

Flawed script ruins good premise in 'Summer of Sam'

■ Spike Lee's latest is a haphazard tale, making for a visually stunning – but ultimately disappointing – film.

BY SAMUEL MCKEWON
Editor

At the outset of Spike Lee's new film "Summer of Sam," famed columnist Jimmy Breslin tells us there's eight million stories in this naked city — New York City. He fails to tell us the movie's script isn't among the better ones.

The script (written by Lee, Victor Colicchio and Michael Imperioli) is the major villain in this visually stunning, painfully flawed film. "Summer of Sam" fails to deliver a real point, possibly because it tries to make too many.

The overall point of the film is lost in so many confusing detours, side-tracks and characters that we forget which ones to care about. When the film finally arrives at its anticlimactic destination we wonder "why did we even bother coming here," and wish we could have taken a trip into the story of David Berkowitz, aka "Son of Sam" instead. Of course "Summer of Sam" offers only quick pit-stop style glimpses of the infamous killer.

There are some interesting aspects to this film. It is about the summer of 1977, the summer that the Son of Sam, who killed six and injured six others with his .44 magnum gun, did most of his damage and taunted cops and tabloid newspapers with his confidence. And Lee does go away from the black perspective and toward an Italian one, honing in on the Bronx for the story. But unfortunately the intense backdrop and Lee's new subject matter lose steam and putter out trying to carry the load of a simply boring story about a bunch of losers.

In the forefront of this confusing collage is Vinny (John Leguizamo), a

The Facts

Title: "Summer of Sam"
Stars: John Leguizamo, Mira Sorvino, Adrian Brody, Jennifer Esposito
Director: Spike Lee
Rating: R (language, sex galore)
Running Time: 2:22 (142 minutes)
Grade: C
Five Words: Script sinks potentially great script

hair dresser who has beautiful wife, Dionna (Mira Sorvino), but sleeps around anyway. Vinny intends to stop his cheating after seeing victims six and seven in Son of Sam's wrath. He doesn't.

Then we meet Vinny's friend Richie, (Adrian Brody) back in his parents' house after a failed stint in Manhattan, where he enveloped himself in the punk rock revolution and picked up a phony Cockney accent. Richie doubles as a gay male dancer to earn money for a rock career (his band is called "Late Term Abortion") destined for failure. He has a local slut (Jennifer Esposito) for a girlfriend, whom he coaxes into doing a porno with him.

Get used to these characters, because you will see a lot of them, and they won't be doing much. Hell, they only venture outside of the Bronx once (which is intended to show close-mindedness, but still isn't any fun).

So much has been made about that summer in news stories leading up to the movie — the heat, the Yankees with Reggie Jackson, looting and riots — that you'd expect the movie to be a huge sprawling affair, full of anger and fear amongst its millions, and not just a domestic story of a man cheating on his wife.

But that's what it is, intercut with a few harrowing scenes revealing Berkowitz (Michael Badalucco), which admittedly, don't really fit in. Had they not been here, the movie would have been an even greater drag. The soundtrack, which features a heavy dose of The Who, is a major



COURTESY PHOTO
THE CAST of "Summer of Sam" features (from left) Adrian Brody, Jennofer Esposito, John Leguizamo and Mira Sorvino as a close-knit group of friends dealing with changing times and a menacing serial killer. The film was co-scripted and directed by Spike Lee.

player in the film including a lurid six-minute montage to the band's "Baba O'Reilly."

Where the film scores major points in style, it fails grandly in substance. True, there lots here to grab onto — pre-AIDS sexual gratification (half the movie involves a sex scene of some sort), a plethora of drugs — but the whole affair is surprisingly banal. Little transpires from beginning to end. The only major question resides in if Dionna will finally leave

Vinny. Or if Richie, who is believed to be the Son of Sam by the neighborhood group of toughs, led by gangster Luigi (Ben Gazzara) will get beat up. We suspect he will; these toughs beat up another man for being a Boston Red Sox fan. Memo to Lee: idiot goons do not make good heavies.

So many of the characters are one-dimensional, it becomes comical. There are numerous scenes where local Italians hurl insults at each

other, saying little for originality.

While "Summer of Sam" isn't particularly invigorating, it is interesting, if only for Lee's sheer ambition and his arrival as a great technical director. His editing is near flawless here, and the film seems more intriguing than it really is. The result: an intermittently brilliant/boring endeavor that's 40 minutes too long.

Maybe one of those other eight millions stories might have fared better than the one used here.

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