

Dorothy M. Knosby

Review #1

My audience is directed toward the ages of 25-45. This audience enjoys the ambiguity that I have provided: they are a crowd that hates spoilers. This audience reads film reviews in publications like *Slant*.

A Big Yup to *Nope*

There is something exciting about watching a new horror film. There is also something exciting about watching a new science-fiction film. And a comedy. And a western? And All of them? At the same time? This loaded blend of genres sounds like a disaster, and we the viewers have seen what happens when some films attempt to take on too many elements at once. Those combinations alone can be a horror. However, the new movie *Nope* infuses multiple genres into one skillfully woven tale, a feat that only accredited directors like Jordan Peele accomplish with zeal.

The opening depicts the horrifying yet silent aftermath of a monkey who went berserk on a television set. This opening scene may feel random at first but foreshadows the tension and fear that looms over the rest of the story. *Nope* takes place on a California ranch owned by the Haywood family, who train horses for movies. OJ Haywood (Daniel Kaluuya) finds himself in a precarious situation after the mysterious and brutal death of his father: either find money to keep the ranch going or lose everything that his family line has built up over the years. His sister Emerald Haywood (Keke Palmer) initially visits the ranch to merely discuss this conundrum but eventually decides to stick around and ride out the storm with OJ in the hopes of finding a solution.

OJ and Emerald can save the ranch by “temporarily” selling a number of their family horses to their distant neighbor Jupe (Steven Yuen), a former child actor, who wrought with traumas past, has decided to resolve his issues and succeed in life by sucking the profits out of unsuspecting tourists. This transaction between the three does not last long. While Jupe sees profit in the horses and the siblings

see salvation in the horses, an additional presence looms above, seeing the horses as something entirely different. An extraterrestrial lifeform (known as a UAP, or Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon) has also taken up residency in the area, and before long begins to cause massive amounts of chaos, catapulting the story into cinematic gold.

The UAP oozes suspense as the exact form and identity of the being is ambiguous for most of the movie. When you do catch glimpses of the UAP, its movements and actions are both beautiful and frightening, creating a cloud of tension as it navigates the area. With movements that seem fitting for both sea and sky, the UAP glides and tucks through the air, encapsulating all that catch a glimpse of it. If the UAP wasn't a known horror, it could almost be mistaken as angelic. The chilling interactions between the characters and the UAP are intensified through the gorgeous score created by Michael Abels, who knows when to add *and* remove sound in order to achieve truly thrilling moments. This score wraps itself around the peaceful yet desolate cinematography that Hoyte Van Hoytema shapes by submerging the audience in inky night scenes and arid day scenes. *Nope* puts in place a great setting, but the actors take the story into another dimension.

Kaluuya and Palmer fantastically portray the sibling relationship between OJ and Emerald; their contrasting personalities cut through the stress and chaos of the story with both humor and heart. This infusion of levity that Peele has perfected within his movies surely derives from his previous years in comedy. It's the realness of their relationship as siblings that creates a highly praised suspension of disbelief in the film. The honesty from the two siblings is in stark contrast to Jupe, whom Yuen masterfully presents as a man who attempts to heal from trauma by denial, deceit, and attempted domination of the UAP.

All of these components could have resulted in mediocre storytelling, but Peele brings them all together in terrifically hair-raising harmony. The story can be viewed solely as an exciting thrill ride, but by looking

closer, Peele combines more than just genres. Nuances of deeper meanings like the nature of greed and the importance of legacy nestle within the layers of science-fiction and fear. Behind the blood, there is the grim reality of forcing wild animals to cater to humans that peeks through, ushering in the questions like, “Who are the real monsters?” and “Why do humans always want more?”

This is the kind of eerie amalgamation that has become expected of a Jordan Peele film. It would be impossible to categorize *Nope* into just one genre or just one box. The combination of complexity and simplicity sucks the audience into the plotline and doesn’t let go. One scene will have the audience cracking up, another will bring forth applause, and next scene right after that will have the audience gripping their seats muttering, “Nope, nope. *Hell* no.” For all accounts, I give *Nope* a resounding “Yup.”

Word Count: 800