

= Grift of the Magi =

" Grift of the Magi " is the ninth episode of the eleventh season of the American animated television sitcom The Simpsons . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on December 19 , 1999 . In the episode , mafia boss Fat Tony successfully extorts a large sum of money from Springfield Elementary School , forcing Principal Skinner to close it down . However , a toy company called Kid First Industries , led by Jim Hope , later buys the school and privatizes it . Classes now start focusing on toys and marketing only , and soon a new toy called Funzo that resembles the children 's ideas is released by Kid First Industries in time for the Christmas shopping season . Bart and Lisa decide to destroy all Funzos in Springfield but Gary Coleman , Kid First Industries ' security guard , tries to intercept them .

" Grift of the Magi " , which satirizes the commercialization of Christmas , was written by Tom Martin and directed by Matthew Nastuk . The episode features several guest appearances ; Tim Robbins as Jim Hope , Gary Coleman as himself , Joe Mantegna as Fat Tony , and Clarence Clemons as a narrator that tells the viewers at the end of the episode how the story ends .

Around 7 @. @ 76 million American homes tuned in to watch the episode during its original airing . It was first released on DVD in 2003 in a collection of five Christmas @-@ related Simpsons episodes , titled Christmas With the Simpsons . Critics have given " Grift of the Magi " generally mixed to negative reviews , particularly because of its plot . The episode has , however , been praised for some of its gags and Coleman 's appearance .

= = Plot = =

Bart and Milhouse have to remain inside the Simpsons ' house when an ozone hole moves over Springfield . The two dress up as ladies and jump on the bed , singing " Sisters Are Doin ' It for Themselves " . When Homer comes in abruptly , Bart falls off of the bed and lands on one of Homer 's bowling balls and breaks his coccyx . Dr. Hibbert informs Homer and Marge that Bart will have to use a wheelchair until the bone has healed . When Bart arrives at Springfield Elementary School the following day , he finds that he cannot enter because the school lacks ramps for the disabled . As Principal Skinner considers a ramp for the school , mafia boss Fat Tony emerges and suggests that his construction company would be a good choice of company to build it . Although the new ramp system almost immediately collapses , Fat Tony informs Skinner that the construction supposedly cost US \$ 200 @, @ 000 and that the school will still have to pay . In response , Principal Skinner decides to close Springfield Elementary due to lack of funds (having used them to pay off Fat Tony and thus avoid brutal mob reprisals) .

All pleas for financial help are in vain , including a private school play performed in front of Mr. Burns at his mansion , until Jim Hope , the president of a company named Kid First Industries , buys the school and privatizes it . The school 's staff is replaced , and classes now focus on toys and marketing . Lisa soon discovers that the company that bought Springfield Elementary is a toy company , using students for research to make a new popular toy in time for the Christmas shopping season . She is then frightened by the appearance of a robotic figure . When Bart and Lisa are back at home , watching television , they see an advertisement for a toy named Funzo . It has many features suggested by Springfield Elementary students during a brainstorming session at the school . They visit Jim Hope 's office to complain , and he apologetically gives them a free Funzo toy . Bart and Lisa later discover that Funzo is programmed to destroy other toys .

On Christmas Eve , with Homer 's help , the two steal all the Funzo toys from underneath every Christmas tree in Springfield with the intention of burning them in the town 's long @-@ running tire fire . However , Gary Coleman , who is a security guard at Kid First Industries , comes to stop them . The two parties argue all night until the next morning when they settle down into civilized discussion about the commercialization of Christmas . Coleman changes his opinion about the toy company and helps the Simpsons destroy the remaining functioning Funzo toys that were not destroyed in the tire fire . Afterwards , Homer invites Coleman to Christmas dinner at the Simpson family 's house , where Mr. Burns shows up after deciding to donate money to Springfield Elementary following an

epiphany he had that night .

= = Production = =

" Grift of the Magi " was written by Tom Martin and directed by Matthew Nastuk as part of the eleventh season of The Simpsons (1999 ? 2000) . It was the first episode that Martin wrote on his own , having previously co - @ - @ written the season ten episode " Sunday , Cruddy Sunday " with George Meyer , Brian Scully , and The Simpsons showrunner Mike Scully . Martin got the inspiration for " Grift of the Magi " after reading a magazine article about how major companies were receiving permission to advertise their products in school students ' textbooks . He thought it " seemed like a gigantic conflict that could lead to big problems " , and therefore believed an episode based on it would be a good idea . According to DVD Talk reviewer Adam Tyner , the episode is a satire of the commercialization of Christmas . A writer for Newsday has commented that episode skewers " the annual craze for that one ' hot ' toy . " This has also been pointed out by Mike Scully , who said in 2008 that " Grift of the Magi " was produced around the time when " every year there seemed to be a hot toy . Like the Furbies , or whatever ? some toy that kids just had to have that year . " In response to Scully 's comment , Martin added that every year " the media would create this gigantic rush at the toy store for various things . This [episode] was coming on the heels of , yeah , the Furby . "

Guest stars in the episode include Tim Robbins as Jim Hope , Gary Coleman as himself , Joe Mantegna as Fat Tony , and Clarence Clemons as a narrator . Scully thought Robbins " did a great job " because the Simpsons staff wanted the character of Jim Hope to be " fun and upbeat and somebody the kids would love . " Clemons narrates a few scenes at the end of the episode , telling the viewers how the story ends . When Coleman agrees to spend Christmas with the Simpsons , Clemons says , for example : " And Gary Coleman was as good as his word , and as for old Mr. Burns , he was visited by three ghosts during the night and agreed to fund the school with some money he found in his tuxedo pants . " Shortly after Coleman 's death in 2010 , an article appeared in the newspaper El Comercio that noted that " the nod to the harsh reality of Gary Coleman in [the episode] is given : in real life a few years ago Gary had to make a living as a shop security guard . "

= = Release = =

" Grift of the Magi " originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on December 19 , 1999 . It was viewed in approximately 7 @ . @ 76 million households that night . With a Nielsen rating of 7 @ . @ 7 , the episode finished 39th in the ratings for the week of December 13 ? 19 , 1999 (tied with an episode of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) ' s 20 / 20) . It was the second highest @ - @ rated broadcast on Fox that week , following an episode of Ally McBeal (which received a 9 @ . @ 9 rating) . On October 14 , 2003 , " Grift of the Magi " was released in the United States on a DVD collection titled Christmas With the Simpsons , along with the season one episode " Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire " , the season four episode " Mr. Plow " , the season nine episode " Miracle on Evergreen Terrace " , and the season thirteen episode " She of Little Faith " . On October 7 , 2008 , the episode was released on DVD again as part of the box set The Simpsons ? The Complete Eleventh Season . Staff members Martin , Scully , Meyer , Matt Groening , Ian Maxtone @ - @ Graham , Matt Selmán , Tim Long , and Lance Kramer participated in the DVD audio commentary for " Grift of the Magi " . Deleted scenes from the episode were also included on the box set .

Since airing , " Grift of the Magi " has received generally mixed to negative reception from critics . While reviewing the eleventh season of The Simpsons , DVD Movie Guide 's Colin Jacobson commented that the episode " feels like an amalgamation of elements from prior holiday programs and never really elicits much humor . Christmas is commercialized and corporations use and abuse their customers ? Those aren ' t exactly rich insights , so [' Grift of the Magi '] comes across as a below average episode . " In his review of the DVD Christmas With the Simpsons , Digitally

Obsessed critic Joel Cunningham wrote that the episode " comes from Season 11 , well past the point when the series had sacrificed character for absurdist humor . Unless you don 't think evil toy marketers , sentient Furbys , and Gary Coleman qualify . Anyway , after the school nearly goes bankrupt , Principal Skinner signs a contract with corporate backers who use the kids to conduct market research . There are some good gags , but the story doesn 't hang together very well . " Adam Tyner of DVD Talk argued that the episode " has a couple of good gags (Gary Coleman chatting on the phone being my favorite) but is quickly forgettable " . Brian James of PopMatters described Coleman 's cameo as " hysterical " in 2004 , and Meghan Lewit of the same website listed " Grift of the Magi " at number eight on her 2009 list of the " 10 best holiday themed TV episodes . "