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MG: Mudgeon on Games *by Mudgeon*

Aye, crazy is this world! Have you been hearing the latest, my friends? Recall that, ne'er so long ago, this fine publication did expose the idiocy of the federal government which was applying pressure to have video and computer entertainments rated! Not only were retailers being pressured into carrying only titles "graced" by a rating, but actual oversight boards were to be established to rate each and every game released for consumer purchase.

A nibble here, a nibble there, and before you know it, government agents will sit with you in your living room as you play your games. Should something appear on-screen not to their liking, why, they'll might even pull the plug on your system! I certainly don't believe gamers need another set of parents to be telling you what should, and what should not, be occurring in your own home. Especially when that parent is as clumsy, ineffective and bureaucratic as the oafs currently clinging to the banks of the Potomac for safety, passing "socially reconstructive" legislation we don't need!

The feds have willing accomplices. They are known as the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) and the Software Publishers Association (SPA). These accomplices have difficulties even deciding how to rate the games. Not only do we have the feds telling us to purify our gaming souls, but now we have private associations authorized to rate the games unable to decide between the two of them how to accomplish the bloody rating in the first place! Idiiotic!

Let's see what's cooking' here! The SPA believes in a system that requires a game publisher to run a disk-based program. The program, with all of it's native, SPA-based intelligence, rates the game publisher's answers to the game content queries in three areas: language, violence, and sex/nudity. If any of these elements are found in the publisher's game, thrilling follow-up questions are presented. A rating of from one to four is assigned to each area indicated to be present in the game, with four being the highest level. Should you be fortunate enough to have a title void of "questionable" elements, you'll receive a rating of ALL (suitable for all audiences). For this insightful treatment of your title, the cost will be about \$350 per title for "large" companies, \$25 per title for smaller publishing companies.

The IDSA complicates matters even more. Their rating system is quite similar to the ratings you find for movie listings—and the IDSA rating oversight committee is going to consist of a group of from 50 to 100 folk who will be paid for their "insights" into your game. There'll be

five rating tags affixed to submitted software—if the title is deemed suited for ages three and up, the rating will be EC (early childhood); for ages six and up, the rating is KA (kids to adults); titles suitable for ages 13 and up get a T (teen) rating; mature folk content suitable for ages 17 and up will receive a M (mature) rating; adults only material will receive an AO rating. The tastes of these 50 to 100 folk could spell either success or disaster for any title submitted to them for review. Plus, to receive the honor of an IDSA rating, companies will have to shell out \$500 per game. This fee will have to be paid, no matter if you're a member of the IDSA or not! Plus, this "blessing" will take at least a week before the publisher will receive the much anticipated rating.

'Tis a grand thing to be seeing competing ratings schemes racing for the power of their blessings. That's what this competition is all about—who has the power to set the gaming agenda! We don't need this interference with our right to determine what is best for ourselves and our families. If the feds wish to come clean, perhaps they should start within their own house. When private associations become part of federal interference, it's time to take another look at what's going on. Some stores have succumbed to the pressure and won't carry unrated products. Well, folks, we remained too silent on this issue for too long and the powers-that-be have gained the upper hand. I don't believe, however, that it can ever be too late to apply the brakes!