

## UNDERRATED FAMILY FILMS

When I watched *The Emperor's New Groove* again after several years I could not believe what a great film it is. Fine plot, great characters, quick and clever dialogue, uses pre-computer-generated imagery (CGI) brilliantly – and yet it is almost forgotten.

1. *The Emperor's New Groove*, Disney, 2000. Incan emperor is turned into a llama and taught a lesson: majestic.
2. *Basil The Great Mouse Detective*, Disney, 1986. 'Big Ben fight scene, robot mouse Queen Victoria and a peg-legged bat. What's not to like?' It was the first film Mark Wallace saw.
3. *Megamind*, DreamWorks, 2010. Unoriginal? I thought it was great, and morally subtle.
4. *Monster in Paris*, English version released 2012. Surprisingly affecting dub of the French original.
5. *Jumanji*, 1995. Supernatural board game in which wild animals come to life? Sounds dire, but it was Tom Doran's childhood favourite.
6. *Small Soldiers*, DreamWorks, 1998. 'Toy Story with heavier firepower,' says Gaz W.
7. *Robin Hood*, Disney, 1973. Unfairly overlooked, overshadowed by predecessors *The Jungle Book* and *Aristocats*.
8. *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, Disney, 2001. Another cartoon classic overshadowed by computer-generated imagery blockbusters to come.

9. *Flushed Away*, Aardman/DreamWorks, 2006. Terrible title; outstanding plot, characters and CGI.
10. *Lion King II: Simba's Pride*, Disney, 1998. Surprisingly high-quality, straight-to-video sequel.

## PLURALS THAT HAVE BECOME SINGULAR

It is a little old-fashioned to use data, dice, graffiti, panini, media and politics as plural nouns these days, and I know only one person who treats news as a plural, but we are dimly aware that these words were not always as singular as they are now. However, Rich Greenhill, a virtuoso of language curios, came up with many other words that were once – unknown to me – plurals. Here are the best ...

1. **Quince** Middle English plural of Old French *cooin*, from Latin for apple of Cydonia, now Chania, Crete.
2. **Stamina** Latin plural of *stamen*, thread or essential element, before it was applied by analogy to flower parts.
3. **Chintz** Plural of chint, a stained or painted calico cloth imported from India, from Hindi *chimt*, spattering, stain.
4. **Pox** Plural of pock, as in pock-marked.

## LISTELLANY

5. **Truce** Plural of true, Middle English, in the sense of belief, trust.
6. **Invoice** Plural of obsolete invoy, from French *envoy*, *envoyer*, to send.
7. **Broccoli** Italian, plural of *broccolo*, cabbage sprout, head, diminutive of *brocco*, shoot.
8. **Dismal** Originally a noun, for the two days in each month which were believed to be unlucky, from Anglo-Norman French *dis mal*, and medieval Latin *dies mali*, evil days.
9. **Sweden** Originally a plural of Swede, a Swedish person.
10. **Bodice** Originally bodies.

Greenhill also pointed out that MMR – measles, mumps and rubella – are all plurals:

11. Measles. Middle English maseles, probably from Middle Dutch *masel*, pustule. The spelling change was due to association with Middle English mesel, leprous, leprosy.
12. Mumps. Late 16th century: from obsolete mump, meaning grimace, have a miserable expression.
13. Rubella. Modern Latin neuter plural of *rubellus*, reddish.

Just to show off, he said – again, I had no idea – that the words primate and termite arose from mistaking the three-syllable Latin plurals *primates* and *termites* (the singulars being *primas*

and *termes*) for two-syllable words. The *Oxford Dictionary* doesn't specifically support this, but it seems plausible.

14. Chess. Middle English: from Old French *eschec*, plural of *eschec*, check, which in the sense of holding back or verifying comes from the game of chess. I did not know that.

15. Delicatessen

16. Lasagne

17. Agenda. Latin: 'things to be done.'

18. Candelabra

19. WAG: stands for wives and girlfriends (mostly of famous footballers) but is often used as a singular, 'a WAG'.

## FOOTNOTES

This list arose after I praised the wonder of the footnotes in John Campbell's biography of Roy Jenkins, a fabulous old-fashioned book, with starred footnotes at the bottom of the page, plus numbered endnotes, including endnotes in footnotes.

1. 'It [is] wearisome to add "except the Italians" to every generalisation. Henceforth it may be assumed.' A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*.

2. **'Strengthened, I should have thought spoiled, by whisky.'** Roy Jenkins, in *Gladstone*, on Queen Victoria's preference for claret.
3. **'Trees didn't burst into flame ... A better simile would be "not like molten gold".'** A footnote to: 'Sunlight poured like molten gold across the ... landscape.' Terry Pratchett, *The Light Fantastic*.
4. **'...his trousers were creased at the sides not front and back.'** A. J. P. Taylor on King George V, in *English History 1914-45*.
5. **'Despite Orwell's expressed wishes, the ... Uniform Edition includes three semi-colons.'** A footnote to: '*Coming Up for Air* hasn't got a semi-colon in it.' Peter Davison, editor, *George Orwell: A Life in Letters*.
6. **"'You're fired" were the exact words as I remember them.'** A footnote to: 'My first job ended when the editor said something to me that made it impossible to go on working for him.' Christopher Hitchens, *Hitch-22*.
7. **'This is the only reference in the canon to Holmes's eyebrows.'** Leslie S. Klinger, editor, *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*.
8. **'It is one of the mysteries of existence that what is called red tape is in fact pink.'** Profs George Gretton and Kenneth Reid, on a quirk of title deeds, in *Conveyancing (2nd Edition)*.
9. **'Haemophilia is, like the enlargement of the prostate, an exclusively male disorder. But not in this work.'** Samuel Beckett, *Watt*.