

Smallville

TV3 Sweden, 4 November 2007, 16:15

Introduction

Smallville is a well-established US series about the exploits of the superhero Superman. In this episode, the villain Lex Luthor is creating an army of 'super demons'. These demons try to possess human beings. Together with Clark Kent, Lois Lane investigates where these creatures are being bred.

A viewer was concerned about scenes in which the demons appeared to take organs from human beings and Lois Lane is stabbed in her efforts to find these creatures. He felt that these scenes were not suitable at this time of the afternoon when many children would be watching television.

TV3 Sweden is a Swedish language channel operated by Viasat Broadcasting UK Limited. Ofcom asked Viasat for its comments in relation to Rules 1.3 (children must be protected by appropriate scheduling) and 1.11 of the Broadcasting Code (violence must be appropriately limited in pre-watershed programmes).

Response

Viasat explained that TV3 does not aim its Sunday afternoon programming towards children. Audience figures show that generally this slot only attracts about a 7% child audience (3-15 year olds).

The broadcaster believed that the scenes showing the removal of body parts were acceptable within the context of programme and the general fantasy genre of this series. The series is well-established and, in its view, the broadcaster did not believe the scenes were excessively graphic. For these reasons, it considered that these scenes were not in breach of Rules 1.3 and 1.11.

However, after carefully considering the scene in which Lois Lane is stabbed, the broadcaster reviewed its decision to air the programme unedited before the watershed. TV3 therefore apologised for any distress that may have been caused and this episode now carries a post-21:00 restriction. TV3 will also be reviewing the scheduling of this series in the light of this complaint.

Decision

We acknowledge TV3's apology and note the action taken to restrict this episode to post-21:00 broadcast.

Smallville is a fantasy series with the main characters possessing supernatural powers. Against this background, most viewers would not be surprised or disturbed at the more bizarre elements of the violent scenes. However, this series does appeal to some children, even though the majority of viewers are young adults. Therefore, broadcasters need to take care in scheduling this series at a time when children are available to view in large numbers as some scenes may be unsuitable.

Ofcom was concerned about the generally violent and dark tone of this episode and, in particular, the scenes concerning the stabbing of Lois Lane and the shots of her removing the knife shown at this time of the afternoon when large numbers of children are available to watch television. We concluded that this episode was in breach of the Code as it was not appropriately scheduled and the violent scenes were not appropriately limited.

Breach of Rules 1.3 and 1.11