

Film Review: 'Dope'

A Cleverly-Scripted, Compelling Coming-of-Age Comedy



'Dope'

By Kam Williams
For *The Skanner News*

Seventeen-year-old Malcolm (Shameik Moore) was raised by a single-mom (Kimberly Elise) in a rather rough section of L.A., but he's more of a milquetoast than a menace to society. He's actually so nerdy he's formed a funk band called Oreo with a couple of fellow geeks, Diggy (Kiersey Clemons) and Jib (Tony Revolori). The tight-knit group of friends carefully negotiate their way through the perilous gauntlet lining their path to school, doing their best to hide the fact that they do "white sh*t" like getting good grades in hopes of going to a good college and making it out of the ghetto.

Malcolm has his heart set on Harvard, which just might happen, given his high SAT scores. In terms of his application, he still has to finish his personal essay and

then do a decent job in his upcoming interview with esteemed alumnus Austin Jacoby (Roger Guenveur Smith), the check-cashing magnate.

However, what might prove more of a challenge is simply keeping his nose clean the rest of senior year. After all, he encounters danger on a daily basis, whether it's bullies trying to steal his sneakers or neighborhood gangstas pressuring him to join the Bloods.

Malcolm's unraveling starts when, against his better judgment, he accepts an invite from a girl he has a crush on (Zoe Kravitz) to a drug dealer's (Rakim Mayers) birthday party at an underground nightclub. His first mistake is even entering the seedy, subterranean rave. His second is asking Nakia to dance, because she's also the object of the macho birthday boy's affection.

Then, when a gunfight suddenly breaks out, Malcolm grabs his backpack and runs

for his life, unaware that his rival in romance has hidden a stash of contraband there. So, the next thing you know, Malcolm's on the run from a number of unsavory characters who covet the carefully-packed powdery substance.

Thus unfolds *Dope*, a cleverly-scripted, coming-of-age comedy reminiscent of the equally-sophisticated *Dear White People*. Narrated by Forest Whitaker, this laugh-a-minute, fish-out-of-water adventure mines most of its humor at the expense of an emboldened 98-pound weakling who's used to having sand kicked in his face.

The picture was directed by Rick Famuyiwa (Brown Sugar) who keeps you entertained by turning more than a few conven-

tions on their heads. The film also features a very pleasant soundtrack which includes a couple of crowd-pleasing tunes by 11-time, Grammy-winner Pharrell Williams.

A rollicking roller coaster ride around the 'hood that's basically a hilarious cross between *Kid and Play's House Party* (1990) and *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004).

Excellent ★ ★ ★ ★

Rated R for profanity, nudity, sexuality, ethnic slurs, drug use and violence, all involving teens

Running time: 115 minutes

Distributor: Open Road Films

Movies

continued from page 6



'Escobar: Paradise Lost'

sexuality and brief nudity) Romance drama, set in France during the reign of Louis XIV, where a couple of gifted landscape artists (Kate Winslet and Matthias Schoenaerts) fall in love while sculpting the royal garden at the Palace of Versailles. Directed by Alan Rickman who plays the king, and co-stars Stanley Tucci, Jennifer Ehle and Helen McCrory.

The Little Death (Unrated) Kinky sex comedy, set in Sydney, exploring the fetishes of five suburban

couples. Ensemble cast includes writer/director Josh Lawson, Kate Box, Tasneem Roc, Lisa McCune and Damon Herriman.

A Murder in the Park (PG-13 for violent reenactments, disturbing images, drug use and brief profanity) Miscarriage of justice courtroom expose' suggesting that the Innocence Project had inadvertently set free on appeal a death row inmate who was actually guilty all along.

Runoff (R for drug use)

Rural tale of survival about a woman (Joanne Kelly) willing desperate to keep a failing, family farm afloat after her husband (Neal Huff) falls ill and they're threatened with foreclosure by heartless bill collectors. With Rashel Bestard, Tom Bower and Drew Cash.

What Happened, Miss Simone? (Unrated) Prestige biopic chronicling the life and times of the legendary Nina Simone. Produced by the late jazz singer and civil rights activist's daughter, Lisa.

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