WRITTEN REASONS FOR DECISION SECTION 12

HEADNOTE	
Type of Publication:	Console Game
Title of Publication:	Grand Theft Auto IV
Other known title:	GTA 4
OFLC Publication Reference No:	800191
Decision:	Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 18 years.
Display Conditions:	Nil.
Descriptive Note:	Contains violence and offensive language

The publication is classified as objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 18 years because of its treatment of violence, cruelty and crime.

The publication is a console game formatted for play on the Xbox 360 console. The game is the latest instalment in a series of popular free-roaming, or open-ended, games from the development company Rockstar Games. The game is plot-driven, broadly fitting into the action/drama genres with strong elements of satire. It tells the story of Nico Bellic, a fresh-off-the-boat Eastern European immigrant to Liberty City (modelled on the real New York city). Nico stays with his cousin Roman, a loser with dangerous levels of gambling debt, and begins to perform odd jobs to keep his head above water. Nico's ulterior motive in visiting Liberty City is to try and find the man responsible for betraying his friends.

As with the previous versions of *Grand Theft Auto* the game utilises a third-person perspective. The storyline is progressed through cinematic scripted sequences, and supported by a wide range of mission objectives. The game world is immersive and fully realised, with the changing of seasons, weather patterns, and time of day, all ticking over with a realistic attention to detail.

The publication deals with matters of sex in terms of s3(1) of the FVPC Act, though not to any significant degree. The player has the freedom to visit a strip club where scantily clad women swing from poles and perform sexually suggestive manoeuvres. Later in the game the player may also engage in sexual activity with prostitutes, though the sex is represented

purely by audio cues and is not explicitly depicted. Sexual matters are not a dominant theme in the game, though their presence indicates that the game is adult in nature.

The publication deals extensively with matters of crime, cruelty and violence in terms of s3(1) of the FVPC Act. In order to proceed through the game Niko must commit criminal acts such as stealing, destroying property, and killing other people. Outside of completing missions the player also has the freedom to explore the city as a realistic urban environment, committing acts of violence and engaging in criminal activity. The extent and degree to which, and the manner in which the publication depicts the infliction of serious physical harm and acts of significant cruelty are discussed in relation to s3(3)(a)(i). Matters of crime are discussed further under s3(3)(d).

The publication does not deal with any s3(2) matters.

The publication features a wide range of depictions of the infliction of serious physical harm and acts of significant cruelty. The depictions occur during the scripted, film-like sequences and in the course of completing missions. In addition the player can, at whim, attack civilians and police using a range of weapons, such as pistol, shotgun, sniper rifle and grenades. Melee weapons include a baseball bat and a knife. When people are hit, either with melee weapons or bullets, small blood bursts are produced. The victim's body flails about in a realistic fashion in response to the location of applied force. While the body can be shot or hit further only a small amount of additional blood appears, and dismemberment is not possible. After a certain amount of time the body disappears altogether.

Possibly the strongest in-game violence occurs when a person is hit by a Molotov cocktail. The victim is shown running to and fro on fire before collapsing. The level of cruelty is stronger because of the length of time it takes for the person to die.

The scripted sequences also feature a range of violence, such as people being shot in the head. These are shown in a very cinematic way, utilising camera angles and sound effects one would expect to see in large budget films.

In terms of s3(3)(d) the game contains the potential for anti-social and criminal behaviour through the freedom Niko has to hijack cars and kill civilians and police with an array of weapons. The missions themselves also involve Niko performing criminal behaviour, such as shakedowns of business owners who refuse to pay protection money, and killing other criminals. The criminal behaviour is balanced to some extent by the positioning of Niko as a sympathetic, and flawed, character trying to find his way in Liberty City, and the power the police have to kill or arrest Niko when he commits wanton acts. Illegal drugs play a very minor part in the game and appear only in as far as some characters are shown snorting cocaine or discussing drug deals. Niko does not take drugs and there is no sense that drug use is ever glamourised.

The dominant effect of the publication as a whole is of an engaging third-person action drama set within an interactive game world.

The unrestricted availability of the publication would be injurious to the public good given the manner in which it deals with matters of violence, cruelty and crime. Weighting has been given to the potential for the player's character to commit gratuitous acts of violence upon unsuspecting members of the public and the police, as well as frequently extreme acts of anti-social and illegal behaviour. This kind of content might be disturbing to younger viewers,

however there is also the risk of children and young persons becoming desensitised or inured over the long term to this type of behaviour, and trivialising it through presenting it as amusing or exciting. Adults are more able to put this material in the context of an entertaining but violent console game. The likelihood of injury to the public good is avoided by restricting this publication to audiences that have attained the age of 18 years.

Written reasons are not legally required for section 12 submissions, but it is the policy of the Classification Office to provide them.

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