

Sic' Em FIDO

by Deanna Symoski



The Simpsons

I still have this memory when I think of *The Simpsons*. I was probably ten or eleven, and I was shopping at Hills Department Store when I found a T-shirt of Bart Simpson on the chest. He donned his now-traditional red shirt and blue shorts, and he was giving the thumbs-up. The caption underneath him read "Cowabunga Dude." My mom agreed to buy me that shirt, favoring it over the more flippant "Don't have a cow, man," or "Underachiever and proud of it," shirts.

I always think of that scene when I read something that causes me to reflect on the edginess of television through the years. When *The Simpsons* first started, Bart was essentially the anti-Christ in the eyes of parent groups and moral advocates. His name was only a letter-switch away from brat, but the show snapped and crackled because of the young one's seeming disrespect.

Controversy, like in all other cases, propelled *The Simpsons* into the mainstream however, and the show became a FOX staple for ten seasons. But now as it begins its eleventh, some fans are vocalizing their desire for a quick and painless end to a show that's lost its pop.

As trends go, the firepower of *The Simpsons* should have fallen by the wayside when more controversial cartoons began appearing. *Beavis and Butthead*, for example, became the next worse thing, and for a period the next hottest thing, as kids and adults alike tuned in to see the birth of the fart joke. But after a pleasurable romp through pointless television, the popularity of *Beavis and Butthead* diminished, and finally the show fell to the fickle tastes of television watchers.

Next at bat was *South Park*. Like *The Simpsons*, this animated vehicle also thrived on its witty satire of world issues. With more backstage intelligence than the majority of shows on TV, *South Park* became a favorite among its target demographic. But the show's ratings have decreased as of last season, partly because of *South Park's* lack of subtlety. Also employing fart jokes and blatant bad taste, the intelligence of the show has been all but disguised, and its tiresome quick-laugh have taken a toll on the novelty of swearing cartoon kids. Even if you want to argue that *South Park* is currently better than the last season of *The Simpsons*, at least *The Simpsons* didn't see downward ratings until several seasons into its career. *South Park* has lost momentum after only two, signaling trouble for a long-term existence.

In the end, no matter what shape the Simpson family takes, its irreverent humor and timely satire will have outmatched any other nomination in this field. Springfield has emerged as Anytown, USA, and given viewers the intelligent laughs that a live-action depiction certainly could not.

Through its hallowed years, *The Simpsons* has birthed some unforgettable characters and legendary situations of its own. One of my favorites is Groundskeeper Willie, who by all fairness stopped being cool about five years ago, but his older episodes still make me laugh. I can still hear "Ya used me Skinner, ya used me!" during the fictitious Scotchtoberfest. Or "Argh! The wee turtles, they were too much for me!" in the episode where Bart falls for Reverend Lovejoy's hell-bent daughter. I don't use the phrases in common conversation or anything, but I still giggle when they happen to cross my mind.

I guess the sad part is that they don't cross my mind so much anymore. In fact, I had to brainstorm just for those examples. I knew they were there, I just had to dust them off because, frankly, like Groundskeeper Willie, the whole show may have lost its luster before now. Reluctantly, I am beginning to see what the critics are talking about. Despite a rare late gem like the Tomacco episode, *The Simpsons* ain't what it used to be. Some say its Homer's emerging mean streak, which has all but devoured the oafish yet lovable Homer. Some say it's the departure of Matt Groening, leaving the show in the hands of a fresh set of writers who don't quite remember the punch of Simpson glory days. And finally, some say that like other great shows in its wake, *The Simpsons* has finally run out of things to say. After all, where can you take a set of characters who do not age?

I guess you take them to your heart. Since my formative years were echoed with the show's catch phrases, I've decided to quietly agree with the naysayers and still catch an occasional episode in syndication. I may not have that old Bart shirt anymore, but I'll always have reruns.

Scully is pregnant, aliens have abducted Mulder, and Skinner is now a believer...are we watching the X-Files anymore? What happened to no one but Mulder believing, Scully being barren and Skinner being a loner? All that is gone, along with the spaceship that took Mulder away.

Last May, the season seven finale of the X-Files took away the normalcy that fans had come to expect. The finale came as a shock to most Philers. At the time that the finale was shown, a decision had just been made to keep the show on for another season, with only half the principal players signed on again. This left the fate of Mulder and Scully up in the air, until an eleventh hour ruling came down from Fox that the show would go on, with Mulder (David Duchovny) only appearing in 11 of the regular 20 weekly shows. That left Scully pregnant and sans partner, and Fox in a quandary. Without an alpha male to stand beside Scully, the network knew that they were in trouble. Can we say 'casting call'?

Enter the parade of actors that tried out for the part of Scully's new partner. People ranging from Lou Diamond Phillips (of *La Bamba* fame), to Bruce Campbell (*Army of Darkness*), vied for the part, but were in the end beaten out by a machine...well, a man

who used to be a machine.

Robert Patrick beat out all others to become Scully's new partner while she searches for Mulder. That's right, Patrick, former T2000, or for the sci-fi illiterate people, the evil cop in Terminator 2, is now the second

introduced on the show are dead three episodes later.

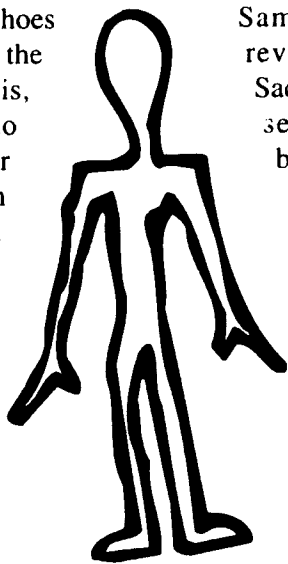
Where does this leave Mulder? At press time, he was still off cruising through space in the mothership. Of course, like all things X-Files, that too is deniable. Last season Philers were

X-Files EXPOSED

BY KATIE GALLEY

half of the X-Files. But the question remains; will this G-man be able to fill the shoes of his predecessor? And the even bigger question is, will he be trying to replace Mulder, or simply step in for him while he is gone? Given the track record of outsiders being accepted on the show, the chances are slim to none. Hope Patrick knows that nine out of ten new characters

promised that the whereabouts of Mulder's long lost sister Samantha would be revealed, and it was. Sadly no one will get to see her anymore, because she's dead. Heaven (or possibly Hell) was not quite the location that most people were hoping for. Guess there won't be any Oprah 'brother-sister' reunions in the near future.



Top stars Pay It Forward

by Erin McCarty
staff writer

"Think of a plan to change the world and put it into ACTION." This is the challenge that seventh-grade history teacher Eugene Simonet (Kevin Spacey) issues to his students on the first day of class in *Pay It Forward*. It's a seemingly unattainable goal for a room full of eleven-year-olds from whom society expects nothing. But as the other students snicker and roll their eyes, the wheels in Trevor McKinney's (Haley Joel Osmand) head are turning. That afternoon, as he rides his bike past the slums of Las Vegas, he begins to put his plan into action.

The plan is simple: Trevor will perform a major favor for three different people, who in turn must promise to "pay it forward" to three more people. If the plan is successful, the random acts of kindness will spread to millions of people in just a few weeks. His first favor is to house a homeless

man named Jerry and give him money with which to start a new life. Trevor's mother, Arlene (Helen Hunt), an alcoholic who is rarely home because she works two jobs, is horrified and proceeds to confront Mr. Simonet. This initial encounter, during which Trevor attempts to bring his mother and teacher together, sets the stage for the rest of the film. The task is not easy because Arlene is stubborn and clings to the past, while Eugene hides a dark secret about the origin of the burns that scar his face. Further complications arise when Trevor's hard-drinking and abusive father, Ricky (Jon Bon Jovi), returns after a long absence.

Meanwhile, as Trevor becomes more and more convinced that his plan is a failure, reporter Chris Chandler (Jay Mohr) is following a phenomenon that reached him when a stranger offered him his brand-new car after his own car was totaled. Intrigued, Chandler is determined to get to the bottom of this "Pay it Forward"

movement, and when he finally does, he has some important revelations about the impact that one individual can make on society.

Helen Hunt is very convincing in her role as the tortured mother trying to break out of a dangerous lifestyle. Her tenuous relationship with her son is strengthened through a series of efforts and failures, and her wall of self-centered tenacity begins to break down as her friendship with Eugene blossoms into love. Kevin Spacey radiates a calm intellectual aura throughout most of the movie as he uses complicated vocabulary in his ordinary conversation. When he does lose his cool, he explodes, and all of the emotion that has been bottled up for so long is let loose.

While both adult co-stars turn out Oscar-worthy performances, it is once again Haley Joel Osmand who steals the show. It is a slightly more worldly youngster we see here. While Osmand's character in *The Sixth Sense* took his co-star to task for say-

ing "the 'S' word," Trevor uses it rather liberally. But he is no less kind and compassionate than the boy who saw dead people. Instead, we see the constant conflict between the idealism in wanting to believe that people can change for the better and the reality that life seems to be nothing but turmoil and disappointment. His anguish, joy, determination, and disillusionment are palpable, and it is the love that Osmand causes us to feel for his character that brings the movie to such a stunning conclusion.

Rated PG-13 for language and a few violent scenes, older children should be encouraged to see this movie with their parents. It may be just a movie, but the premise has very real implications. One person, even an eleven-year-old, can make a world of difference, and this film has the potential to inspire people of all ages to take a chance and "pay it forward."

New Releases

Movies

10/13

Dr. T and the Women
Bounce
Lost Souls
The Contender
The Ladies Man

10/20

The Legend of Drunken Master
Bedazzled
Best In Show

Video*

10/17

Green Mile
James Bond Gift Set Vol. 3
Never Say Never Again

10/24

Three Kings
Toy Story 2
American Beauty
(Pan&Scan)
Batman Beyond/
Return of the Joker
Scream 3
Sin
Britney Spears

Music*

10/17

Limp Bizkit
Enya

10/24

Christina Aguilera
(Christmas Album)
Lil' Moe
Megadeth
Tyrese
Scarface
Rosie O'Donnell
(Christmas Album)

DVD*

10/17

James Bond Gift Set Vol. 3
Never Say Never Again
Rules of Engagement
Toy Story 1 & 2

10/24

American Beauty
Batman Beyond/
Return of the Joker
Sin
U-571 Collector's Edition
Britney Spears

