

Neptune Frost

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Neptune Frost. Dir. Uzeyman, Anisia & Williams, Saul. Swan Films, 2021.

Neptune Frost is often described in reviews as an Afrofuturist musical science fiction film. Opening the door to a fascinating world where art, technology, and revolution merge, the visually and narratively stunning film, directed by visionary duo Anisia Uzeyman and Saul Williams, is an exciting production that defies convention and immerses audiences in an Afro-futurist dreamscape. In the ever-expanding and prominent world of Afrofuturist cinema, this film shines as a visual, poetic, and aural jewel weaving Black identity, gender, and cosmic wonder. The narrative unfolds nonlinearly, seamlessly blending elements of science fiction, magical realism, and social commentary. *Neptune Frost* explores the boundaries of gender and sexuality, the power dynamics between oppressor and oppressed, and the potential for technology to be a liberating or controlling force.



Neptune Frost tells the story of the journey of two bereaved characters and the crossing of their paths after their journey. Matalusa (Bertrand “Kaya Free” Ninteretse), after the death of his brother Tekno in the coltan mine, embarks on a journey and decides to go to the city and questions his identity from a class perspective with the death of his brother. On the other hand, twenty-three-year-old Neptune (Cheryl Isheja and Elvis Ngabo) embarks on a journey to resolve her sexual identity confusion after the death of his aunt. Both characters’ journeys are patterned with obstacles. The dreams the two characters encounter for the first time, equipped with cables and illuminated with neon lights, where time-space is complicated, fuel the transformation of both characters. Through Matalusa and Neptune, the film explores the tension between digital existence and the longing for worldly human connections. This exploration raises profound questions about the role of technology in shaping our identities and the need to strike a delicate balance between progress and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Digitaria, where the journeys of the two characters reach, is the place of those who try to stay out of the political and world conflict and rebel against exploitation. The film’s other characters, Innocent (Dorcy Rugamba), Memory (Eliane Umuhire), and Psychology (Trésor Niyongabo), finally come together. Neptune brings power, energy, electricity, or whatever is missing to Digitaria because in a world where television, radio, and the Internet are cut off, access to them is a right. This idea is embodied in the phrase “we mine, but we do not own what we dig,” closely linked to the unchanging history of colonialism. The people of Digitaria, pondering concepts such as

oligarchy, patriarchy, tolerance, wisdom, self-control, ignorance, and understanding, manage to hack into the world system through connections with Neptune's ability and gain access to the Internet. As a result, all these social and political abstract concepts are concretised in a revolutionary struggle.

Neptune Frost unfolds in a neo-African society where the tangible and the virtual merge seamlessly. Uzeyman and Williams bring to life a world where Afrofuturistic elements are intertwined with ancient mythology, where tradition and technological innovation merge in an enigmatic environment. One of the most important factors in creating this environment is the aural space of the film because the soundscape is as vital as the visuals.

The film's haunting and ethereal soundtrack, composed by Saul Williams himself, envelops the audience with the fusion of electronic Afrobeats, African rhythms, spoken words, and experimental sounds, creating a mesmerizing sonic landscape that mirrors the film's otherworldly setting. The music serves as a conduit, connecting the audience to the characters' emotions with evocative lyrics and the film's larger themes, elevating the film to a transcendent realm where sound becomes its language.

The film's directors stated that the film's influences date back to 2016 and events like the conflict between ethnic groups in Rwanda, student protests in Burundi, the Arab Spring, and hacker movements. These influences explain why the plot and layered narrative of the film combine different subjects. The subtext of the film's story is a powerful exploration of cultural resurgence and the preservation of African identity in an increasingly globalized and technologically driven society. By elegantly weaving together the wisdom of the past, folklore, and the struggles of a community, the film paints a vivid picture of a people reclaiming their heritage and resisting cultural erasure. It does so by taking Afrofuturism beyond mere aesthetics, utilizing the genre's core themes of identity, empowerment, and cultural preservation to present a narrative of hope and reclamation where Afrofuturism and technology collide. The film transcends the constraints of earthly conventions by embracing the cosmic diaspora of identities that exist beyond binary structures.

Compared to other Afrofuturist films, *Neptune Frost* uses a more vernacular and interrogative language and exemplifies the multifaceted evolution of storytelling as a source of inspiration that echoes the timeless legacy of the Afrofuturist and Afrosurrealist works that came before it. Different than the earlier examples such as *Space Is the Place* (John Coney, 1974), *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, 1991), *The Last Angel of History* (John Akomfrah, 1996), or recent ones such as *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018), *Sorry to Bother You* (Boots Riley, 2018), and *A Wrinkle in Time* (Ava DuVernay, 2018), *Neptune Frost* ventures into new territory, combining technology and heritage to illuminate the rich tapestry of black identity and techno-centric resistance. *Neptune Frost* charts the path of its resistance, adding a new chapter to the genre's ongoing cosmic symphony.

Works Cited

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