



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

Review Date: 18 December 2009
23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS: Dr Melissa de Zwart (chair)
Ms Helena Blundell
Mr Alan Wu

APPLICANT Sega Australia

INTERESTED PARTIES None, however fourteen emails from members of the public were received and noted.

BUSINESS To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the computer game *Aliens vs Predator RC* (Refused Classification).

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) has classified the computer game *Aliens vs Predator* MA 15+ with the consumer advice 'Strong science fiction violence'.

2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Classification Act) governs the classification of computer games and the review of classification decisions. Section 9 provides that computer games are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* (the Guidelines). Section 9A of the Classification Act states that 'A publication, film or computer game that advocates the doing of a terrorist act must be classified RC.'

Relevantly, the Code, under the heading ‘Computer Games’, 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+(Mature Accompanied).

Section 11 of the Classification Act requires that the matters to be taken into account in making a decision on the classification of a publication, film or 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 publication, film or computer game; and
- (c) the general character of the publication, film or 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, determined under section 12 of the Classification 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 three member panel of the Review Board met on 18 December 2009 in response to an application from the original applicant dated 7 December 2009 to review the RC classification of the computer game, determined by the Classification Board. The Review Board had previously determined that the application was valid.

The Review Board was assured that the computer game, the subject of the review application, was the same game that was classified by the Classification Board.

The Applicant provided a written submission and recorded gameplay of the computer game before the hearing. On 18 December 2009, the Review Board viewed the recorded gameplay and a demonstration of the game and heard an oral submission from four persons representing the Applicant, Sega Australia.

The Review Board then considered the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

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

- (i) The application for review
- (ii) Sega's written and oral submissions
- (iii) the computer game, *Aliens vs Predator*
- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and
- (v) the Classification Board's report.

Fourteen emails received from members of the public regarding the computer game were noted by the Review Board.

5. Synopsis

In this first-person science-fiction shooter, a player has to undertake campaigns as a US Colonial Marine, Alien or Predator following the awakening of deadly parasites by an archaeological team. The game can be played in single player and various multiplayer modes. The player is assigned a mission determined by their chosen character. During this mission they undertake combat with a range of other player and non-player characters. The game is set in a futuristic alien environment.

6. Findings on material questions of fact

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

- (a) **Themes** – The game is in the first person shooter (FPS) style, with science fiction / horror themes.

The Review Board is of the opinion that these themes can be accommodated in the MA 15+ classification.

(b) **Violence** – The Board notes that the game includes the following violent scenes:

- ‘signature moves’ executed by the alien or predator character which include decapitation, removal of heads and spines, stabbing to the eyes, torso and head, tail stabbing;
- close up of melee / close combat between marines, aliens and predators;
- ‘face-huggers’ attaching larval aliens to human hosts;
- aliens biting to the head and body;
- removal of heads for retinal scan;
- use of various weapons;
- post-mortem damage which can include decapitation and removal of limbs;
- depictions of skinned bodies
- blood splatter including some blood splatter on camera lenses; ichor and acid splatter.

It appears that a significant proportion of the violence in the game is against non-human characters and only armed humans may be attacked. However, unarmed humans may be harvested as hosts for larval aliens and will implicitly die as a result.

Despite these violent scenes, the Review Board is of the view that the violent scenes were relatively brief, meaning that the overall impact was no more than strong. The overall sense of violence was not relentless or prolonged, as each violent scene is interspersed with gameplay, dictated by the tasks assigned to the character. The Review Board is of the view that the game depicts strong violence, which is typical of the science fiction/ horror genre. The impact of individual violent scenes is strong, warranting classification at the level of MA15+.

(c) **Language** – The use of coarse language in the game is infrequent and appropriate to context and can be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification.

(d) **Sex** – There is no sexual activity apparent in the game.

(e) **Drug-use** – There is no drug-use apparent in the game.

(f) **Nudity** – There is one depiction of a scantily clad, stylised (holographic) exotic dancer. The image may be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification.

7. Reasons for the decision

The Review Board is unanimous in its view. The Review Board is of the view that the violence in the game is the principal classifiable element upon which the Review Board should and has made its decision. The Review Board concluded that the violence was strong in impact.

The violent scenes are not prolonged and are interspersed with longer, non-violent gameplay sequences during which the player must complete missions assigned to the character.

The violence is fantastical in nature and justified by the context of the game, set in a futuristic science fiction world inhabited by aliens and predators. The violence is typical of the science fiction/horror genre.

It appears that a majority of the violence is directed against non-human characters, with non-armed humans seemingly incapable of being directly attacked or injured at all. (However, unarmed human may be harvested as hosts for larval aliens and implicitly die as a result).

The 'signature moves', which constitute the more serious violence of the game, do not permit player interactivity in selecting the particular move to be performed. Furthermore, these signature moves are particularly implausible, being executed by alien characters with non-human physiology and weaponry.

The effect of these circumstances is to lessen the impact of the violence, such that its overall impact is no higher than strong.

8. Summary

In a unanimous decision, the Review Board has determined that *Aliens vs Predator* contains classifiable elements that are no higher than strong in impact and therefore is classified MA 15+ with the consumer advice 'Strong science fiction violence'.