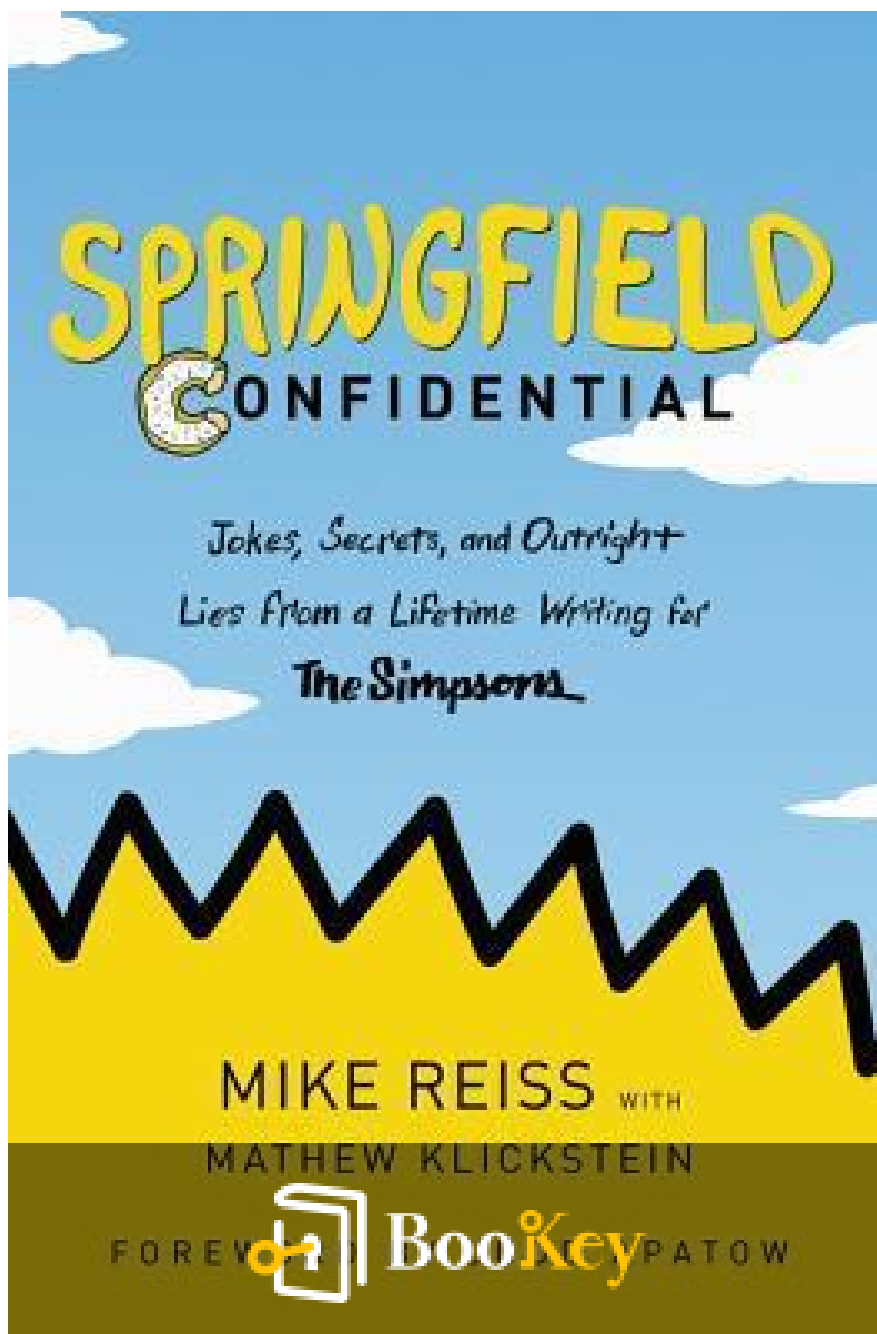


Springfield Confidential PDF (Limited Copy)

Mike Reiss



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Springfield Confidential Summary

Behind-the-scenes tales of The Simpsons' legacy.

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About the book

In "Springfield Confidential," Mike Reiss, longtime writer and producer of "The Simpsons," invites readers behind the scenes of the iconic series that has shaped pop culture for over three decades. With a delightful blend of humor and insider anecdotes, Reiss shares his experiences working alongside legendary creators like Matt Groening and reveals the quirky dynamics of crafting beloved characters such as Homer, Marge, and Bart. This memoir isn't just a love letter to the show; it's a candid reflection on the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of life in Hollywood, showcasing the intersection of brilliance and absurdity in the world of television. For fans of the show and newcomers alike, Reiss's storytelling captivates, making "Springfield Confidential" a must-read exploration of the whimsical yet profound legacy of "The Simpsons."

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About the author

Mike Reiss is a celebrated television writer, producer, and author, best known for his extensive work on the iconic animated series "The Simpsons," where he has contributed to the creation of memorable characters and classic episodes since its inception. With a career spanning over three decades in television, Reiss's wit and humor have not only shaped the show's legacy but also garnered him several awards, including multiple Emmys. In addition to his work on "The Simpsons," Reiss has written for a variety of other programs and has authored children's books, showcasing his versatility as a storyteller. His unique perspective on the world of animation and television, combined with his personal anecdotes, offers fans an insider's glimpse into the creative process behind one of the most beloved shows in television history.

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Chapter 1 Summary: It Begins . . .

Chapter One Summary: It Begins . . .

The journey of creating *The Simpsons* began unexpectedly for the author, who found himself writing for the show after being overlooked for higher-profile opportunities. While working on *It's Garry Shandling's Show*, he was eager to land a new gig with *The Boys*, a sitcom by showrunner Alan Zweibel, but when Zweibel chose his friends for that role, he and his writing partner Al Jean accepted the offer to work on *The Simpsons*—a cartoon that very few people wanted to touch.

At the time, primetime animation had long been considered a risk, with the new Fox network still finding its footing. The atmosphere was casual and playful; the writing team worked out of a trailer with little expectation for the show's success. Despite concerns, they quickly began crafting the first episodes, including classics like "Moaning Lisa" and "The Telltale Head." Their eclectic writing staff, mostly inexperienced in sitcom writing, fueled a creative process that prioritized humor and rapid-fire jokes over traditional pacing.

As premiere day approached, the writers collectively anticipated failure, estimating that the show might last only six weeks. However, the

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unconventional approach—writing what they wanted rather than conforming to expectations of what viewers would approve—laid the groundwork for *The Simpsons* to become something unique. In a television landscape dominated by slower-paced shows, their frantic, unpredictable comedy began to take shape.

The first official table read showcased the cast, including Dan Castellaneta as Homer and Julie Kavner as Marge, revealing surprises about voice talent (like female actors voicing children). Despite concerns over the first pilot episode, the real turning point came with *Bart the Genius*, which reestablished faith in the show's potential and led to a shift in the airing order, culminating in a successful Christmas special premiere.

To the surprise of everyone, including the writers who gathered to watch at a bowling alley, the premiere episode garnered remarkable acclaim, marking it as a significant milestone in television history. Critics hailed it as groundbreaking, and the show soared to a record rating for the Fox network. However, internal strife brewed, particularly between Sam Simon, who felt overlooked for credit despite his crucial role in shaping the show, and Matt Groening, who was increasingly recognized as the face of *The Simpsons*.

As the show skyrocketed in popularity, the initial feelings of harmony started to fray. Simon's bitterness over recognition issues manifested, but he found a creative outlet in writing episodes like "Flaming Moe's," showcasing

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his brilliance despite personal conflict. After tensions peaked, the network decided to replace Simon with Mike Reiss and Al Jean as showrunners—putting two inexperienced writers at the helm of a now-iconic series.

While the debate over who deserves credit for *The Simpsons* continued, the author suggests multiple contributions from key figures including Groening (the creator), Simon (the implementer), and Brooks (who provided depth). The collaborative nature, with contributions from writers and animators alike, established a strong foundation that set *The Simpsons* apart in television history, hinting at the secret behind its enduring success: a respectful and cooperative environment that welcomed innovative storytelling and humor. As the chapter closes, the author reflects on how this collective effort on a seemingly ridiculous project—the evolution of a rough concept into a cultural phenomenon—highlights the unpredictable magic of creativity.

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Chapter 2 Summary: A Brief History of Me

Chapter Two: A Brief History of Me

In this chapter, Mike Reiss whimsically reflects on his life, humor, and upbringing through anecdotes that reveal his comedic roots and lasting influences. Starting with a self-referential moment about a discussion thread on IMDb, Reiss expresses his passion for comedy and the joy it brings him, only to be momentarily deflated by a negative comment. This sets a tone of resilience and humor that characterizes his life story.

Reiss recounts his childhood in suburban Connecticut, where he was the middle child in a family that embraced humor. His early years were marked by a notorious playfulness—a fact verified by a doctor who assured his mother he was merely "a little slow," not brain-damaged. This loving yet chaotic family dynamic, peppered with jokes and laughter, was akin to a prison where everyone shared the same humor, often referencing a singular joke book—highlighting the absurdity of their world. Amidst this laughter, he learned early on that the best jokes often carried consequences, as illustrated by his father's physical reprimands for his punchlines.

His home was a veritable comedy workshop, where family members' humor flourished. From witty retorts with his grandmother to the comedic

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one-liners of his siblings, jokes were the currency of their relationships. This environment paved the way for Reiss's fascination with comedy, leading him to aspire to be like his comic idols from shows like *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and the Marx Brothers, where he found inspiration in their unique styles of humor.

Reiss's formal writing journey began in elementary school, prompted by a mother keen to cultivate her son's storytelling talent. His penchant for creativity led to increasingly outrageous tales about his teachers that he would embellish for his mother's entertainment, which inadvertently tangled him in a comedic web of trouble. This imaginative drive persisted throughout his schooling, where he thrived, despite the challenges and peculiarities of his public high school experience.

After an uneven yet formative time at Harvard University, where he viewed the institution as lacking social enjoyment, he nevertheless found a significant connection with his future wife, Denise, and discovered his passion for comedy writing at the Harvard Lampoon. The Lampoon's grueling selection process reflected the competitive nature of TV writing, and Reiss's entry marked the beginning of his journey into the world of professional comedy.

This chapter is rich with clever anecdotes, reflecting Reiss's lighthearted demeanor while simultaneously unpacking deeper reflections about comedy,

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family, and aspirations. It illustrates his transition from a humorous childhood to a career trajectory shaped by the experiences at Harvard, culminating in his rise within the world of television writing with an emphasis on how humor was not only an escape but a fundamental part of his identity.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Funny for Money

Chapter Three Summary: Funny for Money

As the narrator reflects on their senior year at Harvard, uncertainty looms over their future plans post-graduation. The belief that attending such a prestigious university would secure a comfortable life proves to be misguided. However, everything changes with a life-changing phone call from Ted Mann, an editor at the iconic National Lampoon magazine, known for its edgy humor.

Ted offers the narrator and their roommate and writing partner Al Jean a job, remarking on their amusing articles for the Harvard Lampoon. This exciting opportunity leads them to New York City, where they share a stylish loft and enjoy the freedom to create what they want, despite the low pay that was typical at the time.

Early into their National Lampoon stint, the duo writes a provocative piece titled "How to Write Dirty, by Justice Thurgood Marshall," referencing the Supreme Court justice's contentious engagement with adult films in First Amendment cases. The article is received with a mix of humor and controversy, leading to a surprising legacy—Marshall allegedly launched an FBI investigation into them after his passing.

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While National Lampoon is thrilling, both writers yearn for more significant projects, often working late on various scripts, including a disappointing screenplay for the rock star Meat Loaf. A call from Hollywood changes everything again, as they are invited to write jokes for the notorious sequel, **Airplane II: The Sequel**. Their involvement leads to moments of intense pressure on set but also opportunities to interact with its star-studded cast, including William Shatner.

Despite the chaos, their careers hit turbulence after writing a dark comedy script about the Vietnam War that fails to see the light of day, leaving them unemployed in Los Angeles. Miraculously, they get a call from **The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson**, securing an interview with the television legend himself. Although the audition goes well, the job turns out to be a taxing environment, compelling them to produce up to sixty jokes a day.

The narrator recalls humorous experiences on **The Tonight Show**, including tragedies like their infamous "Red Square" joke—a comedic failure that paradoxically earned laughter on a later occasion, demonstrating the unpredictable nature of comedy. They highlight comical segments, like when Joan Rivers hosted the show with a predictably audacious tone, leading to both highs and lows for the writers.

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Sadly, after a brief tenure, they are abruptly let go from **The Tonight Show**, but shortly after receive an offer to return, which they decline in favor of a new sitcom, **Sledge Hammer!**, a parody of gritty cop dramas. Their expertise in quick wit shines through as the show finds a niche audience, thanks to its unconventional narrative style.

Following **Sledge Hammer!**, they work on **ALF**, a puppet-centric sitcom that allows them to embed sly adult humor in childlike narratives effectively. This beloved show further cements their careers, bringing them valuable lessons in writing for varied audiences. Subsequently, they gravitate towards **It's Garry Shandling's Show**, known for its self-referential humor and unpredictability—qualities that would significantly influence their later work on **The Simpsons**.

As they transition to writing for animated television, the narrator outlines the rhythms of sitcom writing, the fluctuating hours, and the unavoidable realities of long commutes in Los Angeles. The trials and tribulations across various shows shape their understanding of sitcom storytelling—leading into the next act that will delve deeper into the creation of **The Simpsons**, revealing behind-the-scenes dynamics of the show that would become a cultural staple. By this juncture, readers are primed for an inside look into the iconic series' production process and the people behind it.

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Chapter 4: Meet the Writers

Chapter Four Summary: Meet the Writers

Chapter Four delves into the collaborative and intricate writing process behind *The Simpsons*, showing that the show's success lies in a dynamic team of writers rather than an individual genius. While ninety-five percent of the work is rewriting, the actual creative spark ignites in a writers' room where four to six writers pitch and refine jokes, fostering an environment where creativity flourishes—or stalls, as the author experienced in a crowded room laden with tentative humor.

The chapter emphasizes the importance of camaraderie within the writing team, explaining how a disruptive personality can derail the creative process. The author recalls a confrontation with a talented, yet abrasive writer who was ultimately let go for his attitude. In contrast, the current *Simpsons* staff is portrayed as a tight-knit group of dedicated, unpretentious professionals, mostly drawn from small towns across America, who share a passion for comedy, even celebrating small victories like "free doughnut day."

The writers range from novices vying for their break to veterans who have been with the show for over a decade. The process of hiring is rigorous and

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demands a "spec script" from every candidate, showcasing their ability to write in the show's style without necessarily producing a work that gets them hired. A key takeaway is that many aspiring writers overlook the value of a well-crafted spec script, as the author insists it's often the last great writing they will do.

Notably, the chapter highlights prominent writers such as Al Jean, the author's long-time collaborator, renowned for his meticulous work ethic and impressive memory. The author shares amusing anecdotes about writing sessions, revealing how their collaborative approach allowed for flawless comedic timing and continuity.

The chapter also introduces key figures like John Swartzwelder, a reclusive but brilliantly creative writer responsible for many iconic episodes, and Conan O'Brien, who was the first new writer hired when the show started. O'Brien's journey from a promising student at the *Harvard Lampoon* to a major figure in the comedy world exemplifies how talent can originate from various backgrounds but ultimately converge in the writers' room.

Moving to the production side, the chapter outlines the meticulous process of transforming a script into a finished episode, a complex timeline involving numerous stages such as pitching ideas, drafting scripts, rewrites based on audience feedback, voice recording, animation, and sound design. It highlights the duration of nine months typically required to bring an

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episode from concept to air, with each episode undergoing several rewrites—a process that reflects the commitment to quality entertainment.

Additionally, it touchingly reflects on the nostalgia of past "story retreats," once celebrated as a lively brainstorming space but increasingly becoming

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Chapter 5 Summary: Meet the Showrunners

Chapter Five Summary: Meet the Showrunners

The Pressure of Leadership

Running **The Simpsons** proves to be an exhilarating yet challenging experience. Unlike the glamorous perception of being a showrunner, Al Jean and other producers describe it as an arduous task filled with immense pressure. Al, who has been at the helm for over two decades, recounts his entry into the role during the series' third season in 1991. With **The Simpsons** solidifying its status as a groundbreaking hit, Al and Mike were thrust into leadership, tasked with the daunting mandate of not screwing it up.

Their responsibilities were vast, ranging from supervising writing and directing voice actors to approving character designs and editing audio tracks. Despite their creative backgrounds, neither had training in these areas, leading to an on-the-job learning experience filled with late nights and overwhelming deadlines. Al and Mike worked relentlessly, often clocking over 100 hours a week, leaving little time for personal lives or even health.

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Struggles and Triumphs

As Mike humorously reflects on his challenges, he recalls moments that tested his limits—a midnight wake-up call about character design, working through illnesses, and even questioning the integrity of the production budget over a mere 85 cents. These anecdotes exemplify the chaotic and dedicated environment of the show.

Despite the relentless pace, the second season of **The Simpsons** garnered accolades, with season four eventually hailed as a high point in television history, contrasting sharply with early criticisms Mike faced. The physically demanding lifestyle, paired with the stress of the job, led Mike to gain weight, humorously noting a parallel between his struggles and that of Homer Simpson, the show's beloved, bumbling patriarch.

Cultural Impact and Innovation

The chapter also highlights the creative achievements during Mike and Al's tenure, notably the episode "Cape Feare" featuring Sideshow Bob, which humorously parodied cinematic themes while integrating a metaphor for survival through its storytelling format. This episode gained further cultural relevance with its adaptation into an off-Broadway play, **Mr. Burns: A*

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Post-Electric Play*." However, after attending the performance, Mike's enthusiasm waned when it turned out to be bleak and unrepresentative of the show's spirit.

The chapter then delves into the myriad of production roles that have evolved over the years. With nearly fifty producers credited, the distinction between those directly involved in creative output versus those merely holding titles becomes a point of humor and irony, underscoring the show's complex and sometimes chaotic organizational structure.

Character Dynamics and Thematic Padding

Former writer Conan O'Brien notes the contrasting personalities of Mike and Al, highlighting their commitment to quality and work ethic, which foster a creative environment. The chapter offers insight into how padded scenes became a staple of *The Simpsons*. Mike cleverly narrates how they often stretched episodes that were under length through means like extended couch gags or humorous short skits. These padding techniques not only fill runtime gaps but also contribute to the unique storytelling style that fans have come to love.

Concluding Thoughts

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The chapter concludes with reflections on the show's enduring principles, emphasizing a reluctance to update a successful formula that's been cultivated over time. Despite innovations in technology, *The Simpsons* remains committed to traditional, hand-drawn animation and the use of a full orchestra, honoring its roots while continuing to evolve in ways that resonate with viewers. Through trials, triumphs, and the rollercoaster of running a legendary series, Mike and Al's dedication to *The Simpsons* remains a testament to the labor of love woven throughout its history.

Section	Summary
The Pressure of Leadership	Running *The Simpsons* is a challenging role filled with pressure. Al Jean recalls how he and Mike entered this role during the show's early success, facing immense responsibilities without formal training.
Struggles and Triumphs	Mike reflects on the personal and professional challenges encountered, including taxing work hours and health issues. Despite this, the show received critical acclaim, particularly during its fourth season.
Cultural Impact and Innovation	The chapter describes significant episodes like "Cape Feare" that showcase innovative storytelling, as well as the evolving nature of production roles within the show, highlighting its complex organization.
Character Dynamics and Thematic Padding	Insights into the contrasting work styles of Mike and Al show their commitment to quality, with humorous padding techniques becoming a hallmark of the show.
Concluding Thoughts	Reflecting on the show's history, there is a strong emphasis on maintaining traditional animation methods and orchestration while evolving to connect with audiences.



Chapter 6 Summary: Meet the Characters

Chapter Six provides a fascinating exploration of the origins and creative processes behind the beloved characters of *The Simpsons*, detailing how their unique names and traits came to be.

The chapter opens by admiring Matt Groening's talent for creating memorable character names, many of which are cleverly inspired by real streets in Portland, Oregon. Groening's intention to give characters deliberately ordinary names aligns with a comedic principle that eschews overly quirky monikers. Characters such as Dr. Julius Hibbert—originally a female character named Julia—draw from personal connections while Principal Skinner is named in homage to psychologist B.F. Skinner, with dark humor surrounding his parenting style.

Several iconic characters emerge in this chapter. For example, Homer's favorite beer, Duff, was suggested by Jay Kogen with no relation to rock bassist Duff McKagan, debunking some pop culture myths. Meanwhile, Professor Frink pays comedic tribute to Jerry Lewis, while Chief Wiggum embodies socially satirical humor by being pig-like in both appearance and demeanor, drawing inspiration from gangster archetypes. The evolution of characters like Apu, whose name is a nod to the Apu Trilogy, reflects cultural discussions on representation and stereotype, a poignant issue that has evolved since the show's debut.

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The chapter also explains how characters are birthed from collaborative effort—initial vague descriptions transform into fully developed figures through voice work and animation that attune to their comedic essence. The genesis of Groundskeeper Willie, for instance, underscores the spontaneous creativity of the writers, who shaped his identity on the fly, leading to his eventual status as a cultural icon.

Homer Simpson is highlighted as a writer's dream character due to his multifaceted flaws and relatable qualities. He is a quintessential figure, representing a blend of comic absurdity and human tenderness, akin to classic cartoon archetypes. The narrative humorously nods to the absurdity of creating a specific character backstory only to let it evolve whimsically over time.

A significant discussion emerges surrounding Apu, whose mix of positive traits and stereotypical qualities has drawn scrutiny in recent times. The creators grapple with the balance of honoring the character's original design while listening to changing societal sentiments. The chapter encapsulates the show's exploration into cultural representation and the responsibility that comes with it.

Finally, *The Simpsons* has cultivated a rich lexicon of catchphrases, the most famous of which is Homer's iconic "d'oh," derived from earlier

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comedic forms. The chapter closes on a light-hearted note with a fun fact about a real person named Homer Simpson, humorously highlighting the show's pervasive influence.

Overall, Chapter Six illustrates the layers of creativity and thought behind *The Simpsons*, weaving in humor, cultural reflection, and the complexities of character creation in a beloved animated series.

Key Aspect	Details
Chapter Overview	Exploration of character origins and creative processes behind *The Simpsons*.
Creator	Matt Groening's talent for creating character names inspired by real places.
Character Naming	Characters often have ordinary names, avoiding overly quirky monikers.
Unique Characters	Dr. Julius Hibbert (originally Julia), Principal Skinner (homage to B.F. Skinner), etc.
Iconic Beverages	Homer's favorite beer, Duff, has no ties to Duff McKagan.
Character Inspirations	Professor Frink pays tribute to Jerry Lewis; Chief Wiggum reflects gangster archetypes.
Cultural Representation	Apu's evolution addresses discussions on stereotypes and representation.
Character Development	Collaboration leads to detailed character development from vague descriptions.

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Key Aspect	Details
Homer Simpson	A multi-faceted character known for his flaws, representing comic absurdity and tenderness.
Apu's Controversy	Balancing original design with evolving societal sentiments regarding stereotypes.
Catchphrases	Rich lexicon, including Homer's "d'oh," emphasizing the show's comedic influence.
Conclusion	Chapter illustrates creativity, humor, and cultural reflection in character creation.

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Chapter 7 Summary: Meet the Cast

Chapter Seven Summary: Meet the Cast

In the bustling environment of **The Simpsons** recording sessions, the vibrant cast members reflect both their on-screen personalities and their individuality. The chapter unveils the dynamics among the key voice actors, highlighting the origins of their roles and the unique paths each character underwent to fit into the Simpson family and the broader Springfield community.

Dan Castellaneta, the voice of Homer Simpson, is playful yet contrasts sharply with his character's personality—portraying a modest, intelligent man. Originally cast in **The Tracey Ullman Show**, his journey led him to voice a character that would become iconic. **Julie Kavner**, voicing Marge, developed Marge's signature raspy voice through intensive rehearsal and humorously suggests that Marge loves Homer for his prowess in bed.

Nancy Cartwright ingeniously voices Bart Simpson and other characters, embodying the quintessential essence of boyhood. Her energetic personality shines through Bart's rebellious nature, even leading to humorous moments during her pregnancies. **Yeardley Smith**, the voice of Lisa, channels the emotional depth of the show through her singular

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character, resonating with many viewers' experiences.

Hank Azaria and **Harry Shearer** complete the ensemble, with each contributing multiple characters to the series. Azaria's range allows for comedic creations like Moe and Chief Wiggum, while Shearer's ability to alternate between characters such as Mr. Burns and Ned Flanders showcases his extensive experience. Adding a layer of tragedy, **Phil Hartman**—known for his roles as Lionel Hutz and Troy McClure—left an indelible mark on the show before his untimely passing.

The chapter humorously transitions into the world of guest stars, noting the vast number of celebrities who have lent their voices to the series. From the likes of **Johnny Carson** and **Dustin Hoffman** to elusive figures like **Thomas Pynchon** and **Michael Jackson**, the guest stars reflect a diversity of Hollywood talent that has further enriched the series' cultural footprint. The evolution of why celebrities choose to appear on the show unfolds, revealing that many are drawn to it by admiration for the series, pressure from their children, or connections with the producers.

Amidst the anecdotes, a comedic highlight appears with **Joe Frazier** recording a line—a struggle that emphasizes his determination, symbolizing the resilience that echoes through the casting process. Equally entertaining are the relationships formed with guest stars, such as a humorous encounter with **David Copperfield**, showcasing the blend of magic and humor that

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defines the show's appeal.

Though the cast frequently grapples with audience feedback that can be harsh, the continued success of **The Simpsons**—evidenced by numerous awards and sustained viewer engagement—demonstrates its profound impact on popular culture. This dynamic chapter not only illuminates the inner workings of the show's production but also celebrates the contributions of its beloved cast, leaving a lasting legacy in television history.

Element	Description
Chapter Title	Chapter Seven Summary: Meet the Cast
Setting	The Simpsons recording sessions
Main Focus	Dynamics among key voice actors and their roles
Dan Castellaneta	Voice of Homer Simpson; contrasts his character's personality
Julie Kavner	Voice of Marge; developed a unique raspy voice for the character
Nancy Cartwright	Voice of Bart; embodies the essence of boyhood
Yeardley Smith	Voice of Lisa; channels emotional depth
Hank Azaria	Voices multiple characters like Moe and Chief Wiggum
Harry Shearer	Voices multiple characters like Mr. Burns and Ned Flanders
Phil Hartman	Voiced Lionel Hutz and Troy McClure; left a significant legacy

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Element	Description
Guest Stars	Many celebrities have lent their voices, drawn by admiration or family pressure
Joe Frazier	Notable recording moment showcasing resilience
David Copperfield	Humorous encounter highlighting the blend of magic and humor
Audience Feedback	Cast deals with feedback but the show remains successful with awards
Overall Impact	Celebrates the contributions of the cast and legacy on television

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Chapter 8: Four Episodes That Changed the World (Kinda)

Chapter Eight Summary: Four Episodes That Changed the World (Kinda)

In this chapter, the author recounts the transformative impact of four pivotal episodes of **The Simpsons** that not only broke new ground in storytelling but also influenced the show's future direction. Instead of presenting yet another ranking of the best episodes, he shares behind-the-scenes insights into their creation.

Seminal Episode 1: “Like Father, Like Clown”

This episode focuses on Krusty the Clown and his estranged relationship with his Orthodox rabbi father, framed within a narrative reminiscent of **The Jazz Singer**. It marked several firsts for the series: it centered on a character outside the Simpson family, explored themes of Judaism, and showed the depth of the characters beyond the main family. Authentically, the writers consulted real rabbis to craft a scholarly, yet humorous, Talmudic debate. The episode resonated deeply with audiences, even prompting personal reflections on family ties.

Seminal Episode 2: “Homer at the Bat”

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Pitching a new story, Sam Simon introduced a plot where Mr. Burns forms a softball team of professional baseball players, all playing themselves. The episode showcased a departure from the usual focus on the Simpson family, allowing guest stars to take center stage. Despite initial skepticism from the regular cast, it became a massive success and symbolized the show's willingness to stretch the bounds of reality. It also served as a comedic vehicle for exploring sports culture while featuring amusing subplots for each baseball player involved. The episode's impact was felt nationally, even credited with saving a child's life through its depiction of the Heimlich maneuver.

Seminal Episode 3: “Moaning Lisa”

Initially pitched as a simple story about Lisa feeling sad, it turned into a narrative that revealed the character's complexity and emotional depth, establishing her as more than just Bart's counterpart. With mentorship from the character Bleeding Gums Murphy, Lisa learns to embrace her sadness through jazz—a theme that would become integral to the series. This episode signaled *The Simpsons*' potential to handle emotional storytelling, illustrating that animated series could provoke genuine emotional responses.

Seminal Episode 4: “Treehouse of Horror” (The First One)

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The Simpsons ventured into the realm of horror with its Halloween special, which combined three frightening stories that pushed the limits of animated storytelling. Opening with a cheeky disclaimer from Marge, the episode featured dark humor and creative narratives that delighted audiences. Each successive Halloween episode grew in complexity, allowing the writers to create more innovative and original content, solidifying the tradition of Halloween specials in pop culture.

Special Mention: “Homer and Lisa Exchange Cross Words”

In this episode, Lisa discovers her passion for crossword puzzles, leading to a heartfelt resolution with Homer. The puzzle constructed in the episode cleverly incorporated real clues used in The New York Times, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. This episode highlights the writers' love for wordplay and clever storytelling, reinforcing their commitment to creative and engaging content.

Regrets in the Show’s History

The author reflects on a few controversial jokes that elicited significant backlash, including misguided references to conditions like Tourette syndrome and a regrettably crafted musical number about New Orleans that offended many locals. He acknowledges the complexities of navigating sensitive topics in comedy, revealing the show’s evolution and shedding

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Favorite and Least Favorite Episodes

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Chapter 9 Summary: Meet the Fans

Chapter Nine: Meet the Fans Summary

In the whimsical world of *The Simpsons*, there lies a unique perk for writer Mike Reiss: the opportunity to travel globally and share his experiences through a lecture titled “The Simpsons Backstage Tour.” This presentation delivers behind-the-scenes secrets, controversies, and humor associated with the beloved animated series. Since its inception in 2000, Reiss has presented this talk in over four hundred locations across thirty-six states and twenty-one countries.

Despite the absence of a live audience during typical recordings, these lectures offer Reiss a rare chance to engage directly with fans. The enthusiasm he encounters is heartwarming compared to the critical backlash he sometimes faces online. Surprisingly, many ardent fans confess to their previous internet troll behavior, showcasing their duality. Reiss observes that while one might expect Bart or Homer to be fan favorites, preferences often surprisingly lean toward Duffman and Disco Stu—characters that originated from seemingly trivial inspirations like a typo.

Reiss also highlights the importance of fan feedback, recounting how a decrease in Ralph Wiggum’s appearances coincided with diminishing

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comedic material. Yet, a resurgence in fan adoration led to Ralph's revival, demonstrating how fan interactions can influence creative decisions. The supportive nature of fans consistently shines through during lectures, except for one memorable instance where a particularly zealous audience member posed a perplexing continuity question about Moe's ear size.

Mixed audiences often deliver mixed results. In one instance, a spirited speech at Florida State University led to an overzealous security detail, emphasizing the commitment made to ensure Reiss's safety, humorously initiated because they had extra security from a prior high-profile speaker.

In addition to his signature lectures, Reiss tailors special presentations, including one focusing on Jewish themes within *The Simpsons*, which he shares with various Jewish communities. Audience receptions vary significantly—some have proven to be hilariously attentive, while others, such as a commencement speech at a girls' school in South Carolina, elicited mixed reactions, particularly due to a joke about President George W. Bush.

Through a blend of humor and insight, Reiss reflects on societal sensitivities, offensive humor, and audience dynamics. He discusses the importance of relatability in comedy, believing that humor stems from the ability to laugh at oneself rather than merely at others.

Throughout these experiences, he confronts academic interpretations of

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The Simpsons, making light of professors who ascribe complex philosophies to a show that he asserts was created in a more instinctual and less calculated manner. He entertains fan theories, both absurd and entertaining, revealing the quirky engagement of the show's viewer base.

As a response to the common criticism that the series has declined in quality, Reiss counters that all long-running shows inevitably evolve, akin to the aging of a person. As creativity runs its course, bizarre storylines emerge, keeping the show's pace lively and engaging.

Concluding with insights from fellow writer Al Jean, who emphasizes the dedication and innovation that persist in the production, Reiss celebrates the ongoing legacy of *The Simpsons*, ensuring that laughter and evolving storytelling continue to resonate with audiences around the world.

Aspect	Summary
Book	Springfield Confidential
Author	Mike Reiss
Chapter Title	Chapter Nine: Meet the Fans
Purpose of Lectures	To share behind-the-scenes secrets and engage with fans through the "The Simpsons Backstage Tour"
Content Overview	Reiss discusses insights gained from fan interactions, character preferences, and the impact of fan feedback on the show's direction.

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Aspect	Summary
Fan Engagement	Reiss encounters supportive fans, with some surprising confessions about past trolling behavior.
Character Preferences	Duffman and Disco Stu are more popular than expected, while Ralph Wiggum's frequent absence is noted.
Audiences	Reiss experiences varied receptions across different demographics, from supportive to perplexing questions.
Humor and Sensitivity	Reiss emphasizes the balance between humor and societal sensitivities in his presentations.
Academic Interpretations	He humorously critiques complex academic theories imposed on the show, advocating for its instinctual creation.
Show's Evolution	Reiss argues that like all long-running shows, *The Simpsons* evolves over time, resulting in creative and bizarre storylines.
Conclusion	Reiss and Al Jean celebrate the show's legacy, noting the ongoing dedication to innovation and storytelling.

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Chapter 10 Summary: Seeing the World with The Simpsons

Chapter Ten Summary: Viewing the World Through The Simpsons Lens

The author opens with a surprisingly personal note about his extensive travels, provoked mainly by his adventurous wife. Together, they have explored places from the poles to various countries, often facing unique cultural experiences tied to their shared love for *The Simpsons*. Despite the weighty political and cultural landscapes of their travels—including stops in countries where antisemitism is prevalent—the author humorously expresses that his commitment to his wife outweighs his fears.

As he continues his journey, he recounts various global interactions that showcase *The Simpsons* as a unifying force. For example, in Iran, a young tour guide expresses admiration for the early seasons of the show, revealing the show's unexpected reach even in tightly controlled environments. The author highlights how the program has gained traction in diverse regions, from the universal admiration it receives in places like Kurdistan and Singapore, to the mixed perceptions in France, where it faced a nearly two-decade ban after an unfavorable depiction of the country.

While *The Simpsons* resonates globally, the nuances of translation present

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challenges. The author notes how English puns don't always translate well, often leading to lost humor, yet the core of the show remains beloved. He shares anecdotes that encapsulate how different cultures perceive the series: in Latin America, many see it as representative of a Mexican family, while in countries like Japan, the show faces an uphill battle due to cultural taboos surrounding character designs.

Reflecting on his travels, he humorously recounts a series of misadventures and near misses, including the stark contrast between the excitement generated by *The Simpsons* in Bolivia and his own ludicrously unsuccessful navigation due to a Homer-voiced GPS that led him to a completely wrong museum.

He dives deeper into *The Simpsons*' cultural impact, asserting that while it may not be universally appreciated (as shown by negative reactions in France and the cancellation in Venezuela), it's undeniable that it has transcended boundaries, eliciting laughter and connecting audiences from vastly different backgrounds.

As the narrative progresses, the author comically argues the challenges of maintaining *The Simpsons*' long-standing success and its potential continuity. He touches on the mechanics of animated storytelling, discussing how the incessant whims of live-action stars lead to shorter series lifespans. By contrast, animated characters can perpetuate indefinitely, potentially

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creating a future where entire generations might explore new themes, as hinted in a reflective, holiday-themed episode that gives a glimpse into possible character evolution.

In conclusion, he makes light of the pressure surrounding a potential finale and the comedic absurdities tied to each character's fate. His tales culminate in affirmations about the joy of exploring new projects alongside *The Simpsons*, highlighting a commitment to both his past and future endeavors in animation, all while sprinkling in absurdity and humor emblematic of the show itself.

This chapter, filled with autobiographical anecdotes, illustrates the profound impact of *The Simpsons* on both the author's personal experiences and its global cultural landscape.

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Chapter 11 Summary: On Comedy

Chapter Eleven: On Comedy - Summary

In this chapter, the author, Mike Reiss, explores the complexities and nuances of comedy, drawing on his personal experiences to illustrate his insights. He begins by asserting that comedy isn't a skill that can be formally taught, likening the learning process to how children acquire language—through observation and imitation rather than structured education.

Reiss shares his own humorous genesis, revealing that he was born as his mother laughed at Jacques Tati's film **Monsieur Hulot's Holiday**.

Although he later found the film incomprehensible, this anecdote serves as a fantastical origin story for his comedic identity. As he reflects on his childhood, he notes how humor became a refuge for him, especially given his lack of athletic prowess and traditional good looks. This desire to be funny drove him to experiment with jokes, ultimately shaping his career.

His comedic journey is punctuated with amusing anecdotes—like the time he jokingly relayed his sickness to a doctor or made light of a solemn moment during his honeymoon at Pearl Harbor, demonstrating how humor often emerges from the juxtaposition of serious and absurd contexts. He

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equates being funny to a natural trait, similar to being tall, underscoring that it's not about conscious effort but rather an innate characteristic.

Reiss nostalgically acknowledges three major influences in his formative years: Bill Cosby, Bill Murray, and Richard Pryor, recognizing that their unique comedic styles set a template that many subsequent comedians followed, albeit sometimes with less emphasis on substantive jokes. He critiques a past era in comedy that lacked genuine effort, contrasting it with the resurgence of joke-driven humor showcased in **The Simpsons** and later comedies like **30 Rock**.

The author grapples with the essence of what comedy actually is, noting the many theories proposed by philosophers, which he finds inadequate. Instead, he introduces his own simple theory about the completeness of a joke: when it's finished, all its loose ends are tied neatly together. He illustrates this with examples of jokes that employ illogical yet humorous conclusions, suggesting that true comedy often lies in subverting expectations.

Reiss further compiles recommendations for both classic and lesser-known comedies, hinting at a personal disdain for over-hyped films. He champions films that utilize clever humor, like **One, Two, Three** and **Hot Fuzz**, while also promoting the documentary **The Aristocrats**, where multiple comedians reinterpret a single joke, showcasing the diverse styles and interpretations of humor.

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Amidst these reflections, he highlights the evolving nature of comedy—emphasizing that platforms like Twitter now serve as breeding grounds for new comedic talent, including his own ventures into tweeting. He shares a sampling of his tweets, illustrating how the platform has refined his comedic voice, ensuring it remains relevant in today’s fast-paced social landscape.

This exploration of comedy highlights its rich, subjective nature, celebrating the joy of laughter while also acknowledging the hard work and creativity that underpin the profession Reiss so passionately embraces.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Comedy is innate and best learned through observation and imitation.

Critical Interpretation: Imagine walking through life with a sense of humor as your constant companion. Like Mike Reiss, you might find that many of your most meaningful connections are forged in moments of laughter, allowing you to navigate challenges with levity. Embracing the idea that comedy isn't just a skill but a natural trait means giving yourself permission to be funny, to see the absurd around you, and to use that as a tool for connection. It inspires you to explore your unique comedic voice, not through strict rules or formal education, but through the simple joy of sharing your perspective, helping you build resilience and a deeper bond with those around you.

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Chapter 12: How Krusty Became The Critic

Chapter Twelve: How Krusty Became The Critic

As Al and I wrapped up our two-year stint on *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening approached us with an intriguing idea: a spin-off centered on Krusty the Clown. Our concept depicted Krusty as a single father living in New York, accompanied by an irritable makeup artist and a zany boss reminiscent of media mogul Ted Turner. However, Matt ultimately decided on a different route—an unconventional live-action reality show starring Dan Castellaneta, the voice behind Krusty, as he embarked on a series of adventurous escapades.

A year later in 1993, Jim Brooks proposed to us a sitcom format set within a morning show akin to *The Today Show*. Intrigued by our Krusty concepts, we repurposed our ideas to revolve around a film critic character, incorporating elements like Krusty's crabby makeup lady. Jim Brooks also suggested we feature comedian Jon Lovitz, having enjoyed his performance in *A League of Their Own*. Lovitz was enthusiastic when we approached him to star in a live-action pilot—until he found out it was for television. Defiantly declaring, "I'm a MOVIE STAR!!!" he almost backed out until we shifted the pitch to animation. Thus, *The Critic* came to life, marking an unusual journey where the last decision made was to animate the show.

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Backed by the success of **The Simpsons**, Jim secured a deal with ABC for us to produce twenty-two episodes regardless of the content's merit. But when we pitched the animated film critic concept with Jon Lovitz, ABC initially rejected it. After negotiations, they agreed to a smaller order of thirteen episodes, commencing a tumultuous television journey.

Recollecting my first encounter with Jon Lovitz at **The Tonight Show**, I quickly recognized his unique talent while he performed a character named Tommy Flanagan—a pathological liar. Our later interactions revealed the paradox of Lovitz's persona: while he projected boldness, he often struggled with self-doubt and was quick to apologize, sometimes for no reason at all. Beyond his comedy career, Lovitz is also classically trained in piano and even sings opera.

For **The Critic**, we assembled a diverse cast, including the voice of Babe the pig, Christine Kavanaugh, and accomplished impressionist Maurice LaMarche. The role of Jay Sherman's sister, Margo, was a challenging casting decision—eventually filled by Nancy Cartwright, who was grateful for the chance to play a female character for once. Meanwhile, character design was a collaborative effort rather than grounded in a singular vision, leading to the Frankenstein-like appearance of Jay Sherman, who bore a striking resemblance to real-life critic James Wolcott.

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The Critic debuted to enthusiastic ratings but soon faced backlash for its irreverent humor, particularly a controversial scene with Sherman and an actress that went too far for ABC's audience. Despite becoming a top-rated show among children, the series struggled to hold its ground and was canceled after just six weeks. Our team's discontent persisted, partly due to the realization of our show's potential had it aired on a different network.

Renowned for mixing shows, Jim Brooks moved **The Critic** to Fox, where it was slated to air immediately following **The Simpsons**. To launch this new phase, a groundbreaking crossover episode was planned, featuring Jay Sherman judging the fictional Springfield Film Festival. Resistance from members of the **Simpsons** team resulted in conflict, with passionate opposition against the crossover fueled by former collaborators. However, Brooks took a decisive stand, reminding us of the absence of a democratic system in creative endeavors.

The episode was produced against the odds and turned out to be a success, gaining popularity. However, despite the stellar ratings, the new president of Fox despised **The Critic** and failed to support it adequately. After airing ten episodes, the network abruptly canceled it, leaving the creators bewildered. The cancellation reflected a larger pattern, as the subsequent president's lack of belief in the show led to its demise.

Despite the setbacks, **The Critic** had not met its end. Years later, during

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the dot-com boom, plans emerged to create original shorts for the internet, allowing us to infuse timely parodies. However, delays and corporate issues stalled the release, leading to the eventual conclusion of the series.

While Jon Lovitz, now looking back fondly on the show, expressed his

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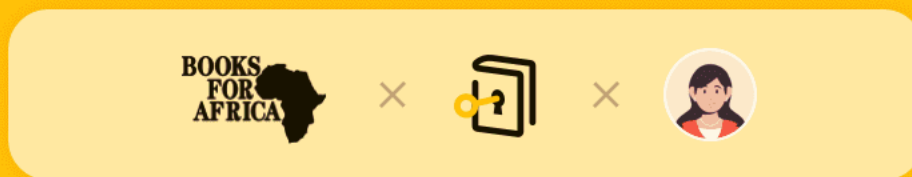




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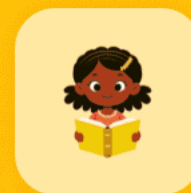
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Chapter 13 Summary: A Development Deal with the Devil

Chapter Thirteen: A Development Deal with the Devil

In the aftermath of their setbacks with **The Critic**, Mike Scully and Al Jean transitioned to securing a lucrative development deal, a common industry practice where studios pay creators to develop TV shows exclusively for them, often leading to countless failed pitches. Observing the decline of this model over the years—where studios increasingly tightened their grip on creative processes—it became apparent that this era of development deals was becoming a relic of the past.

During their search for a studio, the duo had a memorable meeting with Steven Spielberg at DreamWorks, who appreciated **The Critic** but felt they had misused lead actor Jon Lovitz. Their banter fell flat, and the deal was quickly lost. Eventually, they settled with another studio, pitching over a hundred ideas throughout the three-year deal, but none progressed, including a concept titled **Forty Below**, set in Antarctica. Despite their thorough research, the studio insisted it should be set at the North Pole, dismissing the geographical and logistical nuances, which led to further frustration and ultimately, the show never materialized.

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Despite their lack of success during the developmental period, they remained creatively active and contributed significantly to **The Simpsons** with a number of well-received episodes. Tiring of constant rejections from the studios, they reverted to the hack writer approach, mixing existing successful concepts, resulting in **Teen Angel**, which blended **Beavis and Butt-Head** with **Sabrina, the Teenage Witch**. This led to a convoluted production process marked by mismatched casting and ultimately poor reception, culminating in the show's cancellation after barely a season.

Scully also served as a consultant on **Homeboys in Outer Space**, a sci-fi parody that appeared promising but became mired in executive meddling, suffering a fate similar to **Teen Angel**. By the end of his civil partnership with Al Jean, who returned to **The Simpsons**, Scully opted to quit show business altogether, disillusioned with the development process that stifled creativity.

In what he thought was a permanent hiatus from writing, Scully traveled with his wife but couldn't escape the writing compulsion. His attempts to break back into the literary scene were met with a barrage of rejection letters, yet inspiration struck when he reflected on the persistence of writers like Jack London. Gradually, Scully's work began to find acceptance, leading to substantial success through children's books, including **How Murray Saved Christmas**, which became a holiday hit.

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Scully's lesson to aspiring comedy writers is to break from traditional pathways, cultivate a passion for their craft, and pursue projects they believe in, reflecting on the mixed success of the Hollywood treadmill.

In a reflection from Al Jean on Scully's retirement, he understood that Scully became weary of the overwhelming notes and contradictory feedback that plagued the development process, particularly hopeful that *The Simpsons* provided a less cluttered creative environment.

The chapter closes with commentary on *The Simpsons*' unique success, largely due to the absence of intrusive network executives, allowing creative freedom. This point draws a humorous contrast to the chaotic and often nonsensical world of TV executives who frequently offer impractical suggestions detached from the creative process. While Scully depicts an industry rife with frustrations, he also hints at a revolution in quality TV being led by outlets willing to trust their creators instead of stifling them.

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Chapter 14 Summary: Doing Animated Films for Cash (Not Credit)

Chapter Fourteen Summary: Doing Animated Films for Cash (Not Credit)

This chapter delves into the often-overlooked role of script doctors—writers who step in to revise animated films after the original screenwriters have moved on. The author, a seasoned script doctor, casually lists some blockbuster animated films he has worked on, including **Despicable Me**, **Ice Age**, and **Kung Fu Panda 3**, boasting a collective box office of \$11 billion that surpasses even Pixar.

The author highlights the unique challenges of writing for animated films, where the lengthy production process allows for multiple revisions, often leading to a host of anonymous writers making tweaks and adjustments. He humorously describes his work as that of a handyman, called in to fix problems—be it a joke that falls flat or an entire script in need of a rewrite. He recalls specific contributions, such as naming the Minions in **Despicable Me**, which later became a franchise phenomenon of its own.

However, the rewriting process is not always smooth. The author recounts frustrating experiences where his suggestions were ignored, like in **Horton Hears a Who**, where a problematic line remained despite multiple

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alternatives he provided. He shares anecdotes about the reluctance of studios to embrace significant change, often choosing to preserve subpar jokes with the belief that they could salvage them in the animation phase.

One of the author's hardest projects was **Everyone's Hero**, a film that flopped in the U.S. but somehow found an unexpected audience in Iran, illustrating the strange and sometimes ironic trajectory of animated films. In contrast, he describes the collaborative and respectful environment he found while working on the **Ice Age** films, particularly praising producer Lori Forte for her effective leadership.

His work on **Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs** highlights a comedic irony where he and other writers questioned the film's premise of dinosaurs existing during the Ice Age, yet ultimately, those questions posed by audiences did not inhibit the film's commercial success. As a humorous conclusion, he reflects on his travels, humorously noting how even in Chernobyl, people were drawn to the characters of **Ice Age**, highlighting Scrat's embodiment of a seemingly futile pursuit, a metaphor for life itself in the eyes of a Ukrainian fan.

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Chapter 15 Summary: The Sleazy, Nasty World of Children's Books

Chapter Fifteen: The Sleazy, Nasty World of Children's Books

In this chapter, the author reflects on a peculiar moment when Pope Benedict endorsed *The Simpsons*, praising it as a moral show on television, despite its irreverent content. This endorsement contrasts sharply with the initial backlash the show faced upon its 1989 debut, including criticism from church groups and the First Lady Barbara Bush. Initially feeling personally responsible for America's moral decline, the author decided to pivot and write children's books—a realm he initially loathed as much as, humorously, Dr. Seuss might have.

Over the years, the author has written nearly twenty children's books, with *The Boy Who Looked Like Lincoln* being his favorite. The story follows a boy who resembles Abraham Lincoln, facing ridicule from peers. Sent to a camp for kids who look like various objects and figures, he learns that inner character matters more than appearances. Despite its earnest intentions, the book faced backlash; schools banned it, and religious figures even burned copies, mistakenly assuming the book contained inappropriate content. This misinterpretation stemmed from a misunderstanding of a baby character, which led to a humorous but critical reflection on censorship, especially in

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Texas, where ignorance about literature was humorously emphasized.

The author laments the challenges of publishing children's books, citing competition with celebrity authors, such as Julie Andrews and Madonna. Many celebrity books are mere adaptations of their performances, putting "real" authors like him at a disadvantage. He humorously claims that Steve Martin's **Late for School** bears similarities to his own book with a twist, suggesting possibility of influence, although he stops short of accusing Martin of stealing his ideas.

Adding another layer of absurdity, the author recounts a frantic request from a publishing house to write a book about a poor black kid, an assignment he rejected on the grounds of authenticity, especially after being offered an enticing payment. His reflections extend to a particularly bizarre commission from a high-end department store, where he wrote a story from the perspective of a goat, stripped of credit in favor of a store executive. The absurdity of his plight in this industry highlights a chaotic, often humorous world where integrity seems compromised for profit, revealing the paradoxical nature of publishing children's literature.

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Chapter 16: Gay for Pay

Chapter Sixteen: Gay for Pay

In this chapter, Mike Reiss candidly reflects on one of his proudest achievements: creating the animated web series **Queer Duck**, which debuted in 2000 during the dot-com boom. The project originated from a collective effort at a company called Icebox, known for its innovative approach to online cartoons at a time when internet speeds were slow and creativity was paramount. Reiss shares that while he enjoyed working on popular shows like **The Simpsons**, **Queer Duck** held a special place in his heart.

Queer Duck features a cast of LGBTQ+ animal characters, including the titular gay duck, Openly Gator and Bi-Polar Bear, tackling themes of identity and representation at a time when such portrayals were virtually absent from mainstream media. Reiss explains that he was motivated to create the show partly in response to troubling articles highlighting discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly in reference to a ban on gay teachers in Colorado and the complete lack of gay characters on television. This impetus turned into a playful yet meaningful project, and he drew on humor from his own experiences to create relatable content.

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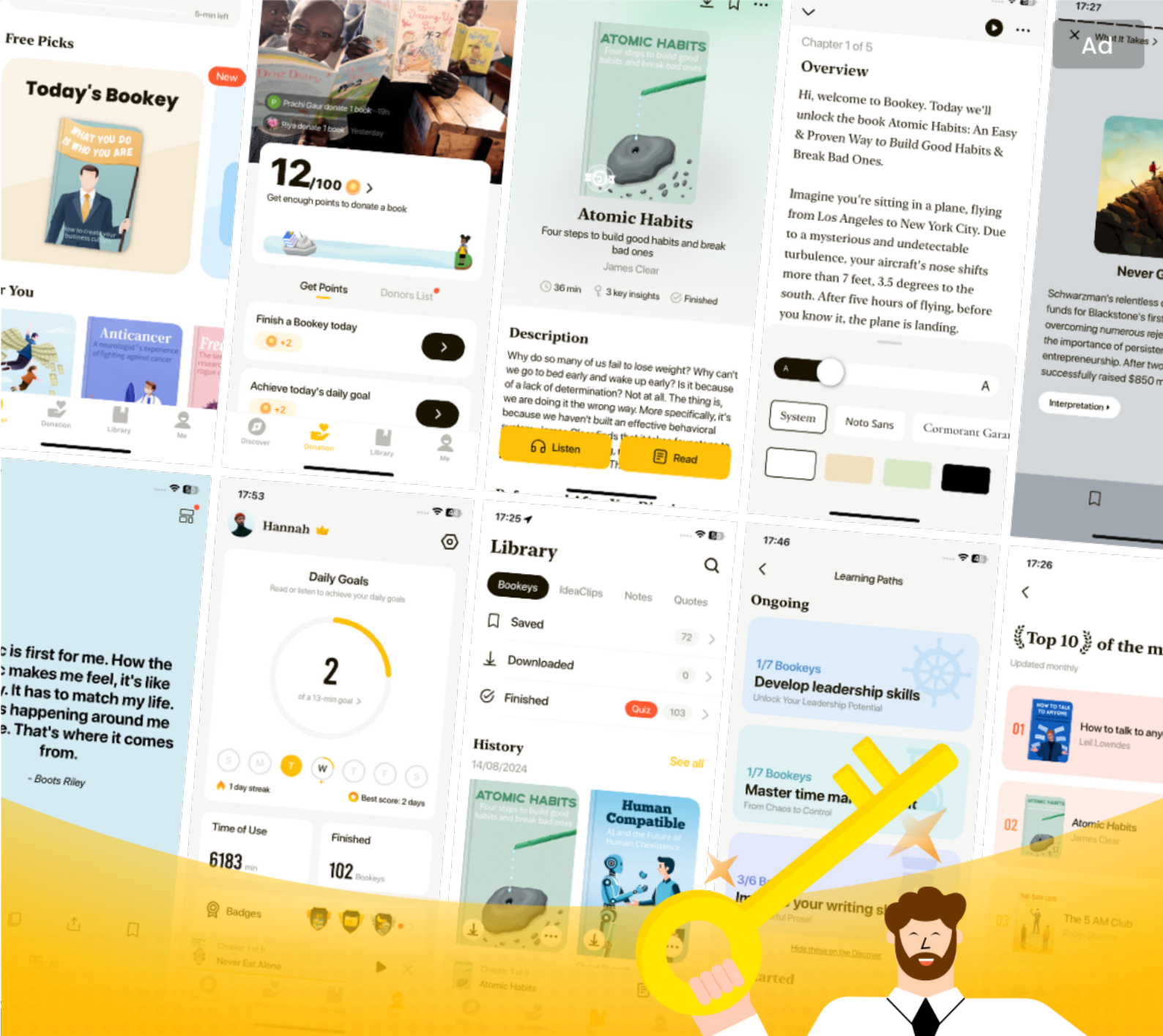
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Reiss also reminisces about the challenges he faced during the creation of *Queer Duck*, including criticisms from open LGBTQ+ individuals, notably from actor Scott Thompson, who initially voiced his concerns about Reiss' ability to authentically portray gay characters. Yet, after finding a suitable voice through actor Jim J. Bullock, *Queer Duck* not only

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Chapter 17 Summary: Writing for Humans Again!

Chapter Seventeen Summary: Writing for Humans Again!

In this chapter, Mike Reiss reflects on his journey through the writing world, highlighting the stark contrast between writing for cartoon characters and real-life individuals. He begins by reminiscing about his early career, where he specialized in crafting jokes for celebrities, including characters like ALF and Joan Rivers. The comedic freedom he enjoyed while writing for animated characters, particularly for *The Simpsons*, stemmed from the fact that these characters did not take insults personally. For instance, a character like Marge could deliver a cutting line without hurting anyone's feelings, unlike human actors who can be sensitive to ridicule.

Reiss recounts a humorous anecdote about Hank Azaria, who hesitated to deliver a particularly harsh line in character but ultimately did so, showing the resilience expected within comedic animation. He contrasts this with his subsequent experience writing for human comedians, such as Johnny Carson and Pope Francis. Reiss humorously elaborates on how he was roped into writing jokes for the "Joke with the Pope" app, and despite his Jewish background, he created a joke about the California drought for Al Roker to share with Pope Francis. While the joke didn't receive the reaction he hoped for, it did solidify his unusual position as a "Missionary of Joy" after

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receiving a plaque from the Pope.

Transitioning to playwriting introduces Reiss's fascination with theater, which began somewhat by chance during a trip to London to see a sold-out production of **Waiting for Godot**. He humorously reflected on his experience waiting in line and then created his own play inspired by that very experience. The initial success of his one-act play and then his later full-length play, **I'm Connecticut**, showcases how the forgiving nature of theater audiences can lead to unexpected humor—even in the form of typos that actors help bring to life.

In an ironic twist, Reiss turns to film writing, sharing his misadventures with the romantic comedy **My Life in Ruins**. Despite its successful audience reception, it was torn apart by critics, underscoring the often harsh realities of public response in the entertainment industry. He expresses disbelief that his allusions to Voltaire went unnoticed by reviewers, reflecting on the daunting nature of criticism in his profession. Reiss candidly admits that negative reviews sting deeply, as his works are like his children. This brings the chapter to a close with a sense of retreat back to the comfort of familiar territory: writing for **The Simpsons**, suggesting a return to safety amidst the harshness of critique.

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Chapter 18 Summary: Back to the Old Tire Fire

Chapter Eighteen: Back to the Old Tire Fire

After spending several years away from **The Simpsons** and gaining a fresh perspective as a fan, the author reflects on the show's brilliance, realizing that it may have thrived without his presence. In season 12, he receives a chance to return as a consultant, courtesy of the showrunner Mike Scully, who modernized the production process by making it less chaotic and more structured—transforming it into what felt like a normal job.

Although excited to reconnect with former colleagues like Al Jean, the author's experience working with a new team of talented writers proved challenging. The creative environment felt reminiscent of high school, filled with gossip and cliques, which sometimes influenced the tone of the episodes. Darker moments crept into the narrative, highlighting the evolving style of **The Simpsons**, such as scenes where Bart strangles Homer or Milhouse suffers an absurd injury.

Despite initial unhappiness and contemplating leaving, the dynamics improved as toxic personalities left the team, and the camaraderie returned. The author enjoyed his part-time role, flying weekly from New York to Los Angeles.

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This routine, however, would soon be disrupted by the ambitious endeavor of **The Simpsons Movie**. The idea of creating a film had lingered for years, sparked initially by a rough animation screening of an episode called "Kamp Krusty." Despite doubts about a film's viability—considering audiences received the show for free—market research revealed overwhelming demand for a movie. This prompted a hasty brainstorming session among the writers, where they outlined a plot in a mere three hours: Homer adopts a pig, which leads to a disaster in Springfield, culminating in the town being trapped under a dome.

However, the author's excitement turned to panic when a casual comment he made during a college talk in Oklahoma led to premature public knowledge of the movie, igniting anger among the studio executives. The planned secrecy surrounding the film's development was compromised, leading to a potentially career-threatening situation. Thankfully, he faced no serious repercussions from his misstep.

The movie's writing team was a star-studded lineup of past and present contributors, and together they committed to refining the script obsessively, culminating in a polished product from hundreds of drafts. One iconic moment from the film that captured the public's affection was the whimsical "Spider-Pig" song, which, despite its simplicity, became a sensation.

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In crafting a humorous ode to Alaska for the movie, the author revealed his less-than-favorable impressions of the state, yet his contribution, humorously underplaying the bureaucratic voice of his character, was ultimately omitted.

Throughout the creative process, many jokes and cameos were written but didn't make the final cut, reflecting the evolving nature of comedy in the film-making environment. For instance, an excellent joke featuring Homer's cluelessness was altered, and in the final movie, instead of referencing Bill Blass, Homer's banter likened him to the more contemporary "Tommy Bahama."

One of the author's favorite jokes—about Springfield's population rushing from a bar to a church, and vice versa during a calamity—made it into the film and garnered praise, even leading to amusing anecdotes with fellow comedian Garry Trudeau, showcasing the unpredictable nature of humor.

Upon releasing in 2007, **The Simpsons Movie** achieved remarkable success, proving critics and fans alike wrong about the feasibility of a theatrical adaptation of the beloved show. The overwhelming positive feedback led the creators to jokingly agree never to undertake such a feat again, yet they acknowledged, once memory fades, they might just try again for more sequels.

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In lighthearted speculation, the author humorously suggests casting Vin Diesel as Homer and William H. Macy as Ned Flanders for potential future live-action adaptations.

Lastly, the chapter discusses a creative song that was written as a trailer for the movie, showcasing Homer's comical frustration with the tendency for TV shows to be turned into lackluster films—a fitting commentary on Hollywood's trend, humorously proposed as a rallying call for fans.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on the final, often discarded, moments in an episode known as "the tag." Sometimes insightful, sometimes nonsensical, these snippets capture the chaotic spirit of **The Simpsons**, reminding readers of the show's enduring tendency to surprise and entertain.

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Chapter 19 Summary: It Never Ends . . .

Chapter Nineteen: It Never Ends . . .

Five years prior, **The Simpsons** launched its first mobile game, **The Simpsons: Tapped Out**. This title cleverly plays on the idea of tapping in the game and the show's potential decline in creativity. Surprisingly, the game became the most downloaded app in the U.S., defying doubts about the show's longevity. That same year, the show earned an Oscar nomination for its animated short featuring Maggie Simpson, titled **The Longest Daycare**. In 2016, **The Simpsons** made television history, introducing innovative episodes with a virtual reality couch gag, live improv animation where Homer answered audience questions, and the rapid creation of a topical short about Donald Trump that garnered millions of views online.

As the show approaches its thirtieth season, it stands as the longest-running series in prime-time history, surpassing shows like **Gunsmoke** and **Lassie**. Its popularity remains intact, airing in seventy-one countries, with rumors of a new movie always circulating. The creators reflect humorously on their resilience, noting their survival through various U.S. presidencies and the loss of beloved cast members. Writer Brian Kelley humorously remarks on the inevitable changes that come with a show of such longevity.

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Despite potential cancellations by networks, the creators are optimistic about the show's future, envisioning reboots, spin-offs, and even bizarre adaptations like a Broadway musical. As a parody of Billy Joel's song, one refrain echoes their enduring presence: "They'll Never Stop The Simpsons!" The series thrives on two core principles: family and folly. The concept of family remains timeless, representing diverse dynamics, while the nature of folly continuously evolves, providing fresh content from societal absurdities, parenting trends, and local scandals.

The show's end would only come, they humorously conjecture, when humans treat each other with kindness and intelligence—hoping that day never arrives.

Judd Apatow reflects on the show's enduring humor, suggesting that while viewership may have dipped, the essence of *The Simpsons* remains vibrant and funny, proving doubters wrong year after year.

The chapter also highlights the incredible success of *The Simpsons Ride* at Universal Studios Florida, which impressed audiences and critics alike shortly after its launch.

The Final Burning Question: Why Are The Simpsons Yellow?

In a lighthearted Q&A, a six-year-old's innocent query about why *The

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*Simpsons** characters are yellow leads to an intriguing exploration. Despite initial uncertainty among writers, the answer is traced back to a former animation artist who was responsible for adding color to Matt Groening's original sketches. The choice of yellow was practical—characters like Bart, Lisa, and Maggie have no defined hairlines, making yellow a suitable blend for skin and hair.

While this clarification doesn't answer why other popular characters are yellow, it captures the whimsical nature of the animation world.

Closing Credits

The chapter pays tribute to **Sam Simon**, one of the original creators of **The Simpsons**, who faced a difficult exit from the show in 1993.

However, Simon's life flourished afterward, marked by directing numerous television episodes, achieving success in poker, managing a world champion boxer, and dedicating his wealth to charitable causes. His transformation from a controversial figure to a beloved philanthropist illustrates the remarkable journey of his final years, leading to his resting place in a cemetery filled with comedy legends.

The author humorously notes that he too will be interred nearby, underscored by a light-hearted epitaph that honors his life and love.

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