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# The Simpsons

"People love to see a bare ass." – Audio commentary for "Homie the Clown"

*The Simpsons: The Complete Sixth Season DVD Review*

By Kay Daly

Writing *Simpsons* reviews is no walk in the park. I just get done praising season five in the kind of hyperbolic terms that would make a supermodel blush, and they go and release season six. So please, wipe from your mind anything I may have said previously about season five being "the best season ever." For now, and until I get a chance to review season seven, I must declare that season six takes the cake.

Why? Well, it's not really a difference in quality. Both seasons are beautifully executed, blending richly comic characterizations with spot-on parody and satire.

But season six adds a little something more—something I like to call "the crazy." Not that season five wasn't willing to go over the top, what with its intense movie parodies and lavish musical numbers. In season six, though, the slap-happiness turns sidewise, producing a subtler yet paradoxically more manic tone.

Of course, there is still an abundance of straightforward parody. The season opens with "Bart of Darkness," which weaves the story of the family's new swimming pool with a terrific reworking of Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (Hitchcock fans will recognize some frames designed in perfect imitation of scenes from the original). Film parody appears again in "Sideshow Bob Roberts," in which Lisa and Bart take an unexpected side trip into *All the President's Men* while investigating an ex-con's run for mayor, and "Fear of Flying," with Marge's *The Prince of Tides*-inspired foray into psychoanalysis. The season's installment of "Treehouse of Terror" (the annual Halloween episode) sends up *The Shining*, as Homer goes mad from lack of beer and TV. Disney similarly gets the barb in "Itchy and Scratchy Land," which depicts a theme park founded by a famous cartoonist who was "was loved by all, except in 1938, when he was heavily criticized for his controversial release 'Nazi Supermen Are Our Superiors.'"

The season also parodies the conventions of its own medium, television. There's "A Star is Burns," which spoofs of the "crossover event" with a guest appearance by *The Critic's* Jay Sherman (orchestrated to build an audience for the new show). And, of course, the season closes with the show's most elaborate parody of both a classic show (*Dallas*) and a TV convention (the cliffhanger) with "Who Shot Mr. Burns," a murder mystery whose solution is left dangling until the start of season seven.

And yet, the season's real signature is the way it blends balls-out parody with more wide-ranging references to less obvious cultural touchstones, and interjects moments of utter



**:: Features ::**

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- "The Simpsons Plane"

randomness to nudge each episode from satire to surrealism.

Take, for instance, "Homer Bad Man," which features one of the season's best musical moments (and a thumbnail-sized Disney parody), Homer's ditty "Under the Sea." Dogged by an accusation of sexual harassment, Homer escapes from bitter reality by imagining himself—yes—under the sea, where he sings a merry (and familiar) Calypso tune while eating all the Disney-esque sea creatures within range. The musical parody we've seen before, but this foray into hallucinogenic non-sequitur? That's new.

And what of "Two Dozen and One Greyhounds," a sly Disney rip-off in which Santa's Little Helper and friends take the place of the 101 Dalmatians? It's straightforward parody, but then there's Burns' repeated insistence that his favorite pup cannot be killed because of his striking resemblance to Hollywood B-actor Rory Calhoun. The writers' willingness to hinge the resolution of the plot on this bizarre and arbitrary detail is just one example of this season's cockeyed approach to storytelling.

This sense of unfettered whimsy appears in other episodes, which range freely over the whole of the American cultural imagination. In "Homer the Great," Homer is hailed as the predestined leader of the Stonecutters, a secret organization eerily similar to the Freemasons, and in "A Star is Burns," Bart apes little known '50s psychic, The Amazing Criswell of *Plan 9 from Outer Space* fame. References like these are so obscure they quickly shift the comedy from run-of-the-mill parody into the realm of Pythonesque surrealism.

Possibly because of this willingness to grasp at any comic straw, season six is packed with some of the most memorable *Simpsons* moments. The writers, now comfortable with the basic contours of their characters, seem committed to pushing these familiar figures into strange new territory. Thus, Homer goes to clown college ("Homie the Clown"). Marge becomes a cop ("The Springfield Connection"). Lisa almost marries a Brit ("Lisa's Wedding"). Bart causes an international incident ("Bart vs. Australia"). And Barney becomes the darling of the art film crowd, in the process coining a classic *Simpsons* sentiment, "Don't cry for me, I'm already dead" ("A Star is Burns").

This delight in warping, skewing and otherwise messing with the familiar *Simpsons* crowd comes to a head in the penultimate episode of the season, the preposterously epic "Lemon of Troy." Here, Bart and a team of pre-teen adventurers invade neighboring Shelbyville after their beloved lemon tree (a Springfield landmark) has been stolen. What they find is an eerie, looking-glass double of their hometown, where Bart is distressed to discover his hi-jinks are unknown, and Milhouse finds comfort in meeting someone who shares his unusual first name ("So this is what I sounds like," he says while embracing his double, "when doves cry").

Throughout the season, the *Simpsons* producers marshal the usual crowd of celebrity guest stars. We're treated to legends of movie and stage, including Meryl Streep as a pre-teen temptress ("Bart's Girlfriend"), Patrick Stewart as the head of the Stonecutters ("Homer the Great"), and the late, great Anne Bancroft as Marge's shrink ("Fear of Flying"). Winona Ryder shows up as Lisa's worst nightmare, a better student and sax player ("Lisa's Rival"), and Mandy Patinkin takes the role of her future fiancé ("Lisa's Wedding"). We also get brief cameos from Dick Cavett and Johnny Unitas ("Homie the Clown"), Steve Allen ("Round Springfield"), Tito Puente ("Who Shot Mr. Burns, Part 1"), and nearly the entire gang from *Cheers* ("Fear of Flying"). And, of course, Kelsey Grammer (Sideshow Bob), Joe Mantegna (Fat Tony) and Jon Lovitz (Jay Sherman) make their habitual guest turns.

The twenty-two episodes of season six are presented on four discs, along with a heaping helping of extras on the final disk. The packaging of season six has drawn fire from fans, and with good reason. Packed in a flimsy, unwieldy molding of Homer's head, the collection seems clever until you try open it or even store it on your book shelf. It flops over uncontrollably, and is difficult to open. Cuteness factor: A. Practicality: D-. Go back to the

drawing board, guys.

### Video and Audio

Per usual, video and audio are perfectly fine.

The audio is available in English 5.1, French Surround 2.0, and Spanish Surround 2.0. English, French and Spanish subtitles are also included.

### Extras

It's heresy to say it, but the creators and cast of *The Simpsons* could probably lay off all the audio commentaries. They're incredibly generous—providing commentaries for all episodes, featuring an ever-changing slate of cast, crew, directors, and producers—but really, they've run out of things to say. Only a few episodes offer interesting, situation-specific comments ("Who Shot Mr. Burns" is a chief example), but much of the track starts to sound like re-tread. There, I said it.

In addition the commentaries, this collection provides deleted scenes, a parody of *America's Most Wanted* created to promote the "Who Shot Mr. Burns" episode, an amusing intro by the show's creator Matt Groening, a short featurette about "The *Simpsons* Plane," and a rather pointless collection of commercials feature the Simpson family.

### Summary

Awkward packaging should not deter any hard-core *Simpsons* fan from checking out this collection. The writers and producers strike a chord of crazy which only intensifies in later seasons. And with classic episodes such as "A Star is Burns" and "Fear of Flying," the season is full to the brim with the best of the best.

5/1/06



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