



File No: T23/20689

Decision Report

Classification decisions are made in accordance with the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act), the National Classification Code and the Classification Guidelines.

Production Details:

Title:	Sympathy Kiss
Alternate Titles:	
Publisher:	Reef Entertainment
Programmer:	Idea Factory
Year of Production:	2023
Version:	Original
Country of origin:	JAPAN
Language:	English
Application Type:	Level 2 Gameplay
Applicant:	Reef Entertainment

Dates:

Date application received by the Classification Board:	10/08/2023
Date of decision:	11/09/2023

Decision:

Classification: RC
Consumer Advice: The computer game is classified RC in accordance with the National Classification Code, Computer Games Table, 1. (a) as computer games that "depict, express or otherwise deal with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified."

Synopsis:

Sympathy Kiss is a Japanese first-person, otome romance visual novel game in which the player makes decisions from the perspective of a female character about developing relationships with various male love interests, set in a modern-day office. The game has no online interactivity or in-game purchases.

Reasons for Decision:

In making this decision, the Classification Board has applied the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (the Classification Act), the National Classification Code (the Code) and the Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012 (the Guidelines).

In the Board's view this game warrants a Refused Classification (RC) classification in accordance with item 1(a)

of the computer games table of the Code:

“1. Computer games that:

(a) depict, express or otherwise deal with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified;” will be Refused Classification.

Further, the Guidelines state that computer games that exceed the R18+ classification category will be RC. In the R18+ classification category "Actual sexual violence is not permitted. Implied sexual violence that is visually depicted, interactive, not justified by context or related to incentives or rewards is not permitted."

Sexual violence is defined in the list of terms in the Guidelines as “Sexual assault or aggression, in which the victim does not consent.”

The examples described below do not represent an exhaustive list of the content that caused the computer game to be RC for implied sexual violence that is visually depicted.

In one sequence of the game, a depiction of implied sexual violence occurs when a male love interest, YOFY, imposes a non-consensual kiss on the playable female character. This scene features in Episode 03 in the carousel of available YOFY storylines with the interaction taking place in a darkened alley at night. The spoken conversation between the characters is in Japanese while the translation appears in English text in dialogue boxes at the bottom of the screen. The dialogue boxes also contain the female character’s inner monologue, or narration, of her experience.

The interaction commences, when YOFY blames the female playable character for hurting him saying, “Well I’m hurting a lot right now and it’s all your fault”. After which the female playable character describes in her narration, “YOFY locked his hand behind my head and pulled my face closer to his, our eyes level”. YOFY says, “So take responsibility and console me.”

The narration is accompanied by a still image, tightly framed, of YOFY standing over the female playable character, grasping the back of her neck, before the frame tilts upwards to focus on his face in close proximity to hers, implicitly pulling her lips towards his own open mouth, his tongue and teeth both visible. His mouth and tongue are shining which gives the appearance of saliva, or that he is salivating, as a single tear drop is depicted on the female character’s face. Soft piano music accompanies the camera slowly panning along the still image to imply movement. YOFY emits an amorous sigh as the female playable character’s narration says, “I was angry, afraid, and still...Still, the feel of his tongue tracing my lips made my body heat, made me melt...”

The still image suddenly shudders with an audible rustling sound, and the framing of the image widens to reveal YOFY is grasping the female playable character’s wrist, holding her arm away from her body, implying that he is restraining her physically. While there is some ambivalence in the female character’s own feelings towards YOFY, the non-consensual nature of the kiss is further emphasised as she narrates, “When I gasped for air, I came back to my senses and began hitting YOFY’s back”. She continues to describe the interaction saying “His restraining hold never relaxed. In an attempt to resist him, I bit down hard on his lips. I ripped my face away and saw that his lips were smeared with red crimson blood”. She apologises for biting his lip, however YOFY responds darkly, “No. I’m not done”.

The still image abruptly transitions to a tightly framed image of the pair kissing again, implying that YOFY has forced another kiss onto the female playable character, and he emits a quiet, but satisfied grunt. The image shifts, bring focus to a distinct outline of blood visible on YOFY’s open lips and tongue, which drips from the corners of his mouth. The narration notes YOFY has bitten her lip in revenge, and the female payable character further narrates, “The taste of iron spread through my mouth”, implying she could taste the blood drawn from his bite. She describes her fear, saying, “He bit my lip as revenge, and my cry came out as little more than a

squeak". The frame then widens showing the pair in which YOFY is restraining the female playable character's wrist again. YOFY lets out a soft, unsettling giggle and says, "Hehe ... Does it hurt? Poor thing..." The female playable character narrates that YOFY licks the blood on her lips, and he says, "Ahh, I can't tell which blood is mine and which blood is yours anymore". YOFY is described at this point as sticking out his, "Blood-soaked tongue" at her with a nefarious smile. The frame shudders again and transitions to a still image of the darkened street with nobody present including YOFY and the female playable character. The female character narration notes that she, "pushed him away with all my strength".

The sequence concludes with the same still image of the empty, dark alleyway and the sound of running footsteps, implied to be those of the female playable character, accompanied by her narration, noting she is, "Confused, mortified, and terror-stricken" and, "I sprinted home".

The still image of YOFY while holding the female playable character with blood on his mouth is also shown in the gallery of images. The image can be clicked on, which allows the player to select and revisit through interactivity functionality. When the image is selected, its size increases and the still frame moves to focus on YOFY's blood-lined mouth, which contributes to the impact of the depiction of implied sexual violence described above.

In the Board's opinion, the above example constitutes a visual depiction of implied sexual violence and cannot be accommodated within the R18+ classification category and the game is therefore Refused Classification.

Decision:

This game is classified RC with consumer advice of The computer game is classified RC in accordance with the National Classification Code, Computer Games Table, 1. (a) as computer games that "depict, express or otherwise deal with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified."