

## WRITTEN REASONS FOR DECISION SECTION 12

<b>HEADNOTE</b>	
<b>Type of Publication:</b>	Console Game
<b>Title of Publication:</b>	Grand Theft Auto IV - Unedited Version
<b>Other known title:</b>	GTA 4
<b>OFLC Publication Reference No:</b>	800853
<b>Decision:</b>	Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 18 years.
<b>Display Conditions:</b>	Nil.
<b>Descriptive Note:</b>	Contains violence, offensive language and sex scenes.

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 primarily because of its treatment of sex, crime, cruelty and violence.

The publication is a console game formatted for play on the Xbox 360 console. The game is the unedited version of a popular free-roaming, or open-ended, game classified R18 on 26 February 2008 (OFLC No. 800191). The game is almost identical to the original, save for the inclusion of a small amount of sexual content removed by Rockstar Games from the Australian version of the game that was originally submitted for classification in New Zealand.

The game is plot-driven, broadly fitting into the action/drama genres with strong elements of satire. It tells the story of Niko Bellic, a fresh-off-the-boat Eastern European immigrant to Liberty City (modelled on the real New York city). Niko 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. Niko'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 ticking over with an impressively realistic attention to detail.

The publication deals with matters of sex in terms of s3(1) of the FVPC Act. The strongest sexual content, available only through the unedited version of the game, is when Niko drives down to the docks to pick up a prostitute. He is faced with three options, which appear in text at the top of the screen. Niko may select between receiving \$20, \$50, or \$70 services, corresponding to being masturbated, receiving fellatio, or engaging in intercourse. In each case the player's point of view is outside the vehicle at a reasonable distance from the activity, and at no time are genitals ever depicted. The masturbation is represented by the woman putting her hand over Niko's lap and moving her hand up and down. Fellatio is represented by the woman moving her head over Niko's lap and moving her head up and down. The intercourse, at \$70, consists of the prostitute briefly masturbating Niko, then sitting on his lap and moving up and down.

When the sexual activity is taking place there are a number of coarse verbal cues that rotate, apparently at random, between all three types of activity. Example include: "oh it's so big", "come on baby I'm going into orbit now", "fuck the shit out of me, yeah you nasty fucker", "oh yeah, grab my titties now you fuck". Some of these lines are delivered convincingly, while others are delivered monotone for comic effect. The sole advantage to the player from Niko visiting one of the prostitutes is the subsequent increase to his health. It is unlikely that a player would want to visit prostitutes more than once or twice in a game, or be able to derive any degree of arousal from the sex scenes. Satisfying curiosity is the most likely reason for a player wanting to see this content, since in the much wider context of the game the presence of these non-explicit sex scenes, with no bearing on story and little concrete advantage, are of limited value.

The player also has the ability to visit a strip club, where inside scantily clad women swing from poles and perform sexually suggestive manoeuvres. It is possible for the player to receive a "lap dance" from a stripper. When this occurs Niko is led into a private room. A woman in a bikini gyrates and shows off her buttocks.

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 in terms of s3(1) of the FVPC Act. In order to proceed through the game the player 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, committing acts of violence and engaging in criminal activity. Matters of crime are discussed further in relation to s3(3)(d), that is, the extent, degree and manner in which the publication promotes or encourages criminal acts.

The publication deals with matters of cruelty and violence in terms of s3(1) of the FVPC Act. 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 under s3(3)(a)(i). 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. These depictions occur during the scripted 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 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 around 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 from big-budget Hollywood movies.

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. In one mission Niko is required to drive home drunk after he and his cousin Roman have been drinking. Both stumble around outside the car and are clearly well over the legal blood alcohol limit. Driving in this state makes controlling the car very difficult, and quickly attracts the attention of the police. After this mission is completed Niko still has the power to drink and drive, yet there is absolutely no incentive in doing so as the effect is unpleasant, driving is affected, and the police immediately respond by trying to arrest him. In these circumstances Niko is better off catching a taxi to his next destination.

The violent criminal behaviour is balanced to some extent by the power the police have to kill or arrest Niko when he commits wanton acts, and the positioning of Niko as a sympathetic, yet obviously flawed, character trying to find his way in Liberty City.

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 sex, violence, cruelty and crime. Weighting has been given to the potential for the player's character to commit gratuitous acts of violence upon members of the public and the police, as well as extreme acts of anti-social and illegal behaviour. This 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. The additional sexual content in the current version of the game also points to its intended adult audience, who are more capable of putting this material in the context of a sophisticated console game that pushes boundaries. 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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