

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR DECISION

Under the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (FVPC Act)

HEADNOTE

Type of Publication:	Console Game
Title of Publication:	Canis Canem Edit
Other known title:	Bully
OFLC Publication Reference No:	601970
Decision:	Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 13 years.
Display Conditions:	When the film is in its inactive state: Nil. When the film is in its active state: The film must be publicly displayed only in premises, or a part of premises, set aside for the public display of restricted publications (whether or not articles other than restricted publications are also displayed in those premises or that part of those premises).
Descriptive Note:	Contains violence.

The publication entitled *Canis Canem Edit*, also known as *Bully*, is classified as objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 13 years. This restriction is due to the publication's treatment of matters of low level violence and crime.

The publication is a Sony PlayStation 2 console game. It is a computer-generated animation that is viewed from a third-person perspective. The player takes the role of Jimmy, a new 15-year-old student trying to navigate the complex social hierarchies of a boarding school called Bullworth Academy. The game takes place over the course of a school year, during which Jimmy must successfully negotiate a number of missions that generally involve standing up to bullies.

The run-down school has five different cliques, the Nerds, the Jocks, the Preppies, the Greasers, and the Outsiders. The object of the game is for Jimmy to be accepted by each of the cliques so that he can discover who is behind a scheme to destroy the school by setting the cliques against each other. To be accepted, Jimmy is assigned a number of

missions which include fighting the school's bullies. Most of the missions are within the school grounds but a few require Jimmy to travel to the nearby town. The missions include good deeds such as standing up to bullies, stopping them tormenting other students, and escorting younger children to the toilets to protect them from bullies, as well as pranks such as raiding the girls' dormitory for underpants, putting stink bombs into lockers and putting glue on the football team's bench. Breaking school rules, vandalism, truancy, and fighting will have Jimmy quickly overwhelmed by prefects, or if he is in town, by the police. Jimmy can attempt to escape them by running away, but this is usually unsuccessful. The resulting punishments are proportionate to the seriousness of the offending and include Jimmy having to mow a large lawn, a task that takes four minutes of real time before the player can resume the gameplay. Instant discipline and purposely boring punishments act as a strong disincentive on the player. Jimmy learns from his mistakes.

The game is multifaceted. As well as completing the missions, Jimmy must attend and pass assignments in Chemistry, Art, English, Sports and Auto Shop classes. He is subject to a school curfew. He is able to go shopping, to compete in BMX races and ball games, and to become romantically interested in girls, (and in one case, a boy). He may even try to kiss a student, but if she objects, she will kick him in the groin.

Jimmy is far from angelic, but he is more of a cut-up than a seriously bad boy. The player cannot make Jimmy get drunk, use drugs, use knives, use guns, have sex, injure, or kill people. There is no blood in the game. Jimmy is able to punch, kick, and use a dustbin lid, a slingshot, a "spud-gun", a firecracker, and briefly, a baseball bat, without injuring or killing anyone, but he will be disciplined for resorting to such violence.

Nothing in the game falls within s3(2) of the FVPC Act. The Act requires the Office to give "particular weight" to the extent and degree to which, and the manner in which, the publication describes, depicts, or otherwise deals with the infliction of serious physical harm in terms of s3(3)(a)(i), and the extent and degree to which, and the manner in which, the publication promotes or encourages criminal acts in terms of s3(3)(d).

The violence in the game does not result in blood, injury or death. While negotiating his relationships with the various cliques in the school, Jimmy inevitably comes into contact with bullies and fights them. The fights are short and are completed with silly moves such as a "Chinese burn", "dead arm", or forcing an opponent to slap himself before he runs away. There are no apparent injuries or blood, and unlike many other fighting games, no special effects, to intensify the violence. The effect of sling shots, dustbin lids, spud-guns and firecrackers on the victims is exactly the same as that of the fist fights. In one very short sequence Jimmy takes a baseball bat from a bully he is fighting and hits him with it. The effect on the victim is the same as that described above and the bat is quickly disposed of. Once these short fights are completed Jimmy is accepted into the cliques and cannot fight their members again. The violence is not expressed in a graphic or excessive manner, and is given context by each particular mission.

On occasion the game involves Jimmy in acts of petty crime or delinquency such as smashing windows, taking bicycles and defacing posters. In each case however, these tasks are related to overcoming the power of school bullies or corrupt teachers. They all result in immediate pursuit, arrest and punishment. The game imposes sanctions on the perpetrator as would be the case in real life. The gameplay cannot therefore be said to promote or encourage criminal acts.

The dominant effect the game will have on its intended audience is that bullying is bad. The player's character Jimmy must negotiate his relationships with various high school cliques. Although Jimmy uses low level violence and commits petty crimes, he learns that violence has consequences and that he must take responsibility for his actions. The game is completed when Jimmy has been accepted by all the cliques and has rooted out the cause of the bullying.

Jimmy's ability to commit pranks, petty crimes and use low level violence could have the effect of concealing the moral of the game from children. Children may also be unaware of the real harms that could be caused by imitating these acts. Teenagers and adults on the other hand will have the judgement and life experience to place the gameplay in its intended satirical and moral context. This context greatly diminishes any harmful effect the game may have on the public good. The publication's treatment of matters of violence and crime is therefore such that it is likely to be injurious to the public good unless restricted to persons 13 years of age and over.

Display conditions are imposed on the publication when it is publicly displayed in its active state, that is, in demonstration or game play mode, because of the publication's depictions of low level violence and crime.