



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

15 January 2004

**23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW**

MEMBERS: Mr Jonathan O’Dea (Deputy Convenor)
Ms Dawn Grassick
Mr Rob Shilkin

APPLICANT: Buena Vista International (Australia)

BUSINESS: To review the Classification Board’s decision to classify the film *Haunted Mansion* M15+ under the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Review Board unanimously determined that the film, *Haunted Mansion*, is classified PG with the consumer advice ‘some scenes may scare young children’.

2. Legislative provisions

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

3. Procedure

The Review Board convened in response to an application from the applicant, Buena Vista International (Australia). The Review Board watched the film *Haunted Mansion*, and received written submissions on behalf of the applicant from Juliana Markezic, Manager, Film Operations and Distribution.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) the applicant’s application for review (including written submissions);
- (ii) the report of the Classification Board relating to *Haunted Mansion*;

- (iii) the film *Haunted Mansion*;
- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act;
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with section 6 of the Classification Act; and
- (vi) the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games*.

5. Synopsis

Jim Evers (Eddie Murphy) is a slick, money-hungry real estate salesman who works with his wife, Sarah. Together with their two children (Megan & Michael), the family detours from a holiday to visit a large house where Jim hopes to secure a new real estate client. Jim and his family face more than they anticipated as they discover the house is a haunted mansion. Together they come through unscathed as the family ultimately triumphs over various supernatural challenges.

6. Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that *Haunted Mansion* contains:

- (a) Scenes containing fairly mild and infrequent violence, especially at 2 & 44 minutes (Master Gracey, now a ghost, briefly seen hanging from a rope) and 54 minutes (lengthy sequence with Jim and Megan set in a crypt). These scenes were justified by context and mild in overall impact.
- (b) Supernatural themes that had a low sense of threat and menace and were overall justified by context.

7. Reasons for the decision

The depiction of violence in relation to the hanging scene (appearing briefly at 2 minutes and repeated as a flash at 44 minutes), contained no real detail and was stylised. The Review Board also agreed with the Classification Board's earlier statement in its decision, that:

"the historical context of the depiction, coupled with the fantastical elements of the story and the fact that Master Gracey 'lives on' as a ghost, mitigates some of the impact ..."

The scene commencing at 54 minutes involved Jim and Megan in a crypt being chased by slow moving skeletons who emerge from coffins, with Jim hitting one. Although a prolonged scene, it is presented in an unrealistic manner with a high level of stylisation and no strong sense of fear or threat to Jim or Megan. There is also a moderating degree of humour present both during this scene and surrounding scenes, particularly involving Eddie Murphy (Jim). Other scenes containing elements of violence were likewise regarded as acceptable within a PG rating.

There is a supernatural theme throughout the film. This is contributed to by the regular appearance of a supernatural 'gypsy head' and numerous ghostly depictions or acts, including scenes involving Jim's face being distorted in a mirror (at 36 minutes) and the ground opening up with fire to take away the 'bad' butler ghost (at 75 minutes).

The Review Board believed that the supernatural theme is justified within the context of the 'haunted house' scenario. The film is essentially in the tradition of many other films in which ghosts are not intended to frighten audiences but to entertain through interaction with earthly

characters. To the extent that some scenes or aspects may be frightening to some very young children, there is clearly no sense of terror generated from the film. Further, the film has a positive and humorous conclusion.

The Review Board agreed with the applicant's submission that *Haunted Mansion* will be seen by audiences as a 'Fun Ghost Story'. The stylised fantasy elements, family setting and light-hearted humour of the Walt Disney production mitigate the impact of potentially disturbing scenes.

Haunted Mansion does, however, warrant a PG rather than G classification because it contains material which might frighten or upset some young children. Some children viewing the film may therefore require the guidance of parents or guardians.

8. Summary

The Review Board believed that the impact of the classifiable elements in the overall context of the film did not warrant an M15+ classification. The Review Board found that the violence and supernatural themes were justified by the context and not of a high level. The Review Board unanimously determined that the film, *Haunted Mansion* is classified PG with the consumer advice 'some scenes may scare young children'.