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# Meme

by Alex Saveliev

February 15, 2019

*A mysterious VHS tape sends a young woman on quest to discover its maker, but she finds herself instead.*

Ambitious cinematic projects often veer off into absurdity and pretentiousness. With its numerous non-sequiturs, fragmented plot lacking a narrative thread and off-kilter editing choices, Sean Mannion's **Meme** is more than likely to provoke a "wtf?" reaction from unsuspecting viewers. The film clearly reaches for the sun, with its stilted grasps at visual artistry and existential themes, yet it burns its celluloid wings.

Down-on-her-luck graphic designer Jennifer (Sarah Schoofs) faces a slew of obstacles: clients who refuse to pay her; her VHS-tape obsessed, cheating boyfriend Tommy (Shivantha Wijesinha); and then there's that mysterious tape that appears in her life, containing frankly nonsensical, strenuously "trippy" footage. It sends Jennifer on a so-called "quest" to find its maker. Eventually, as she learns about parallel realities and encounters folks featured on the tape, her life begins to make sense again (the plot certainly doesn't).

“...the VHS tape does affect Jennifer in strange, hypnotic ways...”

This might sound a bit like Hideo Nakata’s horror classic *Ringu*, and one wouldn’t be far off – the tape does affect Jennifer in strange, hypnotic ways – except *Meme* contains none of *Ringu’s* scares or tension-building. Mannion goes nuts with stylistic flourishes: scenes are rewind and fast-forwarded, grain is splattered over some shots like in an old VHS tape, and the narrative becomes increasingly fractured, cutting between past and present in irritatingly disorienting ways.

Phrases spoke in one scene morph into messages texted in the next, and again into VHS renditions of said scene – and for what purpose? An obviously digital fly buzzes out of the wide-screen shot at one point, then reappears on Jennifer’s cryptic tape towards the end. Some frames are partially blurred. All this creates a somewhat-uncanny effect – but to what end? *Meme* is chock-full of odd choices that *seem* purposeful, the director/screenwriter divulging some inner demons only he can explain.

“The universe is a series of binary computations that result in reality.” This is a sample of *Meme’s* more nifty tidbits of “wisdom.” According to a second-rate actor in Mannion’s metaphysical trip, “the universe is a computer program describing the universe,” which in itself is “embedded in another program,” and so on. We are a set of outcomes embedded in other outcomes. Heady stuff, sure, but the film doesn’t come close to living up to its high aspirations, in a manner that, say, *Primer* did.

“...chock-full of odd choices that *seem* purposeful...”

Wijesinha gives the most natural, lived-in performance as the VHS geek in an otherwise poorly-acted film – a major flaw that lets it down. While Schoofs struggles with the role, looking as confused and sleepy as *Meme's* audience is bound to be, it's the supporting cast that reeks of true inexperience in front of the camera.

I wish I could say that *Meme* is in equal doses confounding and enticing, sort of like *I Heart Huckabees* or *Lost Highway* – but it's mostly just confounding. Shannon clearly had a vision and stuck to it, despite the bad cast and obvious budgetary constraints – and I commend him for it. Too bad the rest of us may never know what it all means (a few tabs of acid may help, but you didn't hear this endorsement here). As it stands, to quote *Meme*, it's all “just information that reveals more information” – most of it, sadly, pure drivel, ripe for memes.



*Meme* (2018) Written and Directed by Sean Mannion. Starring Sarah Schoofs, Shivantha Wijesinha, Lauren A. Kennedy.

4 out of 10

## One response to “Meme”



Post-Punk Monk says:

February 15, 2019 at 12:12 pm

Wha...? “I Heart Huckabees” confounding? That, I don't get. “Lost Highway?” I'm right on board with you.

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