

= Homer the Smithers =

" Homer the Smithers " is the 17th episode of The Simpsons ' seventh season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on February 25 , 1996 . In the episode , Mr. Smithers takes a vacation and hires Homer to take over as Mr. Burns ' assistant .

The episode was written by John Swartzwelder and directed by Steven Dean Moore . The story came from another writer on the show , Mike Scully . The episode features cultural references to The Little Rascals , a series of comedy short films from the 1930s , and the 1971 film A Clockwork Orange . Since airing , the episode has received mostly positive reviews from fans and television critics . It acquired a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 8 , and was the fifth highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network the week it aired .

= = Plot = =

After a company night out to the Springfield drag races , Smithers fails to protect Mr. Burns from being harassed by a drunken Lenny . Though he tries to make amends the next day , Smithers again bungles his duties and attempts to drown himself in the water cooler out of guilt , so Burns suggests he take a vacation . Seeking a replacement who will not outshine him , Smithers purposely selects Homer for the job . He then proceeds to go on vacation to what appears to be a gay male resort . However , Burns soon proves to be ridiculously demanding for someone who has not devoted his life to him like Smithers had . After putting up with Mr. Burns 's constant abuse for several days , Homer finally snaps and punches Burns in anger . Fearing he has killed the old man , Homer runs away in panic , and hides at home .

Homer returns to apologize but is turned away by a fearful Burns . With no one around , Burns learns to do things himself , such as making coffee and operating the telephone . Burns soon becomes completely self @-@ reliant and thanks Homer for making him learn that he can fend for himself . Burns then fires Smithers when he returns from his vacation . Smithers tries to find other employment but eventually decides he can only be happy working for Mr. Burns . He enlists Homer in a scheme to get his job back by handling a call from Burns ' mother (the one task that Burns still cannot do) , but it backfires when Homer accidentally hangs up the phone and then attempts to impersonate Burns ' mother . Smithers and Homer engage in a fight within Burns ' office which ends when Burns accidentally falls out the window . Burns is seriously injured and becomes reliant on Smithers once again . In gratitude , Smithers sends Homer a fruit basket .

= = Production = =

The episode was written by John Swartzwelder , who got the story from another member of the writing staff , Mike Scully . When the show runners of this season , Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein , took over the job from David Mirkin , they wanted to " take the show back " to the Simpson family . Their goal was to have at least 15 episodes per season that revolved around the family or a member of the family , but they still wanted to do the annual Halloween episode , a Sideshow Bob episode , an Itchy and Scratchy episode , and a " format bending " episode , which in this season was " 22 Short Films About Springfield " . They wanted the family episodes to be realistic , and Oakley thought " Homer the Smithers " was a good example . When Scully pitched the idea to the writers , Oakley was surprised that it had not been done earlier on the show . He thought the story sounded like something that would have been done by the third season because it was " simple " and " organic " .

Weinstein said that this episode was an opportunity for him , Oakley , and Swartzwelder to " go nuts " with the " Burns @-@ ism " . He said that they enjoy to write for characters such as Burns and Abe Simpson because of their " out @-@ datedness " , and because they get to use thesauruses for looking up " old time slang " . Burns answers the phone by saying " Ahoy , hoy ! " , for example , which was suggested by Alexander Graham Bell to be used as the proper telephone answer when the telephone was first invented . Burns ' kitchen is full of " crazy old @-@ time " devices and

contraptions . For inspiration , Weinstein brought in " a bunch " of old books with designs of old kitchen devices . Oakley commented that the stuffed polar bear had always been in Burns ' office , and they were excited to " finally " have a use for it .

Matt Groening has noted the challenges of sound mixing with this episode , the results of which influenced future episodes of the show and Groening 's other series Futurama . When the animation for the episode returned , the production staff found the scene of Homer fighting Smithers " horrifying " , as the sounds of character exertion made it seem too violent . After experimenting with the sound , they were eventually able to make the scene humorous by only leaving in sounds of the characters ' agony .

= = Cultural references = =

When Homer gets up early to make Mr. Burns breakfast , he wakes up Marge in bed . She says : " Homie , it 's 4 : 30 in the morning . Little Rascals isn 't until 6 " , referencing The Little Rascals , a series of comedy short films from the 1930s and a 1994 comedy film of the same name . Smithers uses a Macintosh computer with the Mac OS operating system to search for his replacement . Burns tells Homer to make him Postum for breakfast , a hot drink designed to rival tea and coffee . At the end of the episode , Burns is lying in bed in a body cast , chewing loudly and pausing his speech for Smithers to spoon @-@ feed him , as in A Clockwork Orange when a bedridden Alex is spoonfed steak . The manner in which Burns becomes injured is also similar to Alex : they both take a potentially life @-@ threatening fall from a top story window .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " Homer the Smithers " finished 60th in the ratings for the week of February 19 to February 25 , 1996 , with a Nielsen rating of 8 @. @ 8 . The episode was the fifth highest @-@ rated show on the Fox network that week , following The X @-@ Files , Beverly Hills , 90210 , Melrose Place and Married ... With Children .

Since airing , the episode has received mostly positive reviews from television critics . Dave Foster of DVD Times said that in " Homer the Smithers " we see " just how dependent upon Smithers Mr. Burns is " . He added that the staging and animation of the scene in which Homer tries to apologize to Burns " will remain engraved in your memory in the same way as some of the series finest dialogue can . " DVD Movie Guide 's Colin Jacobson enjoyed the episode and commented that " any doubts about Smithers ' sexuality will not last long when we see his vacation . " Jacobson would have liked to see more scenes from Smithers ' vacation , but he still thought the episode offered " nice exposition " for the character . He added : " It ? s fun to see more about his pampering of Burns , and it ? s amusing to watch Homer take over for him . " Jennifer Malkowski of DVD Verdict considered the best part of the episode to be the scenes of Smithers on vacation . She concluded her review by giving the episode a grade of A ? . The authors of the book I Can 't Believe It 's a Bigger and Better Updated Unofficial Simpsons Guide , Warren Martyn and Adrian Wood , called it a " very good episode , and an unusually straightforward one for this surreal season . "