



Australian Government
Classification Review Board

6, 18, 20 April 2005

23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS: Ms Maureen Shelley (Convenor)
The Hon Trevor Griffin (Deputy Convenor)
Mr Rob Shilkin

APPLICANT: Siren Visual Entertainment Pty Ltd (Siren), original applicant for classification, represented by Mr Nigel Rennard (managing Director, Siren).

INTERESTED PARTIES: None

BUSINESS:

- To consider whether the Review Board should exercise its discretion to accept the application for review of a decision outside the prescribed period.
- To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *The Gore Gore Girls* (the film) RC (refused classification).

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) classified the film RC (refused classification) in a two/one majority decision.

2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification decisions. Section 9 of the Act provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines.

Relevantly, the Code in paragraph 1 of the Table under the heading 'Films' provides that films that:

- (a) depict, express or otherwise deal with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified ...

are to be classified 'RC'. The Code also states various principles for classifications, and that effect should be given, as far as possible, to these principles.

Section 11 of the Classification Act requires that the matters to be taken into account in making a decision on the classification of a film include:

- (a) the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults; and
- (b) the literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the film; and
- (c) the general character of the film, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character; and
- (d) the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *2003 Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* (the Guidelines), determined under s.12 of the Act:

- The importance of context
- The assessment of impact;
- And the six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

3. Procedure

a) Siren application made out of time

The Review Board met by teleconference on 6 April 2005 to determine as a preliminary matter whether to exercise its discretion to hear the matter under section 43(3) (b) of the Act as the application was made out of time.

The classification certificate for the film was issued on 23 February 2005. On 7 March 2005, the applicant wrote a letter to the Director of the Classification Board about the decision. The letter was received by the OFLC on 10 March 2005. A response was sent from the OFLC on 30 March 2005. On the same day (30 March), Siren contacted the OFLC by e-mail about a review. Siren submitted a written application on 6 April 2005.

The Review Board found that there was a genuinely held but mistaken belief by the Applicant that a review could be undertaken through representations to the Director of the Office of Film and Literature Classification. The evidence suggests that the Applicant was actively pursuing his review rights but had not followed the correct

technical procedure. Given the continuous efforts of the Applicant to seek a review of the classification, the Review Board unanimously determined that it would exercise its discretion to allow the application to be considered out of time. The Review Board then adjourned.

b) Consideration of application

The Review Board reconvened on 18 April 2005 to view the film and consider the application, having previously determined that it was in receipt of a valid application. A determination on classification was unable to be reached at this time and the meeting was adjourned. The Review Board reconvened on 20 April 2005 by teleconference and made its decision.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

In reaching its decision the Review Board had regard to the following:

- (i) Siren's application for review;
- (ii) Siren's written and oral submissions;
- (iii) The film (including original, director's commentary and other extras);
- (iv) The relevant provisions in the Act;
- (v) The relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with s.6 of the Act
- (vi) The Classification Board's report; and
- (vii) The *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2003*.

5 Synopsis

The film is in the 1970s "schlock horror" genre. The basic story line is that someone is murdering and mutilating women who work as exotic dancers in a nightclub. A private investigator, Abraham Gentry, is hired by a newspaper through the intervention of reporter Nancy Weston to solve the crimes. Together the private investigator and the reporter work to find and expose the killer.

The killer turns out to be a woman who was a body builder who turned to exotic dancing. Through an accident her face and breasts are damaged. She is hired as a waitress in a nightclub. She then becomes a killer, attacking the women who are hired as exotic dancers in the club. She mutilates their faces and breasts in the attacks.

6 Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes of importance, under various classifiable elements:

- (a) **Themes** – the film does not appear to seriously deal with any themes. By its nature the issue of serial killing and mutilation of women is raised but is not dealt

with in any depth by the film. The director describes the film as an “exploitation” movie.

(b) **Sex** – there is only one scene of explicit sexual reference in the film. At approximately 16 minutes a woman is shown stimulating and caressing her breasts, whilst wearing underpants, in front of a mirror. She is murdered and mutilated shortly afterwards. At the conclusion to the film, Abraham and Nancy embrace on a couch but a blind is drawn with Abraham addressing the camera saying “You’ve seen enough”.

(c) **Drug use** – There was limited drug use within the film. At approximately 1 minute a person says “I have a drug here, LSD perhaps you have heard of it”. At approximately 16 minutes a man is depicted smoking what appears to be a marijuana cigarette. He appears to be affected by the cigarette.

(d) **Language** –there is only mild coarse language in the film. “I may be a bitch but I’ll never be a butch”.

(e) **Nudity** – There is no complete nudity in the film. There are several scenes of partial nudity including several of the women exotic dancers stripping to nipple tassels and g-strings. In one scene, a murder victim is shown caressing her bare breasts before a mirror. She is wearing underpants. Shortly afterwards she is murdered. At approximately 74 minutes Nancy is shown wearing her pantyhose under a mini-dress. She is prone on a couch and it can be seen that she isn’t wearing underpants. Her pubic hair is visible through the pantyhose.

(f) **Violence** – the film contains several prolonged, detailed and gory scenes of violence. This violence is sexualised in that all the killings are of women exotic dancers. Some of the women perform a “strip tease” shortly before they are murdered and most are partially naked when they are murdered. The murder and mutilation of the women concentrates on their faces and breasts.

Prior to the credits rolling, at approximately 2 minutes a woman is shown sitting looking at herself in the mirror. The killer comes up behind her and pushes her face into the mirror. In a scene that takes approximately 1 minute the bloodied face is shown in detail. The face appears pale and pasty in colour, the blood is extensive.

At 16 minutes a woman is standing in front of a mirror stimulating her breasts. A shadow is shown. The shadow arm hits her on the head and then the arm slashes at her throat. For approximately 1 minute hands are shown removing the bloodied facial tissue from the skull of the woman. There is significant detail, there is blood, bone, flesh and gore. The head is a pulpy mass. The scene is in mid shot and is prolonged and detailed. The length of time that the gory head is shown is gratuitous.

It is the majority view that the scene is very high in impact. The minority view was that the scene was gory yet unrealistic, with no part of the woman's face identifiable.

At approximately 42 minutes a woman wearing a bra and underpants under an open shirt screams as her throat is cut. Blood is shown coming from the cut, she has blood on her face and hands. The killer rolls her over and removes her underpants with a carving fork. The woman’s buttocks are then repeatedly attacked with a meat mallet

until they are a bloodied mass. Fast military-style music starts to play. The killer puts what appears to be salt and what the director describes as “seasoning” onto the pulped flesh. The buttocks are pulpy and the blood flows freely. The blood drips down the woman’s arm and onto the floor. As the killer manipulates the pulpy flesh there are sucking noises. The killer removes the woman’s eyes from the sockets with a knife and fork. The bloodied head then has the brain removed and other organs are placed beside the head. More blood drips are seen.

The length of the scene and the details are gratuitous. It was the majority view that the scene is very high in impact. The view of the minority was that the scene was no more than high in impact because it was unrealistic looking and silly.

At 46 minutes Abraham is shown putting his finger onto the bloodied meat mallet held by a police detective. He licks his finger.

At approximately 50 minutes the killer slashes another woman’s throat. The killer puts an iron on the woman’s face and removes her shirt. The killer burns both sides of the woman’s face with the iron and the iron is depicted being put into the eye socket of the victim. In a scene that the director later describes in an interview as “the most outrageous” that he has filmed, the killer then cuts the left nipple of the woman off and a fluid comes from the nipple. The killer then cuts the right nipple off and a different coloured fluid comes from the nipple. The killer collects the fluids in two glasses. The director says in his commentary that the left nipple contains milk and the right nipple contains chocolate milk.

At approximately 52 minutes the killer attacks another woman and puts her face into a pot of boiling oil that is heating on the stove. The face is shown whilst still in the pot of oil. The eyeball is shown as being cooked and parts of the face float off and mix with the chips in the pot.

At approximately 76 minutes the killer is exposed as the sharp spoken waitress from the strip club. As Abraham pursues her she falls from a second storey window whereby she is decapitated. Her head is shown being run over by a car. The face is visible and is shown between the car tyre and the road.

7 Reasons for the decision

The Review Board based its decision to refuse classification ‘RC’ the film *The Gore Gore Girls* based on the content of the film as set out above.

The Gore Gore Girls is a film in the “schlock horror” genre. Many of the depictions are almost slapstick in nature and the effects used are generally crude. However, the majority of the Review Board determined that the detailed, prolonged and graphic depiction of the killings and dismemberment of the five partially-naked women in the sexualised context of their work (and in juxtaposition of their strip routines at the club) is undertaken in such a way that the film is offensive to reasonable adults.

Whilst the scenes are not glamorised and it is clearly the film-maker’s intent that these murders are in the “schlock horror” or “B grade movie” mode, the material presented is beyond what can be classified under the Australian system.

The Review Board carefully considered any artistic nature that the film may have had particularly given the submissions of the editorial staff of *Fiend* magazine (and the educational qualifications of those staff), its general character as a “schlock horror” film and that any likely audience would be educated and dedicated “schlock horror” fans. However, the majority of the Review Board found that these matters did not outweigh the community’s concern over the depiction of violence particularly sexualised violence contained within the film.

The minority formed the view that the crude, unrealistic, "schlock horror" nature of the effects and production values, together with the non-menacing, over-the-top storyline and slapstick elements, meant that the impact of the gory violence was markedly less than in other more serious and realistically filmed violent movies. The minority did not consider the violence to be sexual or sexualised in nature, there was no attempt by the killer to engage in any form of sexual activity with any of the victims and there was no attempt to glamorise or eroticise the violence. The minority formed the view that although the film was "gross" and there was occasional breast nudity, the impact of the film did not exceed high and was best accommodated in an R classification.

8 Summary

In a two/one majority the Review Board determined that the classifiable elements and the impact in the overall context of the film *The Gore Gore Girls* warrant a refused classification (RC). They depict, express and deal with matters of sexualised violence and violence in such a way that they offend against the standards of decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that the film should not be classified.