

TITLE: GREMLINS

DATE: 28.6.84

FILM

VIDEO

DISTRIBUTOR: Col-EPI-Warner

FIRST

RESUB

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: USA

CATEGORY: 15 / PG
with heavy cuts

CUTS

NO CUTS

GENRE: Horror

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUB-TITLED DUBBED

FOR BOARD DISCUSSION

APPROPRIATE CATEGORY	U	PG	15	18	R18	CUTS	REJECT
THEME		✓	✓				
TREATMENT			✓				
VISUALS: NUDITY							
SEX							
VIOLENCE			✓			for PG	
HORROR			✓			for PG	
LANGUAGE		✓					
DRUGS							
CRIMINAL TECHNIQUES							
LEGALITY: OBSCENITY							
CHILDREN							
ANIMALS							
BLASPHEMY							
FILM AS A WHOLE			✓			for PG	

SYNOPSIS AND COMMENTS:

I find this film a much greater problem than 'Indiana Jones' which was (the ceremonial scene apart) firmly in the red-blooded adventure genre with an unstoppable hero, never for a moment allowing the viewer to feel that he might fail when taking on insuperable odds. Here the scene is nearer home - literally - and the characters are the sort of ordinary, fallible people we all know in a setting familiar to both young and old. Yet the early Capra-corn later gives way to a film with quite different cinematic antecedents. In typical Spielberg style, it is meddling with things foreign and not respecting nature that causes the trouble, and Joe Dante (like Tobe Hooper before him) is adept at the darker side of the Spielberg dream. As befits a Corman protege, he turns the gremlin transformation scenes into truly frightening experiences, and it is no accident that they take place in the two situations most familiar to children, the home and the school, with figures of authority (and reassurance) brought low.

These are classic horror sequences directed in typical horror style. The isolated, terrorised female is a figure we have met before - and here she is mother herself stumbling up those dark stairs to face whatever terrors lurk in the shadows. Adults are accustomed to this film ritual: I am not convinced that many children would not be very frightened. The initial sights of the gremlins in their new form are designed to build upon this fear. Mother does in fact strike back - again in classic horror film style (gremlins minced in a mixer, stabbed violently with the knife, roasted to explosion point in the oven) before son Billy comes to her aid as she wrestles with the gremlin in the Christmas tree, which Billy beheads, the severed head burning merrily in the fire

This key sequence, in my opinion, would have to be cut to ribbons for 'PG', and I would go on to cut the most blatant horror-film close-ups of the gremlins with their snarling faces and lethal fangs, thus toning down the menace of the creatures, who do in fact later become much less threatening - as in the Marlon Brando/Wild One scene in the bar where they are just renegade bikers having fun, and in the cinema where they are no more than naughty children misbehaving: no more frightening than the seven dwarfs themselves.

Making these cuts does of course alter the very nature of the film: and I believe that this is just what has to be done to make this acceptable for children unused to the conventions and black humour of the horror genre. I agree that this will spoil, even ruin, the film, and would argue strongly for a '15' (not so far removed from the 'PG' the US censors would have liked to have given, by all accounts). Yet two million furry creatures in the shops ensure that this film will have to have a young audience, that it will be aimed at one, and that therefore we must be particularly careful how we handle it. Indiana Jones is always going to be aimed at thrill-seeking, probably older kids. I don't believe that cuddly gremlins will necessarily attract the same audience.

This being so, and we are forced to cut for 'PG', I would consider cutting: the death of the teacher; the terror of the Futtermans as they are attacked; the 'comic' death of the nasty old lady, which may not be so funny for kids (I am unsure about this one); the attack on the man dressed as Santa; Kate's story of the death of Santa (surely the moment when a child finally faces up to the fact, that he/she has known for some time, that Santa is not real is a key moment of growing up: I remember it vividly thirty-three years later, my seven-year-old has not yet faced it); the gremlin's attack with the circular saw-blade and the chain-saw; the cutting of the wires by the child; shots of the disintegration of the gremlin.

But really I hope we don't have to butcher a film that I rather enjoyed. I am among the first to criticise the modern concept of Christmas, but I'm not sure that the association of terror with all the manifestations of Christmas is a joke that most kids would appreciate. Leave the film to cynical horror film addicts!

TITLE: GREMLINS

DATE: 2/7/84

FILM VIDEO

DISTRIBUTOR: Col-EMI-Warner

FIRST RESUB

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: USA

CATEGORY: 15

CUTS NO CUTS

GENRE: Horror

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUB-TITLED DUBBED

FOR BOARD DISCUSSION

APPROPRIATE CATEGORY:	U	PG	15	18	R18	CUTS	REJECT
THEME			✓				
TREATMENT			✓				
<u>VISUALS:</u> NUDITY							
SEX							
VIOLENCE			✓				
HORROR			✓				
LANGUAGE							
DRUGS							
CRIMINAL TECHNIQUES							
<u>LEGALITY:</u> OBSCENITY							
CHILDREN							
ANIMALS							
BLASPHEMY							
FILM AS A WHOLE			✓				

SYNOPSIS AND COMMENTS:

I really find this difficult to see as 'PG', even after having read the arguments for the lower category. The theme itself does not involve merely the losing of innocence about Christmas, but the malevolent destruction of Christmas and ideas associated with it. This theme is not one I would like to see appealing to children, and the treatment is not one with which children will be able to cope. It is a little reminiscent of 'Hallowe'en III' in that the menace comes from the acceptable and traditional, but here it comes from the most comforting elements of a child's life and imagination. It is telling that horror film comparisons spring to mind, especially when I have seen very recently two fantasy films ('Ghostbusters' and 'The Never-Ending Story') which seem quite different to this film.

The destruction of Christmas (as symbolic of much more) appears recurrently through the transformation of pet/cuddly toy into monsters, the Christmas tree attack on mum; the gremlin in the mail-box; the gremlin appearing from

The theme of the quoted film which mum watches, 'It's a Wonderful Life', is presented quite deliberately and stereotypically and just as deliberately subverted. This is surely the plot point of the young woman's story about her father as Santa, dying in the chimney. In this story it is not the loss of belief which occurs when Dad does not come home which is stressed, but that there is a smell and this turns out to be Dad, a rather different kettle of fish (?!).

The gremlins who wreak havoc are not merely mischievous but evil. Mischief and evil are not incompatible but can go together, as in medieval acts of 'maleficium', where the domestic sphere was as important a sphere of social activity as for the child today. Of course evil is traditionally depicted in children's fairy tales and I am not trying to shield children from horror itself, but this horror is particularly potent because it attacks the basic securities. The treatment of this is by typical horror-film-type imagery with which American children might be accustomed through their greater exposure to the genre. And, perhaps most important, there is no protective device against this horror, no real authority against the malevolence. Thus children not only witness attacks on the mother which utilise typical horror or suspense film tension - of the menaced heroine for example - but also a parodic version of Christmas carolling (a child's version of a black mass ?) and a demonic setting for 'Snow White'. The pet dog is effectively tortured, again a familiar side-line of horror films, and of course there are the familiar chain-saw, decapitation, head-burning, not to mention the glob-horror effects and the use of a mixer and oven for killing in messy ways. What will make this fundamentally disturbing is not only that these are unfamiliar images for younger audiences (can't children retain ideas that food mixers are for food mixing and mail-boxes for posting letters a bit longer?) but that there are no countervailing powers.

Again, I am not asserting some automatic Good Must Triumph ethic but, in a case where the theme is so strong and potentially upsetting, one needs some kind of situating framework, including ways of coping with such an attack on the psyche. The younger child is without a knowledge of horror-genres and without an adequate hero/heroine. Only the old Chinaman potentially offers this, and he is relegated surely to the prologue and epilogue.

I can see the problem since so much is invested in this film as 'PG', and I would welcome discussion on this, but I cannot but help see it as '15' and as potentially disturbing to children. Cuts would be difficult since I see the problem not just in images but in the theme as well as the treatment in general.

TITLE: GREMLINS

DATE: 2 7 84

FILM VIDEO

DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia

FIRST RESUB

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: USA

CATEGORY: '15'

CUTS NO CUTS

GENRE: Kids' horror

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUB-TITLED DUBBED

FOR BOARD DISCUSSION

APPROPRIATE CATEGORY:	U	PG	15	18	R18	CUTS	REJECT
THEME		✓					
TREATMENT			✓				
<u>VISUALS:</u> NUDITY							
SEX							
VIOLENCE							
HORROR			✓				
LANGUAGE							
DRUGS							
CRIMINAL TECHNIQUES							
<u>LEGALITY:</u> OBSCENITY							
CHILDREN							
ANIMALS							
BLASPHEMY							
FILM AS A WHOLE			✓				

SYNOPSIS AND COMMENTS:

Like much of the best of children's literature, THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS and ALICE IN WONDERLAND perhaps, GREMLINS presents itself on two levels. In this case, there is for children a horror story straight out of the comic books; for adults a horror story out of the ecology lobby, made enjoyable by cinematic references to other, more apparently grown-up movies. It is on both these counts that I feel decidedly reluctant to go along with a 'PG' despite the urgent wishes of the distributors with thousands of cuddly toys ready with which to flood the market. The film plays with the idea that man involves himself with surface problems (through dad, the inventor) while failing to perceive the dangers that lie beneath the surface, the potential for evil in man. This is a perfectly acceptable, indeed necessary message for adults, but here the potential for evil is expressed through everyday personal objects, often heavy with childhood significance - the cuddly toys and Christmas trees, the little devil-like creatures singing Christmas carols and terrorising the old lady. This is a child's nightmare brought to life - and as entertainment -

'WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE', legitimised monsters as fantasy images for kids but also provided a naughty boy to both identify with and through whom to learn how to cope. GREMLINS has no such similar mechanism: it just presents the "sane" domestic world gone mad, apparently irretrievably. This is fine for adults, indeed part of the fun, but in this form it's really not on for children. I am not only unhappy about the film thematically, but also in its use of horror imagery - the killings with knife, blender and microwave, the attacks by malevolent Christmas tree and chainsaw, the good Magway (?) used as a dart-board target, the dog strung up in the Christmas lights, the finger in the light socket, the rip saw blades used as weapons, the spewing dragon in the final scene. I was appalled at Katie's description of her father dressed as Santa Claus dying in the chimney and I take very seriously the devils (children?) terrorising the old lady and causing her chair lift to whizz up the stairs and hurl her to death. Are we supposed to laugh at this? Are we supposed to condone children laughing at this?

To repeat myself, horror in a cosy domestic family setting is perfectly legitimate for adults. I think it is in general too disturbing for children and that in this case it plays far too highly with childish fears and insecurities while having fun with the adults. The line between fantasy and reality is often difficult for children to draw. The irrational is often more "real" than the rational. This film makes it more difficult.

TITLE: GREMLINS

DATE: 24.7.84

FILM VIDEO

DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia - (M) - Warner

FIRST RESUB

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: USA

CATEGORY: 15

CUTS NO CUTS

GENRE: Fantasy

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUB-TITLED DUBBED

FOR BOARD DISCUSSION

APPROPRIATE CATEGORY:	U	PG	15	18	R18	CUTS	REJECT
THEME		✓	✓	✓			
TREATMENT			✓				
<u>VISUALS:</u> NUDITY							
SEX							
VIOLENCE			✓				
HORROR			✓				
LANGUAGE							
DRUGS							
CRIMINAL TECHNIQUES							
<u>LEGALITY:</u> OBSCENITY							
CHILDREN							
ANIMALS							
BLASPHEMY							
FILM AS A WHOLE			✓				

SYNOPSIS AND COMMENTS:

This film is a clear and unambiguous '15' to my mind, for the following reasons:

The film is very frightening. This by itself would probably make it only a 'PG', were it not for the fact that the frights occur in the context of events that are nasty and raise larger questions, which are difficult for children to handle. But let us start with specific sequences such as that where a Santa is attacked by several gremlins (three?) and presumably done to death. What is, in Western culture, the acme, the summation of kindness, is being attacked here. In other words, it is not merely a matter of being able to cut this particular sequence. For the whole film is about the release of a vicious and mindless evil into the world, which proceeds to attack not merely the unpleasant people such as Mrs Deagle, but all the nice people as well. Neither science (represented by Mr Anson) nor the forces of the law (the police) can do anything about it. It is only the sunlight which kills these gremlins.

Nice symbolism, but not really the sort of thing which children will understand. Again, the sequences in the bar, with Kate rushing around to serve the mass of gremlins while they demand food and drink, and imitate human behaviour, is lovely satire, but will it not be received by children merely as farce? This is typical Spielberg of course: having exhausted the theme of violence, he now turns his attention to another theme, that of satire. But, in doing so, he has made this into a film which requires a more mature audience to appreciate it. '15' is the right category, in other words, quite apart from the question of violence and fright.

There are two other matters to be considered. All the violence occurs in a recognisable, realistic small town with the sort of neighbours, who children will readily identify with some of the sorts of people they know. If the gremlins had struck in some completely fantasy world, they might have been easier for children to cope with. The most frightening bits of the film occur where the people that children will most admire and identify with, Kate and Bill, are attacked: for example, the lengthy sequence where a gremlin is at Bill's last defence (a sort of stick? Baseball bat?) with a chainsaw. Then there are the horror-type effects, again predictably Spielberg, and more than I would like to take at 'PG'.

Finally, one little matter (which is probably more than a little matter, in that it may influence the whole way in which children respond to the film): the final voice-over frames the story nicely, in that the film started with the same voice telling us that we are going to be told a story. But what it tells us is this: "That's the story. So, remember, if something goes wrong at home, it might be a gremlin in your house" (my version) - which means of course that younger children are being instructed to take the fright home with them (older or more sceptical children will probably only laugh with a pleasurable frisson of excitement rather than actual fear).

Overall, therefore, '15'.