

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR DECISION

Under the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 (FVPC Act)

HEADNOTE

Title of publication:	Paul
Other known title(s):	Not stated
OFLC ref:	1100172.000
Medium:	Film
Classification:	Objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 13 years.
Descriptive note:	Contains violence, offensive language and sexual references.
Display conditions:	None

The film is a road comedy from the United States with a running time of 104 min 51 sec. Clive and Graham are two English comic book geeks on a tour of famous American UFO sites. They encounter an alien named Paul who crash-landed to Earth in 1947, and since then has been working with the US government. Now, Paul is on the run from the FBI because he has outlived his usefulness; the government want to harvest his brain for stem-cell research. Clive and Graham help Paul evade the FBI, and in the process meet up with a religious fundamentalist named Ruth. Paul helps Ruth convert to a scientific worldview based on the theory of evolution, after which she and Graham develop a romantic attachment. Paul is eventually collected by other aliens, and Graham and Clive go on to write a successful graphic novel based on their adventures with Paul.

The film deals with matters of sex in terms of s3(1) of the FVPC Act, and highly offensive language under s3A. There are frequent crass verbal references to sexual activity and body parts. For example, an ongoing visual gag is based around an alien comic character drawn by Graham. The alien character is female and has three breasts. Every male's response to seeing the image is to say, "three tits... awesome". After Ruth undergoes her conversion she grapples with the correct use of expletives. Her utterances include, "farting bumholes", "you bet your big fat cock I am", and "this place is a cock-sucking mess". Elsewhere, other characters use similar language, such as "motherfucking titty sucking two balled bitch", and "get your goddamn hands off my motherfucking junk". The language is puerile, and somewhat incongruous with a film that has no other sexual content and might otherwise have had wider appeal. Under s3A there are also non-sexual examples of offensive language, most involving use of the word "fuck" and its derivatives.

The publication deals with matters of crime in so far as the storyline involves sporadic incidences of violence, theft, and occasional drug use. In one scene Ruth smokes her first marijuana joint. She passes out after laughing hysterically and announcing that she is hungry. Beyond the fact that Paul appears to enjoy recreational use of marijuana, drug use per se is not promoted or encouraged in the film.

The film depicts low-level violence on a number of occasions, such as when the friends cause a fight inside a roadside tavern – a scene that pays homage to a bar scene in the film *Star Wars*. Clive is punched in the face by a redneck but is not seriously injured. He is shown with a small amount of blood around the nose. The infliction of serious physical harm is also dealt with under 3(3)(a)(i).

The publication does not deal with any s3(2) matters.

The strongest depiction of violence occurs when Ruth's father shoots Graham with a shotgun. Graham is shown with a large bloody chest wound. He collapses to the ground and dies, but Paul heals Graham, transferring the chest wound to himself. Further images of the infliction of serious physical harm include an FBI agent being killed in a house explosion. Another agent is killed after accidentally driving his car over a cliff. Seconds later the car explodes. The "evil" head of the FBI, played by popular culture icon Sigourney Weaver, is killed by an alien spaceship landing. She disappears under a gangway. These deaths are not graphic, and are presented in a light-hearted manner.

To some extent the film does represent gay people as inherently inferior (s3(3)(e)), since being gay is the source of so much comedy and natural humiliation for anyone who is "straight". One of the film's ongoing jokes is that Clive and Graham are suspected by the people they meet of being a gay couple. Rather than this being a simple misunderstanding, peoples' confusion over their relationship is awkwardly stretched out and their actions misinterpreted for juvenile and fundamentally homophobic comic effect. For example, in an opening scene Graham and Clive have just checked in to their San Diego hotel. Because of a booking error, the hotel has placed them in a room with a double bed rather than two single beds. Their embarrassment is compounded when a pizza delivery worker, seeing the double bed, assumes they are a gay couple, which they strenuously deny. The joke is extended throughout the film, with Graham affectionately referring to Clive as "Sausage".

The dominant effect of the publication as a whole is an uneven alien road movie with a level of crass humour that sits awkwardly with a film that also tries to be endearing. There are extensive references to works in the sci-fi genre, particularly those of Steven Spielberg.

The unrestricted availability of the publication would be injurious to the public good. The widespread use of highly offensive language, much of it sexual in nature, would be harmful to children. Its casual and repetitive use may normalise or encourage emulation and would be likely to result in serious harms such as intimidation or alienation from peers. Further injury could result from the film's crassly homophobic sentiments that implicitly promote the notion that gay relationships are less legitimate than straight relationships, or that being gay is intrinsically funny. The publication is therefore classified as objectionable except if the availability of the publication is restricted to persons who have attained the age of 13 years.

Note:

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