



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

15 December 2008
23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS: The Hon Trevor Griffin (Acting Convenor)
Ms Ann Stark
Ms Irina Kolodizner
Mr Brook Hely

APPLICANT Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment (WB)

INTERESTED PARTIES None

BUSINESS To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the computer game *F.E.A.R 2: Project Origin* RC (Refused Classification).

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the computer game *F.E.A.R 2: Project Origin* MA 15+ with the consumer advice 'Strong violence, blood and gore. Moderate coarse language'.

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 provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines.

Relevantly, the Code, provides that computer games 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; or

- (b) describe or depict in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 (whether the person is engaged in sexual activity or not); or
- (c) promote, incite or instruct in matters of crime or violence; or
- (d) are unsuitable for a minor to see or play,

are to be classified RC.

The Code also provides that 'Computer games (except RC computer games) that depict, express or otherwise deal with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing or playing by persons under 15', are to be classified MA 15+.

The Code also sets out various principles to which classification decisions should give effect, as far as possible.

Section 11 of the Act requires that the matters to be taken into account in making a decision on the classification of a computer game 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 computer game; and
- (c) the general character of the computer game, 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 *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2005* (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

Four members of the Review Board met on 15 December 2008 in response to an application from Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, received on 27 November 2008, to review the Classification Board's classification of the computer game.

The Review Board determined that the application was a valid application and was assured that the subject of the review application was the same computer game which had been classified by the Classification Board.

The Applicant provided a written submission and pre-recorded gameplay of the computer game before the hearing. The Review Board viewed the recorded gameplay on 15 December 2008.

The Review Board also heard oral submissions from the following representatives of the Applicant:

- Mr Roger Clarke (Managing Director, WB)
- Mr Paul Hunt (Consultant)
- Mr Mark Aubrey (Marketing Manager, WB), and
- Ms Melissa Faustmann (Pre-Production Manager, WB).

Parts of the computer game were demonstrated by Mr Andrew Hurford (WB).

The Review Board then considered the application for review.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment's application for review
- (ii) Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment's written and oral submissions, including Mr Hurford's demonstration of the computer game
- (iii) The computer game, *F.E.A.R 2: Project Origin*
- (iv) Three discs of gameplay footage (provided by the Applicant)
- (v) The relevant provisions in the Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and
- (vi) The Classification Board's report.

5. Synopsis

A sequel to the computer game FEAR, *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin* is a first person shooter game set in the ruined city of Auburn. Starting moments before the ending of the original game FEAR, *F.E.A.R. 2* involves the player taking on the role of Michael Beckett, a soldier who is part of an elite military team sent to detain the CEO of Armacham, an 'evil' corporation engaging in psychic experimentation. At the start of the game, Beckett undergoes an operation enhancing his reflexes, after being rendered unconscious in a nuclear type explosion of psychic energy. Throughout the course of the game, Beckett and his squad combat both human enemy forces and mutant beings as they struggle to complete their mission and stop Alma, a young woman with unnatural psychic abilities that is the catalyst for the chaos which the world is experiencing, as well as combat the mysterious forces which she has released.

6. Findings on material questions of fact

A number of classifiable elements were present in the game.

- (a) Themes – Pervading the game were themes of challenge and reward and good conquering evil, as well as human experimentation and psychic mutation. The player

is rewarded by being able to progress to the next level or interval upon killing various enemies, which in turn enables the player to get closer to completing the set mission. The context for the game is the issue of human experimentation and exploitation of psychic abilities by Armacham. The Review Board took the view that the themes in the game are justified by context and can be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification.

(b) Violence – The purpose of the game is the killing of human, mutated and supernatural enemies utilising a variety of weaponry. Killing of enemies is often accompanied by significant blood and gore, including blood spatter, decapitation or dismemberment. The scenery of the game is at times gory, particularly the second interval where the walls and floor of an abandoned hospital are splattered with blood and other gory imagery. At times the ‘camera lens’ of the game is momentarily splattered with blood when the player kills opponents at close range.

The Review Board considered that the impact of these violent elements could be accommodated at the upper limit of the MA 15+ classification, as such impact was justified by context and mitigated by a number of factors:

- First, the violence in this game primarily occurs in a military or quasi-military context rather than a civilian context, with the enemies portrayed as enemy soldiers or mutants bent on conquering the world. The context is very much the ‘good saving the world’.
- Second, in many instances the victims are either masked, heavily armoured or ethereal which tends to de-personalize the shooting. Some of the victims are either mutant or ethereal beings of a stylised nature which further detracts from the reality of some scenes. The depiction of the characters in the game generally also appears stylised in parts, which further detracts from realism.
- Third, whilst post-mortem damage can be inflicted on enemy opponents, it is limited to causing blood spatter and ‘rag doll’ motions of the body without causing body dismemberment. There are no rewards for inflicting post-mortem damage and once a player leaves a scene, the dead body is no longer present should the player return to that spot in the game.
- Fourth, the violence is not sadistic or cruel in nature. For example, the violence is limited to killing enemy soldiers or mutants in the context of military style combat rather than the gratuitous infliction of excessive pain.
- Fifth, the game falls clearly into the horror genre, in which large amounts of blood and gore are common and, to a certain extent, likely to be expected by the likely audience for the game.
- Sixth, whilst shooting of opponents can result in decapitation or dismemberment, such outcomes occur randomly. Accordingly, a player cannot develop special skills in dismembering or decapitating opponents.

The game contains three particular violent scenes of note, which are more impactful than other aspects of the game.

One scene involves the player struggling with the commander of the Armacham army in an attempt to control the gun between them. If the player is successful in the

struggle, the scene climaxes with a gunshot that beheads the commander. In this scene, however, the beheading is heavily obscured and darkened so that visibility is limited, with blood spatter to the lens further obscuring the imagery. In addition, the gunshot occurs very quickly and unexpectedly, with the more bloodied aspect of the imagery disappearing quickly from view.

The second scene involves the beheading of SnakeFist, a friendly character, by a psychic assassin sent by Alma. This scene, however, is mitigated by the non-interactive mode in which it is carried out – the player has no control over the beheading but rather it occurs as an animated ‘cut scene’. It is also an isolated scene that is not representative of the remainder of the game and is the sole scene of its kind in the entire game. It is justified by context as it reflects the extent of Alma’s psychic abilities and is a prelude to subsequent events in the game. Once again, the beheading occurs relatively quickly and unexpectedly and the bloodied imagery quickly disappears from view.

The third impactful scene involves the implied sexual assault by Alma of the principal character, Michael Beckett. The scene is a one-off implied event that is very brief and obscured. The scene is also a non-interactive animated cut scene in which the player exercises no control.

Finally, the Review Board notes that on one of the three discs provided by the Applicant to the Classification Board there was footage of a player in a room of motionless opponents in which the player proceeded to provide a demonstration of the effect of each type of available weapon in the game on these opponents. The Applicant has, however, confirmed in its written and oral submissions that this scene did not form part of the game. Rather, it was provided to the Review Board as an additional aid for understanding the visual elements of the gameplay in the computer game. According to the Applicant’s submission:

‘This simulation was made specifically to show the effects of weapons on other game characters, but is set in a completely different context to the gameplay. It should be viewed as a visual and interpretive aid and not as an example of gameplay’.

The Review Board is satisfied that this scene does not form part of the game and has therefore disregarded this scene in its classification of the game.

(c) Language – Coarse language, primarily ‘fuck’ and ‘shit’, is used throughout the game, typically as exclamations when unexpected events occur, when an enemy is shot or by non-player characters for the purpose of context. The Review Board took the view that the coarse language in the game is moderate in impact and justified by context.

(d) Sex – The sexual content of the game is limited to the single instance of implied sexual intercourse referred to in sub-paragraph (b).

(e) Drug use – None.

(f) Nudity – There is some discreet nudity, primarily when Alma appears nude at certain intervals in the game. These instances are rare and at no point is Alma entirely

nude, as her breasts and other genitalia are obscured by her long hair, hand, camera angles or other visual devices. The nudity in the game can be accommodated in a lower classification.

7. Reasons for the decision

The Review Board determined that due to the impact of certain scenes and the combination particularly of strong themes and violence contained in the computer game, it was not suitable for persons under 15 years of age.

The Review Board unanimously took the view that violence was the sole contentious classifiable element, as the themes, language, nudity and sex contained in the computer game could all comfortably be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification. In relation to violence, while the game contained impactful violence throughout which was at the upper limit of the MA 15+ classification, the violence was justified by context and could be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification. While there were three particularly impactful violent scenes of note, each of those scenes was justified by context and was highly stylised and obscured. Two of the scenes were also animated cut scenes with no element of interactivity. Consequently, the Review Board was of the view that *F.E.A.R 2: Project Origin* could be accommodated within the range of the MA 15+ classification.

8. Summary

The Review Board determined that the computer game *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin*, though containing impactful violence throughout and several particularly impactful violent scenes, sits at the higher end of the MA 15+ classification rather than within the range of the RC classification. The Review Board therefore determined that *F.E.A.R 2: Project Origin* should be classified MA 15+ with the consumer advice 'Strong violence, blood and gore. Moderate coarse language'.