

Movie Review

Parody 'Critters' is creepy-crawly fun

By Matt Diedrich
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"Critters" gives new meaning to the word "derivative." It borrows a little from "Close Encounters," a little from "The Terminator" and even a little from "Q, the Winged Serpent." And, needless to say, it borrows a lot from "Gremlins."

The surprise about this movie is it's not half bad. Anyone who has seen "Ghoulies" knows about bad ripoffs. Fortunately, "Critters" belongs to a much rarer breed: the good ripoff.

The "Critters" of the title are eight nasty little furballs with long pointy teeth. Unlike the Gremlins, they're an extraterrestrial race (officially named the Crites). After they escape from a prison asteroid light-years away from Earth, the

warden (an enormous lump of mucus) hires two intergalactic bounty hunters to seek them out.

Unfortunately, the hunters don't catch up with the Crites until long after they reach Earth. This is bad news for the Browns, a typical rural family whose house is besieged by the ferocious fluffs of fur.

While the Crites are trying to make a meal of the Browns, the bounty hunters land in a nearby small town and proceed to shoot it to pieces a la "The Terminator." The bounty hunters are also shape-changers, capable of taking the form of any of the townspeople, including the local minister.

Needless to say, "Critters" is not a movie to be taken seriously. There are plenty of great, scary moments, especially when the Browns barricade themselves in their house and try to fend off the Crites. But these scenes are balanced

by a surprising amount of genuine humor.

The scenes involving the bounty hunters, a Laurel-and-Hardy pair if there ever was one, are especially funny. Instead of killing Crites, they spend their time blowing away television sets, pianos and a great deal of architecture. This hilarious parody of Arnold Schwarzenegger is one of the movie's best aspects.

"Critters" is not without weaknesses, however. It takes far too long to get going, and with a running time of only 80 minutes, it's over much too quickly.

The special effects are also laughably fake, but often this adds to the humor rather than detracting from the horror. The closing sequence, though, is a shameful excuse for showing neat visual effects. In terms of plot, it makes no sense whatsoever.

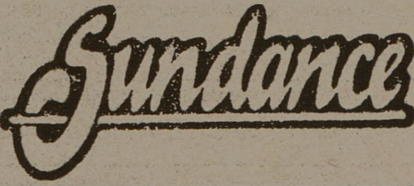
The cast isn't that great, ei-

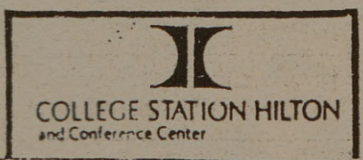
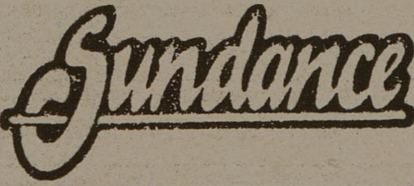



ther, but it's good enough. Dee Wallace Stone, as Mrs. Brown (her third "mother" role in a row), is no longer in danger of becoming typecast; she already is. Her performance is essentially the same one she gave in "E.T." and "Cujo," and it remains about as effective.

Scott Grimes does a much better job as the Browns' young son, a typical kid who has a penchant for firecrackers. Although his constant heroism eventually becomes tiresome, Grimes manages to sustain a consistent level of believability that wins the viewer over.

The cast also includes the underrated M. Emmet Walsh as the town sheriff, a role he's perfected.

If you can ignore the obvious rip-off elements, you might enjoy "Critters." It certainly won't be remembered a year from now, but as an infectious fun escape from reality it succeeds admirably.



					
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