



**Australian Government**  
**Classification Review Board**

Hearing and decision: 28 February 2007

23-33 MARY STREET  
SURRY HILLS, NSW

**MEMBERS:** Ms Maureen Shelley  
Mrs Gillian Groom  
Mr Anthony Hetrih

**APPLICANT:** Roadshow Films

**BUSINESS:** To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *300* **R 18+** with the consumer advice '**High level battle violence**'.

**DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION**

**1. Decision**

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) classified the film **MA 15+** with the consumer advice '**Strong computer-generated battle violence, Death and war themes**'.

**2. Legislative provisions**

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification decisions. Section 9 of the Act provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines.

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2005* (the Guidelines), determined under s 12 of the Act:

- The importance of context
- Assessing impact
- Six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

### **3. Procedure**

The Review Board met on 28 February 2007 in response to the receipt of a valid application from the applicant, Roadshow Films, on 15 February 2007.

Three members of the Review Board viewed the film *300* at the Board's meeting on 28 February 2007.

The Review Board then received an oral submission from Mr Brett Rosengarten representing the Applicant. This was provided in addition to 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) Roadshow Film's application for review;
- (ii) Roadshow Film's written and oral submissions;
- (iii) the film, *300*;
- (iv) the Classification Board's report; and
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Act, the Code and the Guidelines.

### **5. Synopsis**

Based on Frank Miller's epic graphic novel (adult comic), *300* is a retelling of the ancient Battle of Thermopylae. Set in 480 BC, the king of Sparta – Leonidas – leads an elite squad of 300 Spartan warriors against a massive invading force from Persia. With 1,000,000 Persian soldiers at Xerxes' disposal, the Spartans face insurmountable odds as they battle to the death, for valour and the freedom of their homeland.

### **6. Findings on material questions of fact**

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes particularly worthy of mention under various classifiable elements:

#### **(a) Themes**

The themes that are evident throughout the film are those of warfare and death. The Spartans are trained as warriors from birth and believe it is the highest honour to die in battle. They also have a unique style of fighting, where each warrior is responsible for protecting those fighting at their side. Other themes include fighting to the death in the face of insurmountable odds, the strict necessity of fighting for freedom, it being essential for a Spartan to show valour in battle, and the importance of a heroic death.

#### **(b) Violence**

The film contains violence that is no greater than strong in impact.

- There are a number of violent battle scenes at approximately 47mins, 63mins, 82mins and 94mins. These scenes depict liberal blood splatter – in muted unrealistic tones – and shots of trauma to combatants including the occasional dismemberment of arms and legs, beheadings, and impalement by spears and arrows. It should be noted that the almost black blood spray and flow was highly stylised and unrealistic, almost choreographed, in its motion within the frame. The blood splatter did not land on any person.
- The Review Board determined that the scene, which commences at approximately 65mins, in which a giant troll-like warrior – such as generally seen in the fantasy genre – joins the battle, has the strongest impact in the film. In addition to the battle violence taking place there is a detailed depiction and close-up of a sword being pulled out of the creature's bicep (approximately 66mins), followed by it being stabbed in the eye (approximately 67mins), and its beheading, which is framed from the back of the creature. It was noted that the troll seemed unaffected by pain and the initial wounds inflicted on it and there was a lack of realistic arterial spray when it was decapitated. While this sequence had detail, the Review Board determined that it was unrealistic, particularly given the fantasy-genre creature depicted, and could be accommodated within the MA 15+ classification.
- Another scene with detail is the beheading, which occurs in the lull of the battle at approximately 74mins. The scene plays out in slow motion as a soldier mounted on a horse cuts down one of the Spartan warriors. The body is seen standing headless for some seconds and then crumples to the ground. There was no arterial spray or blood gushing from the wound, which added to the unrealistic dream-like quality of the scene and lessened its impact. This unreal sense was reinforced by the music and the mid to long shot of the action drawing away from the battle.

## **7. Reasons for the decision**

It was the unanimous determination of the Review Board that the relevant classifiable element for the purposes of determining the classification of the film was violence.

The Guidelines state that the impact of material classified MA 15+ should be no higher than strong.

The Review Board determined that while there was frequent violence depicted in *300*, its impact was lessened due to the computer-generated visuals and stylistic treatment of the film. Much of the battle action was almost balletic in depiction, having a choreographed appearance. Slow-motion was used to display the manly grace and athletic appearance of the warriors rather than the gore of battle, which was noticeably absent. Further, a number of sequences appeared composed to be similar to paintings by Rubens and two scenes depicted Renaissance-era paintings.

The cumulative impact of the violence in the film was no higher than strong for the following reasons:

While the story has some historical significance (it is based on the historical Battle of Thermopylae), the source material for the film is a graphic novel and as such retells the story in an “over the top” manner. Many fantasy elements are used such as the hunchback, numerous monsters, a giant troll-like warrior and the huge battle rhino with rider. These clearly computer-generated characters add to the fantasy-genre style of the film. These elements help to emphasize the unrealistic, comic-book nature of the battles and violence within the movie.

Further evidence of this “over the top” treatment is seen in the character of Xerxes who is shown as a 2m-tall figure wearing black eyeliner, gold draperies and piercings. His overplaying of all his scenes adds to the “camp” style of the film and provides some comic relief, particularly given his Mardi Gras-style “float” that he uses when going into battle.

While the movie does contain frequent violence, the highly stylised nature of the film lessens the overall impact making the impact of the violence no more than strong. This is illustrated by the:

- dull, muted colours and sepia tones used throughout the film;
- computer-generated backgrounds and characters and visual effect treatments; and the
- use of slow motion and close-ups to capture the classically choreographed battle poses and the “larger than life” physiques of some of the characters.

While blood splatter is liberally used throughout the battle scenes it is highly unrealistic, computer generated and almost videogame-like in nature. The colour of the blood is also so muted, that it appears to be almost black. The blood splatter does not appear to land on any victim and there are few instances of characters seen with bloodied faces or bodies – including those that are decapitated, speared or hacked with a sword.

Having regard to the standards of the community, the Review Board determined that the highly-stylised and unrealistic nature of the violence in this film were of no greater – and in some instances far less – than other similar films that have been routinely classified MA 15+. It concluded that the community would, as a whole, expect the level of violence depicted in this film at an MA 15+ classification.

## **8. Summary**

In a unanimous decision the Review Board determined that *300* should be classified **MA 15+** with the consumer advice ‘**Strong computer-generated battle violence, Death and war themes**’.