

= Treehouse of Horror (series) =

The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror episodes , also known as The Simpsons Halloween specials , is a series of Halloween specials in the animated series The Simpsons , each consisting of three separate , self @-@ contained segments . These segments usually involve the Simpson family in some horror , science fiction , or supernatural setting . They take place outside the show 's normal continuity and completely abandon any pretense of being realistic . The first , entitled " Treehouse of Horror " , aired on October 25 , 1990 , as part of the second season and was inspired by EC Comics horror tales . The episodes are known for being far more violent and much darker than an average Simpsons episode . As of 2015 , there are 26 Treehouse of Horror episodes , with one airing every year .

Episodes contain several trademarks , including the alien characters Kang and Kodos , " scary names " in the credits , a special version of the opening sequence , and parodies of horror , science fiction and fantasy films . The show 's staff regard the Treehouse of Horror as being particularly difficult to produce , as the scripts often go through many rewrites , and the animators typically have to design new characters and backgrounds .

Many of the episodes are popular among fans and critics of the show and have inspired a whole offshoot of Simpsons merchandise , including action figures , playsets , video games , books , DVDs , comic books and a special version of Monopoly . Several of the episodes have won awards for animation and sound editing . In 1996 and 2013 , " Treehouse of Horror VI " and " Treehouse of Horror XXIII " were nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award in the " Outstanding Animated Program (for Programming Less Than One Hour) " category .

= = Segments = =

Treehouse of Horror episodes typically consist of four parts : an opening and Halloween @-@ themed version of the credits , followed by three segments . These segments usually have a horror , science fiction or fantasy theme and quite often are parodies of films , novels , plays , television shows , Twilight Zone episodes , or old issues of EC Comics . Although they are sometimes connected by " wraparounds " , the three segments rarely have any kind of continuing connection within the episode . The exception is " Treehouse of Horror V " , in which Groundskeeper Willie is killed by an axe in a similar fashion in all three segments . The episodes are considered to be non @-@ canon and always take place outside the normal continuity of the show .

From " Treehouse of Horror " to " Treehouse of Horror XIII " , all three segments were written by different writers . In some cases there was a fourth writer who wrote the opening and wraparound segments . For the original " Treehouse of Horror " , there were three different directors for the episode . Starting with season 15 's " Treehouse of Horror XIV " , however , only one writer has been credited with writing each Treehouse of Horror episode .

On occasion , the episodes will be used to showcase special animation , such as the " Treehouse of Horror VI " segment " Homer3 " , in which a computer @-@ animated Homer is shown in a non @-@ animated setting . At the time (1995) , it was groundbreaking , as it was unusual for a television show to use such animation . The segment was executive producer Bill Oakley 's idea and included live action directed by David Mirkin . " Treehouse of Horror XX " included the segment " There 's No Business Like Moe Business " , which was the first to be musically @-@ themed .

= = Traditions = =

= = = Opening sequence = = =

Every Treehouse of Horror episode opens with a special introductory segment . The first , second and fifth Treehouse of Horror episodes open with Marge standing on a stage and warning parents about the content of the episode , advising them to put their children to bed . The warning in the first

episode was put in as a sincere effort to warn young viewers , as the producers felt it was somewhat scary . The entire segment was a parody of the opening of the 1931 film *Frankenstein* . Marge 's warnings quickly became a burden to write . After " *Treehouse of Horror V* " , they were permanently dropped and the writers did not make any attempts at reviving them .

Other *Treehouse of Horror* episodes have opened with parodies ; for example , " *Treehouse of Horror III* " had Homer introduce the episode in a manner similar to Alfred Hitchcock in *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* , " *Treehouse of Horror IV* " had Bart introduce the episode and segments in a manner similar to *Night Gallery* , and " *Treehouse of Horror V* " featured a parody of *The Outer Limits* . The sixth and seventh episodes featured short clips with no lines because the episodes had run long and longer segments were cut . Following " *Treehouse of Horror VII* " , the opening has been upwards of a minute long and sometimes featured an introduction by a character , such as Mr. Burns in " *Treehouse of Horror XVII* " or included over @-@ the @-@ top violence , such as " *Treehouse of Horror VIII* " (which showed a Fox Network censor being brutally murdered) and " *Treehouse of Horror XIV* " (which showed the Simpson family killing each other) .

In the opening segment of the first five episodes , the camera zooms through a cemetery where tombstones with humorous epitaphs can be seen . These messages include the names of canceled shows from the previous season , deceased celebrities such as Walt Disney and Jim Morrison and a tombstone with an inscription that read " *TV violence* " that was riddled with bullets as the camera panned on it . They were last used in " *Treehouse of Horror V* " , which included a solitary tombstone with the words " *Amusing Tombstones* " to signal this . The tombstone gags were easy for the writers in the first episode , but like Marge 's warnings , they eventually got more difficult to write , so they were abandoned . Another reason they were dropped was that the tombstones would list television shows that had been canceled the previous season ; after a few years , several of the shows that were canceled were produced by former *Simpsons* writers .

While the early *Treehouse of Horror* episodes featured a Halloween themed opening sequence , the later ones only included the title and the " created by " and " developed by " credits . Every episode between " *Treehouse of Horror II* " and " *Treehouse of Horror X* " featured a couch gag with a Halloween theme , including the Simpson family dressed as skeletons , zombies and characters from previous Halloween episodes .

= = = Wraparounds = = =

The first four *Treehouse of Horror* episodes had brief wraparounds that occurred before each segment and loosely tied together all three stories . " *Treehouse of Horror* " was the only one that actually included a treehouse as a setting . In that episode , Bart and Lisa sat in it telling stories to each other . " *Treehouse of Horror II* " presented all of the segments as being nightmares of Lisa , Bart and Homer ; " *Treehouse of Horror III* " had Lisa , Bart and Grampa telling stories at a Halloween party ; and " *Treehouse of Horror IV* " is presented by Bart in a parody of Rod Serling 's *Night Gallery* . After a few years , the amount of broadcast time for an episode was shortened , allowing less time to tell a proper story . There were no wraparounds for " *Treehouse of Horror V* " because they had been cut to make more time for the segments . Following that , the writers permanently dropped them .

= = = Kang and Kodos = = =

Two characters that are virtually exclusive to the *Treehouse of Horror* series are Kang and Kodos , a pair of large green space aliens who were introduced in the " *Hungry are the Damned* " segment of " *Treehouse of Horror* " . Kang and Kodos have since appeared in every *Treehouse of Horror* episode , sometimes as important parts of a story , but often just for brief cameos . In some episodes , they only appear in the opening segment , but often they will make a cameo appearance in the middle of a different story . For example , a story about zombies attacking the town briefly cuts to them in their space ship , watching the events and laughing maniacally at the Earthlings ' suffering . The action then switches back to the actual story . The unofficial rule is that they must be

in every episode , although quite often they will be forgotten and are added at the last moment , resulting in only a brief appearance . Their scene in " Treehouse of Horror VIII " nearly did not make the final cut of the episode , but David X. Cohen managed to persuade the producers to leave the scene in .

== Scary names ==

Beginning with " Treehouse of Horror II " , the producers decided to give the cast and crew of the show " scary names " in the opening and closing credits . Although the names quickly became more silly than scary , there have been a wide variety of special credits , from simple names like " Bat Groening " to complex ones like " David ² + S. ² = Cohen ² " . Sam Simon , who left the show during the fourth season but still receives " developed by " and " executive producer " credits , has ever since been listed in Treehouse of Horror episodes as " Sam ' Sayonara ' Simon " . Since his death in 2015 he has been credited simply by his real name .

The idea for " scary names " came from executive producer Al Jean , who was inspired by EC Comics because some of the issues also used " scary " alternate names . The " scary names " became such a burden to write that they were cut for " Treehouse of Horror XII " and " Treehouse of Horror XIII " , but after hearing complaints from the fans , Jean decided to bring them back . Matt Groening 's rule for the " scary names " is that they cannot be longer than a person 's real name , but this is rarely followed by anyone else .

== Cultural references ==

References to films , novels , plays , television shows and other media are commonly featured , and many segments have been parodies of a specific work in the horror , science fiction or fantasy genre . Many segments are spoofs of episodes of The Twilight Zone and entire segments will be based on a single episode . Some of the Twilight Zone episodes parodied include " A Kind of a Stopwatch " , " To Serve Man " , " A Small Talent for War " , " Living Doll " , " Nightmare at 20 @,@ 000 Feet " , " Little Girl Lost " , and " The Little People " . The " Bart 's Nightmare " segment of " Treehouse of Horror II " parodies the episode " It 's a Good Life " and is even presented in a format similar to an episode of The Twilight Zone . The Halloween episodes also regularly parody horror and thriller films such as The Exorcist , The Amityville Horror , King Kong , Night of the Living Dead , The Shining , A Nightmare on Elm Street , The Fly , Psycho , Paranormal Activity , and Dead Calm . Robert Englund , who portrays Freddy Krueger in the Nightmare on Elmstreet franchise , had a cameo appearance in " Treehouse of Horror IX " as the character . Science fiction films have also occasionally been used as inspiration for segments , and in later episodes many of the segments were based more on science fiction than horror . Science fiction works parodied include The Omega Man , the novel Nineteen Eighty @-@ Four , E.T. the Extra @-@ Terrestrial and Orson Welles 's The War of the Worlds radio broadcast . In " Treehouse of Horror " , Edgar Allan Poe 's poem " The Raven " is read by James Earl Jones while the parts are acted by various characters . Recent parodies have included films and television specials in more varied genres , including Mr. & Mrs. Smith , It 's the Great Pumpkin , Charlie Brown , Transformers , Sweeney Todd , the Twilight film series , and Jumanji .

== Production ==

The first Treehouse of Horror episode aired in 1990 as part of the second season , and its on @-@ screen title was " The Simpsons Halloween Special . " It was inspired by EC Comics Horror tales . Although every episode is entitled " Treehouse of Horror " , the first one was the only episode that actually used the treehouse motif . During production of the first episode , Matt Groening was nervous about " The Raven " segment , and felt it would be " the worst , most pretentious thing [they had] ever done . "

The Treehouse of Horror episodes are difficult for both the writers and the animators . The episodes

were originally written at the beginning of the production run , but in later seasons they were written at the end and aired at the beginning of the next season as holdovers , giving the animators more time to work . Part of the difficulty for the animators is that the episodes always involve many complex backgrounds , new characters , and new designs . They are difficult for the writers because they must produce three stories , an opening and , in the early episodes , a wraparound . They would have to try to fit all of this into a 20 ? 22 minute episode . The episodes often go through many last minute changes , with rewrites requiring new lines to be recorded . " Treehouse of Horror III " in particular underwent somewhere between 80 and 100 line changes in the six @-@ week period between the arrival of the animation from Korea and the airing of the episode . By the fourth season , executive producers Al Jean and Mike Reiss were less enamored of Treehouse of Horror episodes and considered dropping them , but the other writers insisted that they be kept .

Part of the attraction for the writers is that they are able to break the rules and include violence that would not make a regular episode . In some cases , the writers will have an idea that is too violent and far @-@ fetched or too short for a normal episode , but can be used as a segment in the seasonal special . Several of the writers , former executive producer David Mirkin among them , believe that the episodes should be scary and not just funny . " Treehouse of Horror V " has been described by Mirkin as being one of " the most intense , disturbing Halloween show ever " as it was filled with violence and gore in response to new censorship rules . Earlier " Treehouse of Horror " episodes began with Marge issuing a disclaimer that " if you have sensitive children , maybe you should tuck them into bed early tonight instead of writing us angry letters tomorrow . " However , these episodes seem mild compared to the carnage that followed in later episodes , according to Jean , who calls it " a societal thing " . He points out that his 10 @-@ year @-@ old daughter loves films like Coraline , and that , " [in] the age of scary stories [...] appropriateness has gotten lower . "

Although gruesome for the most part , some segments , such as " Citizen Kang " in " Treehouse of Horror VII " , satirize political issues . The opening segment of " Treehouse of Horror XIX " featured Homer attempting to vote for Barack Obama but a rigged electronic voting machine instead registers a vote for John McCain . Rather than taking sides in the election , Al Jean says it is " mostly a comment on what many people to believe to be the irregularities in our voting system . [sic] " In " Treehouse of Horror XVII " , a segment called " The Day the Earth Looked Stupid " ends with Kang and Kodos taking over Springfield as part of a mission called " Operation : Enduring occupation " . The script originally called for Kodos and Kang to look over the smoking ruins of Springfield and say " This sure is a lot like Iraq will be . " The Fox network did not have any objection to the line , but it was rejected by some of the writers as too obvious and was cut from broadcast . While cut from the aired version , the line does appear in the " review " version sent to newspapers and magazines .

The first " Treehouse of Horror " episode was the first time that an alternate version of the theme that airs over the end credits was used . Originally it was supposed to use a theremin , but one could not be found that could hit all the necessary notes . Usually when the producers submit an episode for the Primetime Emmy Award for " Outstanding Individual Achievement in Music Composition for a Series (Dramatic Underscore) " , they submit a Treehouse of Horror episode , and to date , seven episodes have been nominated . The closing of " Treehouse of Horror IV " features a version of the theme that is a combination of the instruments used in The Munsters theme song and the harpsicord and clicking from the Addams Family theme song .

Although Treehouse of Horror episodes are Halloween @-@ themed , for several years new episodes have premiered in November . This is due to Fox 's current contract with Major League Baseball 's World Series . Season 12 's " Treehouse of Horror XI " was the first episode to air in November . There have been several references to this in the show , such as in " Treehouse of Horror XIV " where Kang looks at a TV Guide and says , " Pathetic humans . They 're showing a Halloween episode ... in November ! " and Kodos replies " Who 's still thinking about Halloween ? We 've already got our Christmas decoration up . " The camera then cuts to a shot of the fireplace with Christmas decorations , and festive Christmas music plays over the opening credits . Season 21 's " Treehouse of Horror XX " aired October 18 , before the World Series , but the following year 's episode , " Treehouse of Horror XXI " , aired in November . Season 23 's " Treehouse of Horror

XXII aired on October 30 , however , as the World Series (which went the maximum of seven games) had concluded on October 28 . As of 2011 each Treehouse of Horror episode has aired in the month of October .

= = Merchandise = =

There has been a variety of merchandise based on the Treehouse of Horror episodes , including books , action figures , comic books , video games , DVDs and a " Treehouse of Horror " version of Hasbro 's board game Monopoly . Although every Treehouse of Horror episode until " Treehouse of Horror XVI " has been released along with its season in a boxset , in 2003 , The Simpsons : Treehouse of Horror DVD was released . It includes Treehouse of Horrors V , VI , VII and XII . A Treehouse of Horror comic book has been published annually since 1995 , and collected into several books , including The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror Fun @-@ Filled Frightfest , Bart Simpson 's Treehouse of Horror Spine @-@ Tingling Spooktacular , Bart Simpson 's Treehouse of Horror Heebie @-@ Jeebie Hullabaloo and The Simpsons Treehouse of Horror Hoodoo Voodoo Brouhaha . Several video games based on The Simpsons include levels with a Halloween theme , including The Simpsons : Hit & Run and The Simpsons Game . In 2001 , Fox Interactive and THQ released The Simpsons : Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror on Game Boy Color . The entire game has a Halloween theme as the player tries to save the Simpson family from the Treehouse of Horror .

Many of the special character designs featured in the episodes have become action figures . Four different playsets have been made by Playmates Toys and released as Toys " R " Us exclusives . The sets are :

The " Treehouse of Horror I " set was released in 2000 and included a cemetery playset as well as " Devil Flanders " , " Bart the Fly " , " Vampire Burns " , and " King Homer " . It also came with an " Evil Krusty Doll " and Gremlin as accessories .

The " Treehouse of Horror 2 " set was released in 2001 and included an interior alien spaceship playset as well as Kang , Kodos and " Alien Ship Homer " . The entire set was based on " Treehouse of Horror " .

The " Treehouse of Horror 3 " set was released in 2002 and included a playset based on the " Ironic Punishment Division " of Hell in " Treehouse of Horror IV " . It came with " Donuthead Homer " , " Witch Marge " , Hugo Simpson and " Dream Invader Willie " .

The final " Treehouse of Horror 4 " set was released in 2003 and included a playset based on Comic Book Guy 's " Collector 's all @-@ plastic lair " . It came with " The Collector " , " Clobber Girl Lisa " , " Stretch Dude Bart " and Lucy Lawless . All the designs were based on " Treehouse of Horror X " .

After the Playmates Toys sets were finished , McFarlane Toys produced four Treehouse of Horror themed playsets including the " Ironic Punishment Box Set " released in 2004 , the " In the Belly of the Boss ? Homer & Marge Action Figures " released in 2005 , " The Island of Dr. Hibbert Box Set " released in 2006 , and a " Lard Lad Box Set " released in 2007 .

= = Reception = =

The Treehouse of Horror episodes are often among the top @-@ rated episodes of their seasons and many of the Treehouse of Horrors have generally been well @-@ received by fans . However , like The Simpsons itself , critics have noted a decline in the quality of the later episodes . In its first airing , " Treehouse of Horror " finished with a 15 @.@ 7 Nielsen rating and a 25 % audience share and would lose to The Cosby Show . It was said that it " set a level of excellence that viewers never expected creator Matt Groening to repeat " , although it was also described as " kind of stupid and unsatisfying " . " Treehouse of Horror V " is considered the best episode by several critics : it finished ninth on Entertainment Weekly 's top 25 The Simpsons episode list , fifth on AskMen.com 's " Top 10 : Simpsons Episodes " list , and was named best episode of the sixth season by IGN.com. In 2006 , James Earl Jones , who guest starred in " Treehouse of Horror " and " Treehouse of Horror

V " was named seventh on IGN 's " Top 25 Simpsons Guest Appearances " list .

In 2006 , IGN.com published a list of the top ten Treehouse of Horror segments , and they placed " The Shinning " from " Treehouse of Horror V " at the top , saying it was " not only a standout installment of the annual Halloween episode , but of The Simpsons , period . " Rounding out the list were " Dial " Z " for Zombies " , " The Devil and Homer Simpson " , " Time and Punishment " , " Hungry Are the Damned " , " Clown Without Pity " , " Citizen Kang " , " If I Only Had a Brain " , " Bart Simpson 's Dracula " and " Starship Poopers " . The third , fourth and fifth episodes were each represented by two segments . The most recent episode on the list was " Treehouse of Horror IX " , which first aired in 1998 .

" Treehouse of Horror VII " is Simpsons creator Matt Groening 's seventh favorite episode , and the line he likes best is " We have reached the limit of what rectal probing can teach us . " " King Homer " of " Treehouse of Horror III " is one of Matt Groening 's favorite segments . " Treehouse of Horror III " is also noted for the moment where Homer shoots Ned Flanders and Bart says " Dad , you killed the Zombie Flanders ! " only for Homer to reply , " He was a zombie ? " It is also one of Groening 's favorite lines .

= = = Awards = = =

In 1996 , the " Homer ³ " segment of " Treehouse of Horror VI " was awarded the Ottawa International Animation Festival grand prize . In 1998 , " Treehouse of Horror VIII " won a Golden Reel Award for " Best Sound Editing ? Television Animated Specials " ; the recipients were Robert Mackston , Travis Powers , Norm MacLeod and Terry Greene . Bob Beecher also received a nomination for " Best Sound Editing in Television Animation ? Music " for " Treehouse of Horror X " .

The second , third , fifth , eighth , ninth , fourteenth and fifteenth and eighteenth Treehouse of Horror episodes were nominated for " Outstanding Individual Achievement in Music Composition for a Series (Dramatic Underscore) " at the Primetime Emmy Awards . The second and third " Treehouse of Horror " episodes were also nominated for " Outstanding Individual Achievement in Sound Mixing for a Comedy Series or a Special " . In 1996 , " Treehouse of Horror VI " was submitted for the Primetime Emmy Award in the " Outstanding Animated Program (For Programming less than One Hour) " category because it had a 3D animation sequence , which the staff felt would have given it the edge . The episode failed to win and Bill Oakley later expressed regret about submitting the episode . The twenty @-@ third and twenty @-@ fifth Treehouse of Horror episodes were nominated for the same award in 2013 and 2015 respectively .