WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT

Directed by Robert Zemeckis
Produced by Frank Marshall and Robert Watts
Distributed by Buena Vista Pictures
Released in 1988

An audacious technical achievement, a landmark in cinema history, with a production so troubled that only Executive Producer Steven Spielberg's involvement kept it from being scuttled by Disney, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is a slick and self-aware mystery-comedy that dazzles. The cast, led by Bob Hoskins, Christopher Lloyd, and Joanna Cassidy, is comfortable, at home in an illusory milieu, thanks to director Robert Zemeckis's imagination and patience. The animation (all hand-drawn) is immersive, even three-dimensional (through layering of shadows, highlights, and tone mattes), courtesy of animation director Richard Williams. And this was practically the last time Mel Blanc was alive to voice his classic Warner Bros. characters (he died in 1989). While making allowances for the Herculean labors that went into its production (it *is* more spectacle than story), *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* still cannot be endorsed without reservation. Sure, there's enough creativity here to power five normal movies; there's pathos, danger, slapstick nonsense, and romantic longings juxtaposed with the emptiness of blind lust.

And that is the problem: Jessica Rabbit.

As a character she is a welcome surprise. She is not a floozy-siren, but a dedicated wife. The key line: "I'm not bad; I'm just drawn that way." But, even if she's not the genuine article, she's still a capable cartoon sex-bomb. Standard Disney properties such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, and *Tarzan* feature eye-popping beauties, too. But the idealized female form is rendered therein with comparative restraint, and, critically, Ariel, Jasmine, and Jane are—from our perspective—no more real or unreal than everything around them; they're not dropped into a heightened-reality version of Post-War Los Angeles. No movie (even a documentary) is real, but animation is another step removed from the world outside the theater.

One might expect the audience to be enamored with Jessica—as an abstraction. But the men *in* the film—Eddie, Marvin Acme, etc., are also drooling over her. And—this is important—they are interacting with her (begging the question of just *how* interactive they can ultimately be). For them, there is nothing abstract about her.

She's just a different kind of woman.

Implications of this sort can prove very suggestive to the vulnerable amongst us.

Our day is distinguished by a spiritual deficit, an all-pervasive loneliness consuming the young. It's not entirely new. But men especially are struggling, now more than ever. In each successive generation there has been a fresh attempt to satisfy that yearning. Political advocacy, materialism, gluttony, drugs/alcohol, T.V.—men have tried them all. But these were always secondary interests and pursuits: this could be the first time in American history that the desire

COPYRIGHT © 2026 IAN C. BLOOM
www.illuminedillusions.com

to woo and win a mate is not at the forefront of male thinking, the first time his dealings with the opposite sex are not fundamental to his search for happiness.

American men are shutting themselves off from society. They're not interested in church, civic groups, bowling leagues—anything. If they join a group it will probably involve a multi-player gaming platform, and they will cling to their avatar and anonymity for the duration. On any given day they could disappear into the ether, never to be heard from again.

Now, some of this is a stubborn reaction to their marginalization in academia, government, and white-collar business. There's no point in parking your butt in a library for four years (and finding yourself six figures in the hole) if you can't start a career when you're out of college. So they are settling for low-paying jobs, refusing to be committed to anything, acting like they don't care. They feel worthless, especially in the eyes of the opposite sex. In part, it's pragmatic/economic—women want to pair up with men who are protector-providers, but, increasingly, men are passive and undernourished, with limited prospects—there's little chance a shift manager at a tire-and-lube express is going to out-earn an attorney. So men, tired of rejection, tired of being labeled creeps and misogynists, have decided to check out. (Curious: for years women fretted about sexual harassment, about unwanted aggressive attention. Now they fret because men pay them no attention at all.) To complicate matters, young people don't know how to interact; they don't grasp social cues and body language. They live through their cell phones. And the less time they have with each other when it doesn't count, the harder things get when it *does*.

So they miss the boat. They just weren't ready. It's too *risky*. Dating isn't even a consideration. Women are seen as too chancy—if there isn't a rape accusation and things progress cordially to the altar, the honeymoon doesn't last. The girl doesn't want to mind the house, and day care is cost-prohibitive. Short of an attitude adjustment (for both parties), there's divorce, bankruptcy, and a custody battle to look forward to.

Some of these marginalized millions retreat into asexuality. But most embrace fantasy/pornography. (As artificial-intelligence platforms fashion personalized 'girlfriends' for teenage boys, we can surmise this isn't all about sexual satisfaction.) And this film, unconsciously, could encourage the idea that the sexual world of the mind is more satisfying (or at least safer) than that concomitant with dating. To *embrace* the abstraction—as occurs in this movie—is the ultimate.

If young men could only channel that deep, primal urge, and find the right woman, everything else would fall into place. That desire—to woo and win—will <u>compel</u> a man to sacrifice, to work hard and save money, to look beyond himself and his shallow desires, from the *wants* of today to the *needs* of tomorrow, to his children, to the future. That desire has grown our populace and brought strength, through sacrifice. To accept reality, in all its messiness, in all its frustrations, and build a life—together—with someone who is just as screwed up as we are, this is the first step in finding happiness in a broken world. Jessica Rabbit is just a dirty joke brought to life, and no more resembles a real woman than Snoopy resembles a dog. We have to accept this. And we must not be fooled. With the portals of the Internet open wide, beckoning one and all, 'innocent' curiosity can set the unwary on the path to destruction. If we seek the unattainable, if we retreat into a world of fantasy, questing about for a sultry chanteuse of our own, we will be lost—to perversion, obsession, and despair.

COPYRIGHT © 2026 IAN C. BLOOM

We must stop asking whether *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is 'age-appropriate'. What does that even mean? In some respects it's a better movie for 9-year-olds than 30-year-olds! It doesn't matter how old the boy/man is, this temptation, to lose oneself to a world of secluded, manageable delights, does not fade away, not really. This dream (it's really a nightmare) is always in the back of the mind. And discernment has little to do with age. We are in a lifelong fight with ourselves to accept reality, and this film could have serious ramifications, on an unconscious level, for someone struggling to maintain a healthy equilibrium.

Now, to be fair, this movie came out a long time ago, and is little discussed outside of film schools; it can only serve as a 'gateway drug' if it is viewed before dabbling in the netherworld of virtual reality and customizable sex bots. Once *that* Rubicon is crossed, Jessica Rabbit is old hat. In 2001, Aki Ross in *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* demonstrated that photo-realistic CGI movie characters could fan the flames of desire much the same as conventional 'babes' when 'she' was voted by Maxim magazine's readers to be the 87th sexiest woman in the world. It's only gotten weirder since.

So where does this leave us?

To start with, every day we are feeding our souls, as well as our stomachs.

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 says, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth."

Paul speaks here of eating food offered in sacrifice to idols, that this is of no import, for idols have no life, no power (*C'mon, it's only a movie*). But—if your brother is struggling, eating such food leaves him conscience-stricken. So, to encourage and guard him, such food should be avoided. Accordingly, for some, Jessica Rabbit is more than a forgettable cutie in a funny flick. She is the sparkling oasis in a desert of despair, always just out of reach.

At one point in the film, one of Judge Doom's weasels frisks Jessica, taking indecorous pleasure as he thrusts his hand betwixt her bosoms. In no time at all, his hand is caught in a bear trap and he howls in pain. Would that we take this as a metaphor and proceed with caution, never taking the insidious nature of lust for granted, and declining to recommend *any* movie with sexual overtones to somebody whom we have reason to believe may be on the verge of turning his back on the real world.

But there are deeper implications at play. The toons are alive—they move around, talk, and make decisions/have autonomy. And like any created being ("…I'm just *drawn* that way"), they are subject to the creator. (The fact that the creator controls the annihilating power of Dip only reinforces this authorship.)

> What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast

COPYRIGHT © 2026 IAN C. BLOOM

> thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Romans 9:14-21)

So God created us with a purpose that cannot be thwarted, His will is manifested in the creation, and His creatures have no ultimate control; some will be preserved, some will be destroyed. Yet we want what God already possesses; we want the power that is rightfully His, the power that we could not handle even if we somehow managed to seize control. Remember the Garden of Eden? When Eve told the Serpent that she and Adam would die if they ate the fruit of the Tree, the Serpent said she was wrong—Genesis 3:5—"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Should man's desire for absolute dominion and self-exaltation find expression in the creation and cultivation of virtual-sexual constructs (especially if they become corporeal and sentient), the give-and-take of normal human relations would be lost. And just like recalcitrant toons can be destroyed with Dip, now man can discard his digital paramour/android Eve with impunity. No more arguments. No more alimony. This is the emergent delusion of our decadent age: that the hollow beauty of manufactured companionship will be as real as the reality we deny…and that we can be done with it (and throw off our fixations) whenever we choose.

We think we are masters, when we are truly slaves.

In his introductory scene, Judge Doom destroys, to no apparent end, a squeaky toon-shoe that only wants love. Eddie Valiant and Lt. Santino—our representative humans in the scene—react with controlled horror. At the end of the film, Doom is revealed to be a corrupt toon. What a relief for us! A maniacal toon killed one of his own kind—man is vindicated; he will use this power of total annihilation with judicious restraint (he'd *never* hurt that cute little shoe, no sir). After all, hasn't Eddie returned to his former role as a protector of toons? He reveals Acme's will at the film's climax, where before he was content to see it buried. Yes, despite the death of his brother at the hand of a toon, Eddie does the right thing when it really counts. (And, for that matter, he conquered his addiction to alcohol with just a grimace of self-reproof and no DT's!) He's brave, resourceful, he may be a little rough around the edges, but—deep down—he's a good guy. He's one of *us*.

This is wishful thinking in the extreme.

> The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Psalm 14:1-3)

Who Framed Roger Rabbit is an expression of the best and worst of human creativity. It is a wonder, a marvel of delight and delusion. This is a movie that delivers big laughs; there's a lot of *fun* here. But it's hardly *frivolous;* the implications, buried in the film's subtext, are monstrous. Perhaps it still has value…but it should not be dismissed as mere entertainment.

COPYRIGHT © 2026 IAN C. BLOOM