



*Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*

CLASSIFICATION BOARD

CLASSIFICATION OF A FILM:

**DETAILS OF THE FILM:** FILE NO: T99/1792

Processing Date(s): 12.7.99

**Title:** SUMMER OF SAM

**Producer:** John Kilik, Spike Lee

**Director:** Spike Lee

**Production Co:**

**Country of Origin:** USA

**Applicant:** Buena Vista

**Running Time:** 136mins 142mins

**Format :** 35mm

**Colour/B&W:** Colour

**Dubbed:**

**Application Type:** PE / SH

**Version:**

**Language:** English

**Subtitled:**

**PROCEDURE:**

The Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995, and the Classification Guidelines approved by the Standing Committee of Attorneys General, are followed when classifying films.

**Film viewed:** YES

**Screening date:** 12.7.99

**Written submissions:** NO

**Oral submissions:** NO

**MATERIAL CONSIDERED:**

In classifying this film regard was had to the following:

(i) The application YES

(ii) A written synopsis of the film YES

(iii) The film YES

(iv) Other NO

**DECISION:**

(1) FILM CLASSIFICATION: R

(2) CONSUMER ADVICE: medium level violence, adult themes, drug use

(3) RATIFIED BY: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_  
(Senior Classifier)

**SYNOPSIS:** A feature film by Spike Lee, giving a view of the Bronx community and its reaction to the spate of serial killings perpetrated by David Berkowitz, the “Son-of-Sam” killer, in the summer of 1977. The narrative focuses on the rather sordid lives of the poorer residents of the Bronx, and specifically on Vince, a young hairdresser, who cheats on his wife, and associates with a group of friends who are minor drug dealers. As hysteria builds up about the murders, Vince’s mates become convinced that his best friend, Ritchie, who has turned to the punk movement, is in fact the killer.

**REASONS FOR THE DECISION:** The film provides an insight into the rather sordid lives of the central characters and shows how a community descends into panic and irrationality when threatened by an unknown evil. In the process many contentious issues are touched upon, including illicit drug use, pornography, prostitution, vigilante justice, and psychopathic behaviour. The mix of these issues along with the depictions of violence, results in a package that is both conceptually and visually impactful and likely to be offensive to some sections of the adult community. The Board considers that an adult perspective is therefore required and is of the view that an R classification is warranted.

Elements contributing to this are:

#### VIOLENCE

1. Several impactful scenes (e.g. at 2, 8, 30, 31, 68, 104 minutes) of the deranged serial killer randomly walking up the pedestrians or couples in parked cars and shooting at them at close range. Bodies are shown recoiling, with blood spraying and/or splattering on windows. Post-action visuals at 11, 31 and 68 minutes show some of the victims covered with blood.
2. The scene at 90 minutes where Vinnie and his mates viciously bash Ritchie. The latter is heavily kned in the head, shown in close-up and in slow motion with blood gouting from his mouth. He is then repeatedly kicked about the head and body, before being dragged along the road. A close-up visual shows him in a semi-conscious state with his face battered and bruised and blood flowing from his mouth

#### ADULT THEMES

1. the ongoing background theme of the deranged serial killer. He is presented as a very disturbed and tormented individual - on three occasions he is shown shouting and screaming to himself in his own bedroom, prior to the murders. On another occasion he suffers the delusion that a dog is instructing him to kill people

2. some sequences (at 46 and 69 minutes) showing Ritchie dancing erotically on stage before a male audience (on one occasion also violently slashing at a life size inflatable doll) and later going with a customer into a toilet, the implication conveyed that he is working as a male prostitute.

3. some scenes of sexual activity involving the main characters and including depictions of implied thrusting intercourse (at 5 and 55 minutes), explicit breast mouthing (at 33 minutes), implied fellatio (at 39 and 59 minutes), and manual rubbing of female breasts and crotch (at 42 minutes). At 88 minutes Vinnie and his wife end up at a sexparty / orgy with head and shoulder visuals of a group of naked people engaged in implied sexual intercourse. Also present in the film and associated with some of these scenes is some explicit sexual language e.g. "suck my huge cock", "can I stick it up your arse", "I smelt the pussy juice all over your face". "suck a big black dick"

**DRUG USE**

There are several scenes of the main characters using and dealing in illegal drugs. In particular Vinnie is shown taking unspecified tablets and also snorting cocaine (at 15, 83, 113 and 122 minutes). Ritchie is also shown buying some marijuana and later smoking a joint (at 18 and 39 minutes). Finally another character is shown explicitly injecting heroin into his arm (at 69 minutes). The board notes however that the drug use is not promoted or encouraged in the film.

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NAME:

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

FILM VIEWED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

DETAILS OF VOTING:

unanimous

Key:

V(imj), O(adult

themes), O(drug use)