

= Miracle on Evergreen Terrace =

" Miracle on Evergreen Terrace " is the tenth episode of The Simpsons ' ninth season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on December 21 , 1997 . Bart accidentally ruins Christmas for the Simpson family by burning down the tree and all their presents . It was written by Ron Hauge , directed by Bob Anderson , and guest starred Alex Trebek as himself . Hauge was inspired to write the episode after learning of an orphanage that had been ripped off . The episode was selected , among other Christmas @-@ themed episodes of the series , on a 2005 Christmas special DVD boxed set . The authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide criticized the episode as a rehash of older themes , but it was also described as one of The Simpsons ' more memorable episodes in a review of the 2005 DVD boxed set release .

= = Plot = =

The Simpson family are making their last @-@ minute Christmas preparations . At bedtime on Christmas Eve , Marge tells everyone nobody can open presents until 7 AM . However , Bart wakes up early to secretly unwrap his gifts . One of the presents is a remote @-@ controlled fire truck . Bart has fun playing with the truck , until it sprays water on an overloaded electrical socket , and the Christmas tree bursts into flames . The flames immediately engulf the plastic Christmas tree and all of the presents . Bart manages to extinguish the fire before it spreads , and hides the burned evidence outside beneath the snow in the front yard .

When the family come downstairs , and discover that the Christmas tree and presents are gone , Marge asks Bart what happened . Bart makes up a story about how he caught a burglary in progress . The police investigate , and Kent Brockman decides to do a story on what he believes is the Simpsons ' yuletide misfortune .

As a result of Brockman 's report , everyone in Springfield shows their community spirit by giving them \$ 15 @,@ 000 . With the donations , Homer buys a new car . Driving it home , a speeding Homer unintentionally drives the car onto a frozen lake , where the ice cracks , causing the car to sink and explode .

The next morning , Bart 's conscience gets to him , and finally he admits the truth when he disobeyed his family , which prompts Homer and Lisa to choke him . Soon , Brockman and the news crew arrive to do a follow @-@ up story . After the family go along with the lie , the story quickly unravels when a cameraman , with help from Santa 's Little Helper , finds the burned remains of the Christmas tree . The family is forced to explain , but it is too late for the viewers , who feel they have been scammed . The citizens shun and harass them until the family can pay back the \$ 15 @,@ 000 .

Later , when arriving home , the family find that everyone in Springfield is stealing their belongings in order to cover the \$ 15 @,@ 000 debt . In the end , the family playfully fight over a tattered washcloth , the only item they have left .

= = Production = =

Writer Ron Hauge said he got the idea for the episode one day when he was heading to work . He was listening to the radio and heard of an orphanage getting ripped off , and they were getting back more than they gave . The spectators in the stands during Bart 's dreams are various animators . When Krusty says " 15 @,@ 000 Missoulians " it is a reference to Ron Hauge having lived in Missoula , Montana . When the Simpsons ' car says " I 'll Keell you " , this is a reference to a Wiffleball bat in the writer 's office that said that .

= = Cultural references = =

The episode has several references to Christmas films . The title is a play on Miracle on 34th Street

while the scene where everyone rallies around to support the Simpsons is reminiscent of the last scene of the classic holiday movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. The film is further spoofed when Homer tells Lisa to stop playing the piano which parodies a similar scene involving *George Bailey*. A *Charlie Brown Christmas* is also parodied when the senior citizens are dancing at the Springfield Retirement Castle ? their dancing is based on the way the *Peanuts* characters dance. Marge appears as a contestant on *Jeopardy!* with host Alex Trebek guest starring. One of the stuffed animals Chief Wiggum is carrying is Binky from Matt Groening's comic strip *Life in Hell*.

= = Reception = =

In its original broadcast, "Miracle on Evergreen Terrace" finished 23rd in ratings for the week of December 15 ? 21, 1997, with a Nielsen rating of 9 @. @ 8, equivalent to approximately 9 @. @ 6 million viewing households. It was the second highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week, following *King of the Hill*.

The episode received mixed to positive reviews from critics. The authors of the book *I Can't Believe It's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide* said "A deliberately mawkish Christmas episode that is low on good jokes (although the Simpsons watching their own fire on TV is a good start) and a retread of any number of episodes where Bart does wrong, feels guilty and eventually has to fess up. The only real ray of sunshine is the closing moments when the neighbours get their revenge but the Simpsons find the family spirit after all." In its review of a 2005 DVD boxed set of Christmas @-@ themed episodes of *The Simpsons*, *The Journal* described "Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire", "Miracle On Evergreen Terrace", "Skinner's Sense of Snow", and "Dude, Where's My Ranch?" among memorable episodes of the series. In his review of the same DVD, *Digitally Obsessed* critic Joel Cunningham wrote that "Miracle on Evergreen Terrace" is "a good one [... ] A nice combo of humor, satire, and heartwarming holiday fuzzies". Andy Dougan wrote in *Evening Times* that the episode is "one of the darkest, blackest Christmas cartoons ever animated".