

RETRO REVIEW: “Gremlins” (1984) |

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For the last few months, I've been doing something called Retro Reviews every Wednesday. Here's how it works: I put three movie choices on Twitter (you can follow me @KeithandMovies). People vote, I watch the movie that wins, and then I write a review about it the next Wednesday. The movie that comes in second place gets another chance to be voted on the next week.

Last week, I was pretty sure I knew which movie would win. I was right - "Gremlins" won by a lot. I was happy about this. I first saw "Gremlins" when it came out in theaters in the summer of 1984. After that, I watched it many times on VHS (which is like an old version of DVDs). But it had been a long time since I last watched it. So I was excited to see it again with fresh eyes.

Joe Dante directed "Gremlins," and it was the biggest movie he ever made. Chris Columbus wrote the story. In the movie, a dad named Rand Peltzer (played by Hoyt Axton) is in Chinatown buying a Christmas gift for his son. He finds a cute little creature called a mogwai in an old shop. The mogwai comes with three important rules: Don't get it wet, keep it out of bright light (especially sunlight), and never feed it after midnight.

Rand goes home to a small town called Kingston Falls. He gives the mogwai to his son Billy (played by Zach Galligan) as a surprise. They name it Gizmo. Billy is a nice guy who works at a bank but wants to be a comic book artist. He likes a girl he works with named Kate (played by Phoebe Cates). They and the other funny people in town have normal lives. That is, until someone breaks the rules for taking care of the mogwai. Soon, Kingston Falls is filled with naughty creatures called gremlins, who cause a lot of trouble in the town.

Director Joe Dante has fun with all parts of this movie, which is a mix of science fiction, horror, comedy, and monster story. He, Columbus, and Steven Spielberg (who helped make the movie)

start by showing how cute and cuddly Gizmo is. The first 30 minutes probably made a lot of kids want to buy Gizmo toys. But then the second half of the movie gets wild and crazy. There's a really funny scene in a bar that shows how silly and mischievous the movie can be. It's a mix of comedy and playful violence that made me laugh just like it did when I was younger.

Interestingly, this was Zach Galligan's first movie, and it was the biggest role he ever had. Phoebe Cates was in a few more movies before she stopped acting in 1994. Both of them do a good job in this wacky movie. It's full of running jokes (jokes that keep coming back), really funny moments, creature craziness, and things that remind you of the 1980s. Some of the lines in the movie might sound a bit old now, but overall the movie is still good. It has the same fun, over-the-top energy that made it so popular back in 1984.