

Art Imitates Life

By Reg P. Wydeven
February 4, 2006

One of the first movies I ever remember seeing was 'Grand Theft Auto', the 70s car-chase flick that marked the directorial debut of Ron Howard. I remember the movie because Howard also starred in the film, and I, of course, knew him better as Richie Cunningham.

Any young boy would love this movie because it was chock-full of car chases, and even cooler, car crashes. The chase begins after Howard's character, Sam Freeman, runs off with his girlfriend, Paula Powers, to elope in Las Vegas. Freeman and Powers have a forbidden romance because she's the daughter of a wealthy gubernatorial candidate and he's a boy from the wrong side of the tracks. Powers' rich but dorky fiancé, Collins Hedgeworth, follows them in hot pursuit. So is a gang of hired thugs seeking the \$25,000 reward for Powers' safe return, not to mention her father's Rolls Royce Silver Cloud that Freeman stole.

On the way to Vegas, Freeman and Powers cause dozens of car wrecks, smash two helicopters and even an ice-cream truck. 'Grand Theft Auto' is the epitome of a 70s movie – wholesome family entertainment focusing on the theme of love conquering all, with exciting car-chases and demolition derby-ish crashes thrown in.

Almost 30 years later, the title 'Grand Theft Auto' has emerged again. This time, instead of describing a wholesome 70s car-chase romp, it describes a dark video game set in San Andreas, California. The game features characters that obviously steal cars, but also commit other crimes such as homicide, drug dealing and pimping. Worse yet, if players successfully complete certain aspects of the game, they are able to unlock a hidden 'mini-game' that allows players to engage in explicit sexual acts.

When the game was released in October of 2004, the industry board that rates video games was unaware of the hidden mini-game and gave 'Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas' a mature rating. Once the board learned of the mini-game, it changed the game's rating to adults-only. In addition, numerous national retailers, such as Target, Wal-Mart and Best Buy, pulled the game from their shelves.

The problem that many critics of the game have is that these actions were only taken after more than 12 million copies of the game had been sold, generating about \$600 million in sales for the game's manufacturer, Rockstar Games, and its parent company, Take-Two Interactive.

The City of Los Angeles recently filed a lawsuit against Rockstar Games and Take-Two Interactive for failing to adequately disclose the explicit content of 'Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas' and for engaging in unfair competition. The City's attorney's office is seeking civil penalties from the manufacturer and is requesting the company take action to ensure full disclosure to consumers about the content of their video games.

Legal troubles are also associated with another wholesome 70s family movie – 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'. The movie focuses on Charlie and his visit to Willy Wonka's magical, whimsical candy company. Neighbors of the Chicago-based Blommer Chocolate Co. would say this chocolate factory isn't quite as magical as Willy Wonka's.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently cited the company for allegedly violating the Clean Air Act because excess dust and noxious odors were being emitted from its plant. Because these emissions are unsafe for children, the elderly and people with heart and lung diseases, the EPA may fine Blommer, which clearly won't result in 'Happy Days'.

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