

ShoWest: District 9 Footage Solves The Mystery

A few weeks ago when we wrote about the viral marketing campaign for District 9 , Josh admitted that it's totally unclear what on earth this movie is about. But now that a whole bunch of footage from the movie has been screened at ShoWest, we have some answers, and a new movie to look forward to this summer.

District 9 , as you may know, is produced by Peter Jackson, and directed by first-timer Neill Blomkamp. And, as we suspected, it's about a world in which aliens have been living on the earth for 28 years, sequestered in their own district... District 9, of course. The movie takes place in a city in South Africa, where a man is sent to do an investigation within the alien district, is infected by some kind of alien goo, and then learns enough about the condition of the aliens' lives to start fighting against humans on their behalf.

The movie is filmed in faux-documentary style, and not knowing anything about it, I was convinced for a few minutes that it was an actual documentary about the living conditions in a real-life slum somewhere. It's a really, really effective technique, and maybe the reason for all the secrecy thus far-- Jackson and Blomkamp want you to go in thinking this might actually be a documentary. The reveal in the footage we saw came when the helicopter flying over the slums flew up higher, and toward an alien ship hovering over the city. Awesome.

The rest of the footage focused on the main character, who starts off as staunchly anti-alien like pretty much everyone else in the film. It's unclear what it is that "infects" him, or why he's inside an alien home to begin with, or even what happens to him after the infection. For a moment it looked like some kind of Alien -type beast would jump out of his stomach, and then for a while he seemed to be turning into a zombie. But at some point this new infection inspires him to go back into District 9 and actually get to know the aliens, who apparently speak English and have names like Christopher. He tells them "I did not know they were doing this to you guys" over footage of aliens being beaten by armed guards, and then is seen shooting a gun in the general direction of fellow humans.

Writing it all out, it sounds really far-fetched, but I promise the footage was very convincing. The aliens are shaped like your general Predator-style extra-terrestrial, and look pretty good, even though Rory Bruer, who introduced the footage, said the effects weren't finished. If he hadn't said that, I would never have noticed-- the movie looks great, especially with the gritty faux-documentary style. And the undeniable social commentary of the film didn't feel heavy-handed, maybe because the fake-out at the beginning acknowledged the real-life parallels and then just let the rest of the footage speak for itself.

Overall, I was totally impressed, and glad to have a bit of a break from all the big-budget tentpole footage we've been seeing here. If the story of District 9 is told effectively, and remains as fascinating in the execution as it is in concept, Blomkamp will be starting his career in serious style. And we'll all have a summer movie to look forward to that's something more than your average blockbuster.

About the Author

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