

'Nope' is another genre-disrupting Peele masterpiece

By Katie Walsh

Tribune News Service

In "Nope," writer/director Jordan Peele presents us with a big, shiny summer blockbuster — a cowboys and aliens riff built from the DNA of sci-fi spectacles of yore — and then proceeds to vivisection the very notion of a summer blockbuster before our eyes.

He wants us to question the nature of image-making, and he starts at the beginning of film history, with photographer Eadweard Muybridge. In 1878, Muybridge crafted the first known example of the "moving pictures": a two-second clip called "The Horse in Motion," made up of sequential photographs of a jockey riding a race horse.

That the jockey on the horse — the first person featured in the movies — is Black, and unknown, is the starting point for Peele's exploration of seeing and the seen in "Nope," which interrogates the power of images, who gets to create them, and who gets the credit.

These are complex questions, but Peele has wrapped them up in an incredibly original, and entertaining, piece of sci-fi filmmaking that is both unlike, and like, anything you've ever seen before.

Daniel Kaluuya stars as OJ Haywood,



Universal Pictures/TNS

From left: Daniel Kaluuya, Keke Palmer and Brandon Perea in "Nope."

a taciturn horse wrangler grieving the loss of his father (Keith David) in a freak accident, while continuing to run the family business, Haywood Hollywood Horses, with his sister Emerald (Keke Palmer), providing animals to movie sets. As recounted in a lively on-set safety speech by Emerald, the siblings happen to be descended from the rider who first appeared on horseback in the Muybridge clip, and through OJ and Emerald, Peele

reckons with erased Black film history and seeks to reinscribe it.

However, at their Agua Dulce desert ranch, strange things are afoot. Clouds are ominous, winds threatening, roaring screeches emanate from the sky and spook the horses.

They enlist Angel (Brandon Perea), a surly young employee from the local Fry's Electronics, to install security cameras, and he takes a vested interest in

the potential extraterrestrial phenomena there, examining the footage and returning to witness it himself.

"Nope" is Jordan Peele's "Jaws," a monster movie made from the rib of Steven Spielberg's pioneering '70s blockbuster. It also bears the imprint of Spielberg's "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," and is deep with references to '80s and '90s cult sci-fi. Film fan Peele can't help but reference his favorites, and this is a movie about making movies, specifically the unnamed technicians and laborers who keep the movie machine running, but don't get the glory. Peele assembles and disassembles the pieces of the blockbuster in front of us, showing us how it works, asking us to think about the many varied ways in which we engage with moving pictures, photographs, technology and spectacle, from the carnival, to security camera footage, to a virtual reality headset.

"Nope" is another genre-disrupting masterpiece from Jordan Peele, whose intellectual, curious and playful perspective has become vital, and necessary, for the horror and sci-fi genre to evolve. There's so much more to explore in the depths of "Nope," but for now, let us just say, "yup."

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