streaming on Disney+ in 2019, Oakley named this one of the best classic Simpsons episodes to watch on the service.^[12] The episode is frequently cited as a popular one among the show's fans on the Internet.^[3]

In 1998, *TV Guide* listed it in its list of top twelve *Simpsons* episodes.^[13]

Entertainment Weekly, in 2003, placed the episode 14th on their top 25 *The Simpsons* episode list, praising the episode's structure and finding the *Pulp Fiction* references "priceless".^[14]

Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood, the authors of the book *I Can't Believe It's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide*, called it "an untypical episode, and a very good one", naming the Skinner and Chalmers story as the best.

In 2019 several sources cited the episode as one of the show's best, including *Consequence of Sound* who ranked it number five on its list of top 30 *Simpsons* episodes,^[15]

Entertainment.ie who named it among the 10 greatest *Simpsons* episodes of all time,^[16]

The Guardian who named it one of the five greatest episodes in *Simpsons* history^[17] and while IGN named "A Fish Called Selma" the best episode of the seventh season, they added that "22 Short Films About Springfield" was "good competition" for the crown.^[18]

In 2004, *Empire* named the episode's *Pulp Fiction* parody the seventh best film gag in the show, calling Wiggum and Snake bound and gagged with red balls in their mouths "the sickest visual gag in *Simpsons* history".^[19] The episode is the favorite of British comedian Jimmy Carr who, in 2003, called it "a brilliant pastiche of art cinema".^[20]

4.1. Legacy

Unproduced spin-off

The episode sparked the idea among the staff for a spin-off series entitled *Springfield Stories*^[21] or simply *Springfield*.^{[7][22]} The proposed show would focus on the town in general, rather than the Simpson family. Every week would be a different scenario, such as three short stories, an adventure with young Homer, or a story about a background character that was not tied into the Simpson family at all.^[21] According to Bill Oakley, the show wasn't just going to focus on secondary and minor characters, but also in other things that were outside of the normal *Simpsons* universe, with the episodes being "free-form", but Josh Weinstein recalls that executive producer James L. Brooks "didn't go for it".^[2] The idea never resulted in anything, as Groening realized that the staff did not have the manpower to produce another show as well as *The Simpsons*.^{[22][23]} By 2006, the staff maintained that it was something that they would still be interested in doing,^[3] and by 2007 that it "could happen someday".^[23] "22 Short Films About Springfield" also helped inspire the *Futurama* episode "Three Hundred Big Boys".^[4]

"Steamed Hams"



A steamed hamburger, sliced in half. <https://handwiki.org/wiki/index.php?curid=1820580>

In one segment of the episode, titled "Skinner & The Superintendent", Seymour Skinner invents the term "steamed hams" to refer to hamburgers, claiming that it is an expression in the regional dialect of Albany, New York. Starting in late 2016, over two decades from the episode's premiere, the scene gained renewed popularity in Facebook groups and pages relating to *The Simpsons*. It has also spawned numerous parody and remix videos on YouTube, many of them featuring "Steamed Hams But ..." in their titles, including some videos from an original Seattle–Tacoma Fox-affiliated KCPQ broadcast.^{[24][25]}

In 2016, 20 years after the episode aired, around 1000 people commented on its Facebook page of Australian supermarket chain Woolworths inquiring about "steamed hams". The company responded by posting an image of hams with the caption, "We've received a lot of feedback from you all in the last 24 hours about whether we stock 'Steamed Hams'. Please note that in Australia, we call them Hamburgers. 'Steamed Hams' is an Albany, New York expression. Fans of *The Simpsons*, this is for you."^[26] The continuing popularity of the segment caused an upsurge in fan-made YouTube remixes and variants.^[27] In January 2018, Bill Oakley, the writer of the segment, posted the original draft for the segment on Twitter.^[28] He said it believed it was the most famous thing he had written, and one of his favorites.^[7]

In April 2018, a reporter for GameSpot, during an interview with actor Jeff Goldblum for the video game *Jurassic World Evolution*, had Goldblum read the part of Skinner in a reenactment of the scene. Goldblum commented at the end of the read: "I like the writing, too—that was from what?"^[29] Oakley responded immediately on Twitter, writing "[I'm] not a fan of fairly big companies like GameSpot having famous actors perform scripts I wrote, verbatim, without giving me any sort of credit whatsoever." The video was taken down within days of its posting.^[30]

In an April 2021 interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Oakley, Weinstein, animation director Jim Reardon, voice actor Hank Azaria and current *Simpsons* showrunner Al Jean shared their thoughts about the "Steamed Hams" popularity. Azaria said he was confused about how popular the segment had become. Reardon became aware of it when his daughters pointed it out a few years ago. They shared their favorite "Steamed Hams" parodies, including one made with Lego animation, one animating the characters with the song "Take On Me" or one featuring the vocals of Green Day. Weinstein said that Groening also enjoyed the phenomenon.^[7]

References

- Groening, Matt (1997). Richmond, Ray; Coffman, Antonia. eds. *The Simpsons: A Complete Guide to Our Favorite Family*. Created by Matt Groening; edited by Ray Richmond and Antonia Coffman. (1st ed.). New York: HarperPerennial. pp. 202–203. ISBN 978-0-06-095252-5. OCLC 37796735. .
<https://archive.org/details/simpsonscomplete00groe/page/202>
- Oakley, Bill (2006). *The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield"* (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
- Weinstein, Josh (2006). *The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield"* (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
- Cohen, David (2006). *The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield"* (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
- Appel, Richard (2006). *The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield"* (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
- Reardon, Jim (2006). *The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield"* (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
- Parker, Ryan (April 14, 2021). "'Steamed Hams' at 25: 'Simpsons' Cast and Crew Attempt to Decipher Classic Moment's Extraordinary Cult Following". *The Hollywood Reporter*.
<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/steamed-hams-at-25-simpsons-cast-and-crew-attempt-to-decipher-classic-moments-extraordinary-cult-following>.
- Pulido, Rachel (2006). *The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield"* (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
- Murray, Noel (2010-03-25). "The Simpsons, '22 Short Films About Springfield'". *The A.V. Club*.
<http://www.avclub.com/articles/the-simpsons-22-short-films-about-springfield,39518/>.
- "Nielsen ratings/April 26-May 2". *Long Beach Press-Telegram*. 1993-05-05. p. C–6.
- Madden, Damian (2002-03-31). "Simpsons: Film Festival". *DVD Bits*. <http://www.dvdbits.com/reviews.asp?id=949>.

12. Katz, Mathew (2019-11-11). "The best classic Simpsons episodes on Disney+". Digital Trends.
13. "A Dozen Doozies". TV Guide. January 3–9, 1998. <http://www.simpsonsarchive.com/other/articles/dozendoozies.html>.
14. "The Family Dynamic". Entertainment Weekly. 2003-01-29. http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,417748_3,00.html. Retrieved 2007-05-09.
15. "The Simpsons' Top 30 Episodes". Consequence of Sound. 2019-12-17. <https://consequenceofsound.net/2019/12/the-simpsons-top-30-episodes/>.
16. Molumby, Deidre (September 6, 2019). "The 10 greatest 'The Simpsons' episodes of all time". Entertainment.ie. <https://entertainment.ie/tv/tv-news/10-greatest-the-simpsons-episodes-of-all-time-418495/>.
17. Belam, Martin (November 28, 2019). "The Simpsons: the five greatest episodes in the iconic show's history". The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/nov/28/the-simpsons-the-five-greatest-episodes-in-the-iconic-shows-history>.
18. Goldman, Eric; Iverson, Dan; Zoromski, Brian (2006-09-08). "The Simpsons: 17 Seasons, 17 Episodes". <http://uk.tv.ign.com/articles/731/731095p2.html>.
19. Kennedy, Colin (September 2004). "The Ten Best Movie Gags In The Simpsons". Empire: 77.
20. Hunter, Jo; Mattin, David; Richards, Jonathan; Greenwood, Phoebe; Hazlehurst, Jeremy (2003-04-14). "Why there's no place like Homer's". The Times: p. 24.
21. Groening, Matt (2006). The Simpsons The Complete Seventh Season DVD commentary for the episode "22 Short Films About Springfield" (DVD). 20th Century Fox.
22. Jeffery, Morgan (2014-12-12). "The Simpsons spinoff was once planned, reveals ex-showrunner". <http://www.digitalspy.com/tv/s195/the-simpsons/news/a613896/the-simpsons-spinoff-was-once-planned-reveals-ex-showrunner.html>.
23. Richards, Olly (2007-05-24). "Life In Development Hell". Empire: 76.
24. "'Simpsons' Unkillable 'Steamed Hams' Meme Explained". 28 August 2018. <https://www.thewrap.com/simpsons-steamed-hams-explained/>.
25. "How a 20-year-old 'Simpsons' joke about steamed hams became a huge meme". 17 January 2018. <https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/steamed-hams-simpsons-meme/>.
26. "Hundreds Of People Won't Stop Asking This Grocery Store For Steamed Hams". BuzzFeed. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/bradesposito/thousands-of-people-keep-asking-this-grocery-store>.
27. Frank, Allegra (2018-01-04). "The internet revives The Simpsons' greatest joke, 'Steamed Hams': Let us now praise 'Steamed Hams'". <https://www.polygon.com/2018/1/2/16842564/steamed-hams-meme-the-simpsons>.
28. Oakley, Bill [@thatbilloakley] (2018-01-04). "Steamed Hams, but it's the original first draft in a thread". <https://twitter.com/thatbilloakley/status/949044048370614273>.
29. "'Steamed Hams' reaches its zenith with Jeff Goldblum as Principal Skinner". The A.V. Club. <https://news.avclub.com/steamed-hams-reaches-its-zenith-with-jeff-goldblum-as-1824255065>.
30. "A 'Steamed Hams' Meme With Jeff Goldblum Is Gone Thanks To A Simpsons Writer". Pedestrian.TV. <https://www.pedestrian.tv/news/steamed-hams-jeff-goldblum-meme-gone-simpsons/>.

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/79667>