

= Homer Defined =

" Homer Defined " is the fifth episode of The Simpsons ' third season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on October 17 , 1991 . In the episode , Homer accidentally saves the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant from meltdown by arbitrarily choosing the emergency override button via a counting rhyme . He is honored as a hero and receives praise from his daughter Lisa , but he starts to feel unworthy because he knows that his so @-@ called heroism was just luck . Meanwhile , Bart is downhearted after learning that Milhouse 's mother has forbidden him to spend time with Bart anymore .

The episode was written by freelance writer Howard Gewirtz and directed by Mark Kirkland . Basketball player Magic Johnson of the Los Angeles Lakers made a guest appearance in the episode as himself , becoming the first professional athlete to do so on the show . He appears in two sequences , one of which sees him calling Homer to congratulate him on saving the plant . The second appearance comes later in the episode in a basketball game sequence that Lakers sportscaster Chick Hearn also guest stars in .

The episode has received generally positive reviews from critics , particularly Johnson 's appearance . In its original airing on the Fox network , " Homer Defined " acquired a 12 @. @ 7 Nielsen rating ? the equivalent of being watched in approximately 11 @. @ 69 million homes ? and finished the week ranked 36th .

= = Plot = =

At the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant , Homer is eating doughnuts . One of them splatters onto the nuclear reactor core 's temperature dial , which is nearing the red zone . Homer fails to see the warning and the plant approaches a nuclear meltdown . He seems to be the only person who can stop it , though he has no skills and cannot remember any of his training ( due to being distracted and occupied with a Rubik 's Cube at the time ) . In desperation , he chooses a button at random with a counting rhyme , which miraculously averts the meltdown . Springfield is saved and Homer is hailed as a hero . Mr. Burns names Homer " Employee of the Month " . Homer 's family is also proud of him , especially Lisa , who starts to see him as a role model . Meanwhile , Homer himself is troubled by the fact that his so @-@ called heroism was nothing but luck , and his gloomy mood deepens when he receives a congratulatory phone call from Magic Johnson , who tells Homer " People like that are eventually exposed as the frauds they are " .

Burns introduces Homer to Aristotle Amadopoulos , the owner of the nuclear power plant in Shelbyville , Springfield 's neighbor town . Amadopoulos wants Homer to give a pep talk to his plant 's lackluster workers . Homer is hesitant to accept , but Burns forces him into it . At the Shelbyville plant , he gives a fumbling motivational speech . Suddenly an impending meltdown threatens the Shelbyville plant . Amadopoulos and Homer go to the control room , and Amadopoulos asks Homer to avert the meltdown . In front of everyone , Homer repeats his rhyme and presses a button blindly . By luck , he again manages to avert a meltdown . Amadopoulos thanks Homer for saving the plant , but angrily berates him for his stupidity . Soon the phrase " to pull a Homer " , meaning " to succeed despite idiocy , " becomes widely used and is entered into the dictionary .

In the subplot , the relationship between Bart and his friend Milhouse has changed . On the bus ride to school , Bart is upset to discover that Milhouse had held a birthday party without inviting him . It turns out that Milhouse 's mother , Luann Van Houten , thinks Bart is a bad influence on Milhouse and has banned him from seeing Bart , a decision Milhouse is downbeat about but makes no effort to defy . Suddenly deprived of his friend , a depressed Bart resorts to playing with Maggie . When Marge finds out about the situation , she decides to visit Luann . Marge admits that Bart is a " bit of a handful , " and she explains that he and Milhouse are best friends and only have each other , so she asks Luann to allow the boys to play together . Later , Milhouse invites Bart over to his house , and Bart thanks Marge for standing up for him .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by freelance writer Howard Gewirtz . It was one of many stories he pitched to the producers of the show . According to executive producer Al Jean , Gewirtz 's script ended up featuring one of the longest first acts ( an act being the amount of time between commercial breaks ) in the history of the show when the episode was completed . Gewirtz 's script originally contained two uses of the word " ass " , once from Bart and once from Burns . This was the first time a character in the show had used this word , and it led to problems with the network censors . Eventually , the censors forced the producers to remove one instance , so that Bart 's line was changed to " bad influence , my butt . "

Basketball player Magic Johnson of the Los Angeles Lakers guest stars in the episode as himself . He was the first professional athlete to do so on the show . Johnson appears in two sequences : first in a scene in which he calls to congratulate Homer on saving the plant , and later in the episode during a basketball game when he " pulls a Homer " by accidentally getting the ball into the basket after slipping on the floor . The recording of the episode was done during the National Basketball Association 's regular season , so the producers had a hard time scheduling Johnson 's session . With the deadline approaching , the producers traveled to Johnson 's home to record his lines . According to the San Jose Mercury News , the recording equipment brought to his home did not work at first and " almost doomed the guest spot . " Lakers sportscaster Chick Hearn also guest stars in the episode , commenting on the game that Johnson plays .

Another guest star that appeared in the episode was actor Jon Lovitz , who provided the voice for Aristotle Amadopoulos and a minor character that appears in a soap opera . This was Lovitz 's third appearance on the show . The character Amadopoulos that he played was designed to look like the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis . The character 's dialogue was written to emulate Lovitz 's comedic style , such as his ability for rapid mood swings . Amadopoulos returned a few episodes later in " Homer at the Bat " , though in that episode he was voiced by cast member Dan Castellaneta rather than Lovitz .

Milhouse 's mother , Luann Van Houten , makes her first appearance in this episode . She was designed to look very similar to Milhouse . Maggie Roswell was assigned to voice the character and she originally based it on Milhouse , who is voiced by Pamela Hayden . The producers felt that her impression sounded out of place so she ended up using a more normal sounding voice . It was Gewirtz who in this episode gave Milhouse his last name , Van Houten , which he got from one of his wife 's friends .

Director Mark Kirkland wanted the Springfield Power Plant to " look the best it had to date " and inserted shadows and back @-@ lighting effects to make the panels in Homer 's control room glow .

= = Reception and analysis = =

In its original airing on the Fox network , the episode acquired a 12 @.@ 7 Nielsen rating and was viewed in approximately 11 @.@ 69 million homes . It finished the week of October 14 ? 20 , 1991 , ranked 36th , down from the season 's average rank of 32nd . It ranked second in its timeslot behind The Cosby Show , which finished 24th with a 15 @.@ 5 rating . The episode was tied with In Living Color as the highest rated show on Fox that week .

" Homer Defined " has received generally positive reviews from critics . The authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , described it as an excellent episode that added new depth to the show in the scene with Marge trying to convince Luann to let Milhouse play with Bart again . They added that Lisa 's " faith in her heroic father makes a nice change " , and said that the episode 's ending , in which Homer enters the dictionary , " is most satisfying . " Colin Jacobson of DVD Movie Guide commented that after the episode " Bart the Murderer " , this episode marks a regression , saying it was almost inevitable that it would not match up to the previous episode . He went on to say that the subplot with Bart and Milhouse was more entertaining . Nate Meyers of Digitally Obsessed gave the episode a 4 / 5 rating , writing that he enjoyed the Homer story but found the Bart and Milhouse

subplot more interesting . He added that " Milhouse 's mom won 't allow him to play with Bart because she thinks Bart is a bad influence . It 's rare for the show to allow Bart to feel genuine emotion , but there is plenty of it in this episode that makes for a nice character oriented story . "

Johnson 's performance has also been praised . In 2004 , ESPN released a list of the top 100 Simpsons sport moments , ranking his appearance at number 27 . Sports Illustrated listed Johnson 's cameo as the fifth best athlete guest appearance on The Simpsons . Meyers wrote that the episode " makes a lot of good points about the public making heroes in a rash , hysterical manner , " and this point is made " with an amusing cameo by Earvin ' Magic ' Johnson " . The San Diego Union 's Fritz Quindt said the animators " did [ Johnson 's ] likeness good , " and noted that in the game the " colors on the Lakers jerseys and the Forum court were correct . Chick Hearn and Stu Lantz were almost lifelike , announcing at courtside in Sunday @-@ color @-@ comics sweaters . And Chick 's play @-@ by @-@ play was so real Stu couldn 't get a word in . " Johnson 's appearance was broadcast on CNN 's Sports Tonight the day before the episode originally aired , and host Fred Hickman stated that he did not find it humorous .

In his book *Watching with The Simpsons : Television , Parody , and Intertextuality* , Jonathan Gray discusses a scene from " Homer Defined " that shows Homer reading a USA Today with the cover story : " America 's Favorite Pencil ? # 2 is # 1 " . Lisa sees this title and criticizes the newspaper as a " flimsy hodge @-@ podge of high @-@ brass factoids and Larry King " , to which Homer responds that it is " the only paper in America that 's not afraid to tell the truth : that everything is just fine . " In the book , Gray says this scene is used by the show 's producers to criticize " how often the news is wholly toothless , sacrificing journalism for sales , and leaving us not with important public information , but with America 's Favorite Pencil . "