



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

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Patricia Vance, President
Entertainment Software Rating Board
317 Madison Avenue, 22nd Floor
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CCFC
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Dear Ms. Vance:

We are writing to urge the Entertainment Software Rating Board to give *Manhunt 2* – the most violent game designed so far for the Nintendo Wii platform – an Adults-Only (AO) rating prior to its July 10, 2007 release. Despite industry claims to the contrary, Mature-rated games continue to be marketed to children under 17.¹ Therefore, an AO rating is the best way to limit children's exposure to this ultra violent game.

Manhunt 2 meets at least one of the ESRB's criteria for an AO rating: "prolonged scenes of intense violence."² A reviewer for video game website IGN.com calls *Manhunt 2* the goriest and most violent game he's ever seen. Players can saw their enemies' skulls in half with a saw; mutilate them with an axe; castrate them with a pair of pliers; or kill them by bashing their head "into an electrical box, where raw power surges through it and eventually blows his head apart."³

At the 2006 Summit on Video Games, Youth and Public Policy, academic, medical and health experts signed a statement saying: "Behavioral science research demonstrates that playing violent video games can increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in children and youth."⁴ The most recent studies employing state-of-the-art neuroimaging techniques support the behavioral research.⁵ There is evidence that violent video games can engender more aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and decrease empathetic, helpful behaviors with peers.⁶



All of this research was done on children who used conventional video game systems. The Nintendo Wii system, however, is not conventional. Players will not merely punch buttons or wield a joy stick. They will actually be able to act out the violence. The reviewer for IGN describes using a saw blade to "cut upward into a foe's groin and buttocks, motioning forward and backward with the Wii remote as you go."⁷ It is reasonable to expect that being able to go through the motions of violence while playing *Manhunt 2* will exacerbate its negative effects. Given what is already known about the impact of violent games played on standard game controllers, it is irresponsible to make this game available to children and teens on a potentially more dangerous platform.

If the ESRB decides to give *Manhunt 2* a Mature-rating, it is more than likely that the game will be marketed and sold to children. The National Institute on Media and the Family found that seven out of ten 4th through 12th grade students report that they play M-rated video games and nearly half of boys list an M-rated game as their favorite.⁸ A recent report by the Federal Trade Commission found that 42% of unaccompanied 13- to 16-year-olds were able to purchase M-rated games.⁹ The FTC also found that the video game industry continues to advertise M-rated games on television and in magazines popular with younger teens. On the Internet, the FTC found that the industry repeatedly violated its own “very limited standard.”¹⁰ Current advertising practices do little to stop game makers from targeting large teen audiences.

Given the video game industry’s unwillingness, or inability, to stop marketing its M-rated games to children, it is critical that *Manhunt 2* receive an AO rating. Any other rating will signal the ESRB’s endorsement for marketing *Manhunt 2* to children, and pave the way for future brutally violent games designed for the Nintendo Wii platform to be targeted to children as well.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you further.

Sincerely,

Alvin F. Poussaint, MD

Susan Linn, EdD

¹ Federal Trade Commission (2007, April). Marketing violent entertainment to children. A fifth follow-up review of industry practices in the motion picture, music recording & electronic game industries. Washington, DC: FTC. Accessed on June 7, 2007 from <http://www.ftc.gov/reports/violence/070412MarketingViolentEChildren.pdf>.

² http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp.

³ Casamassina, M. (2007, May 25) Eyes on *Manhunt 2*. Accessed on June 7, 2007 from <http://wii.ign.com/articles/792/792012p1.html>.

⁴ Consensus statement from the Institute for Media and the Family’s 2006 Summit on Video Games, Youth, and Public Policy. <http://www.mediafamily.org/press/20061031.shtml>.

⁵ Anderson, D.R. et al (2006). Brain imaging—An introduction to a new approach to studying media processes and effects. *Media Psychology*, 8, 1-6; Mathews, V.P., et al (2005). Media violence exposure and frontal lobe activation measured by fMRI in aggressive and non-aggressive adolescents. *Journal of Computer Assisted Tomography*, 29, 287-292.

⁶ Anderson, C.A. (2004). An update on the effects of violent video games. *Journal of Adolescence* 27, 113-122; Gentile, D. A. & Anderson, C. A. (2003). Violent video games: The newest media violence hazard. In D. A. Gentile (Ed.), *Media violence and children*. (p131-152). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing.

⁷ Casamassina, M. (2007, May 25) Eyes on *Manhunt 2*. Accessed on June 7, 2007 from <http://wii.ign.com/articles/792/792012p1.html>.

⁸ Walsh, D. et al (2005, November 29). *Tenth Annual MediaWise® Video Game Report Card*. Minneapolis: National Institute of Media and the Family. Accessed on June 7, 2007 from http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report_vgrc_2005.shtml.

⁹ Federal Trade Commission (2007, April). Marketing violent entertainment to children. A fifth follow-up review of industry practices in the motion picture, music recording & electronic game industries. Washington, DC: FTC. Accessed on June 7, 2007 from <http://www.ftc.gov/reports/violence/070412MarketingViolentEChildren.pdf>.

¹⁰ FTC, 2007.