

Bart Bares All In Film

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In the unlikeliest nude scene since Kathy Bates' hot-tub hijinks in *About Schmidt*, Bart Simpson will reportedly go full frontal in his upcoming feature film.

According to Newsweek, which got a sneak peek at *The Simpsons Movie*, "little Bart flashes his little part to the entire world" while skateboarding sans clothing on a dare from dad Homer.

If his full Monty makes it to the big screen in July, the magazine notes, it may be the first time a Hollywood movie has exposed this sort of skin -- albeit in cartoon form -- without being slapped with an R-rating.

Not surprisingly, buzz around young Simpson's sceptre is already nearing fever pitch among pundits and fans.

"That Bart is a cartoon character, and a defiant adolescent one at that, does make the cultural interest in his private parts more complex and intriguing," says Kim Blank, a professor of popular culture at the University of Victoria.

"But the bottom line -- pun intended -- is that Bart, despite the little pixels that constitute his personhood, is an American icon -- a transcendent celebrity who defies age. And we, as a culture, are always interested in seeing naked celebrities, if only to confirm our fantasy that they have what we have."

Although the pioneer of cartoon flesh was *Fritz the Cat*, which in 1972 became the first animated feature to be rated X, it was arguably Canada's own *Heavy Metal* that popularized it. The adult-oriented fantasy film has grown into a cult sensation since its big-screen debut in 1981, which was met with a restricted rating due to copious amounts of animated sex and nudity.

More recently, the makers of 2004's *Team America: World Police* had to re-cut a sex scene involving genitalia-free puppets nine times before the

Motion Picture Association of America withdrew the movie's NC-17 rating and replaced it with an R.

Young Simpson's foray into flashing, however, is likely to elicit giggles rather than criticism.

"You have to keep in mind how well we have come to know Bart, and this new nude knowledge represents a small but meaningful extension of that," says Blank. "Bart revealing himself is really us revealing ourselves."

Although Bart's big-screen exhibitionism will be a first for Springfield's first family, cartoon historians will note the Simpsons have enjoyed a long-standing flirtation with the naughty.

The cover of the 1991 book *The Simpsons Uncensored Family Album* showed a nude Bart sprawled stomach-down on a bearskin rug in a cheeky homage to Burt Reynolds' *Cosmopolitan* centerfold shoot of 1972.

Then, in 2002, *Rolling Stone* printed a photo on its table of contents exposing baby Bart's cartoon genitals. The picture -- which was also featured on the cover, sans pint-size penis -- was a recreation of Nirvana's album art for *Nevermind*.

And according to *The Simpsons Archive*, the show has aired more than 200 different scenes of implied or pixilated nudity and sexual situations during its nearly two-decade run.

John Alberti, a professor of English at Northern Kentucky University and recognized Simpsons scholar, says any ruffled feathers over such cartoon drawings demonstrates that "it's not the actual parts of the body, it's the meaning attached to them" that counts.

"To me, it's far more disturbing to see Homer hitting himself in the eye with a hammer (in the movie trailer) than to see a little boy skateboard naked," says Alberti.

But Cory Silverberg, a sexual health educator from Toronto, believes critics are letting their jerking knees obscure the reality of the situation.

"I'm always concerned when I hear about child actors being put into uncomfortable situations. But this is not a person, it's a cartoon," says Silverberg.