

= They Saved Lisa 's Brain =

" They Saved Lisa 's Brain " is the twenty @-@ second episode of The Simpsons ' tenth season . It first aired on the Fox network in the United States on May 9 , 1999 . After writing a thoughtful letter to the Springfield Shopper , Lisa is invited to join the Springfield chapter of Mensa . When Mayor Quimby later flees Springfield , the group takes control of the town , hoping to improve the lives of Springfieldians through the rule of the smartest .

" They Saved Lisa 's Brain " was directed by Pete Michels and written by Matt Selman , although the idea for the episode was pitched by former staff writer George Meyer . It featured the first official appearance of Lindsey Naegle and was the first episode in which theoretical physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking guest @-@ starred as himself . The Simpsons staff wanted Hawking to guest @-@ star because they needed someone who would be smarter than all of Springfield 's Mensa members , and because they had heard that he was a fan of the show . The episode features references to Star Trek , painter Vincent van Gogh and architect Frank Lloyd Wright , and mentions the theory of the universe being toroidal , the same shape as a doughnut .

In its original broadcast , " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " was seen by approximately 6 @.@ 8 million viewers , a very low amount for the series . Following the episode 's broadcast , Selman made a controversial statement about East St. Louis , which was pronounced the least livable city in the United States in the episode . While the episode received mixed reviews from critics , Hawking 's appearance garnered critical acclaim , and has since appeared in several lists of best guest appearances on The Simpsons . Hawking has since appeared in three episodes , and an action figure based on his cameos in the series has been produced . Although Hawking has stated that he enjoyed guest @-@ starring on The Simpsons , he has also mentioned that his cameos have made many people mistake him for a fictional character .

= = Plot = =

A low @-@ fat pudding , Grandma Ploppwell 's , is the sponsor of a Springfield contest that promises a luxurious trip to the most disgusting and dimwitted contest participant in town . Many Springfield residents enter the contest , but things do not go well when one of the judges , Rainier Wolfcastle , declares himself the winner for " being seen with you freaks " . The contest ends in a riot and Lisa ends up hit in the face twice with pudding . She denounces Springfield for its anti @-@ intellectualism in an open letter that ends up in the newspaper , for which no one reads . This impresses the Springfield Mensa chapter , which accepts her for membership after Principal Skinner shared her placement tests and she brought them a pie for their latest meeting .

Lisa joins Mensa alongside Comic Book Guy , Dr. Hibbert , Principal Skinner , Professor Frink , and Lindsay Naegle . After the pleasantries , Lisa finds herself at home alongside the Mensa members , whose sense of humor is so esoteric that it is said to be enjoyed by the " Dennis Miller ratio " of Americans . After being bullied out of their reserved gazebo at a park by drunks and Chief Wiggum , they fear that Springfield 's quality is poor because of the city 's stupidest residents having power over their civic institutions . The Mensa group goes to confront Mayor Quimby about the gazebo incident , until he escapes from the city when he mistakenly thinks the group has evidence about his corruption . The town 's constitution states that in the absence of the mayor , the town is to be governed by the smartest by geniocracy . Now in control of Springfield , the group hopes that things will become much better .

Once in control , however , the group allows power to go to their heads . At first they efficiently implement their ideas for Springfield , which include banning green traffic lights and playing only classical music at the dog races , which elevates Springfield past East St. Louis on the list of America 's 300 Most Livable Cities . However , they begin to internally fight over other ideas such as having theaters for shadow puppets and a broccoli juice program , and their wildly unpopular plans at a public meeting ( including the banning of all contact sports and Comic Book Guy 's plan to limit breeding to every 7 years ) further expose the rifts inside the group .

The Springfield townspeople , angered by the new laws , surround the intellectuals in an angry mob

and bring an end to Mensa 's rule . Stephen Hawking has shown up to see what the Mensa group is up to and makes it clear he is unimpressed ; however , he saves Lisa from being seriously injured by the angry townspeople . In the end , Hawking and Homer meet at Moe 's Tavern for a drink . Homer imitates Hawking in an attempt to make him pay the tab and gets punched by a boxing glove on a spring , which is concealed in Hawking 's wheelchair .

In the episode 's other storyline , Homer steals a gift certificate during the post @-@ contest and has erotic photos taken of himself as a gift to Marge , who gets distracted by the interior design Homer did in their basement .

= = Production = =

" They Saved Lisa 's Brain " was written by Matt Selman and directed by Pete Michels . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on May 9 , 1999 . Although the episode 's first draft was written by Selman , the idea for the episode was pitched by former staff writer George Meyer . In the episode 's setpiece , Homer and Bart participate in a gross out contest , while Marge and Lisa are in the audience . According to Selman , the writers took inspiration from real gross out contests , which were " sweeping the nation " at the time . Before the contest in the episode , the spectators are given free samples of a pudding called Grandma Plopwell 's . The name of the pudding was inspired by a brand of pies called Aunt Freshly , which the Simpsons writers usually ate at the time .

The episode features the first official appearance of Lindsey Naegle , a sleazy businesswoman who has since become a recurring character in the series . While different versions of the character had appeared in the series before , namely in the season 8 episode " The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show " , the season 9 episode " Girly Edition " , and the season 10 episode " Make Room for Lisa " , the character 's final design was first seen in " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " . The episode also mentions the character 's name for the first time . Naegle 's name was partly based on Selman 's agent Sue Neagle , and Lindsey was chosen as the first name because Selman thought it sounded " annoying " and " pretentious " . Naegle is voiced by Tress MacNeille , who Selman described as a " huge asset " to the series , and stated that she " breathes life " into the character .

" They Saved Lisa 's Brain " features English theoretical physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking as himself . According to executive producer and current showrunner Al Jean , Hawking was asked to guest @-@ star because " we [ they ] were looking for someone much smarter than all the Mensa members [ in Springfield ] " , and so they " naturally thought of him " . Selman added that the Simpsons staff had heard that Hawking was a fan of the show , and that Hawking 's family members wanted him to guest @-@ star . Bill Mann of The Press Democrat argued that Hawking was chosen to guest star in order to boost the series ' ratings during the May " sweeps " . Mann wrote that " sweeps " are " used to set local TV ad rates for the months ahead " .

In her book *Stephen Hawking : a biography* , Kristen Larsen wrote that Hawking almost missed his recording session , as his wheelchair broke down two days before his flight to Los Angeles , where the recording took place . In order to make the necessary repairs , Hawking 's graduate assistant Chris Burgoyne , aided by a technician , worked a 36 ? hour shift . Hawking was 40 minutes late when he arrived in Los Angeles . When he met the Simpsons staff , he apologized , saying " Sorry for being late . " According to Selman , Hawking was very humble regarding the episode 's jokes about him , and stated that he " took a lot of shots " at himself . The only note that Hawking gave regarding the script was that he did not want to be portrayed as drunk in the episode 's last scene , in which he is discussing astronomy with Homer in Moe 's tavern .

Because of his motor neurone disease , Hawking is unable to speak , and he communicates using a custom @-@ made computer . With small movements of his body , Hawking writes a text onto the computer , which is then spoken by a voice synthesiser . Because of this , Hawking had to write all his lines on his computer , while the staff recorded them by placing a microphone in front of the computer 's speaker . " It 's easy to do a fake Stephen Hawking in your comedy TV show " , Selman said in the DVD commentary for the episode . " Any computer can sound just like his computer , but every line that we wrote for him , he typed in himself and we recorded with our microphones as if had come out of a regular mouth . " Some of Hawking 's lines were difficult to record . In particular ,

the word " Fruitopia " was difficult for Hawking 's computer to " put together " correctly , and it " took forever " to make the word sound right from the voice synthesizer .

= = Themes and cultural references = =

In their book *The Simpsons and philosophy : the d 'oh ! of Homer* , William Irwin , Mark T. Conard and Aeon J. Skoble wrote that " *They Saved Lisa 's Brain* " in detail explores " the possibility of a utopian alternative to politics as usual in Springfield " . They described " *They Saved Lisa 's Brain* " as an " epitome " of The Simpsons diverse comedic humor , and wrote that it can be " enjoyed in two levels " , as both " broad farce " and " intellectual satire " . As an example of the episode 's farcical humor , they referred to the episode 's subplot , which , they wrote , " contains some of the grossest humor in the long history of The Simpsons . " At the same time , the episode is " filled " with what they described as " subtle cultural allusions " , such as the design of Mensa group 's locale , which is based on American architect Frank Lloyd Wright 's house . Likewise , Lisa 's challenge to Springfield calls attention to the " cultural limitations of small @-@ town America " , while the episode also argues that intellectual disdain for the common man can be carried too far and that theory can " all too easily lose touch with common sense " . They also argued that the episode , as well as the series as a whole , offers a kind of intellectual defense of the common man against intellectuals , which they opined " helps explain its popularity and broad appeal [ ... ] [ " *They Saved Lisa 's Brain* " ] defends the common man against the intellectual , in a way that both the common man and the intellectual can understand and enjoy . "

In the last scene in the episode , Hawking and Homer are seen discussing the universe in Moe 's tavern . Scully stated that the scene was included because it " was a chance to get the world 's smartest man and the world 's stupidest man in the same place " . In the scene , Hawking tells Homer " Your theory of a donut @-@ shaped universe is intriguing ... I may have to steal it . " In his book *What 's science ever done for us ? : what The Simpsons can teach us about physics , robots , life and the universe* , Paul Halpern wrote that in mathematics , a " donut @-@ shape " , the three @-@ dimensional generalization of a ring , is referred to as a torus . The generalization of a torus , any closed curve spun in a circle around an axis , is called a toroid . According to Halpern , Hawking 's line references the fact that there are " genuine " scientific theories that the universe is toroidal .

One of the judges for the gross out contest in the episode 's is Madeleine Albright , who was the current US Secretary of State at the time . During the riot that follows the contest , a travelling exhibition of Van Gogh 's paintings is burned to flames . In the episode 's subplot , Homer hires a photographer to take erotic pictures of him . The design of the photographer was based on American portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz . The song that plays during the photographing scenes is " *I 'm Too Sexy* " by English pop trio Right Said Fred . During the rules and regulations announcement , Comic Book Guy declares that sexual intercourse will only be permitted once every seven years in Springfield . This is a reference to pon farr , a term used in the *Star Trek* franchise to describe the psychophysical effect of the estrous cycle that affects the fictional race Vulcans every seven years . His taunting of " I am smart , much smarter than you , Hib @-@ bert ! " is also to the tune of the *Star Trek* fanfare . The episode also mentions actress Geena Davis and cartoonist Mell Lazarus , both of whom are members of Mensa .

= = Reception = =

= = Broadcast and controversy = =

In its original American broadcast on May 9 , 1999 , " *They Saved Lisa 's Brain* " received a 6 @.@ 8 rating , according to Nielsen Media Research , translating to approximately 6 @.@ 8 million viewers . It finished in 54th place in the ratings for the week of May 3 ? 9 , 1999 . The episode 's viewership was considered very low by the *Boston Herald* , who noted that it reached " historic lows " in the ratings .

In a scene in the episode , Comic Book Guy announces that Springfield is in 299th place on a list of the United States ' 300 most livable cities , with East St. Louis being in last place . A journalist for a " local East St Louis [ news ] paper " noticed this , and called Selman to ask him why they were " taking a shot at East St Louis " . Selman jokingly replied : " because it 's a crack @-@ ridden slum " . After the interview , he went on vacation in Greece for two weeks . While Selman was on vacation , executive producer and the episode 's showrunner Mike Scully received a phone call from The Simpsons publicist Antonia Coffman , who reported that Selman 's comment on East St Louis had been taken " very seriously " by the newspaper . The Simpsons staff received several angry letters from East St Louis ' residents , demanding an apology . Because Selman was out of reach , the other staff members had to take care of the controversy .

When Selman returned , Scully scolded him and told him that he had to apologize to the mayor of East St Louis , who , unbeknownst to Selman , was portrayed by Marc Wilmore . Wilmore , a former writer on the television comedy The PJ 's , had been asked by Scully to participate in a practical joke , in which he would play the mayor of East St Louis and confront Selman about his controversial statement . According to Selman , Wilmore gave an " Oscar @-@ worthy performance " . " I was terrified " , he stated in the DVD commentary for the episode , " [ we had ] a twenty @-@ minute discussion in which [ Wilmore ] said that [ his ] children were teased at school [ because of Selman 's comments ] , and that the Fox affiliate were gonna be thrown off the air ... " According to Wilmore , Selman immediately blamed the other writers . Said Selman , " Well , everyone participates , you know [ ... ] Have you never heard of the word ' collaboration ' ? " Selman realized the joke when he turned around and saw " all the other writers laughing " . " I was so relieved " , he said , " I was soaked with sweat [ ... ] I had betrayed my fellow writers , tried to get them in trouble , and they all knew me for the turn @-@ coat that I was . "

As compensation for his involvement with the joke , Wilmore was given a role in the season 11 episode " It 's a Mad , Mad , Mad , Mad Marge " , in which he played a psychologist . In 2002 , Wilmore became a writer on The Simpsons .

= = = Re @-@ release and critical reception = = =

On August 7 , 2007 , " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " was released as part of The Simpsons - The Complete Tenth Season DVD box set . Mike Scully , Matt Selman , Ron Hauge , Rich Appel , Marc Wilmore and Pete Michels participated in the DVD 's audio commentary of the episode . Following its home video release , the episode received mixed reviews from critics . Giving the episode a positive review , DVD Town 's James Plath described it as one of the season 's better episodes . Ian Jane of DVD Talk wrote that , while episodes that revolve around Lisa tend to be " less popular " than others , he considered " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " to be " well done " . Colin Jacobson of DVD Movie Guide gave the episode a mixed review , writing " I like the fact that ' Brain ' pokes some fun at Mensa , one of the more smug , self @-@ congratulatory groups to be found . The show manages a few good laughs as it goes after various pretensions . " However , he added that " the show peters out after a while " , and that it " never becomes particularly memorable " . A reviewer for Currentfilm.com wrote that , while the episode " isn 't without its charms " , it " just don 't hold up very well " . Jake MacNeill of Digital Entertainment News wrote that the episode is " great if you think palindromes are funny " , and added that it was one of the season 's worst episodes . Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood of I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide described it as a " retread " of the season 9 episode " Lisa the Simpson " . They wrote " Once we 're past the How Low Will You Go show , the episode takes a nose @-@ dive until the last few minutes . " They concluded their review by calling the episode " Very , very tedious . "

On the other hand , Stephen Hawking 's appearance in the episode was acclaimed by critics . Although they generally disliked the episode , Martyn and Wood wrote that Hawking 's cameo " saves [ the episode ] from being very boring " . Plath called the performance " very funny " , while Jane described it as " great " . Hawking reached seventh place in UGO 's list of The Simpsons 's " Top 11 Guest Stars " , and finished in fourteenth place in " The Simpsons 20 best guest voices of all time " by Ryan Stewart of The Boston Phoenix . Stewart wrote that Hawking 's line " " Your theory of

a doughnut @-@ shaped universe intrigues me , Homer . I may have to steal it " was a " memorable " quote from the episode . Ethan Alter of The Morning Call described Hawking 's cameo as one of the series ' ten best , and wrote that Hawking 's best line in the episode was " I wanted to see your Utopia , but now I see it is more of a Fruitopia . " Writing for IGN , Eric Goldman , Dan Iversen and Brian Zoromski placed Hawking at number sixteen on their list " Top 25 Simpsons Guest Appearances " . They wrote that he had a " fairly major " role in the episode , and that he had " several great lines " .

In an article written for the Modern Day Pirates titled " In Search of The Last Classic Simpsons Episode " , author Brandon listed " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " as a contender for the latest episode that made him feel like he was " watching The Simpsons in their heyday " . He notes that " [ Stephen Hawking ] ( or his computer ) put a great final moment to the show and was not overused and gawked over like some guest stars that would come ( I ? m looking at you Green Day ) . "

= = = Hawking 's response = = =

After the episode aired , Hawking told the Simpsons staff that he " loved " all the jokes and in an interview with The Guardian in 2005 , he stated that his guest appearances on The Simpsons were " great fun " . An action figure based on Hawking 's appearance in The Simpsons has been produced , with the figurine 's computer screen reading " If you 're looking for trouble , you 've found it " , a line from " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " . Since " They Saved Lisa 's Brain " , Hawking has guest @-@ starred three times on The Simpsons . In 2005 , he appeared in the season 16 episode " Don 't Fear the Roofer " ; in 2007 , he starred in the season 18 episode " Stop or My Dog Will Shoot " ; and in 2010 , he appeared in the Season 22 premiere " Elementary School Musical " .

However , Hawking has also expressed dissatisfaction regarding the impact on his notoriety caused by his appearance in the episode . In a debate with physicist Brian Cox in The Guardian , Hawking was asked what the most common misconception about his work was . He replied , " People think I 'm a Simpsons character . " Writing for The Daily Telegraph , Peter Hutchison argued that Hawking " feels he is sometimes not properly recognised for his contribution to our understanding of the universe . " In his book The book is dead : long live the book , Sherman Young wrote that most people know Hawking from his appearance on The Simpsons , rather than from anything he has written .