



Planet Simpson: How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation

Chris Turner , Douglas Coupland (Foreword)

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D'oh-it's "The Simpsons." And here's the book with the behind-the-scenes story of how America's favorite nuclear family first arrived at a TV near you, how the series grew into a worldwide icon, and who brings it to life so brilliantly week after week, year after year. Since first airing in 1987 as a cartoon interlude on the short-lived "Tracey Ullman Show," "The Simpsons" has deliciously skewered the foibles of American life, evolving into a cultural institution that reaches across the generations. As satire, it's sharp and funny. As a pop phenom, it's in a league of its own. And with *Planet Simpson*, it finally gets the sprawling, multidimensional critical look it so richly deserves. "Smart and funny, Turner writes with fitting enthusiasm for his subject while working in seemly references to cultural theory and TV-insider politics. His book is just the thing for fellow fans, and for anyone interested in how pop phenomena came to be." -*Hollywood Reporter* This book was not prepared, licensed, approved, or endorsed by any entity involved in creating or producing the television series "The Simpsons."

Planet Simpson: How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation Details

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From Reader Review Planet Simpson: How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation for online ebook

K.D. Absolutely says

Nice book. It is a detailed discussion of the history of the The Simpsons: Why did this pop phenomenon click with the audience? According to Turner it is because "all families are, in one way or another, a mess but we still love our families." This is very true. The dysfunctional family of the Simpsons seems to represent not only the most middle class families in the US but I would say in the whole world. As they say, no one is perfect so I guess we can also say that no family is perfect. We commit mistakes, we learn from it, we move on. Still a family. Still in love with each other.

I have not watched any complete episode of "The Simpsons" but when I was heavily traveling overseas in the early to mid 2000's, I used to see this program in the hotel television. Most Asian countries have very limited English channels especially in Japan, China, Thailand, etc. Well, at least in the hotels where I used to stay. But cartoon TV series is not really my cup of tea. I'd rather watch "Desperate Housewives" or "American Idol" or "Friends" if there was nothing else to see on TV. Yes, I was not a voracious reader then.

Why I am saying this? Well, I picked up this book because I'd like to finally know what the TV series was all about. I am impressed. Producer James L. Brooks and company was able to concoct the perfect TV series that everyone could identify with: **Homer**, the nuclear engineer father; **Marge** the mother and according to Turner, the spiritual anchor of the family; **Bart**, the 10-y/o troublemaker; **Lisa**, the intelligent daughter who dumps her fiance because he belittles her family (and the quote above actually came from that part of the book); and **Maggie** the baby who does not speak but sucks and sucks her pacifier.

Now, I am looking for a complete copy of the DVD. I hope I can watch all the seasons during this Christmas season.

Libertine says

I've been a devotee of the Simpsons for many years now, and when I saw this book at the library, I checked it out, thinking it would have some interesting tidbits about the show.

However, I never finished the book, as the writing style was boring and ponderous. The author took himself and his subject matter much too seriously. The book was a pathetic attempt to prove how urbane and sophisticated the author thought he was. It was as if he'd swallowed several encyclopedias about popular culture and philosophy, to name a few, and he frequently went off-topic waaaaay out into the tangents of left field.

There were a few interesting points, but they were buried so deep in verbose paragraphs with tortured sentence constructions and awkward neologisms, that I couldn't be bothered to hunt for more interesting parts that might have been there.

Don't bother with this one. It reads as if it were a collaboration between the Comic Book Guy and Sideshow Bob.

Jamie says

I love me some Simpsons, but I really didn't like this book. Ostensibly it's about The Simpsons television series and after reading the dust jacket I expected to find stories and anecdotes about the show, its history, its creators, and the like. Kind of like an episode of VH1's "Behind the Music" for the show, except with 40% less drugs. Instead, Planet Simpson turns out to be a platform for the author's politics, with amusing Simpsons quotes thrown in when relevant.

If I had to pick one word to describe this mess, it would be "undisciplined." Turner may start a chapter by sticking with a promising topic (e.g., an analysis of the different kinds of humor employed by the show), but he invariably traipses off into la-la land within a few pages. Why am I holding a book called "Planet Simpson" and reading a 10,000 word treatise on Radiohead, the Bush administration, or the evils of consumerism? What does this have to do with Homer? The writing is so meandering and self-indulgent that it stumbles from topic to topic, stitching them together with the only an occasional Simpsons reference or quote. In fact, the only parts of the book I really enjoyed were the quotes from the show and sometimes we'll go pages without any reference to Our Favorite Family.

Don't get me wrong, some of the ideas Turner puts forth are interesting, if smug and written in a needlessly complex and so-anti-elitist-that-it's-elite manner. But there's only so many times I can tolerate phrases like "cultural zeitgeist" or "sisyphean endeavors" or "postmodern deconstructionalist." I have as big a vocabulary as the next guy and understand all those big words (well, after one or two trips to dictionary.com), but I also recognize when someone is deliberately trying to be pedantic and priggish. Yes, I'm being ironic. How postmodern of me.

I just wanted a book that talked about how once Matt Groening got all drunk and punched Al Jean. Is that so much to ask?

Amber says

The thing about me is that I love The Simpsons. I'm not one of those people who refer to episodes by their alpha-numerical title or could identify the essentially reclusive writers in a line up or anything, but I know more than the average person and my adoration for this show is incredibly pure and forgiving.

This book sites one of my personal favorite episodes (4F23, "The Principal and the Pauper") and the point at which the show declined from its "Golden Age" to its "Long Plateau". It is an episode that I refer to, at the chagrin of my husband, pretty often. Sometimes I will just shout, "OK, ARMIN TAMZARIAN" if someone is impersonating someone or if I just feel like it, I guess. It's such an absurd episode and so self-referential and like a hilarious in-joke to me (the premise is that perennial mama's boy and middle school principal Seymour Skinner is actually NOT who he says he is, but rather was a no-good rebel named Armin Tamzarian who assumed the identity of one Seymour Skinner when he was thought to be killed in Vietnam). That is how unflinching my love for the show is.

My sister and I can quote, at length, bits and riffs from the show that normal people probably do not even recall. We identify episodes not by their nerd-title or actual title or even by what happened in them but

instead by our favorite lines. So episode 3F09 is not referred to as such (its production code) or "Two Bad Neighbors" (its actual title) or "the one where George Bush moves in next door and he & Homer don't like each other" but instead by us screaming the lyrics to the song Homer composed at the neighborhood rummage sale: "Hey big spender/Dig this blender/rainbow suspenders ... Now, let's give it up for Table Five!" etc etc.

THE POINT IS: I am pretty biased. Reading 400+ pages about why This Thing That I Love is so awesome is pretty much my (and everyone else's, I would think) favorite thing. Even though I don't agree with every point the author makes (just most of them) I just loved this book.

Dante says

THE SIMPSONS is hands-down my favorite half-hour TV series ever -- and if push came to shove I might have to drop the "half-hour" qualification and simply say that it's my favorite TV series ever. So when I happened upon Chris Turner's book (on ebay, if memory serves), I was intrigued.

Suffice it to say that I enjoyed Turner's musings on THE SIMPSONS and its influence on (and reflection of) modern life. Turner is certainly intelligent, well-read, and has written a far more erudite examination of THE SIMPSONS than I'd ever be able to manage. I suspect any high-brow SIMPSONS fan out there will appreciate this book as much as I did.

The book was written in 2004, so the last 10-12 seasons of THE SIMPSONS are omitted; if Turner were to publish an updated version of the book that incorporated the latest dozen season of THE SIMPSONS, I might be interested in reading it.

...or perhaps not: this book is 438 pages long (not including the notes/index at the end), and it's a no-bullshit 438 pages -- no pictures, small point size and very little space between the lines and paragraphs. If this book was published using the same layout and type sizes of Dan Brown's latest book (INFERNO), PLANET SIMPSON would probably come in at over 1,000 pages. So these 438 pages are not a quick read, but thanks to ample quotes from THE SIMPSONS and frequent recaps of many episodes from the first 14 seasons, it's an enjoyable read.

Colin says

Many parts I liked, but a bit too long.

Kevin Lewis says

Absolutely vital. Not only is it the best book ever written about *The Simpsons*, it's not even all that much about The Simpsons. A great analysis of the 90s, the generation of The Simpsons, and why satire was the perfect form of art to comment and relate to us then and now. The book has its flaws, but they are easily overlooked as the sum total of the book is nothing short of a perfectly casual interplay of television, mass culture, and modern history. Stop reading this, and start reading it.

James says

I'm marking this as done, but I'll be honest: I hardly got past page 50 of this 400-and-something long tome. This was just boring and painful.

Chalk me up as a huge *Simpsons* fan - I rewatch episodes constantly and love the deep layers and textures the cartoon series has built over time. So I really thought a book geeking over *The Simpsons* would sit well with me.

It doesn't. *Planet Simpson* is an overlong essay on someone's opinions about the show. Chris Turner references plenty of valid examples, but so much of what he sets out to establish is completely subjective. I'm not saying he's wrong, I just never felt that what he offers is little more than an opinion. A lot of it feels thinly researched. For example, pointing to Lenny Bruce as the father of riffing is hardly a revelation. His references of the cartoons that came before and after *The Simpsons* are pretty pedestrian and never give the impression that he gave them much thought beyond writing down their names. At one point Turner spends nearly a page on *King of the Hill*, Mike Judge's brilliant poker-faced answer to *The Simpsons*. Despite so many words, he reveals nothing a single episode sitting with that show couldn't. In fact, he says about as much as Wikipedia's first paragraph on the show.

(I'm not suggesting Turner used Wikiepdia, as the book predates the site. But he takes a page to do what Wikipedia accomplishes in two sentences).

Fine, I can work around opinion for the love of a few facts. These Turner mainly harvests from researching interviews with people who have worked on the show, as well as a couple of other sources. But they are scant, so the joy of enriching your *Simpsons* trivia quickly fades.

This book is poorly structured, laid out in several massive chapters that in turn jump topics so much you tend to forget how you got there. It's a rambling mess. Broad, sweeping chapters are possible - Bill Bryson does it often (and brilliantly). But *Planet Simpson* tries to stuff so much into its first major chapter that there is no real thread connecting them - other than the show.

This is a result of not deciding who the audience is: the newcomer or the die-hard fan? *Simpsons*-related material is delved into with quite some detail: Turner details some episodes enough to sometimes take up whole pages, all toward then explaining whatever point he wants to latch on. This gets tiresome if you are already a big *Simpsons* supporter. But at the same time he never delves deeply enough into anything to give a newcomer real context. It's as if he assumes the reader has a fairly good understanding about comedy, television, sitcoms and cartoons, yet only heard of *The Simpsons* in passing. That is just absurd.

Planet Simpson is tedious, shallow, rambling and a real chore. I'm sad, since I love the show and wanted something that would enrich my knowledge and experience. Instead I got a rambling fan thesis. Not recommended (unless you want a nice collection of *Simpsons* research references).

Dimitri says

Not an in-depth look at the creation of the series, but at the innumerable hidden jokes, cultural references, social commentary, impact upon 90's TV animation... in short, the phenomenon.

It's a delight to read when you're a *Simpsons* fan, including the character bios puzzled together from details spread across the (then) 20 seasons ...but anno 2010+ , 99% of this is available 99 thousand times on the internet...

Scott says

I could say that this book reminds me of a young Rory Calhoun, but then that would lead me to wonder why Rory wasn't summarily executed for the good of humankind. To steal a line from a (Season 8 episode) "Hurricane Neddy" cameo...

Jay Sherman: It stinks! It stinks! It stinks!

Yes, this is a first, folks, this is THE FIRST book I have EVER given up on. This book would be better served by having the title changed to "My Rantings and Ravings That Have Only a Small Relation to the Simpsons In Any Form Whatsoever." Had it been called that, I would have given the book 3 stars...but to call it a book about how the Simpsons defines the Western culture is a farce worthy of Mel Brooks.

This book is filled with 300 pages worth of useless adjectives. Honestly, it reminds me of a really, really, really long and boring essay written by a college freshman.

It's all black and white. There is precious little analysis here, it's mainly opinionated bullshit. The author gives very little in the way of reasons and rational and blindly makes outrageous statements. Given the ridiculous opinions that are presented as fact, SOME authentication would have been nice. Sadly, things are presented in a "this the way it is because I said so," sort of way.

The references to Simpsons characters are more or less spot on, but since the author seems to hold these characterizations as an absolute reflection of Western society as a whole, people tend to be pigeon-holed. If this author is any indication, I suppose that I could (based on his rhetoric) judge the entire nation of Canada and it's people by watching "Dudley Do-right."

This book drags worse than a Roseanne national anthem. It should not have been written, it should NOT be read and the worse "lie" of all is in the title.

SCREW FLANDERS SCREW FLANDERS SCREW FLANDERS

Spencer says

If you like your beer cold, your TV loud, and your homosexuals flaming, this book may not be for you.

It's not the story of how the Simpsons got - and stayed - on TV. It's not an insidery tell-all. It doesn't teach you how to draw Mr. Burns.

Instead, it's an examination of how the show fits into our broader culture and why it is an important cultural phenomenon. You might not find that sort of thing interesting - and that's okay. But I do, and I thought it was groin-grabbingly great.

Itch Iseatingnandos says

I'm a super Simpsons nerd and even I couldn't quite finish it

Grace says

Long and meandering, not only does the author discuss The Simpsons, but uses the show as a jumping off point to talk about satire, ironic culture, corporate and authoritarian ineptitude, moral crusades of the 90s, consumerism, the rise of the internet, Radiohead, Nirvana, the DIY aesthetic...I mean, what's not to love?

He makes a convincing argument for Bart as a punk icon and Homer as the pure expression of the id, Lisa as the voice of progressivism, Marge as the defender of family values, Kent Brockman indicative of the real world glibness of news, Troy McClure of the emptiness of celebrity. Really there's no argument to be made, since all of this is fairly obvious to longtime fans of the show, but it was just such a fun read, even when you ended up reading about road rage instead of just The Simpsons.

I grew up on this show-- we're the same age, and my family didn't sit and eat at the dinner table and talk about our day. We watched The Simpsons, new episodes on Sundays and the episodes running in syndication during the week. So, this book pretty much had me at the subtitle, since The Simpsons is my all-time favorite show and I do indeed think it is a masterpiece. Yes, I do regularly quote The Simpsons (as does my family, and I feel instant kinship with anyone who will recognize my Simpsons quotes and throw one right back). I'm frequently reminded of the show's plots in real life. I don't, however, refer to the production codes of episodes (which was kinda frustrating), since I'm not exactly Comic Book Guy.

I do like how this was published in 2004, because I've always been a hardcore seasons 1-9 fan, with 10 starting to come apart, and 11 and 12 the absolute last seasons that have SOME good parts in SOME episodes (as opposed to 1-9 where everything is amazing). I don't need to read anything about the seasons after that, and this book luckily doesn't go too far into the darkness that is season 13 and beyond. Side note: I stopped watching the show around season 13. Since I watched the show about a dozen times a week in syndication, it was obvious even to pre-teen me that the episodes airing in 2000/2001 were just NOT the same caliber as all the previous seasons.

Tl;dr - The Simpsons plus long winded cultural commentary on the 90s made for a really fun read.

Jonathan says

Impossibly high-brow analysis of THE cultural touchstone of the 90s. Although it initially presents itself as a 500 page pop-culture-PhD it nevertheless perfectly captures the humour and spirit of the show, and dives deep into the meaning and cross-cultural impact of what The Simpsons meant and how it reflected on society at the time.

Compulsory reading for any pop culture maven or genuine Simpsons aficionado.

Mr_Toad says

It seems that many commentators were looking for a "fun_read". Well, that's OK, but this book has much more to offer than simply entertainment.

This book tackles serious issues which western society seems piteously unable to correct. For example, to quote Matt Groening himself this time:

"In America, television is interrupted every seven minutes by a barrage of commercials. The overall message is that nothing matters. In fact, the more urgent the material, the more its urgency is diluted."

Some of the gems amongst the many that this book discusses with humour include:

- economies that must continue to grow, not because they need to reach a goal, but because growth is the goal
- a news media that generates content - not because there's news to report but because there's media space to be filled
- the crassness of corporate TV production.

The book ranges over a vast territory with skill and humour. For example, it introduced me to the following splendid words of social critic Neil Postman, thus:

"What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy."
