

Little Monsters

US : 1989 : dir. Richard Alan Greenberg : : 100 min
 prod: : scr: Terry Rossio & Ted Elliott : dir.ph.:
Fred Savage; Ben Savage
 Howie Mandel; Daniel Stern; Margaret Whitton; Rick Ducommun; Amber Barretto;
 Frank Whaley

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ∅ M ∅	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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“ They act up when the sun goes down! ”



Star of TV's *"The Wonder Years"* Fred Savage was one of the more engaging kids of the 1980s, with a deft comic touch, but not seen to his best advantage in this half-baked *"BEETLEJUICE"* clone. Source: Classic Movie Kids

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

“ **"BEETLEJUICE"**-inspired fantasy comedy suffers from a clumsy script and obvious post-production cuts. Boy finds a prankish monster (Mandel) under his bed; their friendship leads to various crises, in our world and the dimly lit land of the monsters. The premise was promising but the results are dismal. Cast tries hard. ***1/2** ”

Radio Times Guide to Films review:

“Funnyman Howie Mandel is Maurice, the wart hog-like creature who lives under Fred Savage's bed, in this adolescent **"BEETLE JUICE"** copy. Together they venture into a land of monsters and get up to all manner of childish pranks. Some of that mischief is actually quite vicious and dark so parents videoing for younger children should take note. Everyone tries hard to mine the fantasy for all the quirky comedy values they can, but the clumsy script defeats even these hardened professionals. A dismal disaster. ***** ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Irritating, ugly monsters living in a dark, chaotic netherworld pop out from under unsuspecting children's beds at night. Rated **"PG"**, but it's definitely not Disney fare ¹ **Turkey** ”

[**no listing** in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Videocassette – **Vestron UK VHS VA 1993** – sleeve notes:

“Brian's been having one of those days... But he's about to have the night of his life with a monster called Maurice. **"LITTLE MONSTERS"** is a fast moving, sometimes frightening, always funny story about bogeymen, burgers, bogeys and the kind

of big trouble that kids can get into when they're allowed to have a hell of a good time. When you're looking for a monstrous time – check out what's lurking under the bed! **"LITTLE MONSTERS"**, Fred Savage, Howie Mandel. They act up when the sun goes down.”

TV Quick note:

“Fantasy comedy. A boy befriends a monster that lives under his bed, and they take off for supernatural escapades.”

What's On TV note:

“Fantasy comedy about a young boy who befriends a fun-loving monster who lives under his bed. ”

“Young Fred Savage befriends a fun-loving monster who lives underneath his bed. ”

¹ *Ah well, there's something good to be said of it after all then.*

Appealing to the same appetite for devilment which Roald Dahl tapped into, albeit on a more sedate level, with his books, the film posits the delirious proposition that you could pop up into your friends' – and enemies' – bedrooms by night and wreak all kinds of havoc while they sleep: planting incriminating chocolatey fingerprints on their fridge, chewing up their homework, laying cunning little booby-traps for their mommies and daddies come breakfast time. It's the sort of idea to bring a blissful smile to many a child's face. Sadly, this tasty little notion fell into the maw of American commercial cinema, and the result is almost unbearably loud and irritating (even, apparently, to Americans). Howie Mandel is a noisy, hyperactive comic from the same drawer as Jim ("**ACE VENTURA**") Carrey, bouncing about and mugging so frightfully one has to be embarrassed for Fred Savage, given the thankless task of playing straight man to him. But the embarrassment goes into overdrive when the film waxes "sincere and emotional" toward the end, and starts to drub out its lesson about liberty vs license. The kids who were hooting with delight earlier are made to squirm before "**LITTLE MONSTERS**" is done with them, but maybe American kids are savvy enough to switch their attention off as soon as film-makers slip in these "responsible" heart-tugging sermons for the benefit of parental ears.

Fred Savage, bathing in the glow of his success on TV's "**The Wonder Years**", is seen to better effect here than in the fairly dire "**THE WIZARD**", released the same year, but at least in that film he was more of an independent agent – here he is little better than a sidekick who must be taught the joys of anarchy by his other-worldly (adult) chaperone. Anarchy means pigging out on junk food, playing pinball machines, or baseball where the goal is to smash as many windows as you can. Anarchy is a cheap and trivial rebellion against your parents, with little reference to yourself as an individual. The film takes, in short, a very patronising view of kids letting their hair down, while sailing wide around any real wickedness – smoking, alcohol, drugs, driving fast cars, sex – these being all *adult* mischiefs.

The gremlins' fantasy world, when we see it, is as threadbare and uninteresting as Willy Wonka's factory in that other dismal fantasy outing, the low lighting presumably intended to obscure the poverty of visual imagination at work. It's interesting to speculate what Terry Gilliam might have done with the same material. Fred's younger brother Ben starred in his own cod nostalgia sitcom "**Boy Meets World**", which seemed to repeat all the errors of "**The Wonder Years**", and in 1991 made "**CLIFFORD**", which was not released until 1994.

See the equally manic "**BEETLEJUICE**", and subject index under [ALL IN THE FAMILY](#), [BEDTIME](#), [COMEDY](#), [FANTASY / FAIRY TALES / FOLK TALES](#), [MOVING HOME](#) and of course inevitably, with a long yawwwwn, [BOY MEETS GIRL](#).