[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [thumb|upright|A World War II gremlin-themed industrial safety poster](/wiki/File:Gremlins_think_it's_fun_to_hurt_you._Use_care_always._Back_up_our_battleskies%5e_-_NARA_-_535381.jpg)

A **gremlin** is a creature commonly depicted as mischievous and mechanically oriented, with a specific interest in [aircraft](/wiki/Aircraft). Gremlins' mischievous natures are similar to those of [English folkloric](/wiki/English_folklore) [imps](/wiki/Imp), while their inclination to damage or dismantle machinery is more modern.

## Origins in aviation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

Although their origin is found in myths among airmen, claiming that the gremlins were responsible for sabotaging aircraft, John W. Hazen states that "some people" derive the name from the [Old English](/wiki/Old_English) word *gremian*, "to vex".<ref name=Hazen>Hazen 1972, p. 465.</ref> While Carol Rose, in her book [*Spirits, Fairies, Leprechauns, and Goblins*](/wiki/Spirits,_Fairies,_Leprechauns,_and_Goblins) attributes the name to a combination of the name of Grimm's Fairy Tales, and Fremlin Beer. Since [World War II](/wiki/World_War II), different fantastical creatures have been referred to as gremlins, bearing varying degrees of resemblance to the originals.

The term "gremlin" denoting a mischievous creature that sabotages aircraft, originates in [Royal Air Force](/wiki/Royal_Air_Force) (RAF) slang in the 1920s among the British pilots stationed in [Malta](/wiki/Malta), [the Middle East](/wiki/The_Middle_East), and India, with the earliest recorded printed use being in a poem published in the journal *Aeroplane* in Malta on 10 April 1929.[[1]](#cite_note-1)[[2]](#cite_note-2) Later sources have sometimes claimed that the concept goes back to [World War I](/wiki/World_War I), but there is no print evidence of this.<ref name=Hazen/>[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

An early reference to the gremlin is in [aviator](/wiki/Aviator) [Pauline Gower](/wiki/Pauline_Gower)[Template:'s](/wiki/Template:') *The ATA: Women with Wings* (1938) where Scotland is described as "gremlin country", a mystical and rugged territory where scissor-wielding gremlins cut the wires of [biplanes](/wiki/Biplane) when unsuspecting pilots were about.<ref name=merry>Merry 2010, p. 66.</ref> An article by Hubert Griffith in the servicemen's fortnightly *Royal Air Force Journal* dated 18 April 1942, also chronicles the appearance of gremlins,[[3]](#cite_note-3) although the article states the stories had been in existence for several years, with later recollections of it having been told by [Battle of Britain](/wiki/Battle_of_Britain) [Spitfire](/wiki/Supermarine_Spitfire) pilots as early as 1940.[[4]](#cite_note-4) [thumb|left|upright|A World War II poster warning of gremlins](/wiki/File:Gremlins_are_floor_greasers%5e_Watch_your_step%5e_Back_up_our_battleskies%5e_-_NARA_-_535378.jpg) This concept of gremlins was popularized during World War II among airmen of the [UK's](/wiki/United_Kingdom) RAF units,[[5]](#cite_note-5) in particular the men of the high-altitude Photographic Reconnaissance Units (PRU) of [RAF Benson](/wiki/RAF_Benson), [RAF Wick](/wiki/RAF_Wick) and [RAF St Eval](/wiki/RAF_St Eval). The flight crews blamed gremlins for otherwise inexplicable accidents which sometimes occurred during their flights. Gremlins were also thought at one point to have enemy sympathies, but investigations revealed that enemy aircraft had similar and equally inexplicable mechanical problems. As such, gremlins were portrayed as being equal opportunity tricksters, taking no sides in the conflict, and acting out their mischief from their own self-interest.<ref name=Sasser>Sasser 1971, p. 1094.</ref> In reality, the gremlins were a form of "[buck passing](/wiki/Buck_passing)" or deflecting blame.<ref name=Sasser/> This led [folklorist](/wiki/Folklorist) John Hazen to note that "the gremlin has been looked on as new phenomenon, a product of the [machine age](/wiki/Machine_age)—the age of air".<ref name=Hazen/> Some experts believe this form of "passing the buck" was important to the morale of pilots. Author and historian Marlin Bressi stated, "Gremlins, while imaginary, played a very important role to the airmen of the Royal Air Force. Gremlin tales helped build morale among pilots, which, in turn, helped them repel the Luftwaffe invasion during the [Battle of Britain](/wiki/Battle_of_Britain) during the summer of 1940. The war may have had a very different outcome if the R.A.F. pilots had lost their morale and allowed Germany's plans for [Operation Sea Lion](/wiki/Operation_Sea_Lion) (the planned invasion of the U.K.) to develop. In a way, it could be argued that gremlins, troublesome as they were, ultimately helped the Allies win the war." Bressi also noted: "Morale among the R.A.F. pilots would have suffered if they pointed the finger of blame at each other. It was far better to make the scapegoat a fantastic and comical creature than another member of your own squadron."[[6]](#cite_note-6) Author [Roald Dahl](/wiki/Roald_Dahl) is credited with getting the gremlins known outside the Royal Air Force.<ref name=rodl>Donald 2008, p. 147.</ref> He would have been familiar with the myth, having carried out his military service in [80 Squadron](/wiki/No._80_Squadron_RAF) of the Royal Air Force in the Middle East. Dahl had his own experience in an accidental crash-landing in the [Libyan Desert](/wiki/Libyan_Desert). In January 1942 he was transferred to [Washington, D.C.](/wiki/Washington,_D.C.) as Assistant [Air attaché](/wiki/Air_attaché) at the British Embassy. There he wrote his first children's novel [*The Gremlins*](/wiki/The_Gremlins), in which "Gremlins" were tiny men who lived on RAF fighters, their wives were "Fifinellas", their male children were "Widgets" and their female children were "Flibbertigibbets". Dahl showed the finished manuscript to [Sidney Bernstein](/wiki/Sidney_Bernstein,_Baron_Bernstein), the head of the British Information Service, who came up with the idea to send it to [Walt Disney](/wiki/Walt_Disney).<ref name=rodl/>[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

The manuscript arrived in Disney's hands in July 1942, and he considered using it as material for a live action/animated full-length feature film, offering Dahl a contract.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) The film project was changed to an animated feature and entered pre-production, with characters "roughed out" and storyboards created.[[7]](#cite_note-7) Disney managed to have the story published in the December 1942 issue of [*Cosmopolitan* magazine](/wiki/Cosmopolitan_(magazine)). At Dahl's urging, in early 1943, a revised version of the story, [*The Gremlins*](/wiki/The_Gremlins) was published as a picture book by [Random House](/wiki/Random_House) (later updated and re-published in 2006 by [Dark Horse Comics](/wiki/Dark_Horse_Comics)).[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

The 1943 publication of *The Gremlins* by Random House consisted of 50,000 copies, with Dahl ordering 50 copies for himself as promotional material for himself and the upcoming film, handing them out to everyone he knew, including the British ambassador in Washington [Lord Halifax](/wiki/Edward_Wood,_1st_Earl_of_Halifax), and the US First Lady [Eleanor Roosevelt](/wiki/Eleanor_Roosevelt) who read it to her grandchildren.<ref name=rodl/> The book was considered an international success with 30,000 more sold in Australia but initial efforts to reprint the book were precluded by a wartime paper shortage.[[8]](#cite_note-8) Reviewed in major publications, Dahl was considered a writer-of-note and his appearances in Hollywood to follow up with the film project were met with notices in Hedda Hopper's columns.[[9]](#cite_note-9)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

The film project was reduced to an animated "short" and eventually cancelled in August 1943, when copyright and RAF rights could not be resolved. Thanks mainly to Disney, the story had its share of publicity which helped in introducing the concept to a wider audience. Issues #33-#41 of [*Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*](/wiki/Walt_Disney's_Comics_and_Stories) published between June 1943 and February 1944 contained a nine-episode series of short silent stories featuring a Gremlin Gus as their star. The first was drawn by [Vivie Risto](/wiki/Vivie_Risto) and the rest of them by [Walt Kelly](/wiki/Walt_Kelly). This served as their introduction to the [comic book](/wiki/Comic_book) audience.

While Roald Dahl was famous for making gremlins known worldwide, many returning Air Servicemen swear they saw creatures tinkering with their equipment. One crewman swore he saw one before an engine malfunction that caused his [B-25 Mitchell](/wiki/B-25_Mitchell) [bomber](/wiki/Bomber) to rapidly lose altitude, forcing the aircraft to return to base. Folklorist Hazen likewise offers his own alleged eyewitness testimony of these creatures, which appeared in an academically praised and peer-reviewed publication, describing an occasion he found "a parted cable which bore obvious tooth marks in spite of the fact that the break occurred in a most inaccessible part of the plane." At this point, Hazen states he heard "a gruff voice" demand, "How many times must you be told to obey orders and not tackle jobs you aren't qualified for? — This is how it should be done." Upon which Hazen heard a "musical twang" and another cable was parted.[[10]](#cite_note-10) Critics of this idea state that the stress of combat and the dizzying heights caused such hallucinations, often believed to be a coping mechanism of the mind to help explain the many problems aircraft faced whilst in combat.

### Differences between Dahl versions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Header text** | **In *Gremlins*** | **In** [***Sometime Never***](/wiki/Sometime_Never:_A_Fable_for_Supermen) |
| Habitat | In clouds and in hangars | In one forest in England before the [Industrial Revolution](/wiki/Industrial_Revolution) then moved underground |
| Food source | [Postage stamps](/wiki/Postage_stamp) | Snozzberries |
| Social Structure | Uncertain; rivalry between gremlins of different habitats; no established families | Ruled by one Leader, human-like society |
| Sapience | Comparable to children, no language or culture | Fully comparable to human; read human books |

## In media[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

* On 21 December 1942, [CBS](/wiki/CBS) aired "Gremlins", a whimsical story written by [Lucille Fletcher](/wiki/Lucille_Fletcher), on an episode of [Orson Welles's](/wiki/Orson_Welles) patriotic radio series [*Ceiling Unlimited*](/wiki/Ceiling_Unlimited). [U.S. Air Force](/wiki/U.S._Air_Force) officers discuss their experiences with the irritating creatures, and conclude that feeding them transforms them into an asset rather than a hindrance to aviation.[[11]](#cite_note-11)[[12]](#cite_note-12)\* In 1943, [Bob Clampett](/wiki/Bob_Clampett) directed [*Falling Hare*](/wiki/Falling_Hare), a [*Merrie Melodies*](/wiki/Merrie_Melodies) cartoon featuring [Bugs Bunny](/wiki/Bugs_Bunny). With [Roald Dahl's](/wiki/Roald_Dahl) book and Walt Disney's proposed film being the inspiration, this short has been one of the early Gremlin stories shown to cinema audiences in which multiple gremlins featured, even with *Falling Hare* only having *one* gremlin giving Bugs grief.[[13]](#cite_note-13) It features Bugs Bunny in conflict with a gremlin at an airfield. The Bugs Bunny cartoon was followed in 1944 by [*Russian Rhapsody*](/wiki/Russian_Rhapsody_(film)), another *Merrie Melodies* short showing Russian gremlins sabotaging an aircraft piloted by [Adolf Hitler](/wiki/Adolf_Hitler). The gremlin in "Falling Hare" even has a color scheme that reflects one that was used on [U.S. Army Air Forces](/wiki/U.S._Army_Air_Forces) [training aircraft](/wiki/Training_aircraft) of the time, using dark blue (as on such an aircraft's [fuselage](/wiki/Fuselage)) and a deep [orange-yellow](/wiki/Chrome_yellow) color (as used on the wings and [tail surfaces](/wiki/Empennage)).
* 1944 also saw animated gremlins playing a role in the romantic comedy starring [Simone Simon](/wiki/Simone_Simon) called [*Johnny Doesn't Live Here Any More*](/wiki/Johnny_Doesn't_Live_Here_Any_More), with an uncredited [Mel Blanc](/wiki/Mel_Blanc) providing the voice.
* The 1947 novel by Roald Dahl, [*Sometime Never: A Fable for Supermen*](/wiki/Sometime_Never:_A_Fable_for_Supermen), had the Gremlin leader as the protagonist of the second half of the book. He is described as leading an ancient nature-loving race away from the wars between humans and trying to let his race survive the destruction of humanity.

[thumb||right|](/wiki/File:PubTThou01.jpg)[William Shatner](/wiki/William_Shatner) and the Gremlin in [*The Twilight Zone*](/wiki/The_Twilight_Zone) episode "[Nightmare at 20,000 Feet](/wiki/Nightmare_at_20,000_Feet)" (1963).

* A 1963 episode of [*The Twilight Zone*](/wiki/The_Twilight_Zone_(1959_TV_series)), "[Nightmare at 20,000 Feet](/wiki/Nightmare_at_20,000_Feet)" directed by [Richard Donner](/wiki/Richard_Donner) and based on the short story of the same name by [Richard Matheson](/wiki/Richard_Matheson), featured a gremlin attacking an airliner.[[14]](#cite_note-14) In the original television episode, the gremlin appears as an almost non-human ape-like creature which inspects the aircraft's wing with the curiosity of an animal and then proceeds to damage the wing. [William Shatner](/wiki/William_Shatner) plays a passenger named Bob Wilson (just recovered from a mental breakdown) who sees the Gremlin (played by [Nick Cravat](/wiki/Nick_Cravat)) on the aircraft's wing as he tries to warn the stewardess and other airplane staff members about it. Upon realizing that the Gremlin's work on the wing would cause the airplane to crash, Bob steals a sleeping police officer's revolver and causes a breach in the auxiliary exit to shoot the Gremlin. When the airplane lands, Bob is removed from the aircraft on a stretcher in a straitjacket. [Rod Serling](/wiki/Rod_Serling) narrates that Bob Wilson's conviction will not be long as the final scene shows that the Gremlin left evidence of Bob's claim in the form of a damaged wing. This episode was remade as a segment of [*Twilight Zone: The Movie*](/wiki/Twilight_Zone:_The_Movie) (1983) with [John Lithgow](/wiki/John_Lithgow) playing a similar character called John Valentine.[[15]](#cite_note-15) John Valentine (who is depicted as suffering from [aviatophobia](/wiki/Aviatophobia)) sees the gremlin and tries to warn the people on the airplane as the gremlin damages the wing. After stealing an airplane security guard's gun and breaking open his window, John opens fire on the gremlin, which defends itself and flies away. John is taken away in a straitjacket as the maintenance crew discovers unexplained damages and claw marks on the wing which alerts the people that are present.
  + A gremlin makes an appearance in a [Halloween special](/wiki/Treehouse_of_Horror_IV) of [*The Simpsons*](/wiki/The_Simpsons) (original airdate: 28 October 1993) paralleling [*The Twilight Zone*](/wiki/The_Twilight_Zone)[Template:'s](/wiki/Template:') "[Nightmare at 20,000 Feet](/wiki/Nightmare_at_20,000_Feet)", (the segment is even named "Terror at 5½ Feet") in which the gremlin (with its vocal effects provided by [Frank Welker](/wiki/Frank_Welker)) attempts to destroy the wheel of [Bart Simpson's](/wiki/Bart_Simpson) school bus. Bart ends up using a flare gun to get it off the bus, only for it land on [Ned Flanders'](/wiki/Ned_Flanders) car. Bart is taken away in a straitjacket and later sees the gremlin outside of the ambulance holding Ned's severed head.
  + The [*Eek! The Cat*](/wiki/Eek!_The_Cat) episode "The Eex Files" (original airdate: 5 November 1994) starts out with Eek on an aircraft beside a man claiming to see someone outside on the wing. Of course, when he looks there is no one there. At the end of the episode, Eek is dropped off by an alien on the wing of the aircraft and meets the gremlin, then promptly offers to help him "find his wallet". The final scene shows the half-crazed man looking out the window and "spazzing out" when he sees them both tearing up the wing.
  + A [*Tiny Toon Adventures*](/wiki/Tiny_Toon_Adventures) [special](/wiki/List_of_Tiny_Toon_Adventures_episodes#Specials) titled "Night Ghoulery" (original airdate: 25 August 1995) includes a spoof of [*Night Gallery*](/wiki/Night_Gallery), with [Babs Bunny](/wiki/Babs_Bunny) presenting in [Rod Serling's](/wiki/Rod_Serling) style. It has a segment named "Gremlin on a Wing", which parodies "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet", with [Plucky Duck](/wiki/Plucky_Duck) in William Shatner's place, accompanied by [Hamton J. Pig](/wiki/Hamton_J._Pig) in an aircraft, and a gremlin similar to that which appeared in the [Bugs Bunny](/wiki/Bugs_Bunny) short [*Falling Hare*](/wiki/Falling_Hare).
  + In the [*Johnny Bravo*](/wiki/Johnny_Bravo) episode "The Man Who Cried Clown" (original airdate: 8 December 1997), which is part of "The Zone Where Normal Things Don't Happen Very Often," Johnny sees an evil clown on the wing of the aircraft and is having difficulty convincing the pilots and anyone of its existence which even included a cameo by someone resembling William Shatner who quotes "Oh no you don't! I'm not falling for that again." When he catches and beats up the clown in the airplane's restroom, he is confronted and informed by a pilot that the clown in question and another clown were needed to keep the aircraft in balance during flight. The pilots and some nearby people beat up Johnny and make him take the incapacitated clown's place.
  + At the end of episode 9 of [*Muppets Tonight*](/wiki/Muppets_Tonight), [Miss Piggy](/wiki/Miss_Piggy) sees a gremlin outside of her airplane window. William Shatner is seen sitting next to her as he claims that he's been complaining about the gremlin for years, but nobody does anything about it.
* The 1981 animated film Heavy Metal contains a segment titled "B-17" and elsewhere referred to as "Gremlins" in which the sole surviving pilot of a battle weary aircraft is ravaged by the reanimated corpses of his fellow crew.
* The 1984 film [*Gremlins*](/wiki/Gremlins), produced by [Steven Spielberg](/wiki/Steven_Spielberg) and directed by [Joe Dante](/wiki/Joe_Dante), is loosely inspired by Dahl's characters, featuring evil and destructive monsters which mutate from small furry creatures.
* [*The Real Ghostbusters*](/wiki/The_Real_Ghostbusters) episode "Don't Forget the Motor City" (original airdate: 3 December 1987) has the Ghostbusters traveling to [Detroit](/wiki/Detroit) to battle gremlins who are sabotaging a factory run by a fictional analog of [General Motors](/wiki/General_Motors).
* In [*Cast a Deadly Spell*](/wiki/Cast_a_Deadly_Spell), a 1991 HBO [TV-movie](/wiki/Television_film), gremlins are said to have been "brought back from the [pacific](/wiki/Pacific_Ocean)" to the United States in [World War II](/wiki/World_War II) and are seen damaging cars and houses.
* [*Are You Afraid of the Dark?*](/wiki/Are_You_Afraid_of_the_Dark?) episode "The Tale of the Curious Camera" (March 2, 1994), After getting his portraits back from the basketball team Matt finds that he didn't show up in the photos. To make it up to him the photographer gives him an antique camera because it has apparently chosen him. Matt soon learns that anything or anyone he takes a picture of will have something bad happen to it whether he wants it or not. It is discovered that a gremlin inhabits the camera.
* In the [*Extreme Ghostbusters*](/wiki/Extreme_Ghostbusters) episode "Grease" (original airdate: 25 September 1997), the Ghostbusters have to capture a gremlin that was damaging New York's machines, while at the same time the [FBI](/wiki/FBI) believes them to be the cause of the sabotage.
* In the cartoon series [*American Dragon Jake Long*](/wiki/American_Dragon_Jake_Long), the episode "Jake Takes the Cake" (original airdate: 26 August 2005) features gremlins who mess with any type of mechanical devices and cause a lot of trouble until they are put to sleep and captured.
* In [*Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*](/wiki/Madagascar:_Escape_2_Africa) (2008), Alex sees Mort (mistaking him for a gremlin) messing with the engine and falling off the aircraft.
* In the [*Epic Mickey*](/wiki/Epic_Mickey) games (2010, 2012), Gremlins assist [Mickey Mouse](/wiki/Mickey_Mouse) after he releases them.
* In the Cartoon Network animated series [*Ben 10: Ultimate Alien*](/wiki/Ben_10:_Ultimate_Alien) (2010) and [*Ben 10: Omniverse*](/wiki/Ben_10:_Omniverse) (2012), Ben Tennyson turns into an alien called Jury Rigg that has the ability to disassemble and reassemble machines, mimicking the appearance (pointed ears/cat-like eyes) and abilities of a gremlin.
* In the film [*Hotel Transylvania*](/wiki/Hotel_Transylvania), the titular building is filled with gremlins, amongst other monsters. One old gremlin works as the activities director at Hotel Transylvania as it was seen hosting a bingo game. There is also an elderly gremlin who is known for eating different objects and saying, "I didn't do it."
* In the micro-series [*My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*](/wiki/My_Little_Pony:_Friendship_Is_Magic_(comic_book)#Micro_Series), there is a species called Cloud Gremlins, which cast a spell in Ponyville. In the end, they are defeated by Rainbow Dash.
* The [YouTube](/wiki/YouTube) series *Flite Test****s logo features a Gremlin with its arms stretched out pretending to fly.***[***[16]***](#cite_note-16)