

# NOPE

In *NOPE*, a rampaging chimpanzee on a sitcom set and two siblings chasing a UFO might seem like unrelated stories, but they're reflections of the same theme: humanity's obsession with spectacle and the exploitation of trauma for entertainment.

The film opens with a disturbing, contextless POV shot of chaos — a chimp covered in blood on a silent, abandoned sitcom stage. This horrifying image lingers without explanation until later, when OJ and Emerald meet Ricky "Jupe" Park, a former child star who witnessed that very tragedy. Jupe recalls the incident not by describing what he saw, but by referencing *Saturday Night Live's* parody of it. He filters his trauma through pop culture — through an image of an image.

This moment reveals the film's core idea: our relationship to spectacle and the way both creators and audiences process real horror through the lens of performance. Whether it's Jupe's repressed memory turned into a sideshow attraction or OJ and Emerald's desperate attempt to capture the perfect "Oprah shot," *NOPE* explores how modern culture commodifies even its most violent, unexplainable events into consumable images.

Most of us avoid real horror, yet the demand for fictional horror has never been higher. We have a complicated relationship with fear and its images. On one hand, we crave it — we want to look, to feel something. On the other, we can't bear to. We turn away. We avert our eyes. Ricky "Jupe" Park understands this duality. He turns his trauma from *Gordy's Home* into a spectacle he sells for profit, commodifying the memory of violence and transforming his survival into entertainment. Later, he attempts the same with the UFO, feeding it horses and turning its horror into an attraction. His visitors are vaccinated by the spectacle — desensitized, consumed by the thrill of watching without truly understanding the cost.

Horror films themselves are a kind of commodified trauma. The *Gordy's Home* massacre, much like the events surrounding the UFO in *NOPE*, is inspired by the exploitation of real suffering. Images of trauma can serve a purpose — they can force recognition, helping those in denial see what others have endured. They can even help victims process pain by making it visible, externalized. But for those responsible for capturing such images —

for those whose trauma becomes the spectacle — there is no luxury of looking away. To film it, to frame it, is to bear the weight of what can't be unseen.

In the opening of *NOPE*, we see a strange, almost claustrophobic frame surrounding the credits. Only later do we learn that this frame is, in fact, the mouth of the alien itself. As the camera glides deeper inside — into the creature's throat and heart — we are suddenly met with the famous Muybridge footage: the first recorded motion picture, a horse galloping. Immediately after, Peele cuts to a similar image — a horse on a modern commercial film set. In this sequence, Peele establishes his thesis through pure visual language: the untamable predator at the center of *NOPE* is not the UFO. It's the film industry itself.

To capture that monster — to film it, to frame it — means confronting something that can consume you whole. The creature in *NOPE* is both literal and metaphorical: it devours those who dare to look too closely, mirroring the way Hollywood devours those who try to control spectacle. The cinematographer in the film, obsessed with obtaining “the impossible shot,” articulates this hunger perfectly when he says, “*The dream you're chasing — the one where you end up at the top of the mountain, all eyes on you — the dream I never wake up from.*” His words echo the lure of fame, perfection, and artistic immortality — the dangerous dream at the center of the entertainment machine.

Peele examines the spectacle itself: how it seduces, manipulates, and destroys. He doesn't moralize or offer resolution. Instead, he circles the question, allowing it to remain unresolved — because our relationship with spectacle is unresolved. We both fear and worship it. We condemn it and yet can't look away. *NOPE* becomes an exploration of this moral queasiness — that strange, uneasy space between awe and horror, fascination and exploitation.

Yet beneath its cosmic horror and visual grandeur lies something deeply human: the story of OJ and Emerald. Their struggle to capture an image of the monster is also a struggle for visibility — to reclaim authorship, to correct the historical erasure of Black contributions to cinema. In their victory — in that fleeting, triumphant photograph — Peele honors all those who have been consumed by the machine of spectacle, yet still dared to make an image of it.

As the verse from *Nahum* says: “*I will cast abominable filth at you, make you vile, and make you a spectacle.*” That line could describe the very heart of *NOPE*: the punishment and seduction of being seen, of becoming an image in a world that devours them.