

To those reviewing the Australian Classification System,

I am a 29 year old man who plays games occasionally (between obligations to kids and work, it can be hard to find the time), and follows gaming news.

I've noticed that the way the classification board treats drug use in games, is different to that in film and music.

Several years ago, an R18+ rating was introduced for games, to reflect the fact that the majority of gamers are adults.

Despite this, several games found themselves at risk of being refused classification due to depicting drug use associated with rewards or benefits.

The rule is even applied to fictional drugs, such as "bliss" from the 2018 game We Happy Few (which initially found itself being refused classification, before being rated R18+). On the other hand, if the drug is portrayed as a fictional "magic potion", it seems to pass, raising the question of where the line between a potion and a drug is.

This contrasts strongly with Hollywood movies which often contain scenes depicting use of illicit drugs such as cannabis (possession is legal in some parts of the US, and the in ACT) or MDMA (remains illegal nationwide in both Australia and the US) with no ill-effects, or even positive effects, for the users. Additionally there is popular music, which often contains references to drug use, glamorising it.

When it comes to depictions of violence in video games and in film/music, and drug use in film, we accept that adults are able to tell the difference between reality and fantasy, between what is acceptable/legal and unacceptable/illegal.

I believe the same is true of drug use in video games. I doubt an adult gamer is going to go and seek out illicit drugs in real life, due to playing a game that contained illicit drug use – let alone if the game drug is fictional.

There is also the fact that addictive, dangerous, legal drugs associated with rewards, are not treated the same. For instance the 2010 game Vanquish (rated M15+) allowed the player to smoke a cigarette and then throw it away, which distracted enemies and allowed them to be killed easier. The 2015 game The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt contained a humorous scene + segment of story which was only accessible if the player chose to binge drink.

I believe that, for games rated R18+, the treatment of real illicit drugs, and fictional drugs, should be brought in line with the treatment of legal drugs, and violent content. Adults are able to tell the difference between reality and fantasy, that what is acceptable in a game may not be acceptable in real life.

Thanks for taking the time to read my submission.

Regards,

Glenn Kitson