



## ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

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WWW.ESRB.ORG

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 29, 2005**

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### **ESRB STATEMENT REGARDING 2005 MEDIAWISE VIDEO GAME REPORT CARD**

The ESRB rejects this year's MediaWise Report Card just as we did last year, and for the same reasons. Ignoring the tremendous and verifiable success of the ESRB rating system, NIMF instead relies on flawed research and ignores any and all conflicting evidence. Its statement that it will exclude ESRB from its rating summit proves that NIMF has crossed over from being a fair-minded critic to just another interest group with an agenda to advance, whatever the cost. The shame is that the group most harmed by today's announcement is not ESRB, but the very parents NIMF claims to serve.

The record should reflect the fact that after last year's Report Card we contacted NIMF so that we may better understand their criticism and work together, but no response was forthcoming. Their silence is an unmistakable indication that this is not about working cooperatively in the interests of video game consumers, but rather is about NIMF imposing its own narrow values and morality on the rest of the country, regardless that it has little evidence to show that parents agree with their point of view.

The simple fact remains that the ESRB ratings are the most effective, recognized and trustworthy ratings for video games, and parents can and should rely on them in making game choices for their families. Our most recent nationwide survey of parents found that they agree with the ESRB ratings assigned an overwhelming 82%<sup>1</sup> of the time, which clearly shows that our ratings are strongly representative of their opinions and expectations. NIMF has no comparable research yet still purports to speak for parents.

The following relates directly to claims put forth by NIMF:

- The NIMF relied on a private, for-profit company with a vested financial interest in undermining ESRB for its attack on ESRB ratings. That group itself has rated only 99 games in its history, and even NIMF itself has reviewed only 35 games. This is hardly justification as an authority on video game ratings when considering that ESRB has assigned ratings to over 10,000 games since its inception.
- A nationwide study conducted earlier this year by leading research firm Peter. D. Hart Research Associates reported that among parents of children who play video games, 78% are aware of the ESRB ratings, and 70% use them regularly when purchasing games. Ratings awareness continues to grow steadily as a result of our aggressive marketing, outreach, educational and PSA initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Study conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates and commissioned by ESRB, November 2005

- There is no “science” to the assignment of video game content ratings, just as there is no one way to describe a painting, and Dr. Walsh’s opinions do not serve as a substitute. ESRB uses raters who have experience with children to ensure that the ratings are representative of parental opinions and values. The level of parental agreement measured in our recent study verifies that ESRB ratings are indeed representative of mainstream opinions about ratings, and are effectively helping them make educated game purchase decisions.
- Contrary to NIMF’s claims regarding retailer compliance, the ESRB found in its most recent retailer signage review that among over 8,000 stores in all 50 states, 79% were fully compliant with posting ratings information to educate consumers about ESRB ratings. The NIMF analysis is based upon a sample that is nowhere close to being representative or scientific.
- The NIMF Report Card misrepresents the disparity between the assignment of the M (Mature 17+) and AO (Adults Only 18+) rating as reluctance on the part of ESRB to assign the AO when appropriate. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that publishers understand that retailers largely choose not to stock AO-rated games, and so in the interests of producing marketable games, publishers will oftentimes revise and resubmit a game that was initially assigned an AO by raters in an effort to produce an M-rated game. When this happens, the process starts again from the beginning, and each new version of a game is reviewed independently. The call to issue more AO ratings has little to do with rating accuracy, and more to do with NIMF’s real agenda, which is to destroy the commercial viability of games it deems objectionable. Unlike NIMF, ESRB’s job is to be a neutral rater, not a censor.

See attachment regarding PSVratings.

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### **About Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)**

The ESRB is a non-profit, self-regulatory body established in 1994 by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA). ESRB independently assigns computer and video game content ratings, enforces advertising guidelines, and helps ensure responsible online privacy practices for the interactive entertainment software industry.



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The NIMF MediaWise Report Card is based upon information provided by PSVratings, a private, subscription-based, for-profit rating service provider.

The following information pertains to PSVratings:

- PSVratings, a for-profit, subscription-based rating service, is relied upon by NIMF to provide the basis for its analysis. This company has reviewed only a small fraction of games (99 in total) whereas the ESRB has assigned ratings for virtually every game sold in the U.S. for over a decade (over 10,000). They falsely claim that our ratings lack the independence that theirs do, however they fail to acknowledge that ESRB ratings have always been assigned by independent game raters with no ties to the video game industry whatsoever.
- PSVratings claims to quantify objectionable game content while admitting in its own Disclaimer that this practice is impractical given the interactive nature of video games. They also admit to disregarding vitally pertinent content in the assignment of their ratings out of convenience, whereas ESRB ratings consider *all* pertinent content, regardless of whether or not it is playable. Parents need and deserve ratings that consider all pertinent game content.
- PSVratings suggests that their ratings provide more information to parents about what type of content is in a game, and base this claim on a rating system that uses an ambiguous traffic-light rating for content. PSVratings classifies violent content in three main categories: red being defined as being “graphic,” yellow being “explicit,” and green being “suggestive.” Through these three broad, vague and uninformative categories, a parent is left to figure out what the difference between “graphic” and “explicit” is, knowing little more than that one is apparently somehow worse than the other. The ESRB uses over 30 specific content descriptors, which identify depictions of violence, sexual or suggestive content, profanity, use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and gambling, among others.

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