

= Homer the Heretic =

" Homer the Heretic " is the third episode of The Simpsons ' fourth season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on October 8 , 1992 . In the episode , Homer decides to forgo going to church and has an excellent time staying home . His behavior quickly attracts the wrath of God , who visits him in a dream . The episode was written by George Meyer and directed by Jim Reardon . The chalkboard gag from this episode was a reference to the previous episode " A Streetcar Named Marge " , which had made controversial references to New Orleans .

= = Plot = =

On a freezing Sunday morning , Marge gathers the family to go to church . Homer refuses to go , much to her annoyance and dismay , after he sees the weather outside and accidentally tears his church trousers . Staying behind , he sleeps in late , dances in his underwear (à la Tom Cruise in the film Risky Business) , makes his special waffle recipe , wins a radio trivia contest , watches an action @-@ packed football game , and finds a penny . Homer attributes his good fortune to skipping church and declares it the best day of his life . Meanwhile , Marge and the kids shiver their way through a rambling sermon , only to find themselves trapped at the end since the door has frozen shut . The congregation is forced to stay longer while Groundskeeper Willie defrosts the doors , and then Marge is unable to start her car because of the cold .

When she and the children finally get home , Marge is horrified to hear that Homer intends to never go to church again . She tries to persuade him otherwise , but to no avail . That night , Marge prays for her husband at their bedside . Homer tries to seduce her while she is doing so , but then falls asleep suddenly and has a dream in which God personally appears to him . God is furious with Homer for forsaking his church . Homer answers that " I 'm not a bad guy , I work hard , and I love my kids ... so why should I spend half my Sunday hearing about how I 'm going to hell ? " God agrees to let Homer worship in his own way . Homer starts following his own religion tailored to his personal tastes , including holidays he invents to get out of work .

Marge , Reverend Lovejoy and Ned Flanders attempt without success to bring Homer back to the congregation . One Sunday morning , while everybody else is at church , Homer falls asleep on the couch smoking a cigar , which ignites some magazines and ultimately sets the whole house ablaze . Homer wakes up but quickly succumbs to the thick smoke and faints . Apu , chief of Springfield 's volunteer fire department , rushes to the Simpson house with other firefighters including Krusty the Clown , Chief Wiggum , and Barney Gumble . Meanwhile , Flanders runs into the burning house to rescue Homer and pulls him out just as the firefighters arrive . After the fire is out , Homer declares that God was delivering vengeance . Reverend Lovejoy counters that God was working through the hearts of Homer 's friends , despite their different faiths . Homer agrees to give church another try and the next Sunday is there , albeit snoring loudly through the service . Appearing in his dreams again , God consoles Homer on the failure of his religion . He starts to tell Homer the meaning of life , but is cut off by the ending credits .

= = Production = =

This episode originated when Al Jean commented to Mike Reiss , " We had a lot of luck with Homer stealing cable , which was based on the eighth commandment , so maybe we could look to other commandments . So we thought , ' Honor the Sabbath ' would be a good one . So the ' Homer doesn 't go to church ' storyline was given to George Meyer . " Reiss and Jean thought that as a lapsed Catholic , Meyer would " bring the proper degree of rage " to the episode . Meyer had a lot of fun making the episode , thinking that most people could relate to the bliss of staying home from church . One of the main problems Meyer had writing this episode is that whenever Homer saw God , he had to have fallen asleep so that it appeared to be a dream . Meyer did not want to show that God was literally appearing to Homer . This resulted in him falling asleep so many times during the first draft of the episode that it was almost as if Homer had narcolepsy . This was also the first

episode from season four that was read to the production team . Although first reads on previous seasons had not been well received by the production team , " Homer the Heretic " read very well , particularly some of the visuals in the third act , such as the house on fire and Homer being rescued by Flanders .

This was the first episode of The Simpsons where the animation was produced by Film Roman . Up until this point , Film Roman had mostly worked on Garfield and Friends and Bobby 's World episodes , and were not used to the speed with which The Simpsons episodes were produced . However , they quickly adjusted . Film Roman went on to do the animation for the rest of the series and eventually The Simpsons Movie . Previously , the animation was produced by Klasky Csupo .

The chalkboard gag for this episode , " I will not defame New Orleans " , was made as an apology to the citizens of New Orleans after it was musically insulted in the previous episode .

Along with " Mr. Plow " , a later episode of this season , this is one of the few television episodes that prominently featured snow outside of Christmas or Thanksgiving centric episodes .

In the scene in which Jimi Hendrix and Benjamin Franklin play a game of air hockey in Heaven , Hendrix was supposed to have a speaking line of his own to respond to Jefferson 's line . It was cut late during production because the voice actor for Hendrix did not sound enough like Hendrix . Jefferson 's line was kept because " nobody knows what he sounds like " , whereas Hendrix had a distinct voice .

The abrupt cutting off of God 's voice before he reveals the meaning of life was intended to be cut off by a voiceover promotion for whatever FOX program aired after The Simpsons . However , FOX did not pick up on this and so God 's voice was instead cut off by the show 's credits .

= = Cultural references = =

The brand label on Homer 's shower radio reads " No @-@ Soap , Radio ! " , so @-@ named for the punch line of a well @-@ known practical joke . The scene where Homer dances in his underwear to the Royal Teens song " Short Shorts " is almost identical to a scene in the 1983 Tom Cruise film , Risky Business . The burning floor collapsing beneath Flanders ' feet is a reference to the film Backdraft .

= = Reception = =

In its original broadcast , " Homer the Heretic " finished 36th in ratings for the week of October 5 ? 11 , 1992 , with a Nielsen rating of 12 @.@ 0 , equivalent to approximately 11 @.@ 2 million viewing households . It was the second highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week , following Married ... with Children . Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , the authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , loved the episode . They described it as " A brilliant episode , underlining everything that The Simpsons is about . Homer hates church , Marge wants the kids to see Homer as an example , and everyone pulls together in the end . Good stuff , and if God really is like that , he 's a groovy kind of guy . " In 2012 , HitFix 's Alan Sepinwall cited the episode as his favorite of the show , writing that it " captures everything that was and is great about the series : social satire , extraordinary quotability (' This Things I Believe ') , a good family story , and an innate sweetness in spite of Homer 's outsized antics . " In 2004 , ESPN.com released a list of the Top 100 Simpsons sport moments , ranking Benjamin Franklin and Jimi Hendrix 's air hockey game , a scene from the episode , at # 83 . The episode 's reference to Risky Business was named the 45th greatest film reference in the history of the show by Total Film 's Nathan Ditum .

The writers of the FOX program King of the Hill put " Homer the Heretic " among the five best episodes of The Simpsons , including " Brother from the Same Planet " , " Lisa 's Wedding " , " Lisa 's Substitute " , and " Behind the Laughter " . When asked to pick his favorite season out of The Simpsons seasons one through twenty , Paul Lane of the Niagara Gazette picked season four and highlighted " Brother from the Same Planet " and " Mr. Plow " which he called " excellent " , along with " the sweetly funny " " Lisa 's First Word " , and " Homer the Heretic " .

