
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
NATIONAL CONVENTIONAL TELEVISION PANEL**

CTV re *Power Rangers Wild Force*

(CBSC Decision 02/03-0260)

Decided May 2, 2003

R. Cohen (Chair), P. O'Neill (Vice-Chair), P. Hebden, M. Hogarth, E. Holmes,
J. Levy and H. Pawley

THE FACTS

The original American television program *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* was on the airwaves in Canada in the early 1990s. In 1994, the CBSC rendered a decision with respect to that version of the series [see *CIII-TV (Global Television) re Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (CBSC Decision 93/94-0270 & -0277, October 24, 1994)], which is discussed at greater length below. Since that time, the producers created three other versions of that commercially successful franchise based on the group of young people known as the Power Rangers. In the Autumn of 2002, CTV was broadcasting the latest of those updated series (entitled *Power Rangers Wild Force*) on Saturday mornings from 11:30 am to 12:00 pm. The network rated each episode of the series "G". It should be noted that CTV ceased to broadcast the show before this matter was adjudicated.

Like the other variations that came before it, *Power Rangers Wild Force* is a live action program that features a group of young people, generally five or six, with the ability to transform themselves into superheroes to battle the forces of evil. In *Wild Force*, the characters Cole, Taylor, Max, Alyssa, Danny and Merrick live in Turtle Cove City with Princess Shayla. They are each able to change (or morph) into a Power Ranger, representing a red lion, a yellow eagle, a blue shark, a white tiger, a black bison and a grey wolf, respectively. In order to perform this transformation, they call upon the magic of the Zords, a group of robotic animals living in an area called the Animarium. Their dramatic foils, the "bad guys" in the *Wild Force* series, are the Orgs, large monsters or robots, which aim to control Earth under their leader, General Org Mandilok.

Within broad lines, each episode follows the same formula. The group encounters some

type of Org and the individuals then morph into their superhero characters to fight it. When martial arts-style throwing, kicking and punching do not destroy the Org, the Power Rangers employ fantastical laser weapons such as the “jungle-sword” or “bear-blasters”. The Rangers’ weapons always seem to be on the verge of conquering the Org until, in the last resort, Toxica, General Org’s assistant, uses her magic powers to revitalize the Org and cause it to grow bigger than its original size. As the next step in the escalating spiral, the Rangers call upon their allies, the Zords, to help them. The Wild Zords collectively morph into a giant robot, “Wild Force” Megazord, which the Rangers then pilot to combat the giant Org. The Org and Megazord robots strike each other and shoot lasers and fireballs until the Power Rangers invariably succeed in destroying the aggrandized Org, usually in a fiery explosion. These hostile antics are customarily accompanied by some pro-social message in each episode, which emphasizes values such as working together or protecting the environment.

The CBSC received a complaint dated November 13 from a viewer who wrote of his concerns regarding both the series and the CBSC (the full text of all correspondence can be found in the Appendix to this decision):

For years the CBSC has patted itself on the back for getting *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* off of [sic] Canadian television broadcasting airwaves.

Therefore you can imagine my skepticism as I draw attention to CTV’s Saturday morning airings of *Power Rangers Wild Force*, a show with a similar name, same concept & target audience, same production company &, most importantly, same violence quotient.

CTV’s position on the matter is that by virtue of having a different cast, a somewhat dissimilar name and a production period wholly emancipated from the prior episodes, it’s a different show. I believe this to be a facetious argument.

Due to the CBSC’s publicly articulated position on this show, I think its current incarnation should be taken off the air. I am, however, only articulating this complaint as a formality to embarrass the Canadian Broadcasting [sic] Standards Council and to demonstrate, incontrovertably [sic] & permanently, the irrelevance of the Council.

Being familiar with the complainant’s perspective on broadcasting and related matters, CTV’s Senior Vice-President of Program Planning & Promotion responded directly to the CBSC, rather than to the complainant, regarding this file. He did so in the following terms.

CTV was not the broadcaster of the original *Power Ranger* series but our understanding of that situation was that the series was designed for and targeted young children. While this version of the series is based on similar characters, it is a new production with a different target audience. It was for that reason that CTV categorized *Power Rangers Wild Force* as General Audience [...] and scheduled the program at midday instead of the traditional earlier morning time where we schedule most programming categorized as Children’s [...]. When you compare the content of this program to other accepted General Audience programming, we believe that *Power Rangers Wild Force* is not excessively violent.

[The complainant's] ultimate request was that the program be taken off the air. We can confirm that the show has been pulled and CTV does not have plans to return the program to

air.

Since the complaint was about the entire series, in keeping with the treatment of other series complaints, the CBSC randomly requested a representative number of episodes of *Power Rangers Wild Force* (in this case, 6) for the purposes of this decision (the names of the episodes are “Unfinished Business”, “Homecoming”, “The Flute”, “Team Carnival”, “Monitoring Earth”, and “The End of the Power Rangers, Part I”). Although each episode follows roughly the same formula described above, there are wide-ranging variations in the tone and amount of violence in each of the episodes. For example, in the episode entitled “Unfinished Business”, Merrick does battle against a horned monster which is seeking revenge for previous injustices. The episode contains approximately 3 minutes and 48 seconds of violence (this number is calculated based on scenes of actual violent contact; scenes that were merely threatening, pauses for discussion during fighting or the Rangers “setting up” as the Megazord were not included). Similarly, “The End of the Power Rangers Part I” contains 3 minutes and 38 seconds of violence, as well as a dark and sinister tone in the apocalyptic scenes in which Master Org has turned Earth into a desolate, dark and stormy landscape.

In stark contrast, however, are episodes such as “The Flute” in which the Flute Org attempts to control humans by playing his hypnotizing song that causes people to dance without stopping. The Power Rangers at first try to defeat the Flute Org by playing a counter-tune and it is only when this tactic fails that they resort to lasers, sword-fighting and the Megazord robot. That episode contains only 1 minute and 28 seconds of violent activity. The other episodes contain varying amounts of violence ranging between 1 and 4 minutes.

Each episode consistently demonstrates some consequences of the violence. For example, after fighting the Orgs, the Power Rangers frequently end up with cuts and abrasions, which remain visible throughout the episode. Following fighting sequences, they also frequently hold their limbs in pain or limp and, in some cases, are seen nursing wounds.

The characters rarely fight as their human incarnations; the vast majority of the battling is performed as the Power Rangers superheroes and then a considerable amount is done on a collective basis as the giant robot Megazord. Nonetheless, some character traits are revealed during battle scenes; examples include the nurturing Alyssa asking other Rangers if they are okay or the fiercely independent Merrick insisting on fighting alone. The moral lessons are also occasionally presented in the midst of the fighting scenarios; an example portrays the responsible Taylor and his counter-point, the fun-loving Max, learning to put aside their differences in order to work together against the Orgs in the “Team Carnival” episode. Despite such non-combative elements, it is still reasonable to observe that the action sequences tend to be the *raison d' être* of the program.

THE DECISION

The National Conventional Television Panel Adjudicators considered the complaint under the following provisions of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) *Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming*.

CAB Violence Code, Article 4 (Classification System for English Language Broadcasters)

C8 – Children over 8 years

Descriptive

This classification is applied to children's programming that is generally considered acceptable for youngsters 8 years and over to view on their own. It is suggested that a parent/guardian co-view programming assigned this classification with younger children under the age of 8.

Programming with this designation adheres to the provisions of the Children's Section of the *CAB Voluntary Code on Violence*. These include not portraying violence as the preferred, acceptable, or only way to resolve conflict; or encouraging children to imitate dangerous acts which they may see on the screen.

Programming within this classification might deal with themes which could be unsuitable for younger children. References to any such controversial themes shall be discreet and sensitive to the 8-12 year age range of this viewing group.

Violence Guidelines

- any realistic depictions will be infrequent, discreet, of low intensity, and shall portray the consequences of violence
- violence portrayed must be within the context of the storyline or character development
- might include mild physical violence, comedic violence, comic horror, special effects; fantasy, supernatural, or animated violence

G – General

Considered acceptable for all age groups. Appropriate viewing for the entire family.

Descriptive

This is programming intended for a broad, general audience. While not designed specifically for children, it is understood that younger viewers may be part of the audience. Therefore programming within this classification shall contain very little violence, either physical, verbal or emotional.

It will be sensitive to themes which could threaten a younger child's sense of security, and will depict no realistic scenes of violence which minimize or gloss over the effects of violent acts.

Violence Guidelines

- minimal, infrequent
- may contain comedic, unrealistic depictions of violence
- contains no frightening special effects not required by storyline

PG – Parental Guidance

Descriptive

This programming, while intended for a general audience, may not be suitable for younger children (under the age of 8). Parents/guardians should be aware that there might be content elements which some could consider inappropriate for unsupervised viewing by children in the 8-13 age range.

Programming within this classification might address controversial themes or issues. Cognizant that pre-teens and early teens could be part of this viewing group, particular care must be taken not to encourage imitational behaviour, and consequences of violent actions shall not be minimized.

Violence Guidelines

- any depiction of conflict and/or aggression will be limited and moderate; it might include physical, fantasy, or supernatural violence
- any such depictions should not be pervasive, and must be justified within the context of theme, storyline or character development.

CAB Violence Code, Article 2.0 – Children’s Programming

(Children refers to persons under 12 years of age)

- 2.1 As provided below, programming for children requires particular caution in the depiction of violence; very little violence, either physical, verbal or emotional shall be portrayed in children’s programming.
- 2.2 In children’s programming portrayed by real-life characters, violence shall only be portrayed when it is essential to the development of character and plot.
- 2.3 Animated programming for children, while accepted as a stylized form of storytelling which can contain non-realistic violence, shall not have violence as its central theme, and shall not invite dangerous imitation.
- 2.4 Programming for children shall deal carefully with themes which could threaten their sense of security, when portraying, for example; domestic conflict, the death of parents or close relatives, or the death or injury of their pets, street crime or the use of drugs.
- 2.5 Programming for children shall deal carefully with themes which could invite children to imitate acts which they see on screen, such as the use of plastic bags as toys, use of matches, the use of dangerous household products as playthings, or dangerous physical acts such as climbing apartment balconies or rooftops.
- 2.6 Programming for children shall not contain realistic scenes of violence which create the impression that violence is the preferred way, or the only method to resolve conflict between individuals.
- 2.7 Programming for children shall not contain realistic scenes of violence which minimize or gloss over the effects of violent acts. Any realistic depictions of violence shall portray, in human terms, the consequences of that violence to its victims and its perpetrators.

- 2.8 Programming for children shall not contain frightening or otherwise excessive special effects not required by the storyline.

The National Conventional Television Panel Adjudicators viewed tapes of the six episodes and reviewed all correspondence, as well as the CBSC's previous *Power Rangers* decision. While the Panel has a general concern regarding the application of the classification system to children's programming, which is discussed below, it concludes that neither the series nor any of the episodes is in breach of any of the foregoing provisions.

Previous *Power Rangers* Decision

As noted above and by the complainant, the CBSC has in fact released a decision relating to the very first *Power Rangers* series, namely, *CIII-TV (Global Television) re Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (CBSC Decision 93/94-0270 & -0277, October 24, 1994), which aired weekdays on Global Television at 7:30 am. At that time, the complaints received by the CBSC from parents tended to focus on the program's effect on their children's behaviour and they resulted in the first decision ever to be taken under the then newly revised *CAB Violence Code*. The classification system, anticipated in Article 4 of the *Violence Code*, had not yet been developed, so the series episodes did not include a rating.

The plots involved a group of five (sometimes six) high school students who were able to transform into the Power Rangers (each representing a different dinosaur) to fight the villain of the day, Rita Repulsa. The students would first encounter Rita Repulsa's minions, the "putties", who were humanoid creatures clad in Spandex-like costumes. In their human forms, the students would combat the putties with martial arts style kicking and punching. Rita Repulsa would then send a larger monster requiring the students to morph into their Ranger superhero personas. The fight would escalate to the point where the Rangers merged to form the Megasaurus, which ultimately defeated the monster.

The Ontario Regional Panel viewed two weeks worth of episodes and examined the complaints against *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* under Article 2 of the *CAB Violence Code*. After determining that Articles 2.3 and 2.4 were not applicable to the program, the Panel found breaches of all the remaining sub-Articles it had considered. In the Panel's view, rather than containing very little violence, as prescribed by the Code, each episode contained a considerable amount of violence, some of which encouraged imitation. Not one episode presented an alternative to fighting in order to facilitate conflict resolution, nor were realistic physical consequences of such hand-to-hand combat shown. As well, the violence did not contribute to character development and the few, if any, pro-societal messages were overwhelmed by the violent component.

After studying each of the episodes, the Ontario Regional Panel concluded that the violent elements that were of concern to it (in terms of the Code provisions) were consistently

present throughout and would likely continue to be manifested in *all* other episodes of the series. The Panel thus concluded that the entire series was likely to be in breach. It put the point in the following terms. Members of the Panel

consider that their observations entitle them to take the generalized position that the approach of the entire series is such that it would likely be in breach of those articles of the *Violence Code* in the same manner as the episodes which the Council members viewed in order to render this decision.

In other words, in *that* decision, the Panel expected that the broadcaster, and all other CBSC broadcaster members airing the series, needed to take the necessary steps to ensure that the series would not continue to violate the provisions of the *Violence Code*. Two of the broadcasters airing the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, namely, YTV and TVA withdrew the show from their schedules and the other, Global Television, spent considerable effort and money in modifying the program to reflect the CBSC decision and then, several months later, ceased to broadcast the series.

The Inevitable Comparison

The existence of the previous series and the CBSC decision relating to it beg a comparison between the old and the new. This is not to say that there might not be new issues arising under the *Violence Code* but only that prudence suggests that the National Conventional Television Panel make a comparative analysis of the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* series and the *Power Rangers Wild Force* series.

As a preliminary matter, though, the Panel considers it important to observe that the complainant's argument that the challenged show *must* be problematic since it is "a show with a similar name, same concept & target audience, same production company &, most importantly, same violence quotient" is hardly supportable on those grounds. Clearly, the original show was very popular and financially successful. It is, therefore, not surprising that its owners wished to ensure that the value of the franchise was not lost. That franchise depended on the maintenance of a relationship with the name, the broad concept and the target audience. No problem thus far. Nor would there be if the same production company were involved, any more than one would be entitled to conclude that there would be *no* problem in the event that a new production company had taken over the franchise. It is simply an irrelevant issue.

In the Panel's view, only the violence quotient and other on-screen details are relevant and these are dealt with below. To deal with these, one must turn to the episodes themselves and there is no better place to begin than with the problems uncovered in the original *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* series. The Panel needed to decide whether these were still present in the newest *Power Rangers* series. Here are its conclusions.

With respect to the first series, the Ontario Panel concluded that “Far from containing *very little violence*, the series appeared to convey *considerable* violent physical activity.” In reaching that conclusion, the Panel found that between 25-35% of the dramatic running time of the episodes was consumed with fighting. In the present series, the National Conventional Television Panel finds that the violence quotient has dropped markedly. In the six episodes reviewed, it occupied between 7-19% of the dramatic running time. When averaged over the screened episodes, only a shade over 13% of the time had a violent component. In other words, notwithstanding the assertion of the complainant to the contrary, the Panel finds that the level of fighting or violence had dropped by 50% or more from the 1994 series.

In the original program, the Ontario Panel concluded that the violence was generally not playing a role in the development of character and plot. In the current show, the National Panel considers that considerably more effort was made to define the individual Power Rangers characters by dramatic indicators of personal traits and to make the fighting sequences relevant to the plots.

In the 1994 series, the Ontario Panel “concluded that *none* of the episodes so much as *offered* an alternative to the conflict resolution central to each plot *other than* the application of one fighting technique or another.” It should be noted that, in the original series, much of the fighting was characterized by the Ontario Panel as *realistic* since it took place between the clearly humanoid Power Rangers and the less clearly so, but humanoid nonetheless, putties. In the modern series, there is almost no fighting that the Panel considers realistic in nature. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the fantasy extends not only to the fighting but also to the characters themselves. They are, in an important sense so non-human in nature that there may be said to be no reasoning nature in the “beings” and, consequently, no alternative conflict resolution mechanism that one could reasonably expect to find present in the fantasy monsters.

In the original *Power Rangers* series, the Ontario Panel was particularly concerned by the absence of consequences to the fighting sequences, which they considered, as noted immediately above, as *realistic* scenes of violence. The Panel said:

The Council also noted that none of the martial arts fight sequences (or fight sequences using weapons) resulted in any physical damage caused to the show's heroes or to the "putties", who are distinctly humanoid in appearance. There was never an appearance of blood, broken bones, contusions or *any* form of physical consequence. Although the Power Rangers and the "putties" are continually knocked for loops, spinning through the air, they land on the ground or elsewhere and bob up again as though *nothing* had happened. In fact, the Power Rangers constantly gloss over all consequences other than the predictable result that *they always win* as the result of the exercise of their martial skills. And life is not like that.

In the present series, almost none of the violence, whether realistic or fantastical, is shown *without* consequences. Limping, injured, bandaged Rangers are the regular result of fighting sequences.

Related to that concern was the Ontario Panel's observation regarding the incitation to imitation of dangerous activities. They said, "Suggesting that the martial arts kicking and punching techniques do not have serious, or even minor, physical consequences invites, if not encourages, the seemingly risk-free imitation of the physical acts of aggression by children who have not reached the age of discernment, namely, the very audience for this program." In the 2002 series, that matter has largely been resolved by the regular portrayal of consequences noted immediately above.

In general, the National Conventional Television Panel is comfortable in observing that the complainant's assertion that the 2002 version of the *Power Rangers* show is to such an extent a clone of the 1994 series that it must equally fall afoul of the *Violence Code* is utterly without foundation. Quite the contrary. The National Panel concludes that the *Wild Force* series reflects the producers' remedying of almost all of the concerns of the Ontario Regional Panel in 1994. In fact, the implementation of the improvements is such that the National Panel has *no* series-wide difficulties with the content of *Power Rangers Wild Force*.

Classification

The matter of classification or ratings is a separate issue. Ratings are not content; they are rather a form of advice or information to the viewer *about* content. This is not to diminish their importance but rather to characterize their function. Despite the fact that they are not of primary importance in the way that content undeniably is, they constitute an essential component of the Canadian private broadcasters' system of standards. And there are subtle aspects of the classification system, one of which seems to be misunderstood by some, if not many, broadcasters.

On the basis of its observations, the Panel realizes that some broadcasters may be missing an important point in the application of the classification system. It appears from the CTV letter of response (as well as from other examples of which the CBSC Secretariat is aware) that there is an assumption that the classification system is a single ladder, ascending in a straight line from the floor, namely, the C-rating, to the ceiling, namely, the 18+-rating. In other words, every rung may represent, to those with such a view, a level of increased caution on the part of the audience sentinels (the parents).

That perspective is incorrect. There is not only one ladder. There are two ladders, or scales, or gradations of ratings. The two correspond to two separate types of programming, the first, one that is general and may appeal to any component of the audience, including children, and the second, one that is specifically aimed at children (who are defined as persons under 12).

The first category of programming cannot be easily compartmentalized or defined, since it covers a very broad range of material. In some respects, it might be most easily defined as

being all programming *other than* programming intended for children, and *that* programming is easier to define. The latter is programming *designed for* children. It is not simply programming *which they can watch* without injury to their sensibilities; it is programming which is tailor-made for them by virtue of its simplicity of plot, theme, language level, characters, accompanying music, production design, costumes and so on. It is not simply programming which parents believe their children can tolerate; it is programming intended to be *appealing* to them and, likely, solely to them. It may not always be definable in scientific or quantitative terms; it will, however, generally be understood by programmers and parents as palpably oriented towards children.

In their creation of the classification system, Canada's private broadcasters understood this point well. On the general side of the classification system, they established a long ladder, one with four rungs, and, on the children's side, they established a short ladder, one with two rungs. There is not, in other words, a single ladder with six rungs. At the bottom of the longer ladder, there is the General rung, programming that is suitable for all audiences. Then there is the PG rung, programming that is likely inappropriate for children under 8, and possibly appropriate for children in the 8-years and over category on a supervised basis. Then there are the 14+ and 18+ rungs, which speak for themselves.

On the children's ladder, the bottom rung, C, is appropriate for young children (those under 8), and the top rung, C8, is generally considered acceptable for youngsters 8 years and over to view on their own and recommended for viewing by younger children only on a supervised basis.

The point is that the C and C8 categories are not *below* G, PG, 14+ and 18+; they are parallel to G, PG, 14+ and 18+. The issue is the *nature* of the programming. If intended for children, there are only two possible ratings, C and C8. If *not* intended for children, only G, PG, 14+ and 18+ are possible. Looked at from another perspective, children's programming *cannot have* a rating other than C or C8, and programming not developed for and targeted at children *cannot have* a C or C8 rating. It is a misunderstanding of the system to apply a G (or higher) rating to a children's program in order, perhaps, to alert audiences to the fact that there may be content that is a bit edgy for children. If it is made for children, it simply *must conform* to the exigencies of Article 2 of the *Violence Code*, with which the Panel finds no problem in this case (as discussed above), and it must carry one of the two children's ratings.

It is the view of the Conventional Television Panel that *Power Rangers Wild Force* is, by its nature, programming intended for children. In the circumstances, the G rating applied by the broadcaster cannot be correct. In this respect, the Panel considers that C8 would have been the appropriate rating. To reiterate the guidelines for this rating cited above,

- any realistic depictions will be infrequent, discreet, of low intensity, and shall portray the consequences of violence
- violence portrayed must be within the context of the storyline or character development
- might include mild physical violence, comedic violence, comic horror, special effects;

fantasy, supernatural, or animated violence

It is not, however, the view of the Panel that this error requires that an announcement of this decision be made. The Panel considers that the misunderstanding of the application of the two separate classification ladders is a broad one in the industry and that the error tends to be made in a proactive attempt by broadcasters to alert audiences to the need for more vigilance in circumstances where, as here, greater vigilance was not required. It is the Panel's expectation that CTV and all other broadcasters dealing with children's programming will ensure that their ratings are applied in accordance with the terms of this decision.

Broadcaster Responsiveness

Broadcaster responsiveness is assessed in all CBSC decisions since responsiveness is a requirement of membership in the CBSC. It is expected that broadcasters will address complainants' specific concerns in a timely manner. In this case, the Panel considers that CTV has met its responsiveness requirements by providing an explanation for its decision to air this program. Nothing further is required in this respect on this occasion.

This decision is a public document upon its release by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council. It may be reported, announced or read by the station against which the complaint had originally been made; however, in the case of a favourable decision, the station is under no obligation to announce the result.

APPENDIX
To
CTV re Power Rangers Wild Force (CBSC Decision 02/03-0260,
May 2, 2003)

I. The Complaint

The CBSC received the following complaint dated November 13, 2002:

For years the CBSC has patted itself on the back for getting *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* off of Canadian television broadcasting airwaves.

Therefore you can imagine my skepticism as I draw attention to CTV's Saturday morning airings of *Power Rangers Wild Force*, a show with a similar name, same concept & target audience, same production company, & most importantly, same violence quotient.

CTV's position on the matter is that by virtue of having a different cast, a somewhat dissimilar name and a production period wholly emancipated from the prior episodes, it's a different show. I believe this to be a facetious argument.

Due to the CBSC's publicly articulated position on this show, I think its current incarnation should be taken off the air. I am, however, only articulating this complaint as a formality to embarrass the Canadian Broadcasting [sic] Standards Council and to demonstrate, incontrovertably & permanently, the irrelevance of the council.

Thank you for your consideration.

II. Broadcaster Response

The broadcaster responded with the following:

As requested, CTV is responding formally to the letter of [the complainant] concerning *Power Rangers Wild Force* (CBSC File Number C02/03-260).

CTV was not the broadcaster of the original *Power Ranger* series but our understanding of that situation was that the series was designed for and targeted young children. While this version of the series is based on similar characters, it is a new production with a different target audience. It was for that reason that CTV categorized *Power Rangers Wild Force* as General Audience – 2139407B and scheduled the program at midday instead of the traditional earlier morning time where we schedule most programming categorized as Children's – 2139107B. When you compare the content of this program to other accepted General Audience programming, we believe that *Power Rangers Wild Force* is not excessively violent.

[The complainant's] ultimate request was that the program be taken off the air. We can confirm that the show has been pulled and CTV does not have plans to return the program to air.

Regards,
[The respondent]