

WRITTEN REASON FOR DECISION SECTION 12

TITLE OF PUBLICATION: Resident Evil

OFLC REF:9601224

The publication was examined and the contents were recorded in an examination transcript. A written consideration of the legal criteria was undertaken. This document provides a summary of the reasons for the decision.

HEADNOTE

Decision:

The Classification Office has classified this publication as:

Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years.

Display Conditions:

Nil.

Descriptive Notes:

Contains violence.

Contains horror scenes.

DECISION

Submission Procedure:

This CD-ROM was submitted to the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) by the Labelling Body for classification under s12(1) of the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (the FVPC Act).

Under s12(1) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office is required to examine and classify the CD-ROM pursuant to s23.

Under s23(2) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office must determine whether the CD-ROM is to be classified as unrestricted, objectionable or objectionable except in certain circumstances.

A video recording of the CD-ROM game was supplied by the distributor of the game, with a statutory declaration that the content of the video recording "is fully representative of all the gameplay present in the actual game and does not omit any scenes."

Description of the Publication:

The publication is an interactive CD-ROM 'video game' entitled *Resident Evil*. It depicts a small team of special police officers on a mission to investigate and rescue another team of colleagues who have gone missing in a remote forested area near a secret biotechnology laboratory. A series of grisly killings near the area, where victims appear to have been eaten, is suspected to be associated with the facility. The location and scenario is fictional but roughly located in North America, 1998. Apart from a few opening and closing scenes, the game is all in computer animation, reducing the level of reality and impact of the images.

The game-player chooses to be one of two police officer characters, a male or a female. For the purposes of the game it is most advantageous to operate as the female, who is able to carry more items with herself at any one time. The object is to survive the facility - hidden beneath a mansion - and its occupants long enough to solve the mystery and be rescued having found and demobilised the killers. These are revealed to be a variety of mutations deliberately engineered by scientists as 'bio-weapons'. They are ugly and murderous in their intent, resistant to shooting, and the most numerous but least sophisticated type, a kind of zombie, feasts on the flesh of the human visitors alive or dead. Other animals and creatures peck, tear and slash humans to death. To survive the player must make frequent kills.

The complex is multi-level and a labyrinth of doors, halls, rooms, and caverns. Collecting items and employing them in the correct manner is important to progress. Long periods appear to run where the character is simply in and out of rooms and hallways collecting, but these are regularly punctuated with shooting monsters or the character being bitten or slashed by them. The game requires a well developed level of comprehension, memory, and creative thinking to keep moving. (The playstation required for the disc is itself sophisticated, the fourteen function buttons designed for simultaneous manipulation with both hands. The game requires eleven of these.)

The complete content of the video recording has a total running time of 174 min 28 sec, however this includes repeated notices, additional options and slightly variant opening sequences. The running time of the game's video sequences for the female character option only, with no player interaction, correct options assumed, and full completion of the mission, is approximately 171 minutes. This is indicative only since a game may take significantly less or more time, there are multiple options and outcomes, and the male character has more limited choice of effective weaponry.

During a completed game the female character kills at least 50 zombies, Doberman pincher-type dogs, snakes, multi-tentacled and lizard-like monsters, and a super-humanoid 'Tyrant', the most formidable opponent of all. Another five killings or results of killings are depicted.

This represents at least one hundred rounds of ammunition: shotgun cartridges, acid and flame rounds, bazooka rounds, a flame-thrower, hand-gun bullets, and four rockets. Blood splatters and spurts with each shot, bite or slash. Successful shots disintegrate the head or body of the target, and blood pools quickly around the corpse. Flaming explosions are associated with bazooka rounds, and targets disintegrate into smaller pieces. In animation two human police officers die with blood spurting, while another is depicted in the opening real video sequence horrifically attacked and killed by a dog-like monster, having just found the severed arm of another person.

The meaning of “objectionable”:

Section 3 of the FVPC Act sets out the meaning of the word “objectionable”. The section states that a publication is objectionable if it:

“...describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.”

In classifying this CD-ROM the main question is whether it deals with matters of violence and horror in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.

Matters of horror:

The game depicts a scenario where mutations of people and animals are enemies of humanity, and they take ugly and gruesome forms as they bite, tear and slash. They are mostly depicted in animation, which reduces their impact. The exceptions to this are the opening filmed scenes, where a severed arm is depicted, closely followed by a terrified male attacked and bitten by a snarling monster with slobbering maw. Sound effects heighten the impact of this scene. In animation, the flesh eating zombies bite the human character regularly, and one is depicted in close focus only once, looking back over its shoulder while hunched over a newly decapitated human corpse feasting. It is classically skeletal in appearance, with the teeth and unlidged eyeball dominant. Other zombies are also depicted on their hands and knees tearing into a new kill. Blood spurts and splattering bodies also contribute to the horror element. Tension associated with this is heightened by music and unpredictable events, including ambushes and assaults by the mutant creatures.

Certain publications are deemed to be objectionable:

Pursuant to s3(2) of the FVPC Act, a publication is deemed to be objectionable if it promotes or supports, or tends to promote or support, certain activities listed in that subsection. None of the activities proscribed by s3(2) of the FVPC Act are promoted or supported in any way by *Resident Evil*.

Matters to be given particular weight:

Section 3(3) of the FVPC Act deals with the matters which the Classification Office must give particular weight to in determining whether or not a publication (other than a publication deemed to be objectionable under s3(2)) is objectionable, or should be given a classification other than objectionable.

The Classification Office has considered all the matters in s3(3). The only matter which it considers relevant to *Resident Evil* is that set out in s3(3)(a)(i) namely:

s3(3)(a)(i) “ the extent and degree to which, and the manner in which, the publication describes, depicts or otherwise deals with acts of torture, the infliction of serious physical harm, or acts of significant cruelty.”

The game depicts and requires a large number of killings, with most targets bearing a strong likeness to humans or dogs, and some dead being human characters. For the player the imperative is to kill, otherwise the character will not survive. Shot targets bleed, groan, shriek and yelp. They leave blood stains on floors and walls. Destruction of bodies is spectacular, where shots from various weapons cause at least blood splatters, and optimally physical and bloody disintegration of the target in a ball of flame. Corpses lay in pools of blood, headless or dismembered, or are disintegrated completely by the force of powerful weaponry at close range. The player uses a variety of firearms against mainly unarmed targets, and may employ rounds which disperse acid; this type of chemical weaponry is understood to be internationally outlawed. The sound effects and impacts associated with the different weapons approximate reality. These aspects make the animation of the game more realistic for the player. Some targets require multiple shots to kill; dogs for example are felled only after the third shotgun round, and zombies seven rounds from a handgun. While it is not the only object of the game, since exploration and thought will often allow the player to find more ammunition, killing 'the enemy' is a primary function of the exercise, is reasonably graphic visually and aurally, is sustained throughout the game, and intensifies near the conclusion.

Additional matters to be considered:

Under s3(4) of the FVPC Act, the Classification Office must also consider the following additional matters:

The dominant effect of the publication as a whole:

The dominant effect of the publication is of a lengthy, sophisticated game where the player's character is caught in a particularly frightening and desperate situation. The mutants hunting the humans are not easily killed, and the game-player character must find what is required for self defence and survival in an unknown environment. A high level of tension is maintained by the action and the associated music, which is mainly either tense or menacing.

The impact of the medium in which the publication is presented:

The publication is presented as a CD-ROM interactive game for one player. The disc requires dedicated equipment to access and play, and is not readily copied. With the correct playstation however, the game may be played repeatedly on any television that is video-machine compatible. The images are of medium quality resolution, being reproduced on a television screen, and sound quality is good. Interactive games of this type are highly addictive for players, and have appeal to a broad age range. At this time, the cost of the disc and the hardware required to play it is likely to limit consumption volume.

The character of the publication, including any merit, value, or importance that the publication has in relation to literary, artistic, social, cultural, educational, scientific, or other matters:

The publication is for personal entertainment, and provides some intellectual and hand-eye coordination challenges. It otherwise has no particular merit, value, or importance.

The persons, classes, or age groups of the persons to whom the publication is intended or is likely to be made available:

The publication is intended for persons with a reasonable level of comprehension and problem solving skill, as well as those with an interest in interactive computer games. This intellectually challenging aspect of the game, coupled with the violence and horror content, indicates that it is intended for older teenagers.

The purpose for which the publication is intended to be used:

The publication is intended to be made available to the public by sale through "retail outlets" (from submission form).

Conclusion:

The interactive CD-ROM game titled *Resident Evil* depicts a night where the single game-player character is engaged in a tense and frightening fight for survival in a fictional and mainly, though not entirely, fantastic, scenario. Genetically mutated animals and humans, developed as biological weapons, are completely antagonistic toward humans. The horror associated with these creatures is important to the tension of the game since they attack and eat live persons, including the game-player character. The game-player must kill or evade these creatures or themselves fall prey.

The violence is significant and sustained. Killing is frequent and moderately graphic. The horror aspects are less surprising as the game progresses, but tension around this is maintained. Several minutes at a time might be spent negotiating the hallways, rooms and paths of the game, in order to locate an item and install or use it to make progress in unraveling the mystery. The complicated puzzle aspect of the game needs to be pursued with equal priority to shooting monsters in order for that ability to be maintained until rescue at the conclusion, which moderates the violence.

The CD-ROM game presents sustained, repetitive and moderately graphic animated violence and horror images with a tense, menacing tone. However, the game is a fantasy scenario and representative of reality only in a limited manner, and maintaining this perspective reduces the overall impact of the material. The Office considers that persons in their mid-teens or older are likely to be able to make this distinction without harm. The Office considers that the unrestricted availability of the game is likely to be injurious to the public good, in particular to children and young teenagers who would likely find the fantasy violence and horror content unrealistically exciting, engrossing or disturbing. The Classification Office therefore classifies the interactive CD-ROM video game *Resident Evil* as:

Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 16 years.

Display Conditions:

Where the Classification Office classifies any publication as a restricted publication, it is required under s27(1) of the FVPC Act to consider whether or not conditions in respect of the public display of the particular publication should be imposed.

In considering the issue of public display, the Classification Office must have regard to the matters set out in s27(2) of the FVPC Act, namely:

- (a) *The reasons for classifying the publication as a restricted publication;*
- (b) *The terms of the classification given to the publication; and*
- (c) *The likelihood that the public display of the publication, if not subject to conditions, or as the case may be, any particular condition, would cause offence to reasonable members of the public.*

The publication has been classified as restricted due in particular to the sustained and graphic violence and horror scenes of the game. Horror is alluded to in the title, however not in such a way as is likely to cause offence to reasonable members of the public if publicly displayed. The Classification Office therefore considers that no display conditions are required on the public display of the CD-ROM game *Resident Evil*

Written reason for decision is not required for section 12 submissions. It is the policy of the Classification Office to provide written reasons for section 12 submissions.