

# Simpsons season opener leaves viewers reaching for their Duff

MIKE  
KENDRICK



Some time not so long ago, you could turn on your television set on a Sunday evening and be treated to the timeless quips and hilarious antics of the yellow-skinned family known as the Simpsons. Each episode packed in 23 solid minutes of laughter and talented writing from entertainment greats, along with some thought-provoking social commentary.

Sadly, around the ninth or tenth season of the show's run, the laughter started to quiet, and fans knew that the golden age was over. *The Simpsons* would never be the same again.

And yet, after being assaulted by an endless barrage of marketing and hype more encompassing than Mr Burns' sun-blocking disc this summer, millions of fans worldwide decided to give Matt Groening's entourage a second chance. *The Simpsons Movie* opened in theatres with a bang, breaking several box office records and grossing \$30.7 million on its opening day in the US alone.

Remarkably, it wasn't terrible. Veteran writers of the show's glory years were brought back: Albert Brooks, John Schwarzwelder, and George Meyer each graced the screenplay with their magic touch, reminding us of the days when Homer's stupidity still had a charming wit, and he wasn't just playing catch-up

with Peter Griffin. While it was no Season 6, the film packed several memorable gags paying homage to earlier seasons, with references that only the most devoted of fans would catch. And despite destroying the entire town of Springfield (relax, it's not that big of a spoiler), it sparked a renewed hope for the new season ahead.

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Premiering this Sunday past, *The Simpsons'* 19th season had some great expectations to live up to. Things started off well, with the opening sequence promising the same Grade-A material that the movie had brought back from the show's archives. Picking up where the film left off, Bart performs his skateboard routine through Springfield, now in shambles and being rebuilt by its residents. Even Spider Pig, the surprise hit star from the movie, makes an appearance in the couch gag, raising spirits for the episode to come.

However, the opening act is no different than any that the show

has been spewing out for the past six or seven seasons. A basic setup, complete with needless slapstick and a stupid Homer act (hey, Al Jean, we get it: Homer isn't smart), is crammed into the first few minutes before jetting ahead into a main plot that's completely unrelated to the prologue. Throw in an unnecessary celebrity cameo by Lionel Richie dumbing down his own lyrics with a Homerized rendition of "Say You, Say Me," and the episode puts the shows directly on course for yet another disaster of a season.

And suddenly, after the commercial break, a mysterious stranger enters from stage left. Could it be? Is that—why, yes it is! Stephen Colbert, playing a character who's not Stephen Colbert! Alright, maybe he looks like Colbert, and dresses like Colbert, and uses all of the same Colberisms that Colbert himself uses, but in a casting choice that hasn't even been considered recently, a celebrity providing only his voice for an original character is a welcome change in the world of *Simpsons* cameos.

Sadly, Colbert's appearance is truly the peak of the episode. Followed by the overused "Homer gets a new job" angle and yet another needless musical montage, the episode quickly sinks back down into the depths whence it came, to await a fan of less discriminating tastes.

As most fans know, *The Simpsons* has been on the air for about five years too many—it's about time for the show to make like Bleeding Gums Murphy and Dr Marvin Monroe and head up to that big cartoon retirement home in the sky.



NADIYA BALUKH

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