

EXXCELLENT: TAKING MR. BURNS UNDERCOVER

TWITTER FEEDBACK LEADS CRYAN TO SIMPSONS WRITING OPPORTUNITY

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David Cryan was sitting across the table from Dan Castellaneta in October when he heard one of the most recognizable voices in the past 30 years. Then came another distinctive voice from Nancy Cartwright.

"It just blew my mind," Cryan recalled as he watched the actors bring life to the characters he'd known since he was kid. "These were my personal heroes."

For a lifelong fan of "The Simpsons," the chance to sit in on a read-through of an episode was a thrill. The fact that they were reading a script he had written, well, it didn't get much better than that. Cryan's episode, 'Undercover Burns', will air when the show's 32nd season begins this fall. It centres on Cryan's favourite character, Mr. Burns.

"He can be pure evil," the 29-year-old said, "but at the same time, he's so innocent because he's so out of

"It was the most surreal thing you could imagine. It was truly bizarre."

- David Cryan

touch."

In the episode, the owner of Springfield's nuclear power plant goes undercover, like in the show "Undercover Boss," but takes it to an extreme.

"Like "Mission: Impossible," they give him a whole new body and face and voice so that people in the plant won't possibly recognize him," Simpsons' executive producer Al Jean told Entertainment Weekly. "He's supposed to be a blue-collar guy from another part of the plant, but everything he says is like Mr. Burns. He wants to go to karaoke and sing songs from the 1890s, but the guys don't see through it."

"Stranger Things" star David Harbour has been cast to voice Burns's undercover persona.

Cryan's opportunity arose by reaching out to Jean on Twitter in 2018 — he had done the same thing in 2016 and received some positive feedback. He asked Jean if he would read some of his scripts. Jean requested scripts for other shows

and Cryan sent him three.

Jean got back to him within a couple of weeks and was particularly impressed by his scripts for "Veep" and "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

The Georgetown District High School grad was hoping to have the chance to submit a script for "The Simpsons," instead he got something even better — an invitation to join the show's writing staff.

"It was the most surreal thing you could imagine," Cryan said. "It was truly bizarre."

But his dream job would be blocked by U.S. visa requirements that stated to work in the industry, he must have a film or related degree. He worked with a lawyer for six months but in the end, didn't apply.

"It was like having a winning lottery ticket and not being able to cash it," Cryan said.

Instead, he was offered a freelance opportunity to write an episode.

He brainstormed 10 ideas but eventually settled on



Graham Paine/Torstar

David Cryan has written scripts for other shows, but 'Undercover Burns' is the one that's gotten him onto TV.

the one revolving around Mr. Burns. It took Cryan two weeks to write his episode, which will be his first for TV. "Just getting to write for those characters was pretty amazing," he said.

While Cryan didn't slip in any Georgetown references to the story, he did say

there was a specific event from his childhood that was part of a secondary story that got cut from the episode.

Though he's been writing scripts since high school, Cryan decided a couple of years ago to really focus on it because it is what

he loves to do. In doing so, he ignored some of Homer Simpson's most sage advice: "If something's hard to do, then it's not worth doing."

"I was always realistic," Cryan said. "I knew it was long odds, but I also knew if I didn't give it my best, I'd never forgive myself."

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