

= Marge vs. the Monorail =

" Marge vs. the Monorail " is the twelfth episode of The Simpsons ' fourth season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on January 14 , 1993 . The plot revolves around Springfield 's impulse purchase of a faulty monorail from a conman . The episode was written by Conan O 'Brien and directed by Rich Moore . Phil Hartman provided the voice of Lyle Lanley , while the American actor Leonard Nimoy made a guest appearance as himself .

The episode has been widely praised by fans and critics and is frequently cited as being among the best and funniest of the series . Writer Conan O 'Brien has claimed that , of the Simpsons episodes that he wrote , this was his favorite . Leonard Nimoy 's unexpected guest appearance was also widely praised . Despite this , the episode attracted some criticism when it was first aired due to the somewhat abstract and less situational nature of the plot , particularly from voice actor Yeardley Smith who in 1995 described the episode as " truly one of our worst " .

= = Plot = =

After being caught by the Environmental Protection Agency dumping nuclear waste in the city park , Mr. Burns is fined \$ 3 million . A town meeting is held so that the citizens can decide how to spend the money . Marge suggests that the city use the money to fix Main Street , which is in poor condition . The town is about to vote in favor when someone new to town , a fast @-@ talking salesman named Lyle Lanley , suggests that Springfield construct a city monorail . After being swayed by a song , the now enthused townspeople decide to build the monorail .

Even though Lanley succeeds in winning over almost the entire town , his salesmanship fails to convince Marge , who is frustrated with the town 's purchase because she (correctly) believes the monorail is unsafe and that Lanley is a conman . While watching TV , Homer sees an advertisement that suggests he attend Lanley 's institute of monorail conducting , which is a transparent effort to make even more money from the con . Homer immediately decides to enroll . After a three @-@ week course , Lanley selects Homer at random from among his classmates to be the monorail conductor .

Still annoyed about the town 's lack of understanding of the monorail , Marge visits Lanley to question his motives , and discovers a notebook containing drawings which reveal Lanley 's intention to run off with bags of money skimmed from the monorail project while everyone else falls victim to his faulty train . Marge immediately drives to North Haverbrook , which Lanley mentioned was a previous purchaser of one of his monorails . She discovers that the town is in ruins . While exploring , Marge meets Sebastian Cobb , the engineer who designed Lanley 's North Haverbrook monorail . Cobb explains that Lanley embezzled construction funds through shoddy workmanship and materials , and that the entire project was a scam . Realizing Marge believes him , he offers his assistance in helping to prevent the same fate from happening to Springfield .

At the maiden voyage of the Springfield monorail , Lanley arranges for a well @-@ attended opening ceremony , which will divert the town 's attention while he escapes on a plane to Tahiti . The whole town turns out , and Leonard Nimoy is the guest of honor . The monorail departs just before Marge and Cobb arrive . Although it runs normally at the start , the controls soon malfunction and cause it to speed wildly around the track . Homer , Bart , and the passengers are in danger , but the monorail 's electricity cannot be shut off because of its solar power .

Meanwhile , Lanley 's flight to Tahiti is interrupted by a brief and unexpected stopover in North Haverbrook . The townsfolk are alerted to his presence and they storm the plane to attack Lanley as revenge for ruining their town . Back in Springfield , Marge and Cobb contact Homer by radio and Cobb tells Homer that he will need to find an anchor in order to stop the train . Improvising quickly , Homer pries loose the giant metal " M " from the logo on the side of the monorail 's engine , ties a rope to it , and throws it from the train . Eventually the " M " catches on the sign of a doughnut shop and the rope holds , stopping the monorail and saving its passengers .

= = Production = =

Conan O'Brien conceived the idea when he saw a billboard that just had the word " Monorail " on it , with no other details or explanation . He first pitched this episode at a story retreat to Al Jean and Mike Reiss , who said the episode was a little crazy and thought he should try some other material first . O'Brien had previously pitched episodes where Lisa had a rival and where Marge gets a job at the power plant and Burns falls in love with her ; both went well . James L. Brooks " absolutely loved " this episode when O'Brien presented it .

Leonard Nimoy was not originally considered for the role as the celebrity at the maiden voyage of the monorail , as the writing staff did not think he would accept , because William Shatner had previously turned the show down . Instead , George Takei was asked to guest star as he had appeared on the show once before . After demanding several script changes , Takei declined , saying he did not want to make fun of public transportation as he was a member of the board of directors of the Southern California Rapid Transit District . As a result , the staff went to Nimoy , who accepted .

= = Cultural references = =

The episode is a partial spoof of the 1962 film *The Music Man* , with " The Monorail Song " strongly resembling the *Music Man* 's " Ya Got Trouble " and with Lyle Lanley being a doppelganger for Harold Hill .

The episode starts with a tribute song to *The Flintstones* as Homer heads home from work and crashes his car into a chestnut tree . Later , Leonard Nimoy makes a guest appearance as himself . References are made to his role in *Star Trek : The Original Series* , and an allusion to his role as the host of *In Search of ...* from 1976 to 1982 . Kyle Darren , the caricature of Luke Perry star of *Beverly Hills , 90210* , appears as well . Mayor Quimby uses the phrase " May the Force be with you " from the *Star Wars* franchise , confusing it with Nimoy 's work on *Star Trek* (and ? at the same time ? believing Nimoy to have been " one of The Little Rascals ") . Homer 's Monorail conductor uniform is based on uniforms from *Star Wars* . When Mr. Burns is brought into the court room , he is restrained in the same way as Hannibal Lecter in the film *The Silence of the Lambs* . Homer briefly serenades Marge in their bedroom with a line from the folk song " The Riddle Song " .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " Marge vs. the Monorail " finished 30th in the ratings for the week of January 11 to January 17 , 1993 , with a Nielsen rating of 13 @. @ 7 . The episode was the highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week .

" Marge vs. the Monorail " has frequently been selected in lists of the show 's best episodes . In 2003 , *Entertainment Weekly* released a list of its Top 25 episodes , ranking this episode in fourth , saying " the episode has arguably the highest throwaway @-@ gag @-@ per @-@ minute ratio of any Simpsons , and all of them are laugh @-@ out @-@ loud funny . " In his book *Planet Simpson* , Chris Turner named the episode as being one of his five favorites . In 2006 , *IGN.com* named the episode the best of the fourth season . John Ortved of *Vanity Fair* called it the third best episode of the show , due to , " An amazing musical number ; Leonard Nimoy in a random guest appearance ... Besides being replete with excellent jokes , this episode reveals the town 's mob mentality and its collective lack of reason . This is the episode that defines Springfield more than any other . " In 2010 , Michael Moran of *The Times* ranked the episode as the ninth best in the show 's history .

The authors of the book *I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide* , Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , called it " an unsurpassed episode . It 's hard to know where to start dishing out the praise ? Leonard Nimoy 's guest appearance , the Monorail song , Marge 's narration , the truck full of popcorn ... " Robert Canning of *IGN* strongly praised the episode , stating " It is by far one of the most loved episodes of *The Simpsons* and can safely be called a classic by any fan . From beginning to end , there 's joke after joke after hilarious joke . There 's nothing in this half @-@ hour that doesn 't work , and no matter how many times I watch this

episode , it never , ever gets old . " Todd VanDerWerff of Slant Magazine named it the show 's best episode , stating " It 's the one you think of when you think of a Simpsons episode " , and is " maybe the show 's funniest , and it most perfectly encapsulates what may be the show 's overriding theme : People are really stupid and self @-@ serving , but if you give them long enough , they 'll eventually bumble toward the right answer . "

Leonard Nimoy 's appearance as himself has been praised as being one of the show 's best guest appearances . In a list of the 25 greatest guest voices on the show , released September 5 , 2006 , IGN.com ranked Leonard Nimoy at 11th . Nathan Ditum ranked his performance as the 13th best guest appearance in the show 's history . Nimoy would make a second guest appearance in season eight 's " The Springfield Files " .

Conan O 'Brien has said that of all the episodes of The Simpsons he wrote , this is his favorite . Homer 's lines " I call the big one Bitey " and " Doughnuts , is there anything they can 't do ? " are among series creator Matt Groening 's favorite lines .

Conversely , the episode was not initially well received by many fans of the show 's earlier seasons , as it was a particularly absurd early example of the show taking a more joke @-@ based cartoon approach to comedy , rather than the more realistic situational style of comedy it had employed in its first few years . In 1995 , during the production of the seventh season , Yeardley Smith said of the episode as " truly one of our worst ? we [the entire cast] all agree " .

In 2012 , " Marge vs. the Monorail " was the second @-@ place finisher in a Splitsider reader poll to decide on the best episode of any television sitcom , losing to the Community episode " Remedial Chaos Theory " .

Conan O 'Brien and Hank Azaria performed the monorail song live at the Hollywood Bowl from September 12 ? 14 , 2014 as part of the show " The Simpsons Take The Bowl " .