



Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

# Clockers

## Clockers

Director: Spike Lee

©: Universal City Studios Inc.

Production Company:

40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks

Presented by: Universal Pictures

Executive Producers: Rosalie Swedlin, Monty Ross

Producers: Martin Scorsese, Spike Lee, Jon Kilik

Co-producer: Richard Price

Production Manager: Jon Kilik

Production Supervisor: Caryn E. Campbell

Production Co-ordinator: Angela Quiles

Auditor: Craig Hutchison

Location Manager: Adam G. Williams

1st Assistant Director: Michael Ellis

2nd Assistant Director: John Lyons

Script Supervisor: Shari L. Carpenter

Casting: Robi Reed-Humes

Screenplay: Richard Price, Spike Lee

Based on the novel by: Richard Price

Director of Photography: Malik Hassan Sayeed

A Camera Operator: Gearey McLeod

B Camera Operator: George Pattison

Steadicam Operators: Rick Raphael, John A. Corso

Chief Lighting Technician: Reginald F. Lake

Key Grip: Robert Andres

Stills Photography: David Lee

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Steve Kirshoff

Editor: Sam Pollard

Associate Editor: Tula Goenka

Assistant Editors: Jeffrey Cooper, Geeta Gandbhir

Production Designer: Andrew McAlpine

Supervising Art Director: Tom Warren

Assistant Art Directors: Jeff Sage, David Stein

Set Decorators: Ina Mayhew, Debra Schutt

Property Master: Kevin C. Ladson

Construction Co-ordinator: Kenneth D. Nelson

Costume Designer: Ruth Carter

Key Make-up: Diane Hammond

Key Hairstylist: Larry M. Cherry

Titles Design/Production: Balsmeyer & Everett Inc

Colour Timing: Mark Ginsberg

Music: Terence Blanchard

Music Supervisor: Alex Steyermark

Sound Design: Skip Lievsay

Sound Mixer: Tod Maitland

Re-recording Mixer: Tom Fleischman

Sound Effects Editor: Eugene Gearty

Stunt Co-ordinator: Jeff Ward

Technical Consultant: Lt Donald Stephenson

Cast:

Harvey Keitel (*Rocco Klein*)

John Turturro (*Larry Mazilli*)

Delroy Lindo (*Rodney*)

Mekhi Phifer (*Strike*)

Isaiah Washington (*Victor Dunham*)

Keith David (*Andre the Giant*)

Pee Wee Love (*Tyrone*)

Regina Taylor (*Iris Jeeter*)

Tom Byrd (*Errol Barnes*)

Sticky Fingaz (*Scientific*)

Fredro (*Go*)

E.O. Nolasco (*Horace*)

Lawrence B. Adisa (*Stan*)

Hassan Johnson (*Skills*)

Frances Foster (*Gloria*)

Michael Imperioli (*Jo-Jo*)

Lisa Arrindell Anderson (*Sharon*)

Paul Calderon (*Jesus at Hambones*)

Brendan Kelly (*Big Chief*)

Mike Starr (*Thumper*)

Graham Brown (*Mr Herman Brown*)

Steve White (*Darryl Adams*)

'What is a cult film? A cult film is one which has a passionate following but does not appeal to everybody. Just because a movie is a cult movie does not automatically guarantee quality. Some cult films are very bad. Others are very, very good. Some make an awful lot of money at the box office. Others make no money at all. Some are considered quality films. Others are exploitation.' From 1988 to 2000 *Moviedrome* was presented by Alex Cox and then Mark Cousins. Across that time, more than 200 features were shown, and generations of movie fans and filmmakers would be informed and inspired by the selection, alongside the wit and wisdom of the introductions that preceded each screening. *Moviedrome* was a portal into the world of weird and wonderful cinema. This two-month season features some of the most notable titles screened and wherever possible they are preceded by the original televised introduction.

Nick Freand Jones, season curator and producer of *Moviedrome*

**Mark Cousins:** The Bronx-born writer, Richard Price, published his first novel, *The Wanderers*, aged 24. Its success led him to write *The Color of Money* and *Life Lessons* for Scorsese, as well as the Al Pacino film, *Sea of Love*. In 1994, after two years research, Price published his fifth and hugely successful novel, *Clockers*, about crack-cocaine pushers who work around the clock and live in New York projects. His main character was a 19-year-old dealer called Strike. Price had Strike suffer by giving him a stomach ulcer. He had him dream of escaping by making him obsessed by trains. And he intercut this with equally vivid scenes of his antagonist, a detective played by Harvey Keitel in the film. We're about to see what Spike Lee made of Price's story.

Lee's previous film, *Malcolm X*, had done badly at the box office but that didn't stop him being a major spokesman for Black America. Since 1980 with films like *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever*, he'd become a media celebrity, intellectual force and thorn in the side of white Hollywood. The combination of Lee's political stance, stylish use of camera and music and business savvy made him an ambiguous figure. He'd speak fiercely about the bleak prospects of project teenagers, then make a Nike advert to sell them trainers at \$80 a pop. Lee took Price's mythic story and mixed it with some of the ideas and style of Scorsese's *Mean Streets*. Casting Harvey Keitel, making some of his characters almost saints, as Scorsese had done, lighting the bars red. He hired a newcomer, the 27-year-old Malik Hassan Sayeed to be his cinematographer and together they came up with a highly coloured, high-contrast, sensuous look, filled with what Lee calls 'Chinese angles', after the Kung-Fu movies he loves. The photography was widely praised and Hassan Sayeed has recently been working on Stanley Kubrick's Tom Cruise/Nicole Kidman film, *Eyes Wide Shut*. Terence Blanchard did the music. His fifth Spike Lee collaboration.

*Clockers* only took \$13million in America and I think that's because its first half is very loose, a mood piece rather than a story. The plot tightens after that. Lee has since made two quite preachy films: *Get on the Bus* and *Four Little Girls*, but this one is far richer, I think. Right from the moment we first see Strike, played by newcomer Mekhi Phifer, walking out of the project like some Arthur Miller Everyman, Lee seems to worship his character. Scorsese did too, of course, but his origins were working class, in his point-of-view we're right

Spike Lee (*Chuckie*)  
Shawn Mclean (*Solo*)  
Arthur Nascarella (*Bartucci*)  
Harry Lennix (*Bill Walker*)  
Bray Poor (*detective 1*)  
Craig McNulty (*detective 2*)  
Christopher Wynkoop (*detective 3*)  
Paul Schulze (*detective 4*)  
Lt Donald Stephenson (*detective 5*)  
John Fletcher (*Al the Medic*)  
J.C. MacKenzie (*Frank the Medic*)  
David Evanson (*Smart Mike*)  
Norman Matlock (*Reverend Paul*)  
Isaac Fowler (*Charles*)  
Leonard Thomas (*Onion the bar patron*)  
Maurice Sneed (*Davis the bartender*)  
Calvin Hart (*guard 1*)  
Ginny Yang (*Kiki*)  
Michael Badalucco (*cop 1*)  
Rick Aiello (*cop 2*)  
Scot Anthony Robinson (*Earl*)  
Richard Ziman (*Moe*)  
David Batiste (*T*)  
Mar'qus Sample (*Ivan*)  
Mar'rece Sample (*Mark*)  
USA 1995  
128 mins  
Digital

Moviedrome transmission date: 18 April 1999

#### With thanks to

Bob Cummins and Sharon Maitland

### Become a BFI Member

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

### Sight and Sound

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](http://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)



### BFI Player

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

down there amongst his subjects. Lee, the son of a jazz player and teacher, is more of a middle-class observer. There's a grandeur about *Clockers* and a lack of grit, which makes it flow like honey; and Keitel's interrogation scenes are as stylised as of any other filmed. *Clockers* has none of the controversy of *Do the Right Thing* and many people argued that it didn't explain why some people are sinners in this world and others are saints. Why does Strike get caught up in it all? Where does his brother's saintliness come from? These questions are open. Lee is rattling the cages again. See what you think...

Mark Cousins' original introduction for *Moviedrome*. With thanks to [moviedromer.tumblr.com](http://moviedromer.tumblr.com)

### A contemporary review

*Clockers* opens with a title sequence that's bravura even for Spike Lee. The camera travels over a succession of grisly police photos of murder scenes – Black male bodies torn apart by bullets. Behind a yellow police tape, crowds of Black faces watch a nightly spectacle of bloodletting that's both too immediate and too removed to be comprehensible. At once didactic and operatic, this opening positions us for the film that follows. What's most startling about *Clockers* is its intimacy. Lee puts us inside the skin of a kid who seems morally reprehensible at the outset, making the agony of his experience inescapable.

Lee's choice of camera placement and movement has never been more brilliant. The camera's erratic rhythms and circular patterns articulate the extreme confinement of Strike's world and his panicky sense of being held in a vice. Similarly, the narrative, though dense with incident, seems to turn in on itself, covering the same ground over and over again. Everything in Strike's world – the repetitive riffs of rap music, the claustrophobic space of video games, his fetishised electric trains that circle a single track even as they testify to the existence of unknown and distant places – reinforces the feeling of confinement.

In terms of form and content easily Lee's riskiest and most accomplished film to date, *Clockers* is not without its flaws. In focusing so much on Strike, Lee makes the other characters one-dimensional. Newcomer Mekhi Phifer makes an amazing Strike, so much like an ordinary kid it's hard to remember that he's acting. Yet such extraordinary actors as Isaiah Washington, Delroy Lindo, Harvey Keitel and John Turturro are strait-jacketed by the script and direction.

Lee encourages cinematographer Malik Hassan Sayeed to extend the experiments with the cutting together of various types of film stock begun by Arthur Jaffa in Lee's *Crooklyn*. Sometimes this method yields expressive results, as in the flashback sequences which have the texture of over-saturated 16mm Kodachrome. Just as often, the effect is purely decorative, as in the burnt-up look of the police interrogation scenes which seem borrowed from Oliver Stone's *JFK*.

The film seems infinitely more powerful on the second viewing, and even more so on the third. Desolate, hallucinatory and fearlessly heartfelt it is the 'hood movie to end all 'hood movies. In its violence, there is neither glamour, nor pleasure, nor release.

Amy Taubin, *Sight and Sound*, October 1995