

= Bart the Murderer =

" Bart the Murderer " is the fourth episode of The Simpsons ' third season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on October 10 , 1991 . In the episode , Bart stumbles upon the Mafia bar , Legitimate Businessman 's Social Club , after having a terrible day at school . The owner of the bar , mobster Fat Tony , hires Bart to work as its bartender . When Principal Skinner goes missing after punishing Bart in school , Bart is soon accused of having him murdered and is put on trial . As he is about to get convicted , Skinner arrives and explains that he was accidentally trapped in his garage all week , clearing Bart.

The episode was written by John Swartzwelder and directed by Rich Moore . Fat Tony (voiced by Joe Mantegna) and his henchmen , Legs and Louie , made their first appearances on The Simpsons . The episode features cultural references to songs such as " Witchcraft " and " One Fine Day " , and the American television series MacGyver . Since airing , the episode has received mostly positive reviews from television critics . It acquired a Nielsen rating of 13 @. @ 4 and was the highest @- @ rated show on the Fox network the week it aired .

= = Plot = =

After having a particularly bad day at school , Bart gets caught in a downpour and loses control of his skateboard . He crashes down the stairwell of the Legitimate Businessman 's Social Club , a Mafia bar owned by the Springfield Mafia . Fat Tony , the leader of the Mafia , and his henchmen Legs and Louie are initially inhospitable towards Bart , but they are impressed by his ability to pick the winning horse in a horse race on television . When Bart makes up an excellent Manhattan cocktail for the mobsters , Fat Tony hires him as their bartender and errand boy . As Bart adopts more and more gangster @- @ like traits , Marge grows anxious and tells Homer to go and meet the Mafia , but Homer approves of them after they let him win at poker .

When Fat Tony finds out the Principal Skinner is giving Bart detention after school , the mobsters go to confront Skinner . The next day , Skinner is missing and is presumed to have been murdered . Bart has a nightmare of Skinner 's ghost and his own execution on the chair . He rushes to confront Fat Tony at the bar . When the police burst in , Fat Tony blames Skinner 's disappearance on Bart , who is put on trial . During the trial , Fat Tony , Legs , and Louie lie to the court , saying that Bart is Skinner 's murderer and the leader of the Springfield Mafia .

Judge Snyder is about to convict Bart when Skinner bursts through the doors , disheveled and unshaven , and explains that neither Bart nor the mobsters assaulted him . Rather , when Fat Tony and his henchmen had come to his office meekly , Skinner had yelled at them to not interfere with student discipline , and they left sheepishly . After Skinner returned to his house , he became trapped beneath tons of old newspapers in his garage , and was stuck there for over a week , until he was able to escape . Bart is cleared of all charges despite counsel for the prosecution unsuccessfully trying to convince the Judge to strike Skinner 's speech from the record . Fat Tony tells Bart that he did not want to get him into any trouble on his behalf , but Bart decides to resign after learning that " crime doesn 't pay " .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by John Swartzwelder and directed by Rich Moore . The writers conceived the idea of the episode before the 1990 film GoodFellas , which has a similar plot , was released . After it was , the writers incorporated references to the film into the episode . The character Fat Tony makes his first appearance on the show in this episode . He was modeled after the physical appearance of Paul Sorvino 's character Paul Cicero in GoodFellas .

The writers originally wanted American actor Sheldon Leonard to voice Fat Tony , but they were unable to get him , so they went with Joe Mantegna instead . Mantegna was offered the role during the show 's second season , and since he had seen the show before and thought it was " funny " , he decided to give it a shot . He felt honored that they asked him to do a voice for the show . In an

interview with The A.V. Club , Mantegna said he thinks the reason he got the role was partly due to his performance in the 1990 Mafia film The Godfather Part III , which opened just prior to when he received the role . He thought the script was smart and clever and that he enjoyed recording it . Mantegna has since appeared many times on the show as Fat Tony , who became a recurring character ; it is Mantegna 's longest @-@ running role in his acting career . Mantegna commented : " Who knew that Fat Tony was gonna resonate in the hearts and minds of the [Simpsons fans] out there ? Apparently [the writers] got enough feedback as to how the character was liked that they wrote it in again and again , and I was kind of a recurring guy that they ? d tap into at least a couple episodes a season . "

Legs and Louie , Fat Tony 's henchmen , also made their first appearances in this episode . The character of Louie was based on American actor Joe Pesci , who is known for playing violent Mafia mobsters . Neil Patrick Harris guest starred in the episode as himself , portraying Bart in Blood on the Blackboard : The Bart Simpson Story , a horribly inaccurate made @-@ for @-@ television film based on Bart 's life with the Mafia that the Simpson family watches at the end of the episode . The movie casts Joe Mantegna (looking like his character in The Godfather Part III) as Fat Tony .

= = Cultural references = =

The sequence of Bart crashing down the stairwell to the Mafia bar is similar to a scene in the film GoodFellas , in which a young boy is employed by a Mafia as their messenger . All of the horses in the race that Bart bets on are named after a famous animated character 's catchphrase : " Ain 't I a Stinker ? " (Bugs Bunny) , " Yabba Dabba Doo " (Fred Flintstone) , " Sufferin ' Succotash " (Sylvester) , " That 's All Folks " (Porky Pig) , " I Yam What I Yam " (Popeye) , and Bart 's catchphrases " Eat my shorts " and " Don 't have a cow " . The Chiffons 's song " One Fine Day " is heard when Bart serves drinks to the mobsters during a game of poker . The writers originally wanted to use the song " Be My Baby " by The Ronettes for the scene , but they could not clear the copyrights for it . In his room , Bart stores the Springfield Mafia 's loot ? a truckload of cartons of Laramie cigarettes . While strutting around the kitchen , he sings Frank Sinatra 's song " Witchcraft " . The scene in which Bart wakes up screaming after having a nightmare about Skinner is a reference to a scene in the 1972 film The Godfather , in which Jack Woltz screams after waking up in bed and finding a decapitated horse head by his side . Skinner frees himself from being trapped under the newspapers in a way similar to the character Angus MacGyver 's escapes in the American television series MacGyver .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " Bart the Murderer " finished 31st in the ratings for the week of October 7 ? 13 , 1991 , with a Nielsen rating of 13 @.@ 4 , equivalent to approximately 12 @.@ 5 million viewing households . It was the highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week . Since airing , the episode has received mostly positive reviews from television critics . John Orvted of Vanity Fair named it the eighth best episode of The Simpsons because of the " inspired " Mafia satire and because it " goes deeper into Bart 's ongoing conflict with authority figures . " Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , the authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , praised the scene in which Skinner explains his disappearance to the courtroom , calling it Skinner 's " finest hour " on the show . Nate Meyers of Digitally Obsessed named the episode the best in the third season , and commented that there are " many priceless moments " in it , such as Homer 's meeting with the Springfield Mafia . Meyers also praised Swartzwelder 's script . Bill Gibron of DVD Verdict commented that how an episode that starts with Bart having a bad day can lead to him being tried for murder as the head of the local Mafia " is just one of the amazing monuments to this show 's superiority . "

DVD Movie Guide 's Colin Jacobson thought " Bart the Murderer " was season three 's first " truly great " episode because it " starts off strong and gets even better as it moves . " Even though he thinks Mafia parodies have been overused , Jacobson thought this one brought " a fresh approach

and remains consistently amusing . A great guest spot from Mantegna helps . It also feels like the first episode of this season that really moves the series ahead ; it seems like something a little more incisive than most of what came before it . " Andy Patrizio of IGN called " Bart the Murderer " his favorite of the season , and praised the episode for its references to The Godfather and MacGyver . The episode 's reference to GoodFellas was named the 28th greatest film reference in the history of the show by Total Film 's Nathan Ditum .