

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 in the past, 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, this new summer hit *Nope* infuses multiple genres into one skillfully woven tale, a feat that director Jordan Peele has once again masterfully executed.

The opening scene is both silent and horrifying, depicting the 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* is mainly set on a California ranch owned by the Haywood family, who train horses for movies. Their family history runs deep in cinema, with their lineage tracing back to Alistair E. Haywood, the first Black horse rider and animal trainer shown on film. When the mysterious and brutal death of his father occurs on the ranch, OJ Haywood (Daniel Kaluuya) is put into an emotionally troubling situation: either find money to keep the ranch going or lose everything that his family has built up over the years. His sister Emerald Haywood (Keke Palmer) visits the ranch to initially discuss this do or die situation with him but eventually decides to stick around and ride out the storm with OJ in the hopes of finding a solution.

An option for OJ and Emerald to save the ranch is to “temporarily” sell 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, because while Jupe sees profit in the horses and the siblings see salvation in the horses, there is an additional presence which sees 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 problems for all life in the area, catapulting the story into cinematic gold.

The UAP oozes Spielberg level suspense as the exact form and identity of the being is ambiguous for most of the film. The movements and actions of the UAP are both beautiful and frightening, leaving the audience fearfully wondering its motives as it navigates the area. 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 it is the actors that take the story into another dimension.

The relationship between OJ and Emerald are fantastically portrayed by Kaluuya and Palmer; their personalities cut through the stress and chaos of the story with both humor and heart. It is this infusion of levity that Peele has perfected within his movies, no doubt owing to his previous years in front of the camera doing comedy. The honesty from the two siblings is in stark contrast to Jupe, whom Yuen presents fantastically as one who attempts to heal from trauma by “breaking” it.

All of these components could have resulted in a mediocre film if it were not for Peele bringing them all together in terrifically hair-raising harmony. The story can be viewed solely as an exciting thrill ride, but by looking closer, it is clear that Peele has combined more than just multiple genres. Within the layers of science-fiction and fear, there are nuances of deeper meanings like the nature of greed and the importance of legacy. 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 because that just isn’t the work that he is known for. It is the combination of complexity and simplicity that keeps the audience enraptured with the plotline. One scene can have the audience cracking up, another can bring forth applause, and next scene right after that can have the audience gripping their seats muttering, “Nope, nope. Hell no.” To *Nope* I say, “Yup” and it has left me ravenous for more.