



Planet Simpson: How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation

By Chris Turner

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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."

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Although this unauthorized book "was not prepared, licensed, approved, or endorsed by any entity involved in creating or producing" *The Simpsons*, Canadian journalist Turner embarks on an encyclopedic exposition of the show's episodes, catchphrases, characters, cultural impact, social commentary, themes and influences. In 1987, 33-year-old cartoonist Matt Groening devised the dysfunctional family during a 15-minute wait before pitching the concept to producer James L. Brooks. Short segments on Fox's *Tracey Ullman Show* escalated into the full series in 1989–1990, with accolades and awards piling up during the following 15 years. Turner flavors his straightforward Simpsons study with footnotes and facts on everything from Ayn Rand and Columbine to Y2K and Yeats. Unraveling and analyzing plot threads, he views the series as "more anti-authoritarian by far than almost anything else that's ever aired in prime time," and he praises it as a "cultural institution" comparable to the Beatles. Turner's fannish enthusiasm and tsunami of trivia will appeal mainly to devotees, though cultural historians may value it for its vision of Springfield as a satirical mirror reflecting the trials and tribulations of contemporary life.

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From *Booklist*

On the verge of becoming the all-time longest-running situation comedy, *The Simpsons* has had unprecedented effect on American popular culture, as Turner convincingly argues. He traces the show's history, from cultural touchstone to beloved institution, and offers lengthy profiles of the characters, elucidated with tidbits from 15 years' worth of episodes. Especially fascinating is his depiction of the online community devoted to *The Simpsons*, which pores over each episode for arcane references and whose efforts have been subtly acknowledged in metatextual gags on the show. While Turner overstates the case for *The Simpsons'* cultural importance, even claiming that, since it appeals to all ages, it is in some respects more important than rock and roll, his observations are thoughtful and perceptive, and he conveys them in a breezy, sometimes smart-alecky tone totally appropriate to the subject. Long-winded but never dull, dense but never academic, *Planet Simpson* may be too much for casual viewers. For the show's sizable hardcore audience, however, especially the most serious-minded viewers, it's a feast. *Gordon Flagg*

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Review

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