

Goosebumps aims for a hit

► GOOSEBUMPS FROM PAGE D1

There are many in the “Goosebumps” universe, including an Abominable Snowman, a haunted mask, a swamp-dwelling werewolf and the gleeful (and, most important for the film, speech-enabled) Slappy, a possessed ventriloquist dummy. Several actors dressed as ghouls drifted through the space. A man on stilts loped into a makeup area. A witchlike woman in ratty clothing practised her planned reaction to an explosion, repeating her double take with the solitary concentration of a Shakespearean actor rehearsing “Hamlet.”

Just before the cameras began to roll, Black walked into the study, with the crew offering the respect due a distinguished clergyman, the actor the high priest of the goofy-creepy.

“Now we go tighter on Phase 2 so Slappy’s back on the pedestal,” called out the director, Rob Letterman, who had previously directed “Shark Tale” and collaborated with Black on “Gulliver’s Travels.” Then the ventriloquist operating the puppet villain, after announcing his plans to terrorize the town, growled the line: “You’ve made Slappy — very unhappy,” which the kids shrunk back from with a sort of benign terror.

Creating just-scary-enough entertainment is not easy.

“The really daunting part — besides the monsters — is the tone and how to make it scary but also fun and not gruesome,” Letterman said. “I really want to make the Amblin movie I grew up with,” referring to early Steven Spielberg pictures. “It’s accessible but with the edge of scares. ‘Keep an eye on the tone’ — that was the advice R.L. had given me.”

The day before, Stine, 71, had visited the set, for a cameo as “R.L. Stine’s” colleague. The moment offered a Hollywood head-spinner: an author whose material is being adapted playing someone who is not him opposite a man who is an exaggerated version of him.

More than most, the “Goosebumps” back story shows the studios’ fevered interest in harnessing a literary smash and the challenges in doing so. Beginning in the late 1990s, a number of versions languished at Fox, with Tim Burton onboard at one point to produce; the mix of horror and comedy is the director’s specialty.

A TV show, which aired in the U.S. on Fox Kids, came and went. Writers cycled through the script. The problems weren’t insurmountable, but they were hardly simple: The original 62 books were episodic. They followed a basic template — a new kid arrives in an idyllic town, then realizes something’s not right. Soon a monster is threatening the town or the child or children, whose problems are compounded by adults not believing them. The hero must overcome adult skepticism and their own fears to vanquish the threat. Only a few antagonists ever recurred.

Stringing the books into one movie wouldn’t work, since the main characters were different in each instalment. And none of the books on their own was big enough

to justify a film. “The challenge in making the movie was how do you take something small and intimate and episodic and make it a worthwhile event,” said Forte.

Fox eventually put the project into turnaround, and around 2008 it landed at Sony. Shortly after, a breakthrough came — the “Ed Wood” writers Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski had come up with the idea of making Stine himself a character; in doing so it allowed multiple books to be threaded together and enabled a host of villains to be included under one roof. The threat would come to Stine and several children, when the monsters the author created had, “Jumanji” style, sprung from the page and come to life. Screenwriter Darren Lemke followed, giving it shape.

The movie in its final form, with a budget estimated at \$90 million, follows teenager Zach (Dylan Minnette) moving in to a Delaware town with his single mother (Amy Ryan), then falling for a neighbour (Odeya Rush), who is the daughter of a reclusive author named R.L. Stine. “Goosebumps” is probably one of the few movies not associated with filmmaker Charlie Kaufman to reference the adaptation process within the frame of the film itself. There are plot turns that involve Stine writing, jokes about how many books he’s sold and even a mini-rant by the author — disavowed, good-naturedly, mostly, as unrealistic by the real-life Stine — about “Steve King” being more famous than he is.

Still, the green light was dependent on Black’s participation. And Black wasn’t going until Stine gave the OK. They met in New York, home of Stine, a longtime joke book writer before he started “Goosebumps” on a lark. Slappy was there too, propped up on a chair.

“I was a little on pins and needles,” Black said. “It was a surreal setting, in a spooky old building that was apropos,” he said, before realizing it was Scholastic headquarters. I mean, we are taking his material and his brand but also his name. We’re messing with his identity.”

“Well, I did want to read the script,” Stine deadpanned, asked how he felt when he heard a distorted-mirror version of him would appear.

The notion of a youth-entertainment economy, separate and distinct from the adult one — and often so large it threatens to engulf it — is now taken for granted. Six of the top 10 movies at the box office this year were made explicitly for children, and two more were seen by a lot of them. No one bats an eye.

And more such properties are in the pipeline. Despite the floundering of bestseller-derived movies such as “Mortal Instruments” and “Beautiful Creatures,” next year will bring films based on Rick Yancey’s alien-invasion YA best-seller “The 5th Wave” and Ransom Riggs’ “Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children,” directed by Tim Burton. Meanwhile, Rainbow Powell’s 1980s coming-of-age story “Eleanor & Park” and Rachel Renee Russell’s middle-grade “Dork

Diaries” series remain in development.

It wasn’t always this way, of course. Sure, there were Saturday morning cartoons and scattered cultural offerings, largely from Walt Disney. But the idea that youthful pop culture would dominate the landscape — that it would be the reason an industry would exist — was, until this century, unheard of.

The “Goosebumps” franchise is a reminder of a time when that was still the thinking; unlike “Harry Potter,” “The Hunger Games” and “Twilight,” these were titles exclusively about and for children. Parents were happy that kids were picking up books, but they didn’t go to great lengths to find out what was in them, and they certainly didn’t become fans themselves.

But “Goosebumps” is also a bridge to the modern era. Practically speaking, it emboldened and enriched Scholastic, which would go on to make a big investment in Harry Potter. Culturally, it showed producers what kind of money lay in this realm — and how, in a world of childlike obsessiveness and anxious modern parenting, reaching a youthful audience is really reaching the American audience.

How, then, will a movie that harks back to a time before the kid-centric era but is coming out decidedly in it fare?

Many people now in their late 20s and early 30s did eat, sleep and breathe these genre benders. The problem is that this group as a rule doesn’t go to PG kids movies, and they’re not old enough to have children who would. There’s a reason big-budget PG films — aimed primarily at that tween demographic roughly between ages 9 and 12 — come out so infrequently these days. Dip too young and the junior high schoolers will roll their eyes; reach too old and they’ll be scared or turned off. A PG arrow, in other words, needs to hit a small target.

Goosebumps” — which Sony hopes will spin off sequels — seeks to achieve a balance. Scenes involving a police officer played by “Veep’s” Timothy Simons goes for more adult laughs. Older teens might also be drawn to a few “Paranormal Activity”-style beats and even the Chuckie-like visage of Slappy himself. But in the main it features the kind of wholesome romance and bend-but-don’t-break scares that will work for a 10-year-old.

Despite the challenge, filmmakers say that when such an effort works, it can strike gold. “If you look at the movies that have done best over time, they have always been PG movies,” said Neal Moritz, one of the film’s producers. Black sees an even bigger cultural issue at play.

“Today’s parents might err on the side of protecting kids a little too much, a little too much helicoptering,” he said. “Scares are a healthy rite of passage. There are things here that will be enjoyed by adults, yes. But it’s a movie that I think kids will see. It’s a movie I think they should see.”

Los Angeles Times



MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

Author R.L. Stine wrote the “Goosebumps” and “Fear Street” series.

CINEMA SHOWTIMES

SHOWTIMES VALID SATURDAY & SUNDAY

GUELPH GALAXY

519-763-9188

MINIONS(G)
SAT. 11:15, 12:25, 2:45, 5:05, 7:30
SUN. 11:45, 12:25, 2:45, 5:05, 7:30

MINIONS 3D(G)
SAT. & SUN. 9:50

FANTASTIC FOUR(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 1:30, 4:10, 7:45, 10:15

JURASSIC WORLD(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 9:15

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE ROGUE NATION(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 12:55, 4:05, 7:15, 10:10

TRAINWRECK(18A)
SAT. & SUN. 4:15, 7:20, 10:10

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 1:40, 7:40, 10:20

PIXELS(PG)
SAT. 11:30, 12:20, 2:45, 5:10, 7:40
SUN. 1:45, 2:45, 5:10, 7:40

PIXELS 3D(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 10:05

VACATION(14A)
SAT. & SUN. 1:30, 4:45, 7:25, 10

STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON(18A)
SAT. & SUN. 12:15, 3:30, 7:10, 10:05

THE GIFT(14A)
SAT. & SUN. 2:10, 4:50, 7:30, 10:10

SHAUN THE SHEEP MOVIE(G)
SAT. 11, 12:15, 2:30, 4:45, 7
SUN. 11:30, 12:15, 2:30, 4:45, 7
THE SEVENTH DWARF(NR)
SAT. 11

SLUGTERRA: EASTERN CAVERNS(NR)
SAT. 12:30 SUN. 11:30

ENCHANTED KINGDOM 3D(NR)
SUN. 12:55

VACATION(14A)
SAT. & SUN. 12:05, 2:35, 5:05, 7:40, 10
SOUTHPAW(14A)
SAT. 6:30, 9:30
SUN. 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 9:30

ANDRE RIEU'S 2015 MAAS-TRICHT CONCERT(NR)
SAT. 12:30

GALAXY PERGOLA

COMMONS

519-821-3468

MINIONS(G)
SAT. & SUN. 12:15, 2:40, 5, 7:30

MINIONS 3D(G)
SAT. & SUN. 9:55

FANTASTIC FOUR(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 12, 2:30, 5:15, 8, 10:30

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE ROGUE NATION(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 12:50, 3:45, 6:45, 10:10

TRAINWRECK(18A)
SAT. & SUN. 12:40, 4:15, 7:10, 10:20

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 1:20, 4:10, 7, 9:50

RICKI AND THE FLASH(PG)
SAT. & SUN. 12, 2:45, 5:10, 7:45, 10:15

BOOKSHELF CINEMA

519-821-3311

INFINITELY POLAR BEAR
SAT: 7:00, SUN: 6:30

ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL
SAT: 9:00, SUN: 8:30

MUSTANG DRIVE-IN

519-824-5431

AUGUST 14-20
THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. (PG)
9:00PM
FANTASTIC FOUR (PG)
11:10PM
MOVIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Listings at www.guelphmercury.com

NIGHTLIFE

ONTARIO FILM REVIEW BOARD CLASSIFICATIONS

G Suitable for all
PG Parental guidance advised
14A Persons younger than 14 must be accompanied by an adult

18A Persons younger than 18 must be accompanied by an adult
R Restricted to persons 18 or older

SHOWTIMES LISTINGS FOR FRIDAY IN THE NIGHTLIFE SECTION

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS OF UNION GAS LIMITED

Union Gas Limited has applied for approval to change its gas commodity, storage and transportation rates effective January 1, 2016.

Learn more. Have your say.

Union Gas Limited has applied to change its rates to better reflect how it supplies natural gas to its customers. The proposed changes include the following:

- A change in the reference price used to set rates on a quarterly basis for a majority of its customers; and
- A change to how it allocates costs to the different types of customers that it serves.

An average residential customer would see the following annual bill impact, but these impacts would only start in 2018:

Residential Customer – Service Area	Approximate Bill Impact
Southern Ontario (Windsor to Hamilton)	Decrease of \$20
Northern Delivery Area (North Bay to Kapuskasing)	Increase of \$26
All Other Delivery Areas	Decrease of \$1.50 – \$51.50

Other customers in Union Gas Limited's service area, including businesses, will also be affected.

THE ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD IS HOLDING A PUBLIC HEARING

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) will hold a public hearing to consider the application filed by Union Gas.

We will question Union Gas on the case. We will also hear arguments from individuals and from groups that represent the customers of Union Gas. At the end of this hearing, the OEB will decide whether to approve the changes that Union Gas has requested in this application.

The OEB is an independent and impartial public agency. We make decisions that serve the public interest. Our goal is to promote a financially viable and efficient energy sector that provides you with reliable energy services at a reasonable cost.

BE INFORMED AND HAVE YOUR SAY

You have the right to information regarding this application and to be involved in the process.

- You can review the application filed by Union Gas on the OEB's website now.
- You can file a letter with your comments, which will be considered during the hearing.
- You can become an active participant (called an intervenor). Apply by **August 25, 2015** or the hearing will go ahead without you and you will not receive any further notice of the proceeding.
- At the end of the process, you can review the OEB's decision and its reasons on our website.

LEARN MORE

Our file number for this case is **EB-2015-0181**. To learn more about this hearing, find instructions on how to file letters or become an intervenor, or to access any document related to this case, please select the file number **EB-2015-0181** from the list on the OEB website: www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/notice. You can also phone our Consumer Relations Centre at 1-877-632-2727 with any questions.

ORAL VS. WRITTEN HEARINGS

There are two types of OEB hearings – oral and written. The OEB will determine at a later date whether to proceed by way of a written or oral hearing. If you think an oral hearing is needed, you can write to the OEB to explain why by **August 25, 2015**.

PRIVACY

If you write a letter of comment, your name and the content of your letter will be put on the public record and the OEB website. However, your personal telephone number, home address and e-mail address will be removed. If you are a business, all your information will remain public. If you apply to become an intervenor, all information will be public.

This hearing will be held under section 36 of the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, S.O. 1998 c.15 (Schedule B).

OUTSIDE WATER USE PROGRAM

WE ARE CURRENTLY IN LEVEL 1 YELLOW

Look for these new road signs showing the most common outside water use permitted activities and restrictions at a glance.

ODD/EVEN DATES BY ADDRESS
7-9 A.M./P.M.*

Lawn watering permitted with alternate day and time restrictions*

Watering of trees, flower and food gardens permitted

At-home vehicle washing permitted; must have shut-off nozzle on your hose

OUTDOOR WATER CONSERVATION TIP:

Set your mower blade to its highest setting and only cut your lawn when grass is 7.5 cm (3 inches) tall to grow stronger, deeper roots.

ALTERNATE DAY AND TIME RESTRICTIONS

*Odd numbered houses may water only on odd-numbered calendar days, and even-numbered houses on even-numbered days, only between 7 and 9 a.m. and 7 and 9 p.m. as needed.

GUELPH WATER OURS TO CONSERVE

guelph.ca/ourstoconserve