

Who Shot Mr Burns

Who Shot Mr Burns is the murder mystery finale of season 6 of The Simpsons screened in May 1995. It was a two-parter that was not resolved until the premiere of season 7 which was four months later. This was around prime Simpsons golden era, you know, before they kept going for another 24 seasons!

(Lisa/Apu clip Why is she saying that? Why are they doing this?)

The Simpsons in the nineties was insane. Peak fandom and ripe for exploitation! Like this (Bartman) and this (Deep Deep Trouble) and whatever this is (Bart awards).

So this whodunnit was the hot topic of the summer of 1995 other than, I dunno... Casper? There was a special edition of America's Most Wanted and even a real contest that nobody one because the only person who got it correct entered while in university and then left the university during the summer. Bit of dumb mistake, probably from watching too many cartoons. To keep even everyone behind the scenes guessing, multiple fake endings were scripted, voiced and animated. Until finally in September 1995 we all found out it was Maggie. The baby.

Co-writer Josh Weinstein released a pitch document summarising the episode idea. It's obviously at a very early rough stage but they knew this mystery should not cop-out by having the gunman turn out to be just a random character turning up last second. They even considered it to be Barney who would actually leave the show for a while. But the show is The Simpsons so it had to be a Simpson which made Maggie the perfect culprit as she could fairly escape the punishment.

And no, this video isn't about WHO REALLY SHOT MR BURNS. It was Maggie. It was Maggie. It's was her.

While planning the episode, special consideration was given to make it actually solvable. A real puzzle with real clues pointing to the real culprit.

SO that's what I'm here to discuss. My stupid over analysis of HOW can you solve the mystery of Who Shot Mr Burns with just the first part alone?

First, a quick summary of the plot.

Springfield Elementary strikes oil and is about to become filthy rich until Mr Burns taps the oil for himself which floods Moe's Tavern with fumes, sinks the Retirement Home and destroys Bart's treehouse. Meanwhile Smithers is fired after Mr Burns reveals his plan to block the sun. Also he can never remember Homer's name.

Mr Burns is easily at his most evil in this episode in order for everyone in Springfield to become a suspect, which is what Part One spends most of it's time doing, setting up motivations for everyone in Springfield.

The suspects are grouped into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary.

Primary are mainly Homer as Mr Burns can't remember his name and Smithers for getting fired and his heart broken. But with them are Bart Simpson for injuring his dog, Lisa Simpson, Principal Skinner and Groundskeeper Willie for robbing the school, Abraham Simpson for ruining his retirement home and Moe and Barney for ruining his bar.

Secondary suspects are mainly those also affected by Burn's actions. So the other elderly people of the retirement home like Jasper and Old Jewish Man (yes, that's his name), other

teachers and students of the school, like Superintendent Chalmers, Mrs Krabappel or even Tito Puente and so on.

Tertiary suspects are everyone else in Springfield given the blocking of the sun would affect them all.

So since the majority of the episode is dedicated exclusively to setting up motives, what actual clues are there?

- 1) Mr Burns recognises his shooter
- 2) Burn's struggles against them
- 3) The type of gun wound his has
- 4) His own gun is missing
- 5) His position as he falls on the sundial

If we look again at our prime suspects, we can actually strike them all off using a process of elimination based on these clues.

Mr Burns recognising his shooter.

Immediately we know it cannot be Homer. This episode firmly establishes Mr Burns never remembers him. In this episode we see Mr Burns interact with Smithers and Skinner and recognise everyone in the Simpson photo, apart from Homer, but that leaves Grandpa Simpson, Moe, Barney and Groundskeeper Willie. Mr Burns never interacts with these characters in this episode, so would he recognise any of them now? In fact, has Mr Burns ever met these characters prior to this episode, excluding any Treehouse Of Horror episodes or retcon episodes (or couch gags or ep set in the future) that happened later (not them knowing Mr Burns i.e. two cars three eyes, Mr Burns knowing them). But to investigate that, you would have to look at every episode Mr Burns appears in and cross reference that with the other characters and then watch every one of those episodes, and who would be stupid enough to do all that work for something so pointless? Here's what I found.

- Season 6 Episode 12: Homer The Great. Mr Burns, Barney, Moe and Willie are all part of the Stonecutters, but Mr Burns doesn't interact with them and they don't call each other by name.
- Season 6 Episode 18: A Star Is Burns. Mr Burns loses to Barney's movie during the film festival, so despite not interacting with him or mentioning his name, he would in theory remember him. And possible Moe as well? But that feels like a stretch.
- Season 5 Episode 21: Lady Bouvier's Lover. Mr Burns is about to marry Marge's mother when Grandpa Simpson stops it. I think it's fair to say Mr Burns would remember that.
- Season 3 Episode 11: Burns Verkaufen der Kraftwerk. After selling the power plant, Mr Burns actually goes to Moe's Tavern to order a drink. He speaks to Moe but Homer interrupts before any actual exchange happens. They all mock him as he leaves. Again, feels like a stretch that Moe would be specifically remembered for this. In the same episode he plays bowls with Grandpa Simpson.
- Season 3 Episode 3: When Flanders Failed. Moe, Barney and Mr Burns all visit the Leftorium. They don't speak to each other but uncharacteristically join in the song.

- Season 2 Episode 13: Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment. Mr Burns goes to the Simpson house to watch a boxing match. Speaks to Barney (thinking he's Homer), plus Grandpa and Moe are there too.
- Season 2 Episode 17: Old Money. Mr Burns turns up to plea for Grandpa's money
- Season 2 Episode 18: Brush With Greatness. Both Moe and Barney are at the unveiling of the painting for some reason. Mr Burns does not speak to them.

So from that I can conclude that Mr Burns would remember Grandpa and Barney, possibly Moe too. But not Willie. From Season 1 to Season 6, Mr Burns and Groundskeeper Willie never interact with each other. Therefore, Mr Burns would not recognise him.

Burns struggle

Mr Burns is frequently framed to be a very weak and frail old man. Even his attempted attack on Skinner did nothing. So for Burns to actually tussle with the gun man, the gun man would have to be a child, an old man or drunk.

So that couldn't be Skinner or Willie. Despite being a barkeep, Moe hasn't shown himself to be much of a heavy drinker himself. Homer is no stranger to a drink, but wasn't shown drinking or drunk during the town-hall meeting. So that only leaves Smithers and Barney, along with Bart, Lisa and Abe.

Gun Wound

The gun wound Mr Burns has is a relatively small puncture. I'm no gunshotologist, but during the town hall meeting, several people are shown stroking guns. Moe is shown to have a shotgun which would have done way more damage to Mr Burns. Also, Skinner is seen to have a suppressor on his gun, yet a gunshot is heard. So neither of them could have shot Mr Burns. But also worth noting is-

Burn's Gun

With a little freezeframing, you can see Mr Burn's gun is missing. We can therefore assume he was shot with his own gun, implying that the gun man didn't have one of their own? Other than Grandpa, only Bart the Smith and Wesson gun Grandpa had, but Marge has buried it in secret, yet it is shown as missing. Skinner, Moe and Barney are shown carrying guns and it's not shown in part one but we later learned Smithers had a gun too. In theory, the only people who would probably not have a gun on them at the time of Mr Burn's shooting is Homer, Lisa and Willie.

Sundial

When Mr Burns falls onto the sundial, he points to West and South. A hint of the gunman's initials. This could be:

- Waylon Smithers
- W. Seymour Skinner
- Smith and Wesson
- Scottish Willie

However, throughout the episode, there are clocks set to 3pm and 9pm. This is specifically designed to influence you to look at the sundial from another perspective, which opens up

more possibilities such as Moe Szyslak. In fact in cases like Moe and Skinner, their full names are revealed for the first time, purely to tie into the sundial clue.

In fact, when you look at it, almost no-one of the prime suspects fits all of the clues apart from Mr Smithers. Yet, there's two more clues found in episode one that prove it's not Smithers.

Pardon My Zinger

Smithers admits he never misses an episode of Pardon My Zinger, a point which is raised in Part Two. But during the episode, a TV screen in Moe's Tavern shows Pardon My Zinger to be playing at 3pm. The time when Mr Burns is shot. In fact, we can see Waylon Smithers leave the town hall, presumably to go home, in the opposite direction to Mr Burns. Which brings me to the final clue.

The Model Town Layout

When Mr Burns reveals the plans to block the sun, he demonstrates with a miniature model of Springfield, which shows the layout of the whole town. While Mr Smithers points out the sundial, we can use this to track where Mr Burns goes when he leaves the town hall. He walks around the building, to the car park. It is here he is shot. And who is the ONLY person in the car park with Mr Burns at this time?

SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER!

He recognises the dog from episode -

The initials are Simpson Mutt from the photo -

No wait, I mean Maggie Simpson!

It's alluded to with stealing candy from a baby, recognising her from the photograph, she's even the only one who doesn't avert her eyes when challenged by Mr Burns. Plus she's the only one in the car park at the time, so it's the perfect crime!

It's worth noting there's other symbolism like this EXIT ONLY sign forming a NO arrow briefly but then the oil rig seems to make a YES arrow pointing at Smithers so maybe? Maybe not?

Either way, it's absolutely remarkable that not only did that the creators manage to create a genuine two-parter whodunnit that is solvable with the first episode alone, it also still manages to be really funny! The murder mystery aspect did not bog down the jokes at all and still remains one of the greatest and most memorable Simpsons episodes of all time.