



OFFICE OF FILM
& LITERATURE
CLASSIFICATION

Tē Tari Whakarōpū Tukuata, Tubituhinga

Scooby-Doo Introduction

On 5 August 2002, the Chief Censor granted leave for the 35mm film *Scooby-Doo* to be submitted to the Office of Film and Literature Classification by a member of the public under s15(3) of the Films, Videos and Publications Classification Act 1993.

Scooby-Doo is a live-action film based on a children's classic animated television series. The plot involves the reunion of estranged friends Fred, Velma, Daphne and Shaggy and their dog Scooby-Doo who together form the investigation team "Mystery Inc." They are brought to the "Spooky Island" amusement park where they are asked to solve the mystery of why teenage holidaymakers leave the island listless and completely changed. The plot unravels to reveal monstrous supernatural beings who plan to take over the world and who are under the control of Scooby-Doo's nephew Scrappy-Doo.

Scooby-Doo originally carried a G rating in New Zealand. This rating was given to the film through the process of cross-rating unrestricted films with the rating they have been given by the Australian Office of Film and Literature Classification.

"We were expecting a fun light-weight movie, similar to the TV series, suitable for our children and younger....My children were genuinely disturbed and we left before the end. I noticed a lot of unattended children at the movie as well." – Letter from complainant.

I have indicated to the Director of the Australian Classification Office my view that the G rating should be 'clean'. It should reassure reasonable parents that there is nothing in the film that they should be concerned about their children viewing." – Chief Censor's decision to grant leave to submit the film for classification.

Scooby-Doo was screening in New Zealand cinemas in July 2002. On 28 July, the Office received a complaint from a member of the public who had taken his children to see the film.

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If a film already has a rating and a person wants to get it changed, they first have to gain the leave of the Chief Censor. They have to make an application providing reasons why they think the rating should be changed. The Chief Censor then considers the application and decides whether to grant leave for the film to be submitted to the Office. In his decision to grant leave for *Scooby-Doo* to be submitted for classification, the Chief Censor noted:

"...its Australian G rating was accompanied with a note that 'some scenes may scare very young children'. I have indicated to the Director of the Australian Classification Office my view that the G rating should be 'clean'. It should reassure reasonable parents that there is nothing in the film that they should be concerned about their children viewing. In theory, therefore, if a G film requires a note such as this, then it is not a G film." – Chief Censor's decision to grant leave to submit the film for classification.



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On 19 August 2002, the film was examined by the Office. In its classification decision, the Office took into account the depictions of horror, violence and sex in the film, and how realistically these were presented. Special effects are used throughout the film and contribute significantly to the film's highly surreal tone. Computer generated imagery is used to create the monsters and the characters Scooby and Scrappy-Doo. The film has strong elements of parody throughout, sometimes in association with coarse humour, such as a sequence involving prolonged flatulence or Scrappy-Doo urinating onto Daphne's dress. There are several low-level verbal references of a sexual nature and humours allusions to drug use that would be incomprehensible to younger viewers.

"While this is a live-action film the manner of the depictions of horror clearly indicate that the intention is to emulate the surreal nature of animation. At first the dragon-like monsters are seen in semi-darkness with a focus on claws and teeth, emphasising their horrific aspect. Soon afterward they are seen more clearly and strongly resemble purple dinosaurs. Significantly negating their horrific aspect is the series of comical misfortunes that befall them." – Office of Film and Literature's classification decision.

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*"The movie was distributed with a G rating but I felt some scenes were genuinely disturbing, and would be harmful to children, many of whom would be sent to see it unaccompanied by their parents because of the character's 'benign' reputation on TV."
– Letter from complainant.*

Like the elements of horror, acts of violence are depicted in a farcical, surreal and impossible manner. There are several ineffectual karate-kicks and punches. The strongest scene of violence involves Daphne and an evil henchman in a rooftop martial arts fight that is highly stylised and involves feats that are impossible to emulate, such as spinning through the air and throwing people huge distances. Again humour is used to limit the impact of these acts, further reduced by the lack of resulting injury, in the manner of animation. A group fight scene in a cave is highly choreographed and humorous, involving a group of dazed teenagers and large purple exploding monsters.

In their complaint, the member of the public who took his children to see *Scooby-Doo* argued that the G rating was not an appropriate indication of the type of content featured in film.

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In his application to have the film submitted to the Office, the complainant suggested that a PG rating would be more appropriate for this film.



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In its decision, the Office concluded that the dominant effect of the film is that of a live-action comedy film with computer generated elements and is based on a children's animated television series. The film has some elements that would scare young children and others of an adult nature that would be incomprehensible to children. Due to the nature of these elements, younger children would benefit from adult guidance.

The Office classified *Scooby-Doo* as PG (unrestricted with parental guidance recommended for younger viewers) with the descriptive note "some scenes may scare very young children" due to the low-level scenes of cartoon-like horror and violence.

Questions

- 1) What is the difference between a G rating and a PG rating? Do you think it is important for young children to have parental guidance when watching a film? Why?
- 2) How do you think the realism of horror, crime, sex, or violence depicted in films impact upon the audience? What is the significance of the context in which these things are presented?
- 3) If a film already has a rating, the Chief Censor has to grant leave before a film can be submitted for classification. Why do you think this is?
- 4) Recently there have been a number of films made based on children's television series from the 1980's and 1990's – can you think of some examples? Do you think these films are targeted at the same age group as the television series were? What issues arise when films are targeted at both adult and child audiences?