



Australian Government

Classification Review Board

29 July 2013
23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

MEMBERS: Ms Victoria Rubensohn
Mr Peter Attard
Ms Jane Smith

APPLICANT Koch Media GmbH

INTERESTED PARTIES Richard Schenke
Steven King
Andrew Brading
Antony Restifo
Dean Rosolen
Luke K

BUSINESS To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the computer game *Saints Row IV* RC (Refused Classification).

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) unanimously classified the computer game RC (Refused Classification).

2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (Cth) (the Classification Act) governs the classification of computer games 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 in paragraph 1 of the Table 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; are to be classified RC.

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 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 *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012* (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

The Review Board met on 29 July 2013 in response to the receipt of an application from Koch Media GmbH on 17 July 2013 to conduct the review.

The Review Board engaged in extended gameplay of *Saints Row IV* upon the Xbox 360 platform prior to meeting with the applicant.

The applicant then took the Review Board through various aspects of gameplay and made an oral submission which was accompanied by a written submission.

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) Koch Media GmbHs' application for review
- (ii) Koch Media GmbHs' written and oral submissions
- (iii) the computer game, *Saints Row IV*
- (iv) the relevant provisions in the Classification Act, the Code and the Guidelines, and

- (v) the Classification Board's report
- (vi) six submissions from individual gamers

5. Synopsis

Saints Row IV is an Open World/Sandbox computer game for the PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Saints Row IV is the latest game in the Saints Row series, with the original title released in 2006.

Saints Row IV is a direct sequel to Saints Row: The Third. The game is set in a fictional Washington D.C. and simulated fictional city of Steelport, five years after the end of Saints Row: The Third. The leader of the Third Street Saints is elected President of the United States and immediately an alien invasion occurs and the protagonist (the Player) and the Saints are kidnapped by aliens known as the Zin and their leader Zinyak. The Player is transported to a virtual version of Steelport where the Player can use super powers to fight against the Zin empire. Various 'side missions' are options in the game.

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:

Violence—The game primarily utilises violence as the human race fights the alien invasion. The violence is frequent but stylised and unrealistic. One of a range of possible DLC weapons that can be purchased is called 'The Rectifier'. The Rectifier is a long three pronged weapon utilised by the Player to impale any characters in the game. The Rectifier is thrust from behind (implicitly via the anus, but the area is pixelated), the victim is then raised and shot projectile-like into the sky, leaving a trail of stars. It was submitted by the producers of the game that the use of this weapon represents a parody of the tradition of alien probes of humans. In the opinion of the Review Board, there is no element of sexual violence related to the use of The Rectifier.

The violence in the game, though frequent, is justified by the storyline. The impact is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA15+ level.

Language—The game contains frequent coarse language. The impact of the language is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA15+ level.

Sex—The game contains no depictions of sexual activity. In the 'Romance' Option of the game there is sexual banter and brief implied sexual activity.

The impact of this element is no higher than strong and can be accommodated at the MA15+ level.

Nudity—One 'side mission' included in the game involves the characters becoming nude, although their genitals are permanently pixelated. There are also a number of other instances where at a distance; one can see a woman's breasts upon a poster and magazine cover.

The impact is no higher than strong, and could be accommodated at the MA15+ level.

Drug Use—During the course of the game, there is an option for a ‘side mission’ where the Player can achieve an unlimited sprinting power or superpower. Having acquired alien narcotics, the Player then has to inhale the drugs to gain the necessary superpower. The game directly links drug use to incentives and rewards. The fact that at another point in the game, these superpowers can be acquired in a different manner is irrelevant to the fact that in this option the drug use directly achieves the incentive of acquiring superpowers. Though the drugs are referred to as ‘alien’ their usage is represented in a realistic manner using realistic drug taking methods. The means by which the drugs are obtained from a street dealer parallels reality. The dialogue of the Player and other characters underlines the link between the drug use and the achievement of superpowers e.g. “This alien shit should give us an edge” (spoken by a female character).

7. Reasons for the decision

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted. The game Saints Row IV is therefore classified Refused Classification.

8. Summary

The Review Board decided that the computer game should be classified RC – Refused Classification.