



Australian Government
Classification Review Board

11 December 2006

23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS:

Ms Maureen Shelley (Convenor)
Ms Ann Stark
Mrs Gillian Groom
Mr Anthony Hetrih

APPLICANT: 20th Century Fox represented by:

- Mr Marcos Oliveira, Managing Director
- Mr Marc Wooldridge, Marketing Director
- Mr Russell Anderson, Sales Director

BUSINESS: To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *Eragon M* with the consumer advice "**Moderate violence**".

Also present:

- Secretariat support, Office of Film and Literature Classification

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) classified the film *Eragon M* with the consumer advice "**Moderate fantasy violence**".

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.

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;
- Assessing impact;
- Six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

3. Procedure

Having earlier received a valid, written application for review, four members of the Review Board viewed the film *Eragon* at the Review Board's meeting on 11th December 2006.

The Review Board then received verbal submissions from Mr Marcos Oliveira, Mr Marc Wooldridge and Mr Russell Anderson, representing the Applicant. These were confirmed by a written submission. The Board then met in camera to consider the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) 20th Century Fox's application for review;
- (ii) 20th Century Fox's written and oral submissions;
- (iii) The film, *Eragon*;
- (iv) relevant provisions in the Act;
- (v) relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with s 6 of the Act; and
- (vi) the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2005*.

5 Synopsis

The fantasy-genre film *Eragon* is set around the developing story of a young man, Eragon, who finds a dragon's egg in the forest. He learns of his destiny to be a Dragon Rider when the egg hatches and the dragon hatchling Saphira bonds with him. Together they take up the mantle of the legendary Dragon Riders to rescue his people from the domination of the evil King Galbatorix. Led by Eragon and Saphira, the people of Alagaesia fight the king and return the kingdom to a rule of justice. The narrative develops as Eragon learns through various means of his destiny and of the need of his people for a Dragon Rider to release them. The film climaxes with a battle between forces led by Eragon and the forces of Galbatorix. The film is based on the novel *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, reportedly written when he was 15.

6 Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes particularly worthy of mention under various classifiable elements:

(a) Themes – as well as the fantasy themes clearly apparent, there are themes of separation and loss and of abandonment. These themes are justified by context.

(b) Violence – this element appeared frequently throughout the film.

Violence as in combat and fighting was present in the earliest scenes. At approximately 25 minutes soldiers attack an unarmed man, at 44 minutes there is an assault upon Eragon, which is shown in close up. At 62 minutes Eragon attempts to kill Durza, the sorcerer, by shooting an arrow at his forehead. There is a close-up of the arrow in the sorcerer's forehead and detail around the wound before he disappears. This occurs within a context of fighting with loud explosions and sounds of rocks crashing. During this fight Bron, his tutor, jumps in front of Eragon, taking a spear in the chest and saving him. Bron later dies from this wound.

The violence is moderate in impact as the scenes are rapid, with fast editing techniques and frequent scene changes, and are dimly lit.

Further examples of combat violence occur during the lead up to the climactic battle scenes. These scenes, from 83 minutes to 89 minutes, contain hand to hand combat and massed battle scenes.

The violence is more stylised than realistic, and occurs on an infrequent basis. The combat and battle scenes are justified by context.

Additionally, in considering the element of violence, the Review Board noted two associated aspects – the use of fire as an element of violence and the apparent use of torture as a means of attack. Scenes involving Durza with his captives or underlings, usually involved threatening actions by the sorcerer, which resulted in screams and expressions of pain on the faces of his captives. For example at approximately 36 minutes Durza points his finger at a Ra'zac with resultant images and sounds of pain. Another instance of apparent magical torture involved Arya at approximately 5 minutes.

The Review Board noted the use of fire as a weapon of offence and defence. There were images of buildings and other aspects of habitation burning, used to signal the existence of conflict (at approximately 31 minutes). Fire was used in association with mayhem and panic during battle scenes. At approximately 83 minutes fireballs were employed as part of the increasing scenes of battle. Throughout the next 6 minutes of battle scenes, fire is used as a weapon, with individuals clearly on fire and in pain, the dragon breathing fire as an offensive weapon, and constructions burning with people inside.

(c) Language – there was limited use of coarse language in the film.

(d) Sexual References – this element was not present.

(e) Drug Use – this element was not present

(f) Nudity – this element was not present

7 Reasons for the decision

The Review Board found that the violence was mitigated by the fantasy element and that the action was in context. However, the violent scenes were

more than infrequent with the impact being accentuated by detailed and close-up visuals of action, by the use of fire (lighting) and by sound effects.

The suspense occasioned by the scenes of conflict and threat was relieved by images of the companionship between Eragon and Saphira and by Eragon's developing understanding of his role and of the people who were there to support him.

Relief was also provided by the use of cinematic images of the landscape and of accompanying music. However the Review Board noted these scenes were less frequent than scenes involving battle and/or individual physical conflict and combat.

The Review Board based its decision to classify the film *Eragon* "M" with the consumer advice "Moderate fantasy violence" on the content of the film as set out in 6 above.

The Review Board noted that considerable care had been taken to ensure that the majority of the elements were dealt with in accordance with the guidelines for a PG rating. The relationship between Eragon and Arya is dealt with sensitively and with little or no sexual content. Likewise the portrayal of the dragon, Saphira, has been done with a gentle touch.

The submission of the Applicant that: *"the continued mixing of the fantasy adventure with the real characters provides a major amelioration of the portrayal of some of the scenes involving violence. This amelioration both in individual scenes and in those involving the battle scenes has the result of considerably lowering the impact of the violent episodes"* was given considerable weight in the Review Board's deliberations regarding the element of violence. The Review Board also noted the Applicant's argument that the magical consequences of some of the violence minimised its effect.

However, the Review Board must apply the Code and the guidelines, and whilst acknowledging context, must also attend to the content of the film as presented, and to its overall impact on the potential audience.

Additionally, the classification system makes no discrimination between children above or below the age of 12. The Applicant has advanced arguments, which suggest that such a discrimination could be made in the case of this film. However, the Review Board must consider the potential impact of this film in relation to all children under the age of 15.

Eragon is a film based on an action story that depicts a conflict in a magical setting, which has seemingly real consequences. It is the element of violence and its frequency that led the Review Board to settle on the M classification.

A “PG” classification requires violence to be “*mild and infrequent, and be justified by context.*” It was the determination of the Review Board that there were more incidents of violence, realistic and magical, than could be considered as infrequent. A continuing theme of the film is the contest, as well as the gathering threat of the battle between Eragon and the forces of King Galbatorix and Durza the sorcerer. Repeated demonstrations of this contest are given throughout the film, prior to the battle scene.

Whilst the magical element of the content mitigated the impact of some of these incidents, the detailed scenes, with painful and fearful consequences, ensures the impact moves beyond “mild” to “moderate”.

Specifically the use of fire, including the sight of people on fire, the agony and torment manifested by his victims as a result of the menacing actions of Durza and the sustained action of the final six minute battle scene were considered to have moderate, rather than mild, impact. This was accentuated by the sound and lighting techniques.

To have allowed the classification “PG” would have led to an underestimation of the potential impact of the violence, including frequency of occurrence on younger viewers. However, the magical context and level of impact places the film in the “M” classification, rather than any more restrictive classification. The “M” category serves to classify a range of films and it was the Review Board’s conclusion that this film was located in the lower levels of “M” classification, requiring limited consumer information.

8. Summary

While the fantasy nature of the film *Eragon* tempers the impact of the violence, its impact was considered to be “moderate”. Accordingly, the Review Board determined that the film warranted an **M** classification and the consumer advice “Moderate fantasy violence”.