# Disney+ criticised for streaming banned animal cruelty scene from The Abyss



Disney+ is facing backlash after airing a highly controversial scene from the 1989 sci-fi classic *The Abyss*, which depicts a live rat being submerged in a liquid that allows it to breathe. The film, recently released on the streaming platform in 4K, includes a sequence that has historically been deemed as animal abuse, raising significant ethical concerns among audiences and animal welfare organisations.

The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) classifies the notorious scene under the Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act 1937, which explicitly prohibits the display of animal cruelty in theatrical releases. The BBFC consulted the RSPCA before making its decision, concluding that the scene caused "terror" to the animal. This led to the scene being cut out for any cinematic exhibition, ensuring that *The Abyss* would not be screened in its entirety in UK theatres or released physically in an unedited format. The BBFC stated, "We sought expert legal and veterinary advice, which confirmed that the scene constituted the cruel infliction of terror on an animal."

Despite assurances that the rats used during filming survived, the ethical implications of depicting such distress in a commercial film remain contentious. The RSPCA has expressed serious concerns about what it perceives as a "loophole" in broadcasting regulations. David Bowles, the RSPCA's Head of Public Affairs, remarked on the issue, highlighting the inconsistency in content regulation across different platforms. "The RSPCA is really concerned that a loophole currently exists allowing animal abuse scenes deemed unacceptable elsewhere to be streamed freely and legally into our homes," he commented. This inconsistency raises questions about viewer protection in a changing media landscape, as traditional broadcasting standards do not apply to online streaming platforms.

In the UK, adherence to the Ofcom Broadcasting Code prohibits any material that has been cut by the BBFC from being broadcast on TV. However, online streaming services are not bound by the same regulations, which creates a gap in protections for viewers against animal cruelty. The RSPCA's advocacy underscores the urgent need for a refined legal framework that is responsive to the evolving ways in which audiences consume media.

This situation has been compounded by the recent cancellation of a planned 4K Ultra HD release of *The Abyss* in the UK, a decision driven by the insistence of the BBFC to censor the rat scene. This follows a long history of censorship concerning the film, where various versions in the UK have been altered, requiring significant cuts—around 45 seconds in total—to manage the portrayal of the rat's distress. The versions released in other countries continue to show the original scene, making the UK's approach to content regulation particularly stringent.

As conversations about animal rights and ethical filmmaking evolve, the debate surrounding *The Abyss* illustrates broader concerns about how such images can impact audiences and the responsibility of platforms like Disney+ to adhere to ethical standards in content delivery. There is a growing call for these platforms to reconsider their policies regarding the presentation of potentially harmful content, ensuring that audiences are not inadvertently exposed to scenes that celebrate or trivialise animal cruelty. The need for a consistent, protective framework is more pressing than ever as society grapples with these moral dilemmas in entertainment.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/2061611/sci-fi-classic-banned-rat-scene), [[4]](https://melonfarmers.co.uk/bw_23d.htm)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/2061611/sci-fi-classic-banned-rat-scene), [[2]](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096754/alternateversions/), [[5]](https://www.hidefninja.com/community/threads/the-abyss-4k-blu-ray-ultimate-collectors-edition-usa.119815/page-3)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/2061611/sci-fi-classic-banned-rat-scene), [[3]](https://censorship.fandom.com/wiki/The_Abyss), [[6]](https://violence-hurt-animals-in-film.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-abyss.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://melonfarmers.co.uk/bw_23d.htm), [[7]](https://www.avforums.com/threads/the-abyss-4k-cinema-release.2476966/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/2061611/sci-fi-classic-banned-rat-scene> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096754/alternateversions/> - This IMDb page provides detailed information on the various versions of 'The Abyss' (1989), highlighting the specific cuts made to the rat scene in the UK. It explains that the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) required the removal of shots depicting a rat being submerged in oxygenated liquid, replacing them with close-ups of characters describing the event. The page also notes that the original UK VHS release included the uncut version, while subsequent releases adhered to the BBFC's cuts. Additionally, it mentions that the Special Edition DVD contains all extended and altered scenes, including the controversial rat scene.
3. <https://censorship.fandom.com/wiki/The_Abyss> - This article from the Censorship Wiki discusses the censorship history of 'The Abyss' (1989), focusing on the UK release. It details how the BBFC, adhering to strict policies regarding animal cruelty, mandated cuts to the scene where a rat is submerged in oxygenated liquid. The piece also notes that the uncut version is available in other countries, and mentions that a planned 4K Ultra-HD release in the UK was cancelled due to the BBFC's insistence on censoring the rat scene.
4. <https://melonfarmers.co.uk/bw_23d.htm> - This article from Melon Farmers provides an update on the censorship status of 'The Abyss' (1989) in the UK. It reports that the 4K Blu-ray release was cancelled because the BBFC insisted on censoring the rat scene on grounds of animal cruelty. The piece also provides background information on the film's plot and the controversy surrounding the rat scene, noting that the rats used during filming are said to have survived the ordeal.
5. <https://www.hidefninja.com/community/threads/the-abyss-4k-blu-ray-ultimate-collectors-edition-usa.119815/page-3> - This forum thread on Hi-Def Ninja discusses the censorship of 'The Abyss' (1989) in the UK. It explains that every UK release, including cinemas, has been cut by around 45 seconds, achieved by reframing the image so the rat struggling was not shown on screen, but people’s reactions were visible. The thread also mentions that the BBFC's decision was based on advice from the RSPCA, which deemed the scene to contravene the Cinematograph Films (Animals) Act 1937.
6. <https://violence-hurt-animals-in-film.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-abyss.html> - This blog post provides a detailed description of the controversial rat scene in 'The Abyss' (1989). It notes that a pet white rat is submerged in a glass container of clear liquid to demonstrate underwater breathing. The rat struggles briefly as though drowning, then begins to breathe the liquid. The post also mentions that the rat survives all dangers faced by the human crew members and is seen on her owner’s shoulder at the film’s end.
7. <https://www.avforums.com/threads/the-abyss-4k-cinema-release.2476966/> - This thread on AVForums discusses the censorship of 'The Abyss' (1989) in the UK. It mentions that the rat scene was cut before in both versions of the film and that the BBFC has stated that it would probably still be cut now. The thread also notes that Disney was happy for the scene to be edited, but director James Cameron vetoed the cuts, leading to the cancellation of the 4K Blu-ray release in the UK.