

Rockstar Games blames Hot Coffee on hackers

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Created 13/07/2005 - 10:23pm

Submitted by srlinuxx on Wednesday 13th of July 2005 10:23:29 PM Filed under [Gaming](#) [1]

Following nearly two weeks of building controversy, Take-Two Interactive subsidiary Rockstar Games today addressed charges that the PC version of its best-seller, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, contains sexually explicit minigames unlockable by a widely available mod.

In a statement, Rockstar claimed it is not responsible for the so-called "Hot Coffee" mod. Instead, the company said it was the result of "the work of a determined group of hackers who have gone to significant trouble to alter scenes in the official version of the game."

Two ongoing investigations--one by the US-based Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) and another by an arm of the Australian government--are examining the popular crime game. Specifically, they are looking at whether the sex minigames and nude models featured in them are based on preexisting code, accessed via the mod, or were introduced by the mod itself.

The publisher, which has a reputation for being reticent with the press, has said little since the "Hot Coffee" mod was uncovered. Since then, the debate over the mod's origin has prompted stories in the general media, enthusiast press, and major business and finance outlets.

Today's statement not only fingers hackers as creating the mod, but it also goes into some detail about their modus operandi: "Hackers created the 'Hot Coffee' modification by disassembling and then combining, recompiling and altering the game's source code."

Rockstar added it intends to take steps to ensure the Hot Coffee mod is neutralized. "Since the 'Hot Coffee' scenes cannot be created without intentional and significant technical modifications and reverse-engineering of the game's source code, we are currently investigating ways that we can increase the security protection of the source code."

In addition to addressing the mod's origin, Rockstar also updated the industry on its compliance with the ESRB investigation, saying it was doing all it could to aid the ratings board.

"We are continuing work diligently to assist the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) as it investigates the circumstances surrounding the recently discovered "hot coffee" modification. ... We remain confident that the ESRB assigned Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas the correct rating, M (Mature 17+)."

By Curt Feldman

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