



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

Us

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A middle-class family's relaxing getaway turns into a waking nightmare when their lake house is invaded by a group of strangers who appear to be their exact doppelgangers. Following the critical and commercial success of *Get Out*, Jordan Peele cements his position as one of the most visionary directors to emerge from recent US cinema with this politically astute, dementedly funny and frequently shocking chiller.

Kelli Weston, bfi.org.uk

With Jordan Peele's reanimated *The Twilight Zone* series soon upon us, it's fitting that he cites one of the cult TV show's original episodes, 'Mirror Image', as inspiration for this follow-up to his Oscar-winning debut *Get Out*. 'Mirror Image' featured a woman menaced by her physical double, another manifestation of a tried-and-tested horror trope, the doppelganger. From Jekyll and Hyde to the somnambulant alter ego of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, through *Sisters'* psychotic twin and the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* pod people, these shadow versions serve as canny metaphors to explore hidden desires and darker impulses. Peele is both cinephile enough to reflect those that came before him, and sufficiently smart and savvy to create his own unique mythology, 'the Tethered'.

Trailers for *Us* suggested a home-invasion thriller along the lines of *Funny Games* or *The Strangers*. But where *Get Out* was largely confined to the opulent house and grounds of the pseudo-liberal, bodysnatching white family out to get black hosts, *Us* expands, eventually, to encompass an entire country. It maps a broader, bolder canvas than *Get Out*'s streamlined slavery analogy. Peele is flexing his filmmaking muscles here, and regularly crosscuts fields of action, from the various family members fighting their vengeful doubles to a climax that elegantly executes an elaborate dance between different time periods and worlds. Accordingly, its ideas are a little harder to pin down, more open to interpretation.

Clues and allusions that pay off later are layered in from the very first scene. Young Adelaide watches a TV commercial for the 1980s charity initiative 'Hands Across America', which enlisted some 6.5 million people to form a coast-to-coast human chain to highlight poverty. This striking image is brilliantly repurposed in the film's stunning final shot, a disenfranchised underclass rising up in solidarity. Earlier, a terrified Adelaide asks her alter-ego apparition Red who she and her fellow Tethered invaders are; Red's answer, in a guttural rasp with a rictus grin, is 'We're Americans.' *Us*: literally, the US.

It's a more inclusive critique, then, than *Get Out*'s post-racial takedown. Peele addresses race mainly through presenting, without comment, a well-to-do black family as his protagonists: Adelaide, her husband Gabe and their children Zora and Jason. Privilege and oblivious complacency (Gabe regularly envies his friend Josh's more luxurious trappings) can affect us all. It's no great stretch to ultimately envisage the film as an adrenalised playing out of Karl Marx's theory of alienation, people estranged from their humanity by

brutal systems of repression and domination. The Tethered, after all, are clad in workmanlike red jumpsuits.

They're also much more than bogeymen. These are fully rounded characters, and the cast deserve great credit for fleshing out their dual roles. Winston Duke's Gabe is garrulous comic relief, while his Abraham is a suffering, near-mute man-child. Shahadi Wright Joseph's Zora is a plucky, frightened teen, but her glowering, toothlessly grinning Dahlia is arguably the film's most chilling creation. Elisabeth Moss has devilish fun with her extended cameos. And alongside her haunted heroine Adelaide, Lupita Nyong'o's unnerving physical and vocal contortions as Red embody a reckoning for a lifetime of unwilling, undeserved servitude. #TimesUp, indeed.

Lest this all sound far too worthy and serious, Peele first and foremost provides supremely exciting and effective entertainment. His comedy background and evident love of horror dovetail in scene after scene. A grimly tense and expertly staged attack can be followed, or even spliced, with sudden jolts of humour. One sequence featuring 'Ophelia', a non-brand equivalent of Amazon's talking Alexa, switches from terror to outrageous laughter in the flick of a vocal command. And Michael Abels's propulsive score effortlessly shifts from dread-tinged minimalism to full-blown operatics, including a mischievous orchestral version of a hip-hop anthem that crops up early on, Luniz's 'I Got 5 on It'.

So rich and relentless are *Us*'s themes and ideas, with exposition still unfolding in its third act, that there's a nagging feeling it doesn't quite all fully cohere. Still, Peele is evidently invested in starting conversations and repeated viewings. Younger audiences may want to investigate the relevance of 1980s video-cassette titles (including *C.H.U.D.* and *The Man with Two Brains*) displayed in the opening scene; non-religious audiences might now look up recurring Bible verse Jeremiah 11:11. *Us* follows in the tradition, from Hitchcock to Spielberg, of genre films mining a deeper level than mere surface thrills. And if Jordan Peele seeks to make us confront the man or woman in the mirror, that he constructs such intricate, twisted funhouses in which to do it is a mighty bonus.

Leigh Singer, *Sight & Sound*, May 2019

US

Director: Jordan Peele
a Monkeypaw production
in association with: Perfect World Pictures
Presented by: Universal Pictures
Executive Producers: Daniel Lupi, Beatriz Sequeira
Produced by: Jordan Peele, Sean McKittrick, Jason Blum, Ian Cooper
Written by: Jordan Peele
Director of Photography: Michael Gioulakis
Editor: Nicholas Monsour
Production Designer: Ruth De Jong
Costume Designer: Kym Barrett
Music: Michael Abels

Cast

Lupita Nyong'o (*Adelaide Wilson*)
Winston Duke (*Gabe Wilson*)
Elisabeth Moss (*Kitty Tyler*)
Tim Heidecker (*Josh Tyler*)
Shahadi Wright Joseph (*Zora Wilson*)
Evan Alex (*Jason Wilson*)
Cali Sheldon (*Becca Tyler*)
Noelle Sheldon (*Lindsey Tyler*)
Madison Curry (*young Adelaide*)
Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, Anna Diop (*Adelaide's parents*)
USA 2019
116 mins

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Us Tue 1 Nov 20:40; Sat 19 Nov 15:10; Tue 29 Nov 20:40

Creature from the Black Lagoon (3D)

Tue 1 Nov 20:50

The Autopsy of Jane Doe

Wed 2 Nov 18:10; Sat 26 Nov 20:40

Let's Scare Jessica to Death

Wed 2 Nov 20:45; Sat 19 Nov 20:45

Blacula

Thu 3 Nov 20:55; Sat 26 Nov 13:00

Cronos

Fri 4 Nov 18:30; Sat 19 Nov 12:10; Sun 20 Nov 18:30

Fright Night

Fri 4 Nov 20:50; Tue 22 Nov 20:40 (+ intro)

Possession

Sat 5 Nov 20:20 (+ intro by author Kier-La Janisse); Sun 27 Nov 15:30

Ganja & Hess

Mon 7 Nov 18:00; Sat 26 Nov 15:20

La Llorona

Mon 7 Nov 21:00

Frankenstein

Tue 8 Nov 18:20; Sun 27 Nov 13:00

Viy

Tue 8 Nov 20:50

Inferno

Wed 9 Nov 20:40; Sat 26 Nov 18:20

The Entity

Fri 11 Nov 17:55; Tue 15 Nov 20:30

Nightbreed – Director's Cut

Sat 12 Nov 20:35

Nosferatu (Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens)

Sun 13 Nov 15:50 (+ intro by Silent Film Curator Bryony Dixon); Sat 19 Nov 14:10

The Skeleton Key

Mon 14 Nov 20:45

Def by Temptation

Wed 16 Nov 18:10 (+ intro); Sat 26 Nov 18:10

Candyman

Thu 17 Nov 20:50 (+ intro)

Kuroneko (Yabu no naka no kuroneko)

Fri 18 Nov 18:15

Jennifer's Body

Sun 20 Nov 15:15; Mon 21 Nov 18:00; Fri 25 Nov 20:45

Pontypool

Mon 21 Nov 20:30; Sun 27 Nov 12:20

Under the Shadow

Wed 23 Nov 20:40; Tue 29 Nov 18:10

Ouija: Origin of Evil

Thu 24 Nov 20:40; Mon 28 Nov 18:10

Pet Sematary Fri 25 Nov 18:15; Mon 28 Nov 20:40

28 Days Later Sat 26 Nov 20:45

Good Manners (As Boas Maneiras)

Sun 27 Nov 18:10; Wed 30 Nov 20:25

A Nightmare on Elm Street

Wed 30 Nov 20:50

IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS EVENTS

Matchbox Cine presents House of Psychotic Women

Sat 5 Nov 17:50

Son of Ingagi + Panel Discussion

Wed 9 Nov 18:10

Live Commentary with Evolution of Horror, Brain Rot and The Final Girls

Sat 19 Nov 18:00

Big Monster Energy

Tue 22 Nov 18:30

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