DANGEROUS GAMES?

CENSORSHIP AND "CHILD PROTECTION"

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

I also declare that I am familiar with the rules of the Department and the University relating to the submission of this thesis.

Signature: …………………………….   Date: ……………….. *

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ABSTRACT

Movements active in Australia and the United States of America over the past couple of decades have called for, and have caused, the censorship of fantasy role-playing games and computer games due to controversial content. They have used the excuse of "child protection" as a substitute for examining the far more pressing, but more complex, issues facing modern Western societies in an era of moral panic and crisis arising out of rapid social and economic change. Members of such movements are moral crusaders of fundamentalist and / or protectionist viewpoints.

These patterns of behaviour have been common throughout history, particularly during the twentieth century in relation to entertainment media popular among youth. Censorship continues, even though its focuses of attention vary according to the changing nature of the underlying moral crises. The exact character of moral crises in any particular country has a distinct effect on the course and nature of censorship in that country as do the legacy of earlier internal censorship movements.

Actual fantasy role-playing games products and computer games are analysed as primary sources to arrive at these conclusions. Other primary sources include both negative and positive historical commentaries on these works, including Government reports and transcripts. Secondary sources supply valuable background information such as earlier country specific censorship histories, further commentaries on the primary sources, and provide the highly useful moral panic / moral crisis framework for this study. This thesis fills a notable gap in the continuing history of entertainment censorship left by the pre-existing sources in this area and elaborates upon the exact nature of moral panics and crises. The author hopes that future researchers will expand upon all this material and cover new movements to censor entertainment media as they arise.

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I estimate that this thesis contains a maximum of 19,800 words, taking into account all the standard exclusions in arriving at such a total.

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, human beings have demonstrated a universal need to be entertained. From the earliest myths and folk tales, through to plays, novels, and comparatively recent developments in electronic entertainment, people of all cultures and social positions have found at least some forms of entertainment that they can appreciate and enjoy. Entertainment encourages thought and imagination. At times, it leads to the inspiration to change one's own life and / or those of others in some way. People who enjoy a particular form of entertainment tend to group together, often to the amazement or even incomprehension of those who, for whatever reason, cannot appreciate that form of entertainment. Failure to appreciate can lead to failure to understand. Fear of the unknown often leads to the phenomenon known as censorship that is the subject matter of this thesis.

While it is certainly true to say that censorship can, and has often been, applied to areas of life that have little, if anything, to do with entertainment - reports of military conflicts come most readily to mind - such matters are beyond the scope of the material that will be presented here. Instead, this thesis will concentrate upon the examination of the censorship of entertainment products, with a special emphasis on fantasy role-playing games and computer games. Their opponents have traditionally considered these two forms of gaming dangerous to society.

This thesis will investigate why this has been so and why the most intense controversies concerning fantasy role-playing games have taken place in the United States of America and the most intense controversies concerning computer games have taken place in Australia. Both countries have many similar social conditions that produced similar calls for censorship, but the end results varied significantly. This thesis will explain these similarities and differences. At all times, it will present both main censorship controversies in their proper historical context, showing that they are logical historical developments given the earlier histories of censorship in Australia and the US, and that some largely unresolved issues from censorship concern over fantasy role-playing games flowed on into later computer game censorship controversies. Furthermore, it will be prominently suggested that movements for

games censorship can be linked to child protection movements, and that these movements use games as a scapegoat for avoiding the true causes of serious social and economic problems.

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As, in the author's experience, there is only minimal understanding among people in general of what is meant by a "fantasy role-playing game" and a "computer game", these terms will now be defined. For the purposes of this thesis, unless otherwise specified or implied, the term "fantasy role-playing game" will be considered synonymous with the original, most popular, and most controversial example of this style of gaming, namely *Dungeons and Dragons*. Six to eight participants sitting around a table conduct the typical game. One participant acts as the "Dungeon Master" and typically describes a medieval fantasy world, similar to those contained within fantasy novels and traditional European folk tales, which is imagined by the players.[1] The players individually create and use imaginary inhabitants of this fantasy world and tell the Dungeon Master how their characters react to situations described in that world. Depending upon player responses, the Dungeon Master goes on to describe different situations and areas of the fantasy world that are arrived at as a result of the "actions" of the players' characters. The Dungeon Master, in addition to a narrator role, also takes on the responsibility of controlling all the people and mythical (sometimes demonic) creatures the players' characters meet in the fantasy world.[2] Players may choose to respond to the Dungeon Master's handling of these characters with responses that are in character with the pretend beings they control in the game.[3] Therefore, acting, so long as it generally involves remaining in one's seat, is encouraged.

The makers of *Dungeons and Dragons* have always provided plenty of rule books and related playing accessories - an odd assortment of polyhedral dice in particular - to aid

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[1] John Eric Holmes, *Fantasy role playing games* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1981), p. 46.

[2] John Eric Holmes, "Confessions of a dungeon master", *Psychology Today* 14.6(1980), p. 84. Holmes was an author and promoter of fantasy role-playing games, particularly *Dungeons and Dragons*.

[3] Holmes, *Fantasy role playing games*, pp. 16-17; Holmes, "Confessions of a dungeon master", p. 87.

in the generation of imaginary characters, gameplay, and, most controversially, imaginary combat.[4]   During combat, depending upon the particular capabilities of the players' characters and the imaginary beings controlled by the Dungeon Master, a vast array of deadly magical spells and devices may be utilised in addition to more mundane and historical offensive weapons.   As this game contains a strong, heroic emphasis and as heroism has traditionally been defined in martial terms, combat is an integral part of the game, even if it does take place only in the minds of the participants.   Successful fantasy role-playing gamers use considerable amounts of their imagination and creativity to overcome the challenges presented to their imaginary characters by the Dungeon Master.

Role-playing is a concept borrowed from the discipline of psychology.   Various clients of psychologists throughout the past century have been instructed to role play as it has proven to be an effective technique in many cases to uncover unresolved tensions and other personality disorders.[5]   Often, the psychologist, or an assistant, takes the equivalent part of the Dungeon Master by presenting an imaginary situation - based on the real world - to clients, and subsequently responding to the ways in which the clients react to that situation.[6]   Some professions, from aircraft pilots to teachers, also use role-playing, but in training programmes rather than as aids to resolve psychological problems.[7]   Psychological role-playing concepts were combined with the martial medieval imagery of tabletop wargames, and magical situations from fantasy literature and mythology, to produce fantasy role-playing games as we understand them today.[8]

Computer games, while similar to fantasy role-playing games in many respects, are generally solitary pursuits.   The typical computer game involves the player sitting

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[4] Holmes, "Confessions of a dungeon master", p. 94.

[5] M. S. Bloombaum, "Role playing", *Encyclopedia of psychology* 2nd edn., vol. 3, ed. Raymond J. Corsini (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), pp. 326-27.

[6] A. S. Bellack, "Role-play tests", *Encyclopedia of psychology* 2nd edn., vol. 3, ed. Raymond J. Corsini (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), p. 327.

[7] Ken Mercer, "Dungeons, dragons and teacher development", *New Education* 6(1984), p. 107.

[8] Holmes, *Fantasy role playing games*, p. 63.

down in front of a personal computer and trying to overcome problems presented within an imaginary world, or partial imitation of the real world, by an entertainment software program. These problems – at least those that tend to cause censorship controversies – tend to revolve around combat that takes place on screen and / or situations in which the game character controlled by the player encounters a situation that somehow involves sexual activity. Successful computer games players use their intelligence and mastery over the game's rules and controls to overcome the challenges presented by the computer program.

Similar entertainment forms that involve the player connecting some sort of console, into which cartridges or compact discs may be inserted, to a television set are known as video games, but these are not considered here as censorship controversies have heavily concentrated upon computer games. Computer games tend to contain more complex storylines and often display higher quality visual output than video games, so they are open to greater degrees of realism. Computer games are also harder to set up than video games and require much more complex and expensive equipment - other factors which tend to ensure their greater appeal to big-spending and highly computer literate late teenagers and young adults as opposed to young children. These older gamers tend to prefer and receive more potentially controversial material than their younger gaming colleagues, so it comes as no surprise to learn that computer games have attracted the overwhelming majority of electronic games related censorship controversies. Although usually a solitary activity, some computer games are played over various types of computer networks, and may be discussed and often downloaded on the Internet, thereby ensuring that game content may be widely experienced.

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Pressing need for a study of the issues raised above was suggested through the author's personal prior experiences with the censorship of fantasy role-playing games and computer games. At one point, he had his fantasy role-playing game adventure story rejected because it contained references to controversial supernatural creatures that were no longer part of the official *Dungeons and Dragons* game as the result of intense public pressure on the games company concerned. Later, a computer game,

Phantasmagoria, he had been much anticipating was banned for sale to everyone in Australia because it contains material the Government censors deem unsuitable for minors to see or play. Concerned over these setbacks to his entertainment plans, the author informally researched the censorship of both types of games intensively, determined to get to the root of the problem and thus banish much frustration through an understanding of exactly what was happening and the reasons, especially historical, behind such developments. He found that no prior study had been taken at a scholarly historical level that placed fantasy role-playing games and computer games together in an historical context of entertainment censorship to analyse how and why these products were censored. In particular, the pre-existing literature's description and analysis of games censorship in Australia is quite deficient. This thesis will go a long way to correct such shortcomings.

Most classic examples of existing literature on censorship in Australia concentrate upon the censorship of free speech, literature, or the censorship of film. The need for freer speech and written expression in a political sense was recognised as far back as 1944 with Brian Penton's book *Think or be Damned*.[9] Frank Hardy wrote, in 1961, of the harsh injustices he personally encountered as a result of falling foul of Australia's harsh libel laws following the publication of his novel *Power Without Glory*.[10] Writers during the 1970s continued these themes with works such as Keith Dunstan's *Wowsers* (1974) where "killjoy" Victorian prudery was mentioned as the key reason for the banning of numerous novels mainly on sexual grounds.[11] That same year, Peter Coleman suggested that the campaign against Government censorship of literature was almost over, but guard needed to be raised over a possible imminent anti-libertarian backlash against the emerging new freedoms.[12] Writers in the 1990s tended to note that the backlash had indeed arrived, and that writing may now be censored in new and emerging media as well.[13] This concept of the rebirth of

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[9] Brian Penton, *Think or be damned* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1944), pp. 89-92.

[10] Frank Hardy, *The hard way: the story behind* Power Without Glory (Sydney: Australiasian Book Society, 1961), pp. 7-9.

[11] Keith Dunstan, *Wowsers* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974), pp. 7, 190-91, 200-01, 206-09.

[12] Peter Coleman, *Obscenity, blasphemy, sedition: 100 years of censorship in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974), pp. 131-34.

Australia's traditionally harsh censorship regime and the possible reasons for such re-emergence will be revisited in upcoming chapters, especially chapter three.

Film censorship has received particularly close attention in pre-existing discussions of censorship in Australia. John Bennett wrote of serious concerns over perceived injustices, along with ideas for remedying such injustices, in his 1968 work *Freedom of Expression in Australia*.[14] Eric Williams essentially supported Bennett's ideas, but added that film has had a particularly hard time with the authorities in Australia because it has long been regarded as just entertainment for the masses, rather than art - thus it is looked upon as suspicious, foreign, and source for probable widespread corruption of morals.[15] Later monographs from the 1970s detailed the past and present workings of Australia's film censorship system in greater depth, the improvements that were to be or had just been made to it, and compared it to the film censorship systems of similar nations, most notably the United States of America. These publications included the rewritten edition of Enid Campbell and Harry Whitmore's *Freedom in Australia*, and Ina Bertrand's comprehensive work *Film Censorship in Australia*.[16] Although film censorship is not a primary concern of this thesis, it will be mentioned later, particularly to set a context for Australian computer games censorship.

Foreign writings regarding film censorship are valuable for comparative studies. Such contrasts with the Australian experience of censorship, particularly games censorship, will be made in later chapters. Sometimes, as in the example of *In the Public Good? Censorship in New Zealand*, overseas works go even further and launch into detailed and insightful discussions regarding the nature of censorship itself.[17]

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[13] Michael Pollak, *Sense and censorship: commentaries on censorship violence in Australia* (Balgowlah, NSW: Reed Books, 1990), pp. 384-85; Robert Pullan, *Guilty secrets: free speech and defamation in Australia* (Glebe, NSW: Pascal Press, 1994), pp. xi, 211.

[14] John Bennett, *Freedom of expression in Australia* (Sydney: Civil Liberties, 1968), pp. 10-17.

[15] Eric Williams, "Cultural despotism – film censorship", *Australia's censorship crisis*, eds. Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1970), pp. 52-76, but especially p. 53.

[16] Enid Campbell and Harry Whitmore, *Freedom in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1973), pp. 289-95; Ina Bertrand, *Film censorship in Australia* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1978), see especially pp. ix-xi, 185-99.

Others illuminate the distinctive features of their nation's film censorship system and, when British, inform the Australian reader of the ancestry of our own censorship system.[18]   Few locally available monographs illuminate film censorship in the United States, but *The Dame in the Kimono* by Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons does a detailed job explaining the origins and conduct of the Hays Production Code which once set detailed standards as to the depiction of many types of controversial material in American film.[19]

The foreign literature is also quite useful in censorship discussions as a whole as it often proposes reasons as to why censorship arises from time to time and even why it tends to surround certain issues, practices, and groups of people.   A sociological approach often helps here as censorship is a phenomenon that arises from groups of people with the aim of supposedly ensuring the increased moral coherence of that group of people, no matter how misguided such attempts might be.   Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* is a well-known work in this area and has been positively commented upon numerous times since its original publication back in 1972.[20]   Less well known, but hardly less important, is the similar work by Jeffrey S. Victor - *Satanic Panic* - where the term "moral crisis" is mentioned instead of "moral panic".[21]   Both are complementary, however, and both can be readily applied to the games censorship phenomenon wherever it occurs.   Chapter one contains further information on these topics.

Serious limitations are contained within the existing literature, no matter how useful it may seem at first.   There is no known scholarly work on the censorship, especially the

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[17] Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the public good? Censorship in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, NZ: The Dunmore Press, 1998), pp. 12-19.

[18] John Trevelyan, *What the censor saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), pp. 23-25; Mark Kermode, "Horror: on the edge of taste", *Film and censorship*, ed. Ruth Petrie (London: Cassell, 1997), pp. 155-60.

[19] Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The dame in the kimono: Hollywood, censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), pp. 270-79, 283-92.

[20] Stanley Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics* (London: Mac Gibbon and Kee, 1972).

[21] Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic panic: the creation of a contemporary legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), pp. 181-94.

history of censorship, of fantasy role-playing games or computer games. Existing references to these controversies are usually confined to a short mention as part of larger journal articles or book chapters. There does not appear to have been a willingness among local or foreign writers of the past couple of decades to concern themselves much with games censorship. For mentions of computer games censorship, the best sources of information from the Australian perspective are still Government reports, legislation, and Hansard transcripts. No professional historian has so far concerned himself or herself with placing relatively recent fantasy role-playing and computer games censorship controversies into any sort of historical context or country comparative perspective, nor has anyone traced the development of both types of censorship and seriously attempted to propose the reasons why such censorship has occurred. This thesis attempts to rectify such concerns over its three central chapters. Censorship has been an ongoing concern among those who desire freedom of expression for thousands of years. As each new form of entertainment arises, censorious actions against them need to be properly analysed, particularly at an historical level, so that such events are not seen or treated in isolation, but rather as recurring processes during times of societal change and transition.

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Chapter one of this thesis critically and historically examines the concept of censorship in itself. It asks: What exactly is censorship? Over what issues does censorship tend to arise? Why are entertainment products of particular concern to pro-censorship advocates? What is a moral panic? What is a moral crisis? How do these crises in morality lead to censorship? What are protectionist movements in censorship? From what areas of society do pressures for increased censorship tend to arise? With such a distinct critical history of censorship developed, the framework is established for the following two chapters, each of which deals with the censorship of a particular type of gaming product.

Chapter two deals with the censorship of fantasy role-playing games. It asks: What types of fantasy role-playing game content have been the focuses of censorship controversies? Why does this controversial content exist? Why and among whom has such content caused concern? Is the concern over content justified? What has

been the result of such controversies, and why? Why have the majority of controversies taken place in the US? How can the different reactions of Americans and Australians to this issue be explained? Why did concern over these games gradually begin to die out?

Chapter three deals with many similar questions surrounding computer games. It asks: What types of computer game content have been the focuses of censorship controversies? Why does this controversial content exist? Why and among whom has this content caused concern? Is the concern over content justified? What has been the result of such controversies and why? How is computer games censorship a reflection of earlier fantasy role-playing game censorship? How is computer games censorship linked to film and Internet censorship? Why have the most prominent controversies regarding computer games taken place here in Australia? How can the different reactions of Australians and Americans to these same products be explained? Why has concern over computer games in Australia still not died out?

In particular, chapters two and three make extensive use of primary sources collected by the author for both fantasy role-playing games and computer games. These are often the actual gaming products themselves that are essential for any accurate examination of the controversies that surround them. The author does not intend to fall into the ready-made trap for those that believe themselves to be authorities on censorship by discussing something with which he has had no actual experience.

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With these remarks by way of introduction, the foundations for the first chapter have been laid. What exactly is censorship anyway, and how does it tend to operate? It is only by answering this question that a proper analysis of actual censorship movements can be made in the succeeding chapters.

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CHAPTER 1

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF CENSORSHIP

What exactly is censorship? From a strictly subjective perspective of the author who readily acknowledged his anti-censorship inclinations arising from being adversely affected by pro-censorship movements in his own life, it was once defined as: "A push (whether successful or not) by one group of people to impose their values on another group of people by seeking to limit or stop their access to one or more categories of fiction." While this definition may have been adequate to clarify the author's former emotional views, it is intellectually inadequate to explain the true depths and complexities of the mechanics of censorship. A more objective and detailed elucidation of censorship needs to be discovered before fantasy role-playing games and computer games controversies can be examined in a proper scholarly fashion in chapters two and three respectively.

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Watson and Shuker believe that "censorship occurs whenever particular words, images, sounds, and ideas are suppressed or muted".[1] They add that muting may be the result of some form of government legislation or some sort of industry code of practice.[2] Anti-censorship advocate Wendy Bacon agrees that censorship means suppression and adds that all such suppression is bad.[3] Her censorship debate rival, Peter Coleman, refutes these assumptions and takes a censure approach, claiming that censorship is a legitimate technique to publicly label material that offends against community standards whether for violence, sadism, or inhumanity.[4] But anti-censorship advocates can use references to violence too in saying, as do Pullan and Pollak, that censorship battles are fights - fights over power - to the extent that it is

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[1] Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the public good? Censorship in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, NZ: The Dunmore Press, 1998), p .12.

[2] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?* , p. 12.

[3] Wendy Bacon and Peter Coleman, *Censorship: Wendy Bacon versus Peter Coleman*, ed. Ann Turner (South Yarra, Vic.: Heineman Educational Australia, 1975), p. 5.

[4] Bacon and Coleman, *Censorship*, p. 5.

actually violence to prevent someone from freely expressing their deeply held convictions.[5]   After all, one's beliefs - one's convictions, need not necessarily promote violence, sadism, or inhumanity.   They may simply be in disagreement with the views of one or more other people.   Fundamentally, though, censorship involves restrictions placed upon certain entertainment items for the alleged protection of society.

Censorship is a very old phenomenon.   The original "censors" were in fact magistrates whose duties were, in part, to watch over the public morals of the ancient Romans.[6]   During the sixteenth century in England, censorship was applied to the emerging popular entertainment form of stage plays in order that they would not subvert the fundamental power structures of society.[7]   A similar lack of trust of the general population that gave rise to increased censorship can easily be seen in Victorian times where the rise of literacy, and, near the end of that period, the rise of movie houses, saw rapid moves to ensure people, particularly commoners, were not made risks to society as a result of what they read or saw.[8]   In the modern era, censorship continues in many areas of popular entertainment, from role-playing games, to computer games, to the Internet.   What is clear is that censorship has been with humanity for a long time, and looks to be in no hurry to disappear from view.

Although the mere fact of the existence of censorship never changes, its focus of attack does change according to prevailing concerns among those who provide the authority behind the censoring.   In a list of films banned in Australia from the 1920s through to the 1960s, the very brief reasons provided are proof enough of how much attitudes have changed over the past few decades.   For example, there are records of bans on the grounds of: "criticism of Germany", "pacifism", "horror" (for the classic *Frankenstein* no less), "Communism", "criticism of the treatment of Aborigines",

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[5] Robert Pullan, *Guilty secrets: free speech and defamation in Australia* (Glebe, NSW: Pascal Press, 1994), pp. x-xi; Michael Pollak, *Sense and censorship: commentaries on censorship violence in Australia* (Balgowlah, NSW: Reed Books, 1990), p. 7.

[6] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?* , p. 12.

[7] John Trevelyan, *What the censor saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), p. 23.

[8] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?* , p. 12.

"blasphemy", "propaganda", and even "against the public interest" (in films which may have even remotely portrayed the Royal Family in a negative light).[9] In the US, the Hays Production Code, adopted for some years by all reputable movie industry professional organizations starting from the 1930s, disallowed depictions of (among many other things): sexual relationships between white and black people, revenge "in modern times" (Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was permitted), and ministers of religion in comic or villainous roles.[10] The restrictions in both countries reflected the desire among censorship authorities for the maintenance of a world where conservative white middle-class views were considered mainstream and any and all minority social "problems" could be ignored so as not to upset the delicate order of the majority.[11]

Concerns over the content of films led to the formation of formal film classification bodies in most Western countries. Films watched by industry or government trained censors receive classifications according to predetermined criteria. Those that exceeded such criteria are often prohibited from public screening and / or sale, while those within the criteria are generally provided with a rating according to the suitable age group for the audience. If a film distributor wants a lower rating for their film, cuts can be made, with or without the specific recommendations of those who do the classifying. Over the years, the ratings categories tend to change as concern over film content varies.[12]

In the UK and the USA, industry bodies are responsible for film classification – the British Board of Film Classification, and the Motion Pictures Association of America respectively.[13] Only in the United States, however, are unclassified films allowed to be shown or sold in some places – usually in locations not normally frequented by the

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[9] Eric Williams, "Cultural despotism – film censorship", *Australia's censorship crisis*, eds. Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1970), pp. 70-72.

[10] Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The dame in the kimono: Hollywood, censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), pp. 284-85.

[11] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?*, p. 13.

[12] Trevelyan, *What the censor saw*, p. 53.

[13] Mark Kermode, "Horror: on the edge of taste", *Film and censorship*, ed. Ruth Petrie (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 155.

general public.[14]　The UK, like Australia, prohibits unclassified films from being screened in public or sold.[15]　In Australia, classification is handled by a Government agency, part of the Attorney General's Department – the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC).　The OFLC, as will be seen later in chapter three, also classifies all computer games sold in Australia, although its authority over literature has never extended into the realm of fantasy role-playing games as literature censorship these days apparently tends to concentrate upon what is commonly termed erotica or pornography.　Not all censorship is performed directly by, or with the support of, government bodies, although, as particularly chapter three will show, governments can often be influenced by pro-censorship lobby groups to enact special legislation to further the aims of these groups.

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The concepts "moral panic" and "moral crisis" readily explain why censorship enjoys a periodic resurgence.　Each will now be detailed in turn and will form the basis of analysis of the two main areas of censorship that are the focus of this thesis.　Moral panic arises during times of peak concern over the influences of new media on youthful consumers.[16]　Traditional boundaries become stretched, ambiguities over behaviour arise, and "normal" values are increasingly placed under the spotlight.[17]　A backlash by traditional "experts" launched in an effort to reassert older values only partly succeeds as the rules of society are further developed and clarified.[18] "Community concern" is usually raised and bolstered by the mass media and fuelled by traditional pillars of society such as the clergy and politicians.[19]

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[14] Leff and Simmons, *The dame in the kimono*, p. 278.

[15] Trevelyan, *What the censor saw*, p. 240.

[16] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?*, p. 13.

[17] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?*, p. 14.

[18] Stanley Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics* (London: Mac Gibbon and Kee, 1972), p. 9.

[19] Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics*, pp. 9-10.

Typically, a moral panic begins with an initial problem for which a group marginalised by mainstream society attempts a solution.[20]   Initial societal reaction that involves various elements of misperception becomes amplified by media exploitation.[21]   Such amplification involves sensationalism and exaggeration along with providing a ready mouthpiece for all those who affirm the dominant morality of society.[22]   Calls for harsher crackdowns amidst "public outcry" tend to follow, but this tends to lead only to increased deviance by members of the marginalised group that in turn tends to confirm the negative stereotypes held of them by their attempted or successful suppressors.[23]   The role of the traditional mainstream media cannot be downplayed here, as it is they who (at least indirectly) tend to actually encourage deviant behaviour by widely releasing details of "incidents", and exaggerating their relevance and effects – placing them in the context of cultural fears and anxieties.[24] Thus, in attempting to deal with deviance in society, society itself tends to encourage it and makes it unlikely to ever disappear completely.

Moral panics tend to be induced by periods of moral crisis. In short, a moral crisis is the perception of a rapid decline in traditional moral values clashing with partial acceptance of new values.[25]   People often want to have things both ways and often end up making poor decisions and crude compromises that truly satisfy no one. A moral crisis worsens with widespread disruption and stress in family relationships. For example, increasingly broken and strained marital bonds have led to generally increased levels of stress among the general community, and, in particular, a widespread perception of increased difficulties in coping with life as a child today.[26] In spite of these factors, the loving two parent family is still the much sought after

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[20] Paul Jones, "Moral panic: the legacy of Stan Cohen and Stuart Hill", *Media International Australia* 85(1997), p. 7.

[21] Jones, "Moral panic", p. 7.

[22] Jones, "Moral panic", p. 7.

[23] Jones, "Moral panic", p. 7.

[24] Peter Horsfield, "Moral panic or moral action? The appropriation of moral panics in the exercise of social control", *Media International Australia* 85(1997), p. 32.

[25] Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic panic: the creation of a contemporary legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), pp. 181-84.

[26] Victor, *Satanic panic*, pp. 182-84.

ideal, and, when people are not able to realise this ideal, great amounts of anxiety tend to be produced.[27]

A widespread perception of the moral decline in society can readily exacerbate any moral crisis. Whether or not such a decline is actually taking place is largely irrelevant. It is the perception of a decline, in short, a possible myth, that is most important.[28] For example, in the US, at the end of the 1980s, various surveys found that up to three quarters of the population felt that moral standards among their fellow citizens had declined over the past few years.[29] Victor sees a major cause of this development of negative perceptions in the "widening gap between the ideal and the real".[30] In other words, "The American Dream" is compared to what most people actually experience. There is a perceived rise in lying and dishonesty.[31] Many people no longer feel very comfortable with traditional ideals that stress duty towards others and the community over individual satisfaction.[32] While they may see the value of such ideas, they want compromise with newer values, but often have their moderate views shouted down by extremists on both sides.[33] A changing society, especially one in the late twentieth century, a century which has seen perhaps more change of all types than any other century in history, is bound to undergo plenty of stresses which lead to yearnings for simpler times, even if it is now no longer possible to re-embrace the past as most people's desires are not truly aimed towards such a goal. In some cases, both movements for change and movements for reversion to the past seek swiftly to enthusiastically and widely entrench their particular values. The unfortunate by-products of these social movements are searches for scapegoats and the rise of moral crusades that seek to stop such "evils". The end result is censorship.

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[27] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 184.

[28] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 187.

[29] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 187.

[30] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 188.

[31] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 190.

[32] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 191.

[33] Victor, *Satanic panic*, pp. 192-93.

A moral crusade is, in fact, part of a moral panic. Both seek to identify and stigmatise deviants from the promoted social order.[34] Techniques used by the crusaders are varied, but most of these people tend to use: emotionally powerful atrocity stories backed up by anecdotal evidence, testimonials by actual witnesses to whatever is being crusaded against, negative stereotypes, and estimates as to the extent of the perceived problem.[35] Scapegoats are sought and scapegoats are found in order to lead to a perfect world from the point of view of the crusaders.

Moral crusaders seek censorship and those who seek censorship are often moral crusaders. These people tend to fall readily into a couple of occasionally overlapping recognisable types. Perhaps the most common type of crusader is the religious fundamentalist, especially, in Western societies, the Christian fundamentalist. These people believe themselves to be fighting against "sinful" forces that threaten to undermine traditional God-given morality that forms the basis of society.[36] In such a context, the work of Satan tends to lurk among perceived deviance.[37]

The other major type is the protectionist who seeks to guard a group of people they perceive as being vulnerable from the adverse effects of another group and its practices. Most often, those deemed in urgent need of protection are women and children.[38] Protectionists are frequently more successful than their fundamentalist counterparts in their endeavours as protectionist views tend to influence larger numbers of people, most of whom are not overly religious, and they often frame their arguments in secular terms that law-making politicians readily understand.[39] Sometimes, movements spearheaded by women aim to protect children, some say, out

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[34] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 209.

[35] Victor, *Satanic panic*, pp. 212-17.

[36] Victor, *Satanic panic,* p. 219.

[37] Victor, *Satanic panic,* p. 219.

[38] Victor, *Satanic panic,* p. 222; Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?*, p. 12. The term "protectionist" is used throughout this thesis in relation to various censorship controversies alone – it is never applied to issues of economics or commerce. Also note that protectionist movements ultimately directed towards women via children need not involve any element of feminism, nor be necessarily supported by most women.

[39] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?*, p. 12.

of parental guilt over the aforementioned value conflict in most Western societies where the pressures to fulfil one's self are in hard, stressful competition with pressures to look after others such as one's own children.[40] People tend to hate the qualities of others that they hate most about themselves. As such, games that young people tend to play are deemed as harmful because "evil mainly harms children" according to the unconsciously projected reasoning of parents who regret the ways in which they mistreat or neglect their children.[41]

Both fundamentalists and protectionists tend to concentrate their efforts into promoting the censorship of entertainment products because they see such products as being of primary appeal to the young, or at least most likely to corrupt the young if they fall into their hands.[42] The theme of wariness over youth entertainment has been around at least since the emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s.[43] Youth were emerging as a distinct economic and social grouping in their own right and were asserting their unique identity over the extensive moral outrage of their worried parents.[44] Later, the "problems" of fantasy role-playing games and computer games emerged and rock related protests declined in favour of these new concerns. The focus of attention may have changed over the years, but many of the deep underlying issues that lead to censorship have most certainly not.

Calls for censorship do not arise from any one notable section of the adult population, nor do they arise from any one major ideology. They certainly do not derive from large amounts of credible, scientific evidence. Rather, they come from those who either feel threatened by the changing morality of society, or the backlash against some of the changes. Rapid changes in society have taken place throughout the twentieth century, but never as much as in its later decades. This is why censorship is

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[40] Victor, *Satanic panic,* p. 223.

[41] Victor, *Satanic panic,* p. 205.

[42] Watson and Shuker, *In the public good?*, pp. 12-13.

[43] Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-rock: the opposition to rock 'n' roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 3. Any researcher particularly interested in rock and roll, rock and roll censorship, and / or 1950s and 1960s conservatism will find this monograph an invaluable resource.

[44] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*, p. 8.

enjoying a resurgence and can be analysed using the now familiar patterns of the moral panic and the moral crisis. It is hoped that the guidelines provided above will assist the reader in making proper sense of the forthcoming analysis of fantasy role-playing games and of computer games.

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While it is certainly true that some concern over more traditional types of entertainment media – film and music of primary appeal to youth – remains and will likely always remain, genuine cutting-edge developments in entertainment censorship over the past couple of decades have included both fantasy role-playing and computer games as prominent central issues. Controversial games have received truly scant attention by censorship historians over that period, an omission this thesis will now take extensive steps to rectify. These developments are too important to ignore as they show that the underlying causes of censorship remain while their focuses move into different areas. As illustrations of this concept, role-playing games controversies will be analysed in the next chapter, followed by computer games controversies in chapter three.

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CHAPTER 2

FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES CONTROVERSIES

Dungeons and Dragons is the most popular fantasy role-playing game of all time. Conversely, it has also been the most controversial. Over much of the quarter century since the publication of its first rulebook, it has endured the fear and suspicion of pro-censorship fundamentalists and protectionists alike. In many cases, the fundamentalists have also been protectionists in an effort to broaden the appeal of their protests. The game's publishers and its many players alike have felt the force of these groups, but, today, it still manages to retain a reasonable degree of largely non-controversial popularity, particularly among youth worldwide. *Dungeons and Dragons* has always been most popular in its birthplace, the USA, and, as such, and due to particular features of that country's population, has always been most controversial there. This chapter investigates the issues and people behind the controversies in an endeavour to place the censorship and attempted censorship of this form of gaming into some sort of historical context.

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The precise *Dungeons and Dragons* content that has caused controversy is considerable and requires detailed examination. It ranges from depictions of demons (henceforth used as a collective term that also incorporates devils and similar supernatural beings for the sake of simplicity unless otherwise indicated) in many of the game's rulebooks, and, by association, alleged incitement into the "evil" practices of Satanism and the occult, to fears that participating in the game may lead to murder and suicide. In a similar way, rock and roll music and lyrics, also popular among the young, have been attacked for decades.[1] No doubt, rock censorship attempts paved the way well for censorship attempts targeting fantasy role-playing games.

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[1] Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-rock: the opposition to rock 'n' roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), pp. 3, 48-49, 78.

A careful inspection of the primary sources reveals the extent of the role of demons and similar creatures in the *Dungeons and Dragons* game. Mentions are most frequent and prominent throughout the First Edition (1977-1989), particularly at the beginning of that period as opposition to the game was forming. For most of its publication life, the Second Edition (1989-2000), either omitted all references to such beings or changed their form in some way; whereas the closing products of the Second Edition and the opening products of the Third Edition (2000-?) began to reinstate demons as a notable part of the game.[2]

Fundamental to the participation of every player in the *Dungeons and Dragons* game is the *Player's Handbook*. The First Edition version of this "special reference work" initially makes mention of demons in connection with descriptions of the various character classes players may choose to use for their characters in the game.[3] Clerics (fighting priests) may eventually gain the ability to actually command demons at high levels of authority; paladins (holy warriors) rapidly gain special magical powers to combat these foes; and magic-users (wizards) can command such beings into service.[4] Later, the largest section in that book, the (magic) "Spell Explanations", details the effects of (but not the words to) many incantations the players' spell using characters can cast, some of which can affect demons either for combat purposes, or for purposes of control such as binding into service.[5] Examples of the titles of such spells include: *cacodemon*, *spiritwrack*, *trap the soul*, *binding*, and *gate*.[6] At the back of the book lie very brief descriptions of alternate worlds inhabited by supernatural creatures such as demons.[7] Demons were an integral part of the First Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons* and no player could ignore their existence in the fantasy milieu of the game.

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[2] There has never been any direct compulsion to stop playing a particular edition after a new edition has been released, although official material is published only for the current edition. At any one time, gaming sessions of older editions are taking place among some fantasy role-playing groups. The vast majority of players, however, adopt new editions quickly and without much complaint.

[3] Gary Gygax, *Players* [sic] *handbook* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1978), p. 1.

[4] Gygax, *Players handbook*, pp. 20-25.

[5] Gygax, *Players handbook*, pp. 43-100.

[6] Gygax, *Players handbook*, p. 42.

[7] Gygax, *Players handbook*, pp. 120-21.

Also important to every gaming group is the manual for the Dungeon Master, the co-ordinator of each gaming session.   The First Edition *Dungeon Masters* [sic] *Guide* contains further commentaries on the role of demons in the game.   A section on aerial combat mentions, in meticulous detail, techniques specific types of demons use to slay likewise airborne opponents.[8]   Further spell explanations that did not belong in the *Players Handbook* depict diagrams of a magic circle, pentagram, and a thaumaturgic triangle – all of which have traditionally been associated with the practice of magic (and, by fundamentalist thought association, Satanism) in the real world.[9]   Perhaps the ultimate offence to the tastes of those who stridently protested against the inclusion of demons in the game was an appendix to the book that enabled the random generation of demon appearances and combat capabilities according to the results of a few dice rolls against a series of tables.[10]   For example, the head of such a creature might be found to be bat-like, crocodilian, or snake-like; its overall visage gibbering – drooling, rotting, or skeletal; and its tail barbed or stingered.[11]   However, many types of demons had been already pre-created for First Edition players.   The various monster manuals are treasure troves of such information.

All three First Edition books that contain details of monsters *Dungeons and Dragons* players may fight in imaginary battles, namely, the *Monster Manual*, *Monster Manual II*, and the *Fiend Folio*, have specific sections that depict and discuss demons at length.   Most notoriously, the *Monster Manual* details, and presents sketches of, several species of the hierarchies of both devils and demons.[12]   Some mention is made of these beings as individuals, their names based on actual fearsome evil beings from pagan and Christian mythology, for example Orcus, Asmodeus, and Baalzebul.[13] *Monster Manual II* introduced an expanded demonic universe as it listed further mythology   based   individual   devils   and   demons   such   as   Mammon   and

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[8] Gary Gygax, *Dungeon masters guide* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1979), pp. 50-53.

[9] Gygax, *Dungeon masters guide*, p. 44.

[10] Gygax, *Dungeon masters guide*, pp. 194-95.

[11] Gygax, *Dungeon masters guide*, p. 194.

[12] Gary Gygax, *Monster manual* 4th edn. (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1979), pp. 16-23.

[13] Gygax, *Monster manual*, pp. 17, 20-21.

Mephistopheles, as well as species types of each, and further demonic being categories such as demodand and the daemon.[14] Fortunately, for those who objected to the inclusion of such beings into the game, the *Fiend Folio* added very little to the repository of information on demons.[15]   Furthermore, every single First Edition monster book details the various methods by which the players' characters may command demons to serve them.[16]   While no one forced any gaming group to use these imaginary creatures in their gaming sessions, demons were readily available for use if an adventure required them to be present.

Two other First Edition rulebooks have caused concern over the issue of demons and related matters. *Legends and Lore* presents lists, descriptions, and depictions of gods, heroes, and other divine and semi-divine beings from historical mythologies worldwide with the aim of allowing for their inclusion in *Dungeons and Dragons* gaming sessions.   Many such mythologies include beings with stereotypical Satanic desires such as demanding child sacrifices and requiring the lives or souls of good creatures.[17]   Lastly, one of the final books of the First Edition, the *Manual of the Planes*, details in some depth the actual home "worlds" (such as the Nine Hells, the Abyss, Gehenna, and Pandemonium) of demons and similar creatures and how the societies of such beings are constructed.[18]   With entire fantasy worlds populated with complex varieties and societies of demons, most of whom were potentially controllable or servable by the players' characters, such creatures were prominent parts of the First Edition of the *Dungeons and Dragons* fantasy role-playing game and led to maintained accusations of Satanism and encouragement of the occult against the participants.

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[14] Gary Gygax, *Monster manual II* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1983), pp. 27-49.

[15] *Fiend folio: tome of creatures malevolent and benign*, ed. Don Turnbull (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1981), pp. 24-26.

[16] See Gygax, *Monster manual*, pp. 16, 20 for examples.

[17] James Ward and Robert Kuntz, *Legends and lore* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1984), pp. 35-36, 43, 61, 71, 105.

[18] Jeff Grubb, *Manual of the planes* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1987), pp. 74-84, 99-103, 107-12.

While protests against the inclusion of demons and similar references to the occult were the most initially visible manifestations of concern over the game, there have also been controversies over the very concept of fantasy role-playing in itself in that it may lead susceptible players into disassociating themselves from reality, perhaps even to the point of murder and suicide in the real world. Combined with these latter concerns is often the standard fear of involvement with the occult. Evidence of both these concerns is most readily found with reference to the actual publications of the game's opponents. United States based opposition to *Dungeons and Dragons* that sought its partial or complete ban will be discussed first, followed by Australian reactions that trailed the initial controversies in the USA.

Perhaps the most infamous example of pro-censorship anti-*Dungeons and Dragons* literature from the US, clearly intended to horrify its readers into taking action against the game by alleging associated atrocity stories, is the comic book *Dark Dungeons* released in 1984 by a Christian fundamentalist group known as Chick Publications.[19] This undeniable piece of anti-fantasy role-playing games propaganda shows the adventures of a teenage *Dungeons and Dragons* player, Debbie, from her seduction into the world of witchcraft, through to the suicide of her friend, Marcie (whose game character died during a recent gaming session), and her repentance following the advice of a saintly looking Christian minister and his enthusiastic witchcraft hunting friend.[20] According to *Dark Dungeons*, *Dungeons and Dragons* playing is perfect training for "real" witchcraft and other occult powers; players are so weak-willed and identify with the misfortunes experienced by their game characters so much, that they are easily seduced by evil and distorted depressive thoughts to the point of suicide; and the rulebooks of the game are only fit to be burnt in bonfires conducted by fundamentalist Christian ministers and similar functionaries.[21] To support its case, some comic panels contain Biblical references and quotes.[22]

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[19] Jack T. Chick, *Dark dungeons* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1984), pp. 1-24. [comic book] About palm-sized.

[20] Chick, *Dark dungeons*, pp. 1-24.

[21] Chick, *Dark dungeons*, particularly pp. 3, 5, 10-12, 16-22.

[22] Chick, *Dark dungeons*, pp. 19, 21, 23.

Less sensational 1980s publications by US Christian fundamentalist groups against the *Dungeons and Dragons* game, calling for its ban, include the unpaginated but detailed brochure "Dungeons and Dragons: *only a game?*" released by the Pro Family Forum.[23]   Its main worry is that most of the game's youthful players cannot adequately distinguish the "distorted" occult fantasy of the game from reality, and, as such, need protection from it.[24]   The Forum is concerned that, as more young people buy *Dungeons and Dragons* products, their souls will turn against the Christian God, and those who promote such Satanism and a long list of similar "perversions" will simply profit from such "wickedness".[25]   To bolster their arguments they provide dozens of out-of-context quotations from the game's First Edition rulebooks, all of which emphasise the supposedly occult and non-Christian aspects of the game and some of the evil practices performed by the fantasy creatures residing in the imaginary *Dungeons and Dragons* worlds.[26]   The alarm evident in the brochure is such that it places all adults who work with youth in any capacity - secular or religious - on alert as it claims that fantasy role-playing games are highly prolific and pervasive among the young and pose a severe threat to their well being.[27]

American Christian fundamentalist opposition to the *Dungeons and Dragons* game with the aim of preventing it from "corrupting" the souls of the young people who play it eventually culminated in the publication of a book outlining their concerns. Outwardly more professional than the literature of the 1980s, *The Truth about Dungeons and Dragons* is in fact no less concerned with Satanist, occult, and alleged reality distortion effects of playing the game than are its predecessors. In the words of the author as early as chapter one, "We must recognise the dangers of our children spending so much time playing this game. It often leads to a distortion of reality, as

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[23] Pro Family Forum, Dungeons and Dragons*: only a game?* (Fort Worth: Pro Family Forum, 1982). [brochure]

[24] Pro Family Forum, Dungeons and Dragons*: only a game?*

[25] Pro Family Forum, Dungeons and Dragons*: only a game?*

[26] Pro Family Forum, Dungeons and Dragons*: only a game?*

[27] Pro Family Forum, Dungeons and Dragons*: only a game?*

well as filling the child's mind with images of the occult."[28]   The "fact" that the fantasy world experienced in the game is shared and is often more exciting than real life, leading the players to social withdrawal, hostility, and paranoia is considered highly disturbing by the author.[29]   Like earlier publications against *Dungeons and Dragons*, this book is filled with Biblical quotes that speak out against many of the practices encouraged in even the least controversial gaming sessions, such as the casting of magical spells and worship of pretend deities by the players' characters.[30] The author believes that the game sets itself up as an often-evil alternative to the one "true" religion, Christianity, and thus can readily lead the young astray.[31]   Unlike many earlier publications, however, this book details various actual incidents of murder and suicide where some thought *Dungeons and Dragons* to be a contributing factor.[32]

Around the same time the above-mentioned and similar pro-censorship fundamentalist publications were being widely circulated, specific individuals emerged from the United States to publicly speak out against the *Dungeons and Dragons* game.   Perhaps the most prominent was protectionist Patricia Pulling who formed the organization, "Bothered About *Dungeons and Dragons*" (BADD), following her son's suicide in 1982.[33]   Her son had supposedly been a fan of the game and this prompted Pulling to learn what she could about it before tagging it as the source of her child's death and attacking it as Satanic and mind influencing in a series of booklets, public lectures, and media appearances across the country.[34]   She was convinced *Dungeons and Dragons* caused irreparable harm to children and was determined not to let others suffer the same fate as her son.   Occasional "expert" support came from psychiatrist Thomas Radecki who had a background in the

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[28] Joan Hake Robie, *The truth about* Dungeons and Dragons (Lancaster, PA: Starburst, 1991), p. 13.

[29] Robie, *The truth about* Dungeons and Dragons, p. 69.

[30] Robie, *The truth about* Dungeons and Dragons, pp. 25-38.

[31] Robie, *The truth about* Dungeons and Dragons, pp. 61-65, 69.

[32] Robie, *The truth about* Dungeons and Dragons, pp. 57-60.

[33] Robert D. Hicks, *In pursuit of Satan: the police and the occult* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), p. 287.

[34] Hicks, *In pursuit of Satan*, pp. 287-89.

analysis of television violence upon viewers and clearly held the debateable view that such violence does negatively influence people, particularly children.[35]   In spite of this limited intellectual assistance, Pulling was widely ridiculed by most academics and other intellectuals for her populist proofs, casual inferences, and all-embracing generalisations; but her words had considerable appeal to the general population, many of whom became negatively influenced towards the game, seeing it as the source of many of the problems of youth.[36]   Other critics of Pulling pointed out her fundamentalist Jewish beliefs, hardly dissimilar to Christian fundamentalism, and her deliberate ignorance of any evidence that might disprove some of her accusations.[37] By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the public came to treat the Satanic "threat" less seriously as associated atrocity stories became less plausible, and Dr. Radecki was struck off the medical register owing to unprofessional conduct of an undisclosed nature.[38]   Pulling died in 1997, still convinced of the worth of her cause, but she left the *Dungeons and Dragons* game more popular than ever as fantasy role-players used the challenges she posed to strengthen their own cause.[39]

Actual censorship successes against *Dungeons and Dragons* that led to its banning in certain places and institutions in the United States were sporadic and never at the hands of any Federal Government body.   In the early 1980s, following the screening of the television movie *Mazes and Monsters*, loosely based on a false but popular atrocity story of a psychotic college student who died after playing a "live action" session of *Dungeons and Dragons* amid underground steam tunnels, numerous Tennessee and Utah parents suddenly removed their children *en masse* from previously popular and uncontroversial programs for gifted school children run by dedicated fantasy role-players.[40]   An in-depth *60 Minutes* television special on

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[35] Hicks, *In pursuit of Satan*, p. 288.

[36] Hicks, *In pursuit of Satan*, p. 289.

[37] Daniel Martin and Gary Alan Fine, "Satanic cults, Satanic play: is *Dungeons and Dragons* a breeding ground for the Devil?", *The Satanism scare*, eds. James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991), p. 115.

[38] Dragon *magazine archive: 250 issues of* Dragon *magazine* (Renton, WA: TSR, 1999), #242 (December 1997), p. 120. [cd-rom product]

[39] Dragon *magazine archive,* #242 (December 1997), p. 120.

Dungeons and Dragons further increased alarm throughout the USA in 1985.[41] Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, some panicked parents banned the game in their homes and, occasionally, a school would ban it to everyone following negative media reports about it or the bad behaviour of someone who was alleged to be a player (regardless of the true source of such behaviour).[42] Police and district attorneys caught onto this trend, alleging that the game was responsible for all sorts of crime and mischief.[43] There were even acts of self-censorship where potential players were curious about the game, but put off by all the negative accusations surrounding it - Satanism in particular.[44] All reports of such censorship tend to stress that the *Dungeons and Dragons* game received plenty of negative publicity from the mainstream news media and that this likely induced and increased the negative feelings many non-players had about the game, even though any genuinely effective or wide-ranging attempt at censorship never arose.

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The makers of the *Dungeons and Dragons* game, Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), are no strangers to recognising and outlining the controversies generated by their most popular product.[45] Throughout their silver anniversary commemorative book, they briefly mention the various periods of community concern raised by their business activities. Against the fervent wishes of their critics, negative publicity against the *Dungeons and Dragons* game has often had the effect of significantly boosting, rather

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[40] Dragon *magazine archive*, #145 (May 1989), p. 6; Diane Weathers and Donna M. Foote, "Beware the Harpies!", *Newsweek*, 24 September 1979, p. 55; Toles-Patkin, "Rational coordination in the dungeon", p. 9.

[41] Lisa A. DeRenard and Linda Mannik Kline, "Alienation and the game *Dungeons and Dragons*", *Psychological Reports* 66(1990), p. 1219.

[42] Dragon *magazine archive*, #161 (September 1990), pp. 76-78.

[43] Armando Simon, "Emotional stability pertaining to the game of *Dungeons and Dragons*", *Psychology in the Schools* 24(1987), pp. 331-32; Suzanne Abyeta and James Forest, "Relationship of role-playing games to self-reported criminal behaviour", *Psychological Reports* 69(1991), p. 1187. Also, see further references to psychological studies later in this chapter.

[44] Dragon *magazine archive*, #182 (June 1992), pp. 91-94.

[45] Due to a corporate takeover, some very late Second Edition *Dungeons and Dragons* products and all Third Edition *Dungeons and Dragons* products were / are published by Wizards of the Coast.

than reducing sales.[46]   They also emphasise that media reports of deaths because of their game are often distorted and sometimes completely untrue.[47]   In the early 1980s, reaction against the game was so strong among fundamentalists, that they considered the encircled face of a bearded wizard in the company's logo an occult symbol.[48] TSR changed its logo in time, but not due to the pressures of its critics.   Detailed examination of its own critics may be found in its main periodical, *Dragon* magazine, which carefully described most *Dungeons and Dragons* censorship related controversies as they occurred, often along with player and company reactions.

Both TSR and the game's players have defended the *Dungeons and Dragons* fantasy role-playing game intelligently and extensively in *Dragon* magazine over the years. Some readers even formed informal groups to advance and defend the cause of fantasy role-playing games.   Few criticisms passed unchallenged.   To begin with the demon-related concerns mentioned first in this chapter that formed the most obvious objection to the game, its creators raised ten pertinent points in 1990 to fully justify their inclusion in the game.   They consistently based their support upon demons' value as readily identifiable, powerful, and challenging enemies for the players' characters to fight and destroy in classic battles of good versus evil with good emerging triumphant.[49]   In fighting such unrepentant evil, the fantasy characters of the players contrasted their own good actions with those of truly evil beings – far from supporting such evil, they combated and vanquished it in the defence of less powerful beings of good.[50]   While the game does allow for the possibility of being evil and commanding evil beings in an imaginary fantasy environment, such actions have long been strongly discouraged and never required in pre-designed adventures released by TSR.[51]   Indeed, when one *Dungeons and Dragons* player was asked to respond to the

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[46] David Eckelberry, Kim Mohan, and Steve Winter, *The story of TSR: 1975-1999* (Renton, WA: TSR, 1999), p. 11.

[47] Eckelberry, Mohan, and Winter, *The story of TSR,* p. 11.

[48] Eckelberry, Mohan, and Winter, *The story of TSR,* p. 12.

[49] Dragon *magazine archive,* #157 (May 1990), p. 56.

[50] Dragon *magazine archive*, #157 (May 1990), p. 56.

[51] Dragon *magazine archive*, #154 (February 1990), p. 9; Monte Cook, Jonathan Tweet, and Skip Williams, *Player's handbook* (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2000), pp. 88-90.

accusation that the game is Satanic some four years previously, he jokingly remarked that, "*D&D* [*Dungeons and Dragons*] can't be the tool of the Devil, I killed him last time I played!"[52]

Early 1990 *Dragon* articles, however, revealed a new official line in terms of the depiction or even mention of demons. In short, there was to be no such mention at all in the then recently released Second Edition. For thirteen years, TSR had received an objection or two each week protesting against the inclusion of demons in the game.[53] Over one thousand letters overall added up to a "lot of angry moms" (such as Patricia Pulling and her followers no doubt), so all references to demons were expunged from the new edition.[54] Furthermore, TSR was always well aware that the existence of demons in the game gave significant ammunition to *Dungeons and Dragons'* detractors and increasingly negative views towards it from the general public.[55] Therefore, the prime factors of misinformation towards the game initially did not receive official company approval in the Second Edition.[56]

Although it at first appeared TSR had caved into pro-censorship pressures, they actually waited until much of the controversy had died down before re-releasing demons under different names - baatezu and tanar'ri - in later Second Edition publications such as the *Monstrous Manual* which detailed all standard monster types for the game.[57] Several traditional mentions and depictions of demons and the alternate dimensions from which they originate returned in the late 1990s with the publication of products such as the adventure *A Paladin in Hell* and the sourcebook *Guide to Hell*.[58] Likewise, it looks as if the Third Edition has no qualms about

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[52] Terri Toles-Patkin, "Rational coordination in the dungeon", *Journal of Popular Culture* 20.1(1986), p.12.

[53] Dragon *magazine archive*, #154 (February 1990), p. 9.

[54] Dragon *magazine archive*, #154 (February 1990), p. 9.

[55] Dragon *magazine archive*, #155 (March 1990), p. 6.

[56] Dragon *magazine archive*, #155 (March 1990), p. 6.

[57] *Monstrous manual*, ed. Tim Beach (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1993), pp. 11, 337.

[58] Monte Cook, *A paladin in Hell* (Renton, WA: TSR, 1998); Chris Pramas, *Guide to Hell* (Renton, WA: TSR, 1999).

referring to such beings, as mention is made of them in the new *Player's Handbook* without any hesitation or commotion.[59] Some initial misgivings among players that *Dungeons and Dragons* was going to cave in to the wishes of those who wished to censor it were essentially unfounded as TSR found alternative ways to circumvent mistaken instances of fundamentalist inspired community outrage.

TSR staff and *Dungeons and Dragons* players, through *Dragon* magazine, were likewise keen to refute the allegation that the game's participants cannot properly distinguish fantasy from reality and thus have a significantly increased likelihood of committing murder or suicide. Players pointed out that, for each reported case of suicide, various other possible contributing factors such as domestic problems and histories of depression prior to any interest in fantasy role-playing games were overlooked by the *Dungeons and Dragons* critics.[60] Editorials reaffirmed the consumer research based trust of the game's manufacturers in their buying public in that such people were normal and well adjusted and could certainly cope with a bit of harmless fantasy in their lives.[61] It was also pointed out by both players and editors that pro-censorship critics of role-playing games are often highly selective in their evidence, and, using the same methodology, one could prove that just about anything, such as even getting good results at one's studies, could induce murder or suicide.[62] The Third Edition *Dungeons and Dragons Player's Handbook* actually begins with the following disclaimer just in case there is still any doubt as to the nature of the game:

> This game is fantasy. The action of the *Dungeons and Dragons* game takes place in the imaginations of the players. Like actors in a movie, players sometimes speak as if they were their characters or as if their fellow players were their characters. These rules even adopt that casual approach, using "you" to refer to and to mean "your character". In reality, however, you are no more your character than you are the king when you

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[59] Cook, Tweet, and Williams, *Player's handbook*, p. 280.

[60] Dragon *magazine archive*, #160 (August 1990), p. 36; #161 (September 1990), pp. 76-77; #162 (October 1990), p. 37.

[61] Dragon *magazine archive*, #194 (June 1993), pp. 6-7; #197 (September 1993), pp. 4-8.

[62] Dragon *magazine archive*, #151 (November 1989), p. 5.

play chess.   Likewise, the world implied by these rules is an imaginary one.[63]

By the middle of the 1990s, pro-censorship movements in the USA for the banning of *Dungeons and Dragons* waned (but they still have not completely disappeared) as most critics began to realise the game was indeed not worth worrying about, and instead concentrated their efforts upon other areas of entertainment.

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Australians were not immune to the major censorship controversies surrounding *Dungeons and Dragons*. In the words of one Australian player, "We [Australians] tend to follow your [USA] news a great deal. Whenever you experience a 'media earthquake', we experience the aftershock."[64]   While the height of the controversy over the game in the United States occurred during the first half of the 1980s, Australia experienced its own significant controversies in the latter half of that decade, concentrated particularly throughout 1986 and into 1987.

Local reports of the game up until that point tended to be positive. A 1984 article in a series investigating "Kid's Culture" published in the *National Times* mentioned how the game had captured the imagination of thousands of Australian children and was able to provide an outlet for their fantasies to be aired in an intellectually constructive fashion.[65] Echoing early praise for the game from the United States, it was applauded as encouraging socialisation among children and providing a harmless way in which to channel unresolved frustrations and hostility.[66] Such initial optimism was soon to disappear from the media as the moral panic and pro-censorship pushes surrounding *Dungeons and Dragons* from the United States reached Australia.

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[63] Cook, Tweet, and Williams, *Player's handbook*, p. 6.

[64] Dragon *magazine archive*, #181 (May 1992), p. 78.

[65] Deborah Smith, "*Dungeons and Dragons*", *The National Times*, 3-9 February 1984, p. 18.

[66] Holmes, *Fantasy role playing games*, pp. 208-09; Smith, "*Dungeons and Dragons*", p. 19.

The earliest reports of *Dungeons and Dragons* in Australia in 1986 began to imply that there was a risk to society in the form of that game. One Brisbane newspaper article of that year quoted an English lecturer who both praised and criticised the game. On one hand, he commended the game for encouraging social interaction among children and vastly improving their thinking and reading skills, getting them away from the "mindlessness" of television.[67] He also condemned it for its intense fantasy and focus on imaginary violence as players might easily get too involved with their characters and actually act out violence in real life.[68] The article concluded with an inevitable link to the United States where New York police supposedly connected a teenage murder-suicide to the game.[69]

Not long afterward, Brisbane Boys College banned the *Dungeons and Dragons* game on its premises, setting off a precedent that would eventually reach the knowledge of the Queensland State Government. The college's chaplain was the impetus behind the ban after he called it "unchristian" following his observation that it caused emotional, spiritual, and mental disturbances among youth, and his belief it contributed to the suicide of one youth that he knew.[70] Support came from a number of like-minded parents who were disturbed at their children's involvement with the game.[71] Clearly, community concerns were growing and a moral panic had already begun.

The Queensland State Government of the time investigated *Dungeons and Dragons* and discarded ideas it had any educational value, but also initially rejected the idea of attempting any form of prohibition in case it gave the game any further notoriety.[72] Despite protests from fantasy role-playing gamers who suggested that responsible older students and teachers supervise the game, they eventually settled on the idea of

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[67] Timothy Pie, "Imagine that!", *The Courier Mail*, 6 March 1986, p. 5.

[68] Timothy Pie, "Imagine that!", p. 5.

[69] Timothy Pie, "Imagine that!", p. 5.

[70] S. Hocking, "School bans game after boy suicide", *The Courier Mail*, 6 May 1986, p. 3.

[71] Hocking, "School bans game after boy suicide", p. 5.

[72] Hocking, "School bans game after boy suicide", p. 5.

a partial ban in the form of prohibiting the use of occult themes in teaching at State schools.[73]   No longer could the classroom be used to play games that required students to act the part of supernatural characters.[74]   While making no specific mention of *Dungeons and Dragons*, the ban was widely believed to be in response to community concern following the alleged suicide because of the game mentioned by the chaplain at Brisbane Boys College.[75]   This still left open the prospect that students would still play it at school outside of class time or at home.

Such a possibility remained with some members of the protectionist Queensland Government well into the following year when Family Services Minister, Yvonne Chapman, while admitting she had no close knowledge of the game, remarked that she realised reports were increasing of its negative effects on people's lives. Although she believed fantasy role-playing games did not adversely affect the average person, she unsuccessfully called for their complete ban to everyone because those products might cause some unbalanced person to hurt themselves or others.[76]   Several years later, in 1991, Paul Gibson of the New South Wales Parliament called for an official investigation into the "satanic influences" of games "such as *Dungeons and Dragons*" which he believed had considerable effect upon the mental health of some young people.[77]   It is unclear whether his views resounded in other States and why he brought up the issue so long after the height of the controversy, but, as in Queensland, *Dungeons and Dragons* remained on sale and retained its popularity and widespread use among young people.

While a religious person with protectionist views was ultimately behind the partial ban of *Dungeons and Dragons* in Queensland State schools, he was hardly as

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[73] A. Geraghty, "Goodbye to Halloween in schools…and it's no trick", *The Courier Mail*, 22 July 1986, p.1; Philip Cass, "Down among the dungeon dabblers" [Newspaper article. Source, date, and page number unknown. Probably from a suburban Brisbane newspaper dated 1986 or 1987].

[74] Geraghty, "Goodbye to Halloween in schools", p. 1; Mercer, "Dungeons, Dragons and teacher development", pp. 107-08.

[75] Geraghty, "Goodbye to Halloween in schools", p. 1.

[76] Neil Doorley, "Violent fantasies almost reality", *Sunday Sun*, 23 August 1987, p. 6.

[77] Kathleen Hickie and Karin Bishop, "Is Satan hiding in the games room?", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 1991, p. 5.

prominent an activist as anyone from the United States such as Patricia Pulling. Other Australians, mainly religious, particularly Christian fundamentalists, also spoke out against the game. Ultimately, they had little or no further effect in restricting *Dungeons and Dragons*, but they may well have increased restrictions in individual households where parents were worried about their children's fantasy role-playing pastimes.

Queensland's most prominent fundamentalist critic of *Dungeons and Dragons* was Pastor Paul Camac of the Caloundra Assembly of God. Also known for his campaign to take the children's canned food "Spooky Spaghetti" off the market for its occult depictions, Camac unsuccessfully wrote to toy companies and the State Government to convince them to ban the game from sale to everyone.[78] He also preached against it to anyone who would listen, saying that he strongly believed it was a major factor in the doubling of the suicide rate for boys (the main players of *Dungeons and Dragons*) during the 1965-85 period as the game desensitised its young players to violence and death, encouraging anti-social behaviour.[79] To bolster his opinions, one new ex-player member of his congregation, Andrew Zarb, aged 17 and pictured in a newspaper report beside a Bible, told of the struggles within his conscience against thoughts of committing immoral acts outside as well as inside the game.[80] Nevertheless, obvious fundamentalists were not the only religious people to be concerned about *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Anglicans were the only major Australian Christian religious denomination to seriously consider speaking out against *Dungeons and Dragons*. At their October 1986 Synod in Sydney, they debated, but ultimately rejected, a motion to determine whether the parents and teachers of children should be alerted to the alleged dangers of the "undesirable and demonic" game.[81] Some rather fundamentalist clergy quoted the Bible's admonishments against the practice of the occult, remarking that the game

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[78] Doorley, "Violent fantasies almost reality", p. 6.

[79] Doorley, "Violent fantasies almost reality", pp. 6-7.

[80] Doorley, "Violent fantasies almost reality", p. 6.

[81] Alan Gill, "Satan at work or just a game? A judgement avoided", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1986, p. 4.

encouraged this and that anyone who played it was associating with real-life powerful evil forces.[82] They claimed to know of actual cases where children had been seriously psychologically disturbed through their participation in the game and had turned away from the teachings of Christianity.[83] Other clergy rejected these notions, defending the game as having some of its roots in works highly regarded by recent Christian writers.[84] Most lay members opposed the motion, saying that there was nothing wrong with exercising one's imagination, and that passing the motion would make the Synod a "laughing stock" and perhaps even lead to increased sales of the game.[85] They were not wrong, as controversies surrounding *Dungeons and Dragons* at that time often drastically boosted sales, if not sold out, copies of the game and its associated products.[86]

The reason why Queensland was particularly susceptible to the censorship of *Dungeons and Dragons* while the rest of Australia remained largely unconcerned by the controversy may be largely explained in the person of the then Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Responding to, and certainly encouraging a culture of separateness from the rest of the country, he believed that his fellow Queenslanders benefited from a protectionist political environment of conservatism, including censorship, largely derived from traditional Christian morality.[87] Conversely, the populations of most other States considered the Bjelke-Petersen Government backward and often ridiculed it as a result.[88] In such a political and social environment, it is little wonder that matters such as the censorship of fantasy role-playing games that did not overly concern other Australians caused a significant degree of concern among many Queenslanders who agreed that ideas of Satanism and the occult were reaching into the entertainment of their children. Even so, the overall easy-going Australian culture

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[82] Gill, "Satan at work or just a game?", p. 4.

[83] Gill, "Satan at work or just a game?", p. 4.

[84] Gill, "Satan at work or just a game?", p. 4.

[85] Gill, "Satan at work or just a game?", p. 4.

[86] Cass, "Down among the dungeon dabblers", page number unknown.

[87] Peter Trundle, "So he fell by his own hand", *The Courier Mail*, 27 November 1987, p. 9.

[88] Trundle, "So he fell by his own hand", p. 9.

was not rooted in nearly as much public concern and action over Satanist issues as that of the United States.

Americans have long lived in a society founded on serious, deeply held religious beliefs, and it appears that some of these beliefs, particularly those that maintain the existence of the Devil, actually increased in popularity as the moral crisis described in chapter one continued and people saw the world in increasingly threatening black and white terms. According to Victor, "belief in the Devil is more prevalent among Americans than it is among the peoples of any other major industrial society".[89] Surveys show that US belief in the existence of the Devil rose considerably since the 1960s, to reach a level of perhaps fifty to sixty percent by 1990.[90] By way of contrast, the equivalent figures for most European nations hovered around twenty percent.[91] A 1982 Gallup poll found that thirty-four percent of adult Americans believed in the Devil as a personal being who actively influences human beings to commit evil acts, while a similar percentage maintained that such a being is in fact an impersonal force, but that it has the same motivations.[92] At this time, as US controversies over the *Dungeons and Dragons* game were reaching their height, so too were widespread allegations of Satanic ritual abuse, particularly in child care and teaching institutions.[93] Given these contextual factors, it is little wonder that Satanism and the occult was of such great concern in that country to the extent that so many adults would actively campaign against fantasy role-playing games.

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With the slight exception of the ultimately de-registered psychiatrist Dr. Radecki, no known critic of the *Dungeons and Dragons* game possessed the academic qualifications to formally diagnose participation in this pastime as being in any way

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[89] Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic panic: the creation of a contemporary legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), p. 203.

[90] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 203.

[91] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 203.

[92] Hicks, *In pursuit of Satan*, p. 23.

[93] Victor, *Satanic panic*, p. 205.

harmful to one's psychological well-being. All such pro-censorship people relied on anecdotal evidence and "hunches" to "prove" their claims. While such rhetoric clearly appealed to the general population, in academic circles scholars were not convinced. Their research showed that *Dungeons and Dragons* was not harmful in any significant way no matter how carefully they investigated.

American sociologist Gary Alan Fine conducted an extensive study into the fantasy role-playing game phenomenon, particularly *Dungeons and Dragons*, in the early years of the 1980s around the time US controversy over the game reached its height. His goal was not to examine criticisms of the games in particular, but primarily to make sense of their meaning to participants in sociological terms.[94] He found that players have little difficulty distinguishing the systematic, logical fantasy worlds they collectively share from reality.[95] The participants create social worlds made meaningful by the significance given to them by their participants.[96] Fantasy role-playing provides a much-needed creative and imaginative outlet to the usually introverted players who may express themselves cathartically during game play among other people with similar personalities and interests.[97] While disputes over rule interpretations may arise as players strongly identify with their imaginary characters, these tend to be resolved in the players' favour in the interests of harmony within the gaming group.[98] Co-operation is the key, as imaginary objectives at each gaming session require teamwork for completion.[99] The capabilities of each character tend to be complementary towards these goals. Players form an often-misunderstood leisure subculture.[100] Fine's report contains no concerns that *Dungeons and Dragons* or any similar game is in any way harmful to society.

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[94] Gary Alan Fine, *Shared fantasy: role-playing games as social worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. xi, 2-6.

[95] Fine, *Shared fantasy*, p. 12.

[96] Fine, *Shared fantasy*, p. 231.

[97] Fine, *Shared fantasy*, pp. 60-61.

[98] Fine, *Shared fantasy*, pp. 113, 207.

[99] Fine, *Shared fantasy*, p. 233.

[100] Fine, *Shared fantasy*, p. 237.

Based on the author's analysis of two articles published in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, cultural studies scholars likewise gave fantasy role-playing games a positive report. Interestingly, one belated article dates as recently as 1994 when all prominent efforts to ban or otherwise restrict these games had disappeared and, in most cases, taken up similar causes with newer and more "threatening" media deemed popular with the young such as computer games. The earlier study maintains that the emotional involvement of typical *Dungeons and Dragons* players in their game, while often intense, is really no deeper than that experienced by, say, a devout golfer or tabletop war gamer.[101] In addition, while imaginary violence does exist within the game, the game also provides a context for such violence and shows its logical consequences – something not seen all the time in other entertainment media.[102] The latter study, from a careful analysis of both popular and academic arguments for and against fantasy role-playing games, found that the very few players with Satan worshipping and suicidal or murderous propensities brought them to the game rather than the game itself causing such beliefs.[103] The idea that Satanism could be caused from reading the *Dungeons and Dragons* books was considered as ludicrous as holding such beliefs after reading classic works of literature dealing with similar matters such as Dante's *Inferno* or *Paradise Lost*.[104] With these findings that effectively reject all pro-censorship claims to censorship of fantasy role-playing games, it is hardly surprising that psychological studies have reached the same conclusions.

Psychological studies into the alleged negative effects of *Dungeons and Dragons* on its players have generally cleared the game of giving any cause for concern. In one case, a mentally unbalanced young man's participation in a specially arranged session of *Dungeons and Dragons* allowed him to play through his repressed anxieties in a fantasy environment to arrive at a more positive outlook on life.[105] But others caution

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[101] Toles-Patkin, "Rational coordination in the dungeon", p. 9.

[102] Toles-Patkin, "Rational coordination in the dungeon", pp. 9-10.

[103] Kurt Lancaster, "Do role-playing games promote crime, Satanism, and suicide among players as critics claim?", *Journal of Popular Culture* 28.2(1994), p. 77.

[104] Lancaster, "Do role playing games promote…", p. 78.

that such gaming sessions need tight clinical control as excessive and/or violent fantasies among the mentally ill could result in the worsening of existing conditions.[106]   Other studies tend to refute or at least weaken the alleged link between playing the game and personality disorders.   While a few studies did find that fantasy role-players tended to be more introverted and have more specialised and exotic interests than the general population, they found no strong link between such game play and depression, psychoticism, or deep alienation from society.[107]   Psychologists found *Dungeons and Dragons* players to have a healthy psychological profile and the game to have no clear links to increasing players' emotional instability.[108]   There is likewise no observable link between role-playing and criminal behaviour.[109] Reputable academics found the negative pro-censorship reports surrounding *Dungeons and Dragons* to be unsupported by any reliable scientific evidence.

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Major censorship controversies surrounding fantasy role-playing games were about protecting children and young people from spiritual and psychological harm.   People who had particular concern for the younger generation - from parents, to teachers, to ministers of religion, to police and law enforcement officials - collectively expressed their moral panic by acting as moral crusaders and trying to ban or otherwise restrict access to a relatively new and popular youth pastime which they were not willing to understand.   Spiritual concerns related to Satanism and the occult were most prominent in the United States due to that country's deeper religious cultural characteristics in comparison to Australia.   Nonetheless, concerns and action in the

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[105] Wayne D. Blackmon, "*Dungeons and Dragons*: the use of a fantasy game in the psychotherapeutic treatment of a young adult", *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 48(1994), pp. 630-31.

[106] Lee I. Ascherman, "The impact of unstructured games of fantasy and role playing on an inpatient unit for adolescents", *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 43(1993), pp. 335, 342-43.

[107] Neil A. Douse, and I. C. McManus, "The personality of fantasy game players", *British Journal of Psychology* 84(1993), pp. 505, 508; Robert Carter and David Lester, "Personalities of players of *Dungeons and Dragons*", *Psychological Reports* 82(1998), p.182; DeRenard and Kline, "Alienation and the game *Dungeons and Dragons*", pp. 1218, 1222.

[108] Simon, "Emotional stability pertaining to the game of *Dungeons and Dragons*", p. 332.

[109] Abyeta and Forest, "Relationship of role-playing games to self-reported criminal behaviour", p. 1191.

USA soon led to concerns and action in Australia as we tend to closely follow so many of the social developments in that country.

Popular concern was not matched by serious academic research, but that did not bother most morally panicked people from both countries who did not need a genuine scientific basis to their anti role-playing games scapegoating. They were likely ultimately motivated by deep unconscious insecurities regarding so many of the stereotypical contradictions of modern life detailed in the discussion on the concept of "moral crisis" in chapter one. In true form in such times of moral turbulence, respected members of the community used the media, both print and electronic, to fuel the expanding controversy by reporting atrocity stories of murder and suicide to back up their pro-censorship claims. Eventually, the panic died down - even if it has still not truly concluded - as new media emerged and the interests of youth increasingly diverted to activities such as computer games. Not surprisingly, moral crusaders soon turned to this newer form of popular entertainment as their primary scapegoat as the underlying moral crisis was far from over and, for Australians, its precise characteristics were changing. It is to computer games that in-depth discussion will turn in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER 3

COMPUTER GAMES CONTROVERSIES

Australia in the 1990s did not take the same comparatively relaxed attitude to computer games as it had applied to fantasy role-playing games in the 1980s. Instead, the pro-censorship forces were much stronger and the reaction by the authorities much harsher. Australia ended up with the most severe censorship of computer games in the Western world that remains in place even today, significantly out of step with trends from the United States for a change. How and why crises of morality in Australia could have produced, and continue to produce, such a unique reaction against a relatively new form of entertainment media is the subject of analysis in this chapter.

As was the case with fantasy role-playing games, protection of the young from adverse influences continues to be the primary concern, but the reasons for such protection and the subject matter considered objectionable has changed. Computer games controversies are intertwined with related controversies concerning electronic visual media such as the Internet, rather than possessing links to older forms of censorship – literary for example – as was the case with fantasy role-playing games. Fundamentalist spiritual concerns play no major part in these new controversies as highly secular protectionism has emerged as the dominant censorship foundation. To make sense of these developments, the following text draws upon the author's personal experiences in playing controversial computer games and reactions to such products from Government, academic, and popular literature.

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Computer games in themselves are only slightly younger than fantasy role-playing games. In fact, *Dungeons and Dragons* style computer games, even if only in plain text as opposed to graphical format, were released for various home systems as early

as 1981.[1]   For many years, there was little or no concern over this type of entertainment media that remained unregulated unlike other forms of visual entertainment such as films. Matters changed in Australia in 1993 however, upon the release of the game *Night Trap*.[2]

New technologies such as cd-rom had allowed this game to include plenty of video footage of human actors engaged in violent situations.[3]   Many of these "horrifying" situations implied murderous violence against women dressed in "scanty" nightwear that led to concerns that the young players would acquire degraded views of the female sex.[4]   Ironically, although the goal of the game is to protect these women from violence and the "scantiness" of their clothing is a highly subjective opinion, such technicalities were deemed irrelevant by those who saw the mere fact of violent depictions against women within at least a vaguely sexual context as being sufficient cause for complaint.[5]   Only the youthful players were supposed to understand the new technologies involved, leading to the suggestion that parents and guardians could no longer properly supervise their children in their use of an entertainment medium that had gained widespread popularity.[6]

With uncontrolled usage of a graphic interactive medium that was alleged to spread messages of violence and degradation of women, some protectionists saw children – the future of society – to be at tremendous risk, therefore action had to be taken immediately.   The accusations against a particular computer game were soon to become the standard accusations against almost all contentious computer games. A moral panic arising out of various crises in Australian society, not the least of which was the fear that parents could no longer properly protect their children from danger,

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[1] "Gameslayers", *Newsweek*, 26 October 1981, p. 59.

[2] *Night Trap*, [designer unknown] (Sega/Acclaim, 1993-1996).

[3] Megan Turner, "Games children play", *The Courier Mail*, 22 November 1993, p. 13.

[4] Turner, "Games children play", p. 13; Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the public good? Censorship in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, NZ: The Dunmore Press, 1998), pp. 158-59.

[5] *Night Trap*.

[6] Turner, "Games children play", p. 13.

had arisen. The Commonwealth and State Governments moved swiftly to act on such increasingly widespread community concerns.

It is not often that the source of a moral panic can be traced largely to the efforts of one person, but this occurred in May 1993 in connection with computer games in Queensland – the same traditionally conservative Australian State that took some of the strictest actions against fantasy role-playing games in the previous decade. Protectionist Labor Senator Margaret Reynolds began to actively campaign for the introduction of a system of computer games regulation in Australia.[7] On the ABC television talk show *Lateline*, and at a Brisbane censorship conference conducted by local universities, she highlighted the "dangers" of the game *Night Trap* detailed above and continued her efforts later by heading a Commonwealth Government Senate Committee which was established, in part, to propose a regulatory system for computer games.[8] *Night Trap* was not the only game of concern, but it was the main topic of discussion. In what would become a familiar story in later years, only passing mention was made of controversial games such as *Mortal Kombat* containing lots of violence but little, if any, content that protectionists might consider "sexual".[9] Senator Reynolds also raised the possibility of future Internet censorship so that people could not bypass the forthcoming system of computer games censorship and called for international standards in all forms of computer games regulation.[10] With a sensationalist media and concurrent overseas concerns about *Night Trap* supporting her, Australian community concern about computer games increased and Reynolds' Senate Committee, the Senate Select Committee on the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, conducted its investigations.[11]

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[7] Deanie Carbon, "Senator urges ban on violent computer play", *The Courier Mail*, 29 May 1993, p. 9.

[8] Carbon, "Senator urges ban", p. 9; McKenzie Wark, "The video game as an emergent media form", *Media Information Australia* 71(1994), p. 24.

[9] Turner, "Games children play", p. 13.

[10] Turner, "Games children play", p. 13.

[11] Peter Mackay, "How it happened and where it's heading", *PC PowerPlay* November (1996), p. 28; Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, *Report on video and computer games and classification issues* (Canberra: Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, 1993), pp. xi, 11.

After a lengthy investigation that involved mainly protectionist written submissions by, and witness testimony from, a wide variety of interested individuals and organizations, the Senate Select Committee released its *Report on Video and Computer Games and Classification Issues*. It made two special recommendations regarding computer games that would see highly significant changes made to Australia's censorship regime.

Recommendation number six stated:

> Having regard to the extra sensory intensity involved in the playing of interactive games and the implications of long-term effects on users, the Committee recommends that stricter criteria for classification than those applying to equivalent film and video classifications be set by censorship authorities…[12]

Recommendation number four supported number six by proclaiming:

> The Committee is concerned that the level of technology involved with the use of video and computer games means that many parents do not necessarily have the competency to ensure adequate parental guidance. Therefore the Committee recommends that material of an 'R' equivalent category be refused classification. The Committee also recommends that if an 'X' equivalent classification is considered it should not be adopted for video and computer games material...[13]

Paradoxically, the Committee implied that it was somewhat unsure of its strong views from the recommendations quoted above when it stated, in recommendation number seven:

> The Committee supports the efforts of the Office of Film and Literature Classification to conduct research into the effects of video and computer games as an entertainment form as well as their impact on community standards...[14]

Throughout the *Report*, the Senators placed comments so that readers could understand the thought processes and evidence that led to the recommendations such as those mentioned above. The Senators' fears of the "level of technology" involved with computer games that would supposedly lead to inadequate parental supervision

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[12] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, p. vi.

[13] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, p. v.

[14] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, p. vi.

were exacerbated by games industry representatives making wild, inaccurate statements regarding the imminent spread of new and ultra-realistic gaming technologies such as "Virtual Reality and Holograms" at rapidly decreasing prices.[15] The Committee presented no evidence in its *Report* of the inability of parents to adequately supervise their children's use of computer games, presumably relying on their own unsubstantiated feelings on this matter. With regard to violent, "extra-sensory" interactive games corrupting youth so that they would increasingly commit violent acts in the real world, Australia's top censorship officials denied that scientific research supported such links, but the Committee was swayed by the contrary "anecdotal evidence" of the types of people who saw such links with fantasy role-playing games in the previous decade - namely parents, teachers, police, and public prosecutors.[16] Moreover, with particular reference to *Night Trap*, computer games collectively were generally condemned by the Committee as being "demeaning of women", containing "extreme violence" and foreign "mindless matter", and, as such, were "attracting growing opposition in the community".[17]

The Commonwealth Office of Film and Literature Classification was to have its classification responsibilities widened to include all computer games which were to be assessed against a different, tougher set of criteria than that for film. The classifiers were to be given extra funding - apparently to make sure that the new regulations could be backed up by scientific evidence. Furthermore, all initial prejudices against computer games mentioned earlier in this chapter had found their way into an official Government document. Australia's traditionally tough reaction against new, popular entertainment technology was to continue. The *Report* foreshadowed highly significant changes to Australia's Commonwealth censorship system as the moral panic continued.

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[15] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, p. 9.

[16] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, pp. 14-15.

[17] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, pp. 27-28.

Nevertheless, the initial inquiry was not the end of the Senate Select Committee's interest in the censorship of computer games. Throughout late 1993 and the first half of 1994, they actively campaigned to ensure that the censorship ministers (Attorneys General) of all Australian States agreed to the passing of uniform games censorship legislation along the lines promoted by the Committee's 1993 *Report*.[18] When it appeared as if "R" and "X" games would be allowed, even if the criteria would be stricter than for films, the Committee was able to get all State politicians to agree that such games be banned altogether.[19] Particularly keen to have all Committee recommendations followed was its Deputy Chairperson, Liberal Senator John Tierney.[20] The Committee argued, in addition to reiterating all its earlier concerns, that computer games rated "R" or above should be banned as they might somehow fall into the hands of children where parents may not be able to provide adequate supervision owing to the level of technology involved.[21] While it admitted no conclusive research had so far been undertaken to assess the degree of harm to children from playing computer games, the Committee decided to "err on the side of caution" rather than wait for the expected negative scientific reports on such entertainment they felt sure were to be published in future.[22] Formal legislation had not yet passed, but the debate that followed in parliaments around the country virtually ensured full political compliance with the Committee's computer games recommendations.

The Commonwealth House of Representatives discussed computer games censorship in the context of a major reform bill for Australia's entire Commonwealth and State Government-run censorship system. The *Classification (Publications, Films and*

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[18] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services, video and computer games, r-rated material on pay tv* (Canberra: Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, 1994), pp. 24-27.

[19] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services,* pp. 25-27.

[20] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services,* p. 27.

[21] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services,* p. 24.

[22] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services,* p. 24.

Computer Games) Bill of 1994 proposed uniform censorship laws throughout the country and that the OFLC's responsibilities be broadened to include the classification (including banning if necessary in individual cases) of all computer games sold in Australia.[23]   Partly due to recent protectionist concerns related to computer games, the *Classification Bill* added an additional classification principle, namely:

> …the need to take account of community concerns about depictions which condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence, and the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.[24]

Such issues raised in the new classification principle were to be on the forefront of the censors' minds during later examples of the classification of contentious computer games. The *Classification Bill* addressed and fully acted upon all concerns raised by the Senate Select Committee in relation to computer games to the letter.[25]   This Bill experienced another rarity in Australian politics in that it enjoyed bipartisan support with very few reservations, none of which had anything to do with computer games censorship.[26]   These factors were fully consistent with the enthusiasm with which both the Labor Chairperson of the Committee and her Liberal deputy worked together to promote Commonwealth Government action on the heavy regulation of computer games.

Not long after the discussion - for it would be inaccurate to call it a debate - of the Commonwealth *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Bill*, the State Governments discussed complementary legislation that they would introduce to enforce Commonwealth level computer games classification decisions. Typical of the discussions in the State parliaments were those concerning Queensland's *Classification of Computer Games and Images (Interim) Bill*. Labor Deputy Premier

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[23] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary debates (Hansard). 1994. House of Representatives. First session of the thirty-seventh parliament (fifth period). 23 August to 8 December 1994* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994), pp. 1381-82.

[24] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary debates (Hansard)*, p. 1382.

[25] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary debates (Hansard)*, pp. 1382-84, 1396-97.

[26] Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary debates (Hansard)*, p. 1384.

Tom Burns spoke at length on the numerous "benefits" of his State's *Classification Bill*. Essentially, what he did was to simply repeat the major points mentioned by his Commonwealth counterparts in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.[27] In yet another example of repetition, the Queensland *Classification Bill* enjoyed bipartisan support, again removing the need for debate and simply allowing time for members from both sides of politics to state why that *Bill* enjoyed their full concurrence.[28] The moral panic surrounding computer games had reached the stage of complete, unquestioning acceptance among parliaments throughout Australia.

At the Commonwealth level, the newly introduced *Classification Act* provided that computer games be classified in accordance with a Schedule. The Schedule formally allowed for the refusal of classification (or "banning" in other words) of computer games that were "unsuitable for a minor to see or play".[29] A minor was defined as "a person under [the age of] 18".[30] Guidelines developed earlier defined exactly what sort of material was "unsuitable" for minors and would thus cause the banning of a computer game from sale to everyone in Australia. Although the guidelines cover issues other than sex, censorship enforcement developments have shown that the sexual restrictions are those that almost exclusively determine decisions to ban computer games.

The specific sexual restrictions are:

> Material which includes any of the following will be refused classification….

Sex

- Nudity including genitalia <u>unless</u> [sic] there is a 'bona fide' educational, medical or community health purpose.

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[27] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 35* (Brisbane: Legislative Assembly Queensland, 1995), pp. 11326-27.

[28] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36* (Brisbane: Legislative Assembly Queensland, 1995), pp. 11623-25.

[29] Commonwealth of Australia, *Classification (publications, films and computer games) act 1995* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1995), p. 39.

[30] Commonwealth of Australia, *Classification (publications, films and computer games) act 1995*, p. 4.

- Simulated or explicit depictions of sexual acts between consenting adults.
- Any depiction of sexual violence or sexual activity involving non-consent of any kind.
- Depictions of child sexual abuse, bestiality, sexual acts accompanied by offensive fetishes, or exploitative incest fantasies….
- Use of sexually explicit language.[31]

Under Australia's formerly severe but now comparatively generous film classification guidelines, child sexual abuse, bestiality, incest, and offensive fetishes are banned by all classifications.[32] Nudity is permitted from as low as the "PG" rating, violent or non-violent sexual activity from the "M" through to the "R" ratings (and also "X" if non-violent), and sexually explicit language is allowed from the "M" rating upwards.[33] To be sure, every such classifiable depiction differs in purpose, nature, and intensity, and the sex is real only in the "X" rating, but this is what only the film classification guidelines are instructed to take into account.[34] No contextual considerations apply to computer games where there is a blanket ban on the depictions mentioned above, regardless of individual circumstances.[35] It is also worth noting that children of all ages can legally view films rated "M" or less, and those aged fifteen and over can do the same plus view "MA" films under parental supervision.[36] Material few people genuinely care if children can see or not in the lower classifications of one entertainment medium has become absolutely forbidden

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[31] Office of Film and Literature Classification, *Computer games and images – classification guidelines and industry code* (Sydney: Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1994), p. 8.

[32] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, *Report on the portrayal of violence in the electronic media* (Canberra: Senate Select Committee on Community Standards Relevant to the Supply of Services Utilising Electronic Technologies, 1997), pp. 49-57. The comparative generosity of the current film classification guidelines as contrasted with their computer games counterparts is undoubtedly because film (particularly in the non-"X" ratings) is no longer on the cutting-edge of technology or censorship disputes. Film is also a more broadly demographically popular medium than computer games that can induce far larger and more effective anti-censorship protests by disgruntled consumers.

[33] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on the portrayal of violence in the electronic media*, pp. 49-57.

[34] Office of Film and Literature Classification, *Phantasmagoria* (Sydney: Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1995), pp. 1-2. [classification decision summary sheet]

[35] Office of Film and Literature Classification, *Phantasmagoria*, pp. 1-2.

[36] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on the portrayal of violence in the electronic media*, pp. 49-53.

in a newer entertainment medium. Material banned in computer games also includes some material, such as child pornography, banned in all media.

The new Commonwealth *Classification Act* also provided for the anticipated harsher classification system overall for computer games in comparison to films in that there were only four listed classifications rather than six for film that permitted computer games to be sold in Australia: "G" [all ages], "G" (8+), "M" (15+), and "MA" (15+).[37] The split of the "G" rating into two distinct categories and the prohibition on the sale of games above the "MA" level undoubtedly reflected the widespread belief that minors were practically the only users of computer games. Furthermore, the omission of a "PG" rating and concentration on "Mature" ratings suggests the concern legislators had over the possible impact of computer games upon the young.

Each State passed legislation to give the Commonwealth *Classification Act* strong support from law enforcement. Using Queensland's *Classification of Computer Games and Images (Interim) Act* of 1995 as one example, it may be seen that the harsh reaction against computer games became intertwined with emerging concerns over child pornography, particularly such material obtained from the Internet.[38] The term "computer game" became connected with pornography, especially child pornography, by the very title of the *Act*, the *Act's* definition of "computer game" to include "a computer generated image", and the preoccupation with the term "child abuse computer game" (essentially meaning images of child pornography) mentioned throughout the *Act* as being punishable by the harshest penalties.[39] Commercial dealings or demonstrations of any sort with computer games banned by the OFLC were strictly prohibited, and the sale of computer games with no OFLC classification symbols or illegitimate symbols was prohibited, although with lesser sanctions.[40] In a

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[37] Commonwealth of Australia, *Classification (publications, films and computer games) act 1995*, pp. 5, 39.

[38] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Classification of computer games and images (interim) act 1995* (Brisbane: Legislative Assembly Queensland, 1995), pp. 40-41.

[39] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Classification of computer games and images (interim) act 1995*, pp. 1, 8, 14-15, 44-45.

[40] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Classification of computer games and images (interim) act 1995*, pp. 10-16.

blow to the chances of any enterprising company starting up a local computer games production company, it was made illegal to produce a game likely to be banned.[41] The message was clear – the "menace" posed to society by computer games would be severely curtailed.

With the required legislative framework finally in place, politicians apparently believed they had protected society. The Commonwealth Office of Film and Literature Classification would considerably assist supposedly confused parents in deciding what games were suitable for their supposedly more technologically literate children. The harsher classification system for computer games as opposed to film would certainly keep material deemed unsuitable for minors out of their hands and ensure their non-corruption by the interactivity involved in such entertainment. Tough penalties backed up all these new regulations to ensure universal compliance. Nationwide, politicians had acted swiftly to work together and react against what they perceived to be a rapidly increasing danger to the community.

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Yet, all was in fact not well. In their moral panic, the protectionist political moral crusaders had made several fundamental errors of judgement. Most computer games players were found to be adults, not children, and, as such, had their civil liberties infringed through the prohibition of computer games targeted at their age group. Comparable Western countries had introduced government legislation and industry regulation that allowed for adult computer games. The games held up as examples of atrocity stories, which are common to all moral panics, went on sale in Australia or were found not to exist at all. Computer games were banned for containing material allowed even to children in film and for falling foul of censorship guidelines that were often strictly interpreted and permitted no contextual considerations to be taken into account. Emerging academic research was showing that computer games had no real harmful effects on their players and that most parents were in fact able to adequately supervise their children who used these technologies. Above all, few people

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[41] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Classification of computer games and images (interim) act 1995*, p. 15.

genuinely considered the likely possible causes for their extreme reactions against computer games in order to deal with the true underlying foundations of the latest moral crisis in Australian society.

In their panic to protect children from the alleged dangers of computer games, the moral crusaders gave very little recognition to the fact that a significant minority, if not a majority, of players were, in fact, adults. At no point during the initial moral panic over computer games did anyone suggest that this form of entertainment adversely affected adults. With very few exceptions, the automatic assumption was made that children were the exclusive players of computer games.[42] For example, during discussion of Queensland's *Classification Bill*, Deputy Premier Tom Burns recognised that some people had "genuine civil liberties concerns" over the decision to ban games of an "R" level and above, but he believed in taking extra caution as computer games had "particular appeal to children".[43] This degree of caution was such that he believed "…research is needed to ensure that any future decisions in this area are based on cold, hard evidence."[44] Presumably, then, the decisions taken around the country at the time to censor computer games were unrelated to such evidence, but rather panicked fears arising out of a moral crisis.

Subsequent research from both industry and Government groups found considerable earlier underestimations of the percentage of adults who played computer games - but no one took corrective action because of these findings. Australian games industry magazines, *Hyper* and *PC PowerPlay* conducted surveys and found that thirty-three and sixty percent of their readers respectively were over the age of eighteen.[45] One

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[42] Just a few examples of this belief out of dozens available include: Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, pp. 22-23, 29; Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services,* pp. 24-25; Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary debates (Hansard)*, pp. 1385, 1387, 1391, 1397-99; Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, pp. 11627, 11630; Commonwealth of Australia, *Classification (publications, films and computer games) act 1995*, p. 39.

[43] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 35*, p. 11328.

[44] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 35*, p. 11328.

[45] "*Phantasmagoria* banned", *Hyper* October (1995), p. 8; "Bloody games! Sex, violence and videogames", *PC PowerPlay* November (1996), p. 25.

Australian games distributor, Psygnosis, alleged that the percentage of computer gamers over eighteen to be closer to seventy-five percent.[46]   Overseas industry figures suggested similar percentages, America's Interactive Digital Software Association providing a seventy-two percent figure.[47]   The research of the Australian Government supported these findings.   In its 1996 surveys on household use of information technology, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that just below fifty percent of those who played computer games were adults.[48]   Most recently, the concluding report from a five year Government investigation into the use of computer games in Australia today stated that "the adult market for [computer] games is large and growing", and "adults are now regular users of computer games".[49]   Far from just protecting children, the governments of Australia were also unjustly preventing adults from accessing material they and, on occasion, even children, were allowed to access in other entertainment media such as films.

At approximately the same time as Australia, the United States developed and instituted its own computer games ratings systems, also at the urging of moral crusader Senators.[50]   Unlike the Australian experience, however, the US systems are bound by that nation's Constitutional right to free speech and thus allow for the existence of adult games as their true objective is not to ban certain titles, but to rate all games in regard to their suitability for different age groupings or buyer sensitivity to broad categories of controversial content.   Two major privately run systems now exist to which games manufacturers can voluntarily submit their products for examination.   Failure to do so means that their unrated games cannot be sold at most retailers according to industry codes of practice.[51]   One system, developed by the

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[46] Steve Polak, "Game hunting", *Weekend Australian – Syte*, 19-20 October 1996, p. 8.

[47] Interactive Digital Software Association, New study documents broad appeal of interactive entertainment software and hardware (Washington D.C.: Interactive Digital Software Association, 1996). [press release]

[48] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Household use of information technology Australia 1996* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1996), p. 24.

[49] Kevin Durkin and Kate Aisbett, *Computer games and Australians today* (Sydney: Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1999), pp. xv, 126-27.

[50] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services*, pp. 28-29.

Entertainment Software Ratings Board, provides for two ratings above a "Teen" classification – "Mature" and "Adults Only".[52] Its competitor, the Recreational Software Advisory Council, assesses games according to the levels of violence, nudity and sex, and language they contain and gives intensity ratings for each.[53] As a result, the United States permits the sale of all computer games banned in Australia. Likewise, the same situation applies to the United Kingdom - paradoxically where, as in Australia, there is no specific constitutional guarantee of free speech - as its Board of Film Classification and various industry bodies work together to classify computer games according to age suitability.[54] Adult game playing is again recognised and British consumers may buy all games banned in Australia. Australian politicians acquired ample evidence that adults were being unfairly denied access to particular computer games readily available overseas, but they remained unmoved as they maintained that such games had adverse effects upon children. Repeatedly, however, their suspicions proved unfounded.

One major reason often stated as to why computer games had adverse effects upon children, making them, for example, more likely to be violent and hold disrespectful attitudes towards women in the real world, was that parents could not adequately supervise their children due to their inability to come to terms with the level of technology involved in the playing of these entertainment products. The Australian Government's own research strongly refuted this assertion. The Office of Film and Literature Classification's *Families and Electronic Entertainment* investigative report found that parental ability to set rules regarding their children's use of information technology had no relationship to their comfort level with new technologies.[55] Most households with children did have enforced rules regarding computer use and most

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[51] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on overseas sourced audiotex services*, pp. 28-29.

[52] As seen on the game boxes and some associated documentation for computer games such as: *Harvester*, Designer G. P. Austin (DigiFx Interactive and Merit Studios, 1996); *Leisure Suit Larry: Love for Sail*, Designer Al Lowe (Sierra On-Line, 1996).

[53] As seen of the game box of *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh*, Designer Lorelei Shannon (Sierra On-Line, 1996), and other titles.

[54] Ed Ricketts, "Wild at heart", *PC Format* June (1996), pp. 19-26.

[55] Margaret Cupitt and Sally Stockbridge, *Families and electronic entertainment* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Authority and Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1996), pp. xiv-xv, 32.

such rules were generated by the female parent whose ability to set such regulations was not affected by her employment status.[56]   The Australian Bureau of Statistics complemented these findings with statistical data that showed most adults from ages twenty-six through to fifty-five, where they were most likely to be parents of minors, readily learned useful computer skills from information technology equipment suppliers, employers, and adult education centres.[57]   Western Australian psychologist Kevin Durkin added that computer games actually promoted high levels of family involvement and that they did not encourage antisocial behaviour.[58]   Many adults, being computer games players themselves, were, of course, quite able to supervise their children's play.   Yet other causes for concern over computer games were refuted in due course.

The 1993-1995 legislation phase of the censorship of computer games held up two alleged games in particular as the ultimate examples of atrocity stories common to all moral panics. These were *Auschwitz* and *Custer's Last Stand*. From the Senate Select Committee's *Report on Video and Computer Games*, through to Queensland Legislative Assembly discussion on that State's *Classification Bill*, these two titles were condemned as if they were typical computer games and thus provided more than sufficient justification for harsh censorship laws against them.[59]   *Auschwitz* reportedly involved "cramming as many Jewish people as possible into gas chambers", and *Custer's Last Stand* depicted situations where "soldiers raped American Indian women".[60]   Politicians acted horrified by the high levels of sex and violence contained within *Auschwitz* and *Custer's Last Stand*, particularly as these games added similar fuel to the figurative fire that started with the initial panic over *Night Trap*.[61]   The

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[56] Cupitt and Stockbridge, *Families and electronic entertainment*, pp. 32, 62-63.

[57] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Household use of information technology Australia 1996*, p. 26.

[58] Kevin Durkin, *Computer games: their effects on young people – a review* (Sydney: Office of Film and Literature Classification, 1995), p. 71.

[59] Senate Select Committee on Community Standards, *Report on video and computer games*, p. 12; Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 35*, p. 11326; Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, p. 11627.

[60] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, p. 11627.

implication was that a very large number of computer games contained such themes. This level of hysteria was unjustified as not one person was able to find an actual copy of either game anywhere in the world and show it physically as evidence.[62] Furthermore, there was no evidence of any sort that the game *Auschwitz* ever existed in any form.[63] *Custer's Last Stand* was found probably to be an alternative title to *Custer's Revenge* which was a highly obscure and very unpopular adult Atari console system video game from the early 1980s where the graphics could be compared to very crude children's stick figure drawings or prehistoric cave paintings.[64] *Night Trap* itself eventually passed classification for sale in Australia unmodified with a relatively mild "M" rating from the OFLC.[65] Such a low rating from a deliberately severe censorship system again shows just how different computer games reality tended to be from computer games panic. Through their moral panic, politicians were once again unwilling to check their facts and continued to believe just about anything that was negative concerning computer games.

A pervasive concern throughout the entire computer games censorship related panic has been the supposed fact that computer games (and not just those involved in atrocity stories) tend to somehow encourage violence against women, by depicting them in highly sexual ways – thereby perhaps inviting unwanted lustful advances – and / or simply showing them as the victims of violence, especially sexual violence. One recent newspaper report remarked that twenty percent of computer games portrayed violence against women.[66] Leaving aside the fact that at least four times that percentage of computer games contain violence *against men* and very few people have ever seriously complained about that to the point where corrective censorship has taken place, it is worth considering the role of women in computer games – as

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[61] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, pp. 11626-27.

[62] David Hellaby, "Forbidden games", *Australian Penthouse* April (1996), p. 72.

[63] Hellaby, "Forbidden games", p. 72.

[64] Hellaby, "Forbidden games", p. 72; The reader is directed to the Internet at: http://www.sponsor.net/~gchance/2600Stuff/2600Docs/26docsA-L.html for considerable further information.

[65] Based on the author's personal observation of computer game store shelves.

[66] James Chapman, "Computer guru says violence no game", *The Courier Mail*, 25 April 2000, p. 5.

characters, designers, and as players.[67] Far from the negative weak, victimised stereotypes of women that protectionist pro-censorship forces used to censor computer games, female roles in the world of computer games are in fact wide and varied. What sexualised depictions and violence that do exist are readily explained by placing such depictions in their proper context. Most notably, there are no protests from women actually knowledgeable about computer games or players of such games. It will be seen that the moral crusaders' fears are once again unfounded and simply act to cover up more pressing concerns which will be detailed later.

Phantasmagoria was one of the first computer games banned by the new national censorship regulations for reasons that amounted to violence against women. This lavishly produced cd-rom based game that, like *Night Trap*, involves real human actors rather than animated characters, places the player in partial control of a young woman who explores a haunted house and fights a demon that resides within.[68] During the course of the story in scenes that are non-interactive, she is shown making love to her husband while displaying partial breast nudity, and, later, she is implicitly raped by her then demon-possessed husband in an initially amorous sexual scene that involves no nudity.[69] Under the previously mentioned computer games classification guidelines, the *Phantasmagoria* game was banned for sex, nudity, and sexual violence.[70] Aside from the already mentioned sheer contradiction of allowing nudity and sex in equally non-interactive film scenes from as low as the "M" level which anyone of any age may view, relevant contextual factors that could not have been considered as this product is a computer game rather than a film included: adults play computer games and this game was not created for children, and both controversial scenes are essential to the plot which establishes extreme horror from an initially pleasant situation.[71] In addition, it is hard to avoid having physical and psychological

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[67] Based on the author's personal experience of seven years of wide-ranging computer games play and research.

[68] *Phantasmagoria,* Designer Roberta Williams (Sierra On-Line, 1995).

[69] *Phantasmagoria*.

[70] Office of Film and Literature Classification, *Phantasmagoria*, pp. 1-2. [classification decision summary sheet]

[71] Office of Film and Literature Classification, *Phantasmagoria*, pp. 1-2. [classification decision summary sheet]; *Phantasmagoria*.

harm of some sort come to the main character of any horror story, whether that person is male or female. Throughout *Phantasmagoria's* storyline, she displays commendable drive and determination, eventually using her own abilities to overcome her problems and punish the demonic entity ultimately responsible for the various horrific events of the game.[72] She is not a victim nor worthy of contempt. In the five years since this game's release in other countries, no one has blamed any crime of any kind on it, nor has any player of either gender complained about the inclusion of those controversial scenes in a title that sold approximately a near-record million copies overseas.[73] Lastly, the game's designer was the world's leading female computer games creator and co-founder of one of the industry's leading and most respected companies which is known to promote female talent – hardly the situation where any genuine affronts to women would be likely to arise.[74] *Phantasmagoria* is far from a ready recipe for moral corruption and its banning ensured that Australians would miss out on a computer game that held broad demographic appeal overseas.

Another highly popular game, the satirical *Duke Nukem 3D*, was banned in its uncut version for depicting cartoon-like figures of bound women who may be optionally shot by the player's character.[75] The women are in that state after having endured a successful alien invasion of Earth where all the men but one were slain and the younger women kept alive only for breeding purposes in the style of a bad 1950s science fiction movie.[76] The player's goal, by controlling the title character "Duke", is to save what is left of the human race by destroying the aliens and trying not to harm the women in the crossfire.[77] As such, it is hardly surprising that, in a major *Newsweek* profile of the game and its players, neither the female reporter, nor the

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[72] *Phantasmagoria.*

[73] *Phantasmagoria*; Based on the author's email correspondence with hundreds of *Phantasmagoria* players over the past five years. Most correspondence was generated in response to his leading Website dedicated to the game located at: http://www.bit.net.au/~larme/archive/phantas/phantas.html

[74] *Phantasmagoria.*

[75] Ian Mackay, Re: *Duke Nukem 3D* (Brisbane: Manaccom, 1996), p.1. [memo to retailers]

[76] *Duke Nukem 3D*, Designers Todd Replogle and Allen H. Blum III (3D Realms Entertainment, 1996).

[77] *Duke Nukem 3D.*

enthusiastic adult female player used as an example of a typical fan of the game, ever mentioned or complained about any demeaning images of their own gender.[78]

Sex or nudity related concerns led to the banning of numerous other titles. So determined was the OFLC in its literal interpretation of the computer games classification guidelines to prevent all such depictions that, sometimes, extraordinary lengths were taken to ensure full compliance with the regulations. *Dream Web*, a crude cartoon-like game, was banned for "sexualised violence" - in other words where sex and violence are deemed by the censors to be connected in some way - following a scene where the player's character is expected to shoot an evil man, coincidentally while the man is in bed with a woman.[79] When the player's character enters the room, he shoots the man dead after the woman hides.[80] The game does not allow or even imply the woman's harm and the player's character has no part in the sexual activity.[81] In short, there is no connection whatsoever between the sex and the violence, but this example does demonstrate the often-dogmatic application of the computer games censorship system. In *Voyeur*, another banned game, a successful businesswoman verbally accuses her politician father of sexually molesting her as a child.[82] This short scene is much less explicit than what one can readily hear on most current affairs programs but it nonetheless banned the game for its use of "sexually explicit language".[83] Further games, most notably *Strip Poker* and *Tender Loving Care*, were banned solely for showing bare breasted female actors, the same such depictions generally found in numerous "M" rated films and above, most of which are legally accessible to children.[84] *Strip Poker* is a computerised variation of the well-known adult card game, and *Tender Loving Care* presents a sophisticated thriller style

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[78] Katie Hafner, "Log on and shoot", *Newsweek*, 12 August 1996, pp. 58-59.

[79] *Dream Web*, Designer Neil Dodwell (Empire Software and Creative Reality, 1994); "Bloody games! Sex, violence and videogames", p. 29.

[80] *Dream Web*.

[81] *Dream Web*.

[82] *Voyeur*, Designer David Riordan (Interplay, 1994); "Bloody games! Sex, violence and videogames", p. 29.

[83] *Voyeur*; "Bloody games! Sex, violence and videogames", p. 29.

[84] *Strip Poker*, [designer unknown] (Artworx, 1995); *Tender Loving Care*, Designer Rob Landeros (Aftermath Media, 1998); "Bloody games! Sex, violence and videogames", p. 29.

plotline for mature computer gamers.[85]   *Tender Loving Care* was later released as an interactive DVD and passed with an "MA" rating, presumably as a film, while the cd-rom version that provides the same very limited interactivity but with inferior quality video remains a "game" and thus banned.[86]   Some games, most notably *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh* started to be released with an optional parental lock that would block out the more risqué parts of the story, but Australia's game censorship regulations rated such games as if the lock was off all the time.[87]   This led to a situation where adults were patronised as some games sold only with the parental lock turned on permanently.[88]   Knowing that computer games can take weeks to play through entirely, the Commonwealth censorship legislation contains a clause that allows for the Director of the Office of Film and Literature Classification to recall any game at any time for re-evaluation should it be discovered that any contentious material may have been easily missed.[89]   Legislation protects Australians against images permissible, usually to both adults and children, in other media through computer games censorship guidelines that censors can ruthlessly interpret as they occasionally misunderstand the content of the games they assess.   No banned computer game contains any depiction that most people have recently seen as a likely serious threat to people's opinions of women in other media, particularly as evidenced by the accommodating nature of the current film classification guidelines.

Several other arguments exist against the unfounded perception of affronts to women by computer games.   Increasing numbers of women design computer games, usually with popular and detailed plots that tend to have broad appeal between both sexes and the use of women as the main, or major characters in strong roles.[90]   Male designers

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[85] *Strip Poker*; *Tender Loving Care*.

[86] Neil Melloy, "New to DVD", *The Courier Mail – What's On*, 1 June 2000, p.5.

[87] *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh*; Michael Van Raay [*Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh* Australian distributor], Email message to Anthony Larme 17 March 1997; "Violence in video games" *Hyper* July (2000), p. 19.

[88] Another game released with the parental lock turned on permanently was *Duke Nukem 3D* before that ruling was overturned upon appeal.

[89] Commonwealth of Australia, *Classification (publications, films and computer games) act 1995*, p. 11; "Violence in video games", p. 19.

likewise create female characters, often in dignified, active roles, and these too tend to have broad appeal among both males and females.[91] Female characters can capably dish out violence as well as receive it as an inevitable part of taking active roles, as do male characters. In addition, computer gaming is increasingly popular among women, with both US and Australian research confirming that about forty percent of computer games players are female.[92] Combined with the evidence presented above, it is clear that the "violence against women" implication concerning computer games, as with other misunderstandings, has no basis in fact.

Lastly, in regard to computer games related violence and sexual activity being interactive and thus "more damaging" than films to the minds of young people owing to such extra-sensory intensity, recent scientific research tends to refute that notion just as it did with similar accusations surrounding fantasy role-playing games. A study in the *Journal of Psychology* asserted that the commonly held beliefs about computer games giving rise to increased aggression could not be backed up by any scientific evidence.[93] In fact, people who are already aggressive tend to be drawn towards aggressive games.[94] More significantly, the final report of the Australian Government's exhaustive five-year study into the effects of computer games on the community revealed that there is no evidence that computer gamers cannot distinguish fantasy from reality, that they are more likely to be violent as a result of such games, or that interactivity has any real bearing on the psychological impact of any game on its player.[95] Some dissenting psychological studies from the United

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[90] *Phantasmagoria*; *Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh*; also several other popular titles from the author's personal computer games experiences, particularly the award-winning *Gabriel Knight* series by Jane Jensen.

[91] In the author's experience, several best selling action games qualify such as the *Tomb Raider* series. See also: Paul Potinger, "I was a virtual child", *The Australian Magazine*, 4-5 December 1999, pp. 47-48.

[92] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Household use of information technology Australia 1996*, p. 28; Interactive Digital Software Association. New study documents broad appeal of interactive entertainment software and hardware. [press release]

[93] Derek Scott, "The effect of video games on feelings of aggression", *The Journal of Psychology* 129(1994), pp. 121, 128-30.

[94] Scott, "The effect of video games on feelings of aggression", p. 129.

[95] Durkin and Aisbett, *Computer games and Australians today*, pp. xv, 123-24, 128-29.

States that prove the opposite appear to be in the minority and the work of those who have never played computer games for themselves.[96] Computer games still tend to include graphics inferior to those in film, follow clearly unrealistic laws of nature and human behaviour, and ultimately reward the triumph of good over evil.[97] They do not adversely influence their players, interactivity has no bearing upon psychological impact, and normally aggressive people tend to bring such feelings to computer gaming and do not get them from gaming.

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With no valid scientific justification for any of the fears of the moral crusaders against computer games, one must ask why such panic occurred - and is still occurring - so severely in Australia. The reasons lie in several areas. They include: insecurities over Australia's role in the new world economy, generational gaps and fears of new technology arising from such difference, and changing sex roles within the family unit. All these factors combine and work together to form a moral crisis and ensure a renewed expansion of censorship in Australia in an era of massive change in the cultural, social, technological, and economic arenas.[98]

The primary indicator of the main reason behind the unique course of the moral panic over computer games in Australia, and why this country has a harsher censorship system for these products than the USA which shares only the other moral crisis symptoms listed in later paragraphs in this section, lies in the aforementioned brief slighting reference in the 1993 Committee's *Report* to most computer games being of foreign origin and that they contain "mindless matter". When looked at in connection with fears over the Internet and all the foreign material that can be accessed through it, it is hard not to get the impression that many Australians are again suffering from some sort of technological insecurity as film censors were with foreign movies earlier

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[96] Kerrie Murphy, "Easy distinction between a game and reality", *The Australian*, 16 May 2000, p. 15.

[97] Murphy, "Easy distinction between a game and reality", p. 15.

[98] Catherine Beavis, "Pressing (the right?) buttons: literacy and technology, crisis and continuity", *English in Australia* 123(1998), p. 42.

this century.[99]   Australians are fearful of not being able to change their economic practices to keep up pace with the rest of the developed world, the United States in particular.   The source of most computer games, the USA, generates billions of dollars in games revenue each year while, in Australia, legislation tends to prevent encouragement of such an industry.[100]   The US allocates forty-one percent of its investment capital towards information technology projects.[101]   In Australia, computer games and Internet controversies clash with the need to embrace the new global information economy.[102]   Australian Governments and businesses tend to conservatively retain their interest in developing the country's traditional primary production commodity economy in the areas of mining and agriculture, and decrease the funds allocated towards the research and development of new information technology products for export.[103]   There is also an unwillingness to market aggressively and to dare to be innovative like the Americans.[104]   These factors have led to a dramatic plunge in recent years of the Australian dollar against the US currency on world financial markets that tend to invest in economies that show the most promise for strong continual growth.[105]   These desirable economies do not rely on resources like Australia, but rather well marketed cutting-edge information technology.[106]   A distinct lack of political and business will to take major steps to alleviate Australia's disappointing economic situation remains and has presumably unconsciously led to a local state of moral panic concerning many areas of information technology – computer games included.   All other symptoms of the moral crisis in Australia flow on from and increase in severity by their combination with this one.

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[99] See the Introduction.

[100] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Classification of computer games and images (interim) act 1995*, p. 15.

[101] Robert Gottliebsen, "Forget GST, it's the new economy, stupid", *The Australian*, 12 September 2000, p. 22.

[102] Gottliebsen, "Forget GST, it's the new economy, stupid", p. 22.

[103] Josh Gliddon, "The clever country?", *Australian Personal Computer* May(2000), p. 114.

[104] Gliddon, "The clever country?", p. 115.

[105] The Economist, "Tyranny of distanced", *The Australian*, 12 September 2000, p. 22.

[106] The Economist, "Tyranny of distanced", p. 22.

While it is probably true that most computer gamers are adults, it is also true that many are children, so it is still correct to speak of computer games in connection with fears among some parents over their children's use of these games. It has been a common fear among human societies, particularly those of the past century, that the younger generation will corrupt itself and jeopardise future societal stability through their use of new technologies. Previous generations of parents were concerned about their children's apparently excessive use of new technologies and entertainment they themselves did not grow up with and therefore distrusted.[107] Youth tend to use new entertainment media to express their emerging individuality and new peer groupings in a bid for separation from their parents as part of the normal process of growing up.[108] Some of the earlier moral panics from the twentieth century involved youthful fascination with radio, and, later, rock and roll music and television.[109] Even though fantasy role-playing games use the highly traditional technologies of books, paper, and pencils, they may be included in this paragraph owing to their innovative usage of these materials. It has long been a natural view that "vulnerable" children are in most need of protecting from the "threat" of new technologies, and that this protection ensures the protection of current and future society.[110] While it is true to say that concerns over all these older media are still extant among various people and organizations, primary concern has shifted to the newest and most pervasive technologies – this time computer games and even computer technology in general.

Especially throughout the initial and legislative phases of the computer games censorship controversy, connections were frequently made to "related" subjects such as the Internet and the pornography, particularly child pornography, that one might find there. Like computer games, the Internet has the ability to subvert and bypass existing power structures such as more traditional media, parental supervision, and Government regulatory schemes to the likely detriment of the type of society in which

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[107] Pottinger, "I was a virtual child", p. 47.

[108] Martin and Segrave, *Anti-rock*, pp. 13-14.

[109] Pottinger, "I was a virtual child", p. 47; Beavis, "Pressing buttons", p. 43.

[110] Beavis, "Pressing buttons", p. 43.

many in the older generation feel comfortable.[111]   In a society in which power is so often linked to the possession of information, children can supposedly readily gain information about whatever they want - especially sexual activity - without normal supervision by their parents and teachers, a minority of whom are most vocal in proclaiming their "inability" to learn new technologies and spreading undue community concern as a result.[112]   These protectionists fear the corruption of children by the young subsequently acting and thinking in an adult way before they are physically and psychologically ready to accept adult responsibilities.[113]   In such a climate of fear and suspicion, it is not possible for the moral crusaders to make adequate comparisons with more traditional media and realise that, with some effort on their part, proper adult supervision is achievable and that there is no cause for widespread alarm.

Mention must also be made of changing roles within the family.   One member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly raised this point during discussion of that State's computer games *Classification Bill* when he remarked that modern society has placed great importance upon the acquisition of considerable amounts of material wealth.[114]   As a result, it has been hard to fulfil a typical family's material needs on one income, thus necessitating that the other parent - usually the mother with the encouragement of women's liberation movements - gain paid employment.[115]   These changes, supposedly, have left large numbers of children without their primary and most able supervisor, their mother, to guide them in their daily activities, especially those that involve their use of new electronic leisure technologies.[116]   While the Office of Film

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[111] Catharine Lumby, "Panic attacks: old fears in a new media area", *Media International Australia* 85(1997), p. 45; Commonwealth of Australia. *Parliamentary debates (Hansard)*, pp. 1388-92; Legislative Assembly Queensland. *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, pp. 11630, 11636-38.

[112] Lumby, "Panic attacks", p. 45.

[113] Lumby, "Panic attacks", p. 45.

[114] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, p. 11623.

[115] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, p. 11623.

[116] Legislative Assembly Queensland, *Weekly Hansard. First session of the forty-seventh parliament. No. 36*, pp. 11623-24.

and Literature Classification's study did find that mothers are the main rule-makers and supervisors for their children, it did not discover working mothers had any more difficulty supervising their children than do full time homemakers.[117]   What really appears to be the underlying problem based on the evidence presented so far in this chapter is that there is a moral crisis over the female work / home contradiction. Many older protectionists are not fully satisfied with either option or both for women. Broadening female horizons while retaining many traditional feelings of protection, especially those arising from a strong traditional role in the home, has led to deep divisions in society.   Society is changing at a faster rate than these protectionists can completely accept.   This discomfort leads to moves towards overprotection and resultant re-emergence of traditional offers of protection such as via the aforementioned statements and actions of Senator Reynolds.   It is hard for many protectionists to realise that women can be full and active designers and participants in computer games society, and stand unafraid, unintimidated, and comfortable with new technologies - and that generally younger computer games players of both sexes both understand and accept these facts.

<div align="center">*</div>

Controversies over computer games in Australia present excellent examples of the concept of moral crisis which leads to moral panic which in turn leads to actions by moral crusaders to bring about increased censorship.   Contradictory attitudes in the areas of the adoption of new technologies, and towards women and young people have manifested themselves in concern over the content of the newly popular media of computer games.   Such attitudes have no reliable scientific basis, but are simply manifestations of deep insecurities among significant sections of the population.   The issues aired during the computer games controversies in Australia are generally much stronger and local than what amounted to borrowed controversies concerning fantasy role-playing games.   Media assistance helped to raise community concern and politicians over-reacted quickly to introduce strong censorship legislation that was inconsistent with the United States whose economic and political circumstances did not produce a moral panic of any similar magnitude.   Given the findings of a thorough

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[117] Cupitt and Stockbridge, *Families and electronic entertainment*, pp. 32, 62-63.

analysis of relatively recent incidents of games controversies in this chapter and in chapter two, some overall conclusions may now be reached along with suggestions for future historical research concerning the ever-present, but ever-changing, phenomenon of censorship.

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CONCLUSION

Fantasy role-playing games and computer games are not dangerous games. Involvement with *Dungeons and Dragons* is not very likely to lead a player into the murky realm of Satanism and suicide, nor will playing controversial computer games such as *Phantasmagoria*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, or even *Night Trap* lead to feelings of contempt for women among the vast majority of gamers. Every human being has a unique personality, therefore no absolute guarantees can be given that some adverse consequences will not arise among a very small number of players, but society must accept these risks if the effects of entertainment censorship on the majority are to be minimised. Within the framework of moral crisis that leads to moral panic and moral crusades, this thesis has detailed and analysed the results of certain instances of weak or non-existent risk taking where censorship has inevitably arisen.

Censorship is a phenomenon common throughout human history. It influenced the lives of the ancient Romans, Renaissance and Victorian Britons, and twentieth century Australians and Americans. Those with power and authority in any given society have ensured the regulation of entertainment products in full accord with their worldviews. Strong regulation of film earlier this century, for example, resulted from their suspicion that those under their control could not be trusted to enjoy such material without promoting some form of negative societal upheaval. Most recently, adult society has feared that it will lose control over its children - society's future - to the forces of Satanism, advocates of violence towards women, and others.

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen the emergence of a distinct youth consumer culture. Young people have asserted their identity separate from that of their parents and others of older generations through their enthusiastic embrace of successive new forms of entertainment. In the 1950s and 1960s it was rock and roll, in the 1980s it was fantasy role-playing games, and, now, it is computer games and the Internet. Each innovation was, and still is, often opposed to some degree by older pro-censorship advocates. Undoubtedly, future innovations of notable appeal to the young will also endure attempts made to suppress them.

Entertainment censorship of fantasy role-playing games and computer games was analysed in this thesis through the framework of the concepts of moral panic and moral crisis. Contemporary Western societies are currently experiencing a period of rapid social change resulting in moral crisis. Value conflicts between old and new ideals, particularly (but not exclusively) the duty to fulfil one's own needs against one's duty to others, have ensured widespread adult guilt over the perceived neglect of their children. The ensuing guilt has led to a transferral of anxieties towards child over-protection in the form of a moral panic.

Such panics have seen the circulation of atrocity stories – from witchcraft, murders, and suicide in connection with fantasy role-playing games, to allegations that real and urban mythological computer games promote almost unimaginable violence against women. Traditional pillars of society, from parents and police to politicians and priests, have acted as moral crusaders in religious fundamentalist or secular protectionist modes and spoken out against these games, often bringing about their censorship. News media reports have generally taken side with those who panic and the ensuing negative publicity has often helped pro-censorship causes, but, as in all panics, it has never eliminated the focuses of the panics – normally ensuring that the games continue their popularity among those of the younger generation who enjoy them.

Regular comparisons in this thesis between the games related censorship controversies of Australia and the United States have gone beyond the pre-existing literature and shown that the exact character of moral crises in any particular country has a distinct effect on the course and nature of censorship in that country as do the legacy of earlier internal censorship movements. Americans have long lived in a religious culture, and belief in the spread of the evils of Satanism and the reality of the Devil coincided with peak fundamentalist inspired moral panic over *Dungeons and Dragons*. Australians do not live in a predominantly religious culture, so major protests were confined to just one idiosyncratic State. Conversely, in relation to computer games, Australia, with its traditions of speech restrictions and censorship and distrust of new visual entertainment media, in addition to a heavy and seemingly unchangeable reliance on an old primary production economy, unsurprisingly regulated computer games harshly. At the same time, Americans, with their traditions

of free speech and heavy investment in the new global information economy, created a sensible regulatory system for those products.

Further extending the pre-existing literature, scientific and other logical evidence provided in this thesis has shown that fears over both fantasy role-playing games and computer games are unwarranted. Such truths have little or no impact upon the morally panicked however, because the true causes for their anxiety are to be found in other areas – in various moral crises that can display a wide range of symptoms. When the crises change, the symptoms change, and the focus of the panic is transferred to some other medium such as from fantasy role-playing games to computer games. The cycle therefore continues indefinitely.

This thesis has done what it can to fill a gap in the pre-existing literature on the history of censorship which, up until now, had not truly covered recent entertainment related developments in the areas of fantasy role-playing games and computer games. Nevertheless, these are not the only areas of censorship related controversies connected with the activities or perceived activities of the young. Internet censorship research, or even greater depths of research into the primary subjects of this thesis, would be invaluable additions to the corpus of historical investigation into the ongoing phenomenon of censorship. Further useful research may also be undertaken to test and continue to expand upon the moral panic and moral crisis theories that have retained their value in the historical understanding of censorship movements even if this thesis has somewhat extended their claims. The author hopes that future researchers will expand upon all this material and analyse new movements to censor entertainment media as they arise.

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APPENDIX

Censorship Chronologies
(Based on the major events mentioned in chapters two and three)

Fantasy role-playing games

- **1977** - TSR began publication of the First Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Throughout its twelve-year life span, this edition contained many references to demons that raised considerable fundamentalist criticism.

- **1980s** - *Dungeons and Dragons'* popularity and related censorship controversies reached their height as the game was blamed in the media for a wide variety of irreligious, disruptive, and criminal behaviour. Sporadic bans were enforced in homes and at schools throughout the US and Australia. Satanic panic reached its height in the US during this decade.

- **1982** - The US based fundamentalist Pro-Family Forum widely distributed an anti-fantasy role-playing game brochure titled "*Dungeons and Dragons*: only a game?"

- **1982-1997** - Patricia Pulling's "Bothered About *Dungeons and Dragons*" organization actively campaigned in the US against the game, taking both protectionist and fundamentalist viewpoints.

- **1984** - Chick Publications released the anti-*Dungeons and Dragons* fundamentalist propaganda comic book *Dark Dungeons*.

- **1986** - The controversy reached Australia and conservative Queensland State Government effectively banned *Dungeons and Dragons* in State school classrooms following building community concern. The Anglican Synod in Sydney rejected a motion to speak out against the game.

- **1987** - A fundamentalist Queensland minister failed to bring about any form of ban or widespread serious concern over the *Dungeons and Dragons* game.

- **1989** - TSR began publication of the Second Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*. These new publications omitted references to demons.

- **1990** - TSR vigorously defended the use of demons in the *Dungeons and Dragons* game, but retained the ban on mentioning them in their products.

- **1991** - "The Truth about *Dungeons and Dragons*" book by Joan Hake Robie added to the fundamentalist literature against the game. Despite some earlier efforts at accommodation by TSR, *Dungeons and Dragons* was still criticised on mainly religious grounds. In Australia, New South Wales MP Paul Gibson unsuccessfully called for an official investigation into the negative effects of games "such as *Dungeons and Dragons*" on young people.

- **1997** - Wizards of the Coast acquired TSR.

- **1998-2000** - Demons began to return to the *Dungeons and Dragons* game as the voices of its critics virtually disappeared.

- **2000** - Wizards of the Coast began publication of the Third Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*.

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Computer games

- **1993**   - In May, protectionist Australian Labor Senator Margaret Reynolds, horrified by the realistic computer game *Night Trap*, began to actively campaign for a system to regulate these products. By October, her Senate Select Committee on Community Standards released a highly critical report on computer games that firmly recommended their harsher regulation than film and video. Atrocity stories began concerning the "games" *Auschwitz* and *Custer's Last Stand*.

- **1994**   - A further report by the Committee reiterated many of its earlier findings on computer games. In Canberra, both sides of the House of Representatives praised the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Bill* as rightly following the recommendations of the Committee. The newly developed computer games classification guidelines banned almost all forms of sex and nudity in computer games available in Australia.

- **1995**   - The Commonwealth's new *Classification Act* came into force. Queensland's bipartisan supported and newly passed *Classification of Computer Games and Images (Interim) Act* allowed for Commonwealth computer games classification decisions to be strongly enforced at the State level. Other States passed similar legislation. Local censors banned computer games widely popular overseas such as *Phantasmagoria*. New computer games ratings systems in the USA and UK did not ban these games. Preliminary Government research found that many concerns about computer games were largely unjustified. In both Australia and the US, children's access to adult Internet content caused concern.

- **1996**   - Government and industry research found that adults were not as ignorant about computer games technologies as first supposed and, in fact, perhaps a majority of computer gamers were adults. Computer games supporters refuted atrocity stories surrounding *Auschwitz* and *Custer's Last Stand*. Commonwealth and State computer games censorship regimes remained unchanged as bans under their thoroughly discredited rule continued.

- **1999**   - The final report of a five-year Australian Government study into computer games found that there was no cause for community alarm about this pastime and that there was a large market for games among adults. Such results echoed majority academic research opinion. Commonwealth and State computer games censorship regimes still remained unchanged as bans under their thoroughly discredited rule continued. Canberra passed legislation to try to censor Australians' use of the Internet.

- **2000**   - On world financial markets, the value of the Australian dollar plummeted to record lows against strong currencies, particularly the US dollar. Blame centred on Australia's unwillingness to fully embrace the new global information technology economy.

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