

‘Nope’ isn’t as deep as Jordan Peele’s previous work

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: ««««

out of «««««

Running Time: 135 minutes

This feature from Universal Pictures opens at cinemas on July 22.

Writer/director Jordan Peele made a huge impression with his 2017 debut feature “Get Out,” a brilliant horror satire that won accolades and an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. His follow up “Us” detailed sinister doppelgangers and also fared well with the press and audiences. So, expectations have been high for his latest feature.

Readers should keep their assumptions in check. “Nope” isn’t as thematically deep or as terrifying a film as the filmmaker’s previous two efforts. However, it is an enjoyable genre picture that does include a few jolts and plenty of effective gallows humor.

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The story follows OJ Haywood (Daniel Kaluuya), a Hollywood horse wrangler struggling with sister Emerald (Keke Palmer) to keep the family business afloat after the death of their father (Keith David). Of course, it doesn't help that the pair keep witnessing what appears to be a UFO in a cloud above their ranch. With work drying up and OJ forced to sell some horses to neighbor and small-time theme park owner/ex-child actor Ricky 'Jupe' Park (Steven Yuen), desperate measures are taken.

The siblings set out to capture footage of the UFO in the hopes of selling it for big money and earning themselves much-needed publicity. They hire Fry's Electronics security camera expert Angel Torres (Brandon Perea) and then pester Hollywood cinematographer Antlers Holst (Michael Wincott) to help them.

What follows is utterly bizarre. Some early sections are lighter than anticipated as the leads begin to wonder if little gray men are about to appear. But things turn much darker as the story progresses and more individuals are attacked by the mysterious UFO. And that's the movie in a nutshell.

This reviewer may have missed something, but upon first glance it seems to provide simple advice to beware of wild animals (not to mention creatures) and always make sure to maintain a clear head and calm demeanor in dealing with them. Additionally, the movie pokes fun at Hollywood and the desire of some entertainers to put on a big show at literally any cost. However, there initially doesn't appear to be as much going on here thematically as in the filmmaker's previous works.

The good news is that while one may have trouble discerning whether or not there is a deeper meaning present, the craziness on display is still fun to watch. Early on, many events come across as equally baffling and intriguing (especially a bit involving strange items falling out of the air). And there are some aspects of the UFO that have never been seen before. This includes the image of a ship hidden behind an unsettling, unmoving cloud, as well as the look and biology of the craft itself.

The elements are original and make a strong impression. And there are a few memorably tense sequences. There is a sitcom-shoot flashback filmed from the point-of-view of a child that is incredibly tense. Another great bit involves a wild west show that devolves into utter chaos. And the photography is eye-popping at times, like in a surreal shot involving a severely damaged truck crawling down a road.

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The characters are also interesting, if occasionally underutilized. Kaluuya’s OJ is a straightforward man of few words and he sells the hero role effectively. Palmer also comes off well as the sister, but one wishes more was done with the fascinating Ricky ‘Jupe’ Park. His incredible backstory makes one wish he wasn’t relegated to the background. And cinematographer Holst is amusingly deadpan... it would have been wise to do more with him at the close (like the discovery of a reel of incredible footage developed after the big climax).

In truth, the movie ultimately leaves one with plenty of questions about what occurred.

But while “Nope” *is* a bit buggy in places and leaves some threads dangling, those who don’t come down too hard on its inconsistencies will find some thrills and chills. This is a flawed but enjoyable genre picture that should keep many on the edge of their seats. One would be wise to ignore the negatively phrased title as viewing advice. “Absolutely” might not be appropriate, but the film qualifies as a “Sure” when all is said and done.

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