

[Home](#) / [Movies & TV](#) /

Wildly Inappropriate Movies That Got Away With a PG Rating

AUTHOR:  STACIE HOUGLAND EDITED BY:  DAVID REDDISH MARCH 15, 2024
MOVIES & TV



Today's moviegoers can assess the appropriateness of a movie for every age group thanks in part to the Motion Picture Association (formerly MPAA) ratings of G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17. But parents didn't always have a way to know exactly what their preteens might be exposed to, since from around 1970 until 1984, there was no PG-13.

In 1984, parents and critics raised hue and cry over violent and gory scenes in the PG-rated *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Gremlins*, prompting *Doom* director Steven Spielberg to suggest PG-13 as a "halfway" rating to warn folks that a movie might contain material too disturbing or complex for younger audiences. (Fun fact: *Red Dawn* boasted the first PG-13.)

Either because the rating didn't exist at the time – or the MPAA wasn't paying attention – these inappropriate movies contain enough violence, offensive imagery, and vulgarity that viewers probably forgot they're rated PG.

1. Watership Down (1978)

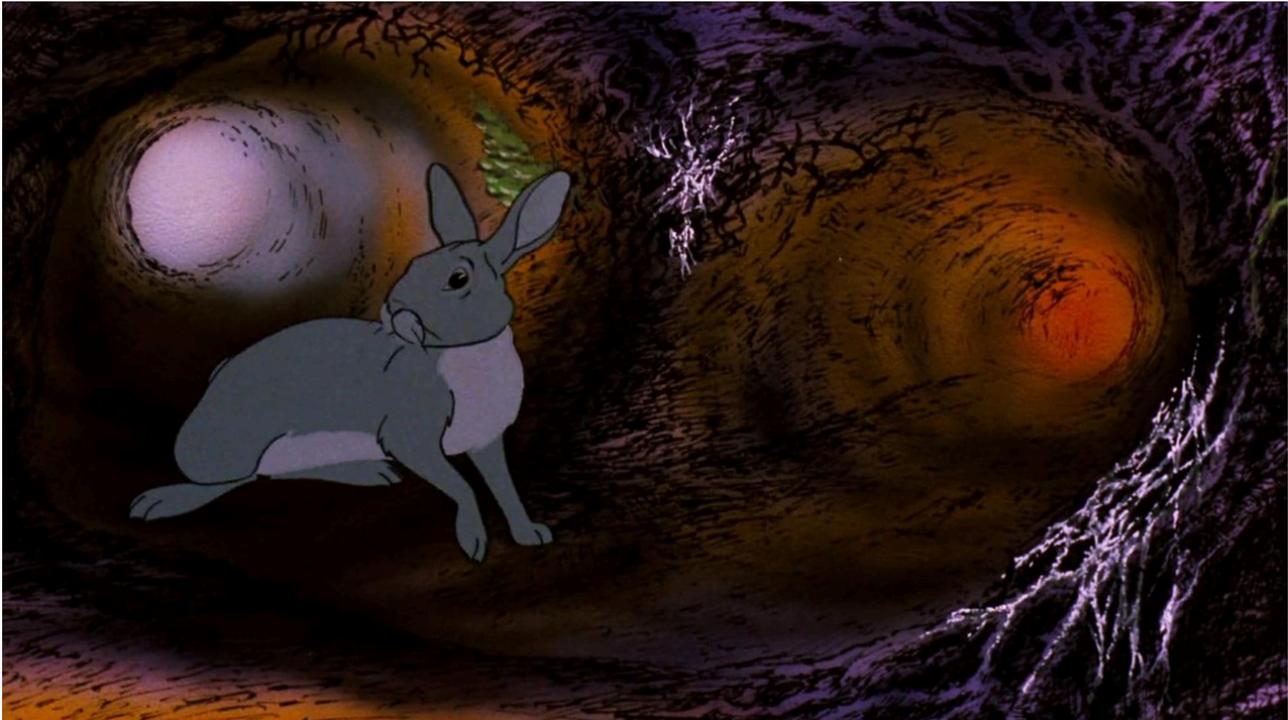


Image Credit: Cinema International Corporation.

This movie did an absolute number on little kids in the 1970s hoping for a cute cartoon about fluffy bunnies but who probably still have PTSD from the deeply upsetting experience. For those who've blocked it from memory, in just 90 minutes 63 rabbits meet their grisly end (that's, on average, seven dead rabbits every 10 minutes, and just eight less than all *Chucky* movies combined) at the hands of other animals, humans, trains,

and a truly terrifying villain who uses his teeth to rip out the throats of his victims.

Disney it ain't, and *Watership Down* had no business getting a PG rating even *before* PG-13 existed.

2. Poltergeist (1982)



Image Credit: Sony Pictures Releasing.

Hold up, you say... they rated this downright terrifying horror film PG? Attacking clowns, ghastly demons, a pool full of skeletons, and some guy who tears his face off – and little kids could just walk right into this nightmare fuel!

Not to mention Tobe Hooper and Steven Spielberg partially based it on the supposedly real story of a Long Island family terrorized by ghosts in the 1950s. An R feels more suitable, even by today's standards.

3. Gremlins (1984)



Image Credit: Warner Bros.

Joe Dante's dark horror comedy and granddaddy of the PG-13 rating featured adorable, merchandise-friendly little creatures called *mogwai*, which a man buys for his son, Billy, as a Christmas present. Billy names the amiable fellow Gizmo, but trouble comes when Gizmo accidentally spawns several aggressive *mogwai*, who torture Gizmo and attack Billy's mother.

Eventually, the reptilian gremlins hatch and embark on a killing spree, taking out Billy's former elementary school teacher, and the gremlins themselves end up stabbed, shredded in blenders, radiated in microwaves, and meeting other grisly ends. Rated PG, back then, *Gremlins* probably scared the bejesus out of kids who once hoped for a stuffed gremlin for Christmas.

4. Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984)



Image Credit: Paramount Pictures.

Like *Gremlins*, Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* sequel directly impacted the rating system after parents squawked seeing a wild-eyed villain in horns rip out a victim's live, still-beating heart, not to mention the scenes of child slavery, human sacrifice, and pain-inducing booby traps.

As critic Ralph Novak of *People* put it at the time, "The ads that say 'this film may be too intense for younger children' are fraudulent. No parent should allow a young child to see this traumatizing movie; it would be a cinematic form of child abuse."

The critical and parental hullabaloo made the MPAA abundantly aware of the need for some kind of ratings middle ground, and the organization introduced PG-13, making *Temple of Doom* the godfather of inappropriate movies.

5. Jaws (1975)



Image Credit: Universal Pictures.

While Spielberg might have first suggested a PG-13 rating, his *Jaws* came out nearly a decade before that – and the MPAA surprisingly gave the classic shark scare-fest a PG. Even today it looks and feels like an R-rated horror movie, from the initial scene of the girl struggling as the shark attacks her, pools of blood in the waves, missing limbs floating around, and the intense, explosive finale.

PG movies shouldn't make people afraid to go into the ocean, but *Jaws* affected entire generations like a true R-rated film.

6. Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988)



Image Credit: Buena Vista Pictures Distribution.

One could say the most offensive thing about this breakthrough animated and live-action movie is that its title is missing a question mark, but that's a topic for another day.

In the 1980s, many audience goers assumed movies with animation targeted a kiddie audience. This one contains some shockingly adult content for a PG movie.

Aside from the ridiculously over-sexualized Jessica Rabbit, Bob Hoskins' alcoholic Eddie swigs regularly from his bourbon bottle, a rabbit also drinks and smokes, and a cigar-puffing baby tosses off lines like "The problem is I got a 50-year-old l-st and a 3-year-old dinky." Let's not get started on the crazy-eyed Judge Doom's melting death scene.

Contrast all this with 2010's *Despicable Me*, which the MPAA rated PG "for rude humor and mild action."

7. Romancing the Stone (1984)



Image Credit: 20th Century Fox.

First off, the meet-strange scene in which Kathleen Turner's acerbic writer slides down a muddy slope and lands with Michael Douglas's face between her legs may make *adults* in the audience uncomfortable, even if the joke goes over younger kids' heads.

The comedy contains various stages of undress, implied boinking, a crocodile bloodily chomping off a man's hand, and drinking and smoking/drug use abounds throughout. It's a solid PG-13 for sure — unless parents want to answer a *lot* of their kids' questions.

8. The NeverEnding Story (1984)



Image Credit: Warner Bros.

Few inappropriate movies scarred as many kids as this one did in the '80s. If a kid *didn't* weep during the scene where the young warrior **Atreyu's** beloved horse sinks into quicksand, lost forever, is that even human?

Fantasy movies are typically pretty dark by their nature, and this one features some pretty depressing adult themes and traumatic moments for kids under 13 by today's standards.

9. Grease (1978)



Image Credit: Paramount Pictures.

Kids who saw [this in the '70s](#) adored Sandy and Danny's cute love story and infinitely catchy tunes, maybe not realizing many of the lyrics involved the birds and the bees. Then there's an older TV host trying to roofie a teenager, implied assault, possible teen pregnancy, and a problematic ending where Sandy, transformed into the perfect tatted-up greaser girl, finds acceptance in Spandex and seduction.

Little kids watching grown adults play teenagers obsessed with getting some action wasn't OK before the PG-13 rating, and it isn't OK now.

10. Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan (1982)



Image Credit: Paramount Pictures.

This dark follow-up to the first unremarkable *Star Trek* movie goes down in history as one of the series' best, but had it been released a few years later, would probably earn a PG-13 rating. When villain Khan drops the slimy, sluglike Ceti eels into the ears of Captain Terrell and Pavel Chekov, filmmakers could probably hear the screams of the theaters' nine-year-olds on Mars.

Just the thought of sweet Chekov succumbing to the disgusting creature grosses adults out today, let alone young audiences unfamiliar with body horror and too young for such intensity. Moreover, an older teen audience might be able to follow the sci-fi concepts it presents, but little kids?

11. Airplane! (1980)



Image Credit: Paramount Pictures.

Where to start with this classic spoof comedy that movie lovers still ROFL at after so many decades? The one-liners and biting satire would've escaped the young ones in 1980, and it still sports a PG rating.

Brimming with casual racism, suggestive innuendo, jokes about self-harm, and general political incorrectness, *Airplane!* entertains older audiences with abandon. Kids? Not so much, and the MPAA might have awarded this hilarious raunch-com an R over a PG-13 today.

12. The Bad News Bears (1976)



Image Credit: Paramount Pictures.

No question, today, the MPAA would rate this movie about an alcoholic coach who takes on a down-and-out youth baseball team PG-13 for profanity and drug use/smoking. **Walter Matthau** as the cantankerous coach and his belligerent, foul-mouthed team still amuse, but parents today would hesitate to show these bad influences to their under PG-13 kiddos.

13. Ghostbusters (1984)



Image Credit: Columbia Pictures.

Gen Xers wax poetic about Bill Murray and his ghost-hunting buddies in the 1984 original, until it comes to showing it to their kids. In between the supernatural hijinks, *Ghostbusters* depicts some line-crossing scenes involving sexual situations and demonic possession too advanced for the under PG-13 set, as well as some strong language and alcohol consumption that would surely land this a PG-13 rating now.

14. Coraline (2009)



Image Credit: Focus Features.

Imagine being a feisty 11-year-old whose parents largely ignore you, and you suddenly discover an alternate version of your house — only your “other” mother has buttons for eyes and collects children like small trophies to steal their souls of all their happiness? And she expects *you* to sew buttons over your eyes to stay in this other world with her?

That’s the terrifying premise of [Henry Selick’s](#) surprisingly PG-rated stop-motion animated film, based on Neil Gaiman’s book, which is *totally* for little kids. Mm-hmm.

15. The Dark Crystal (1982)



Image Credit: Kevin Baker – Netflix.

Universal marketed muppet man Jim Henson's dark fantasy movie as a family film, so no doubt parents felt perfectly fine dropping their unsuspecting preteens off at the theater, not thinking they emerged two hours later scarred for life.

First off, the cruel, buzzard-like race of Skeksis has slaughtered the entire clan of elflike Gelflings except one young one named Jen. When the Skeksis find out that a peaceful clan of Mystics secretly harbored and raised Jen, they send huge, black, crablike creatures called Garthim to kill him.

That, along with the freaky, shrieking seer Aughra, is dreadful enough — but when the Skeksis drain the innocent Podlings' essence *and drink it*, this "family film" gallops straight over PG acceptability's edge. **Shiver**

16. Sixteen Candles (1984)



Image Credit: Universal Pictures.

John Hughes's classic would never get a PG rating today thanks to its crude language and risqué situations, not the least of which involves a boy daring another kid to have his way with his girlfriend while she's passed out drunk after a party.

Even by today's standards, two high schoolers joking about sexual assault would never fly with a PG rating. It also contains racism played for laughs with the exchange student Long Duk Dong, which Hughes defended as a parody and actor Gedde Watanabe claimed contrasted the stereotypical "smart Asian" character. OK, sure.

17. Apollo 13 (1995)



Image Credit: Universal Pictures.

Ron Howard took great pains to produce an accurate account of the aborted *Apollo 13* mission, landing it among inappropriate movies for kids. What 10-year-old cares about all the technical know-how behind the NASA flight controllers attempting to bring the *Apollo 13* astronauts safely back to Earth?

The suspense had adults on the edge of their seats, while the kids they dragged to the movies had a hard time staying *in* theirs. With some strong language and potential main-character death, the intense *Apollo 13* would probably sustain a 13 today — a PG-13, that is.

18. Dead Poets Society (1989)



Image Credit: Touchstone Pictures.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences bestowed a Best Actor nomination on Robin Williams for his unexpectedly gentle, nuanced turn as an unconventional English teacher who espouses a “seize the day” ideology and encourages his students to question authority.

All well and good, until one student defies his controlling father to the point of no return — and while viewers don’t see the boy taking his own life, the aftereffects are all too real. Heartwarming (and heartrending) performances notwithstanding, kid-friendly review site Common Sense Media rates this as 13+ given its thematic elements of suicide and anxiety, with most parents agreeing it’s a tough watch for the younger set.

19. Legend (1985)



Image Credit: 20th Century Fox.

Audiences often forget that Ridley Scott and a pre-*Top Gun* Tom Cruise teamed up for this PG-rated fantasy film about a forest dweller named Jack and the unicorn-killing villain he must fight.

That said, Tim Curry's humongous, horned Lord of Darkness burns brightly in '80s kids minds to this day. Scott hired the makeup artist from John Carpenter's *The Thing* to tackle Curry's challenging red body paint and three-foot fiberglass horns, and Curry endured the daily five-hour process like a champ to deliver one of the movies' most iconic — and hair-raising — looks of all time.

20. The Secret of NIMH (1982)



Image Credit: MGM/UA Entertainment Co.

Those of a certain generation (Xers, we're looking at you) no doubt found themselves scarred for life after watching Don Bluth's first post-Disney movie, about a widowed mouse trying to save her family from...wait for it, *plowing season!* She enlists a group of scary-looking, super-intelligent rats (who've survived lab experiments, natch) to move her house, but not all of them are sympathetic to her plight.

The proceeds involve drugging a monstrous cat, "real" bloodshed, a cunning villain rat who kills their wise leader, and a sword-fighting finale for the ages. Scary and complicated stuff **for under PG-13**, and Bluth's classic animation, while brilliant, veers far from today's cute Disney fare.

21. The House With a Clock in Its Walls (2018)



Image Credit: Universal Pictures.

Horror fans best know **Eli Roth** as the director of the *Hostel* splatter films, so this foray into family-film territory seems like a contradiction. Roth called it "starter horror" for young ones while still managing to push boundaries.

Jack Black stars as the eccentric owner of a mysterious house with a magical, world-ending clock hidden somewhere inside. When his (orphaned, of course) nephew comes to stay, they unravel the house's secrets thanks to the deadly ghosts and demons they discover. Smaller kids could easily find the themes of parental loss and demon-summoning disturbing, to say the least, and the film shows more than a few PG-13-appropriate scenes.

22. Logan's Run (1976)



Image Credit: United Artists.

Based on the 1967 novel, *Logan's Run* depicts a "utopian" society in which a computer manages life and death, killing everyone at age 30 to maintain a balance of resources. Some go willingly, believing they're being "reborn." Others hit the road on foot in search of a mysterious "Sanctuary" as they try to outrun black-clothed hunters called "Sandmen." Perplexing at best, distressing at the very least, *Logan's Run* deserved an R at the time, not a PG.

23. Arthur (1981)



Image Credit: Warner Bros.

Parents popping this Dudley Moore-Liza Minnelli comedy into the DVD player in the '90s may have expected the [animated PBS cartoon](#) series about an aardvark, not a rom-com about a falling down-drunk millionaire and the shoplifting waitress he loves.

The movie plays drinking for laughs — and also for tears, like when Arthur goes on a bender after his beloved fatherly assistant Hobson dies. A scene with Arthur in bed with a lady of the evening isn't anything for little kids' eyes, either. Russell Brand starred in the 2011 remake, which fittingly boasted a PG-13 rating.



Author: Stacie
Hougland

Title: Freelance Writer
Expertise: Movies, TV,
music, lifestyle

Stacie Hougland's work has been published in various print and online publications including *People*, *Playboy*, *AV Club*, *Angeleno*, the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, and *Ranker*. After 10 years as Executive Editor at the movie-ticketing site Fandango, she currently works at Publishers Clearing House writing quizzes on every topic under the sun.

← PREVIOUS

25 Best Sports Broadcasters of All
Time



Money Like a Boss —
Est. 2018

[CONTACT US](#)

Dollars and

Sense

Make

Save

For Geeks

Books

Movies & TV

Video Games

Live Smart

Travel

Auto

Food

Grow

Lifestyle

Retire



[About](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms and Conditions](#)

© 2024 Wealth

[Editorial Policies](#) [Pitch Us A Story](#)

of Geeks