

Primer

PG-13, 77min, 2004, SF, Time Travel

3 out of 5 stars.

1st star for professional quality of film despite its rumored \$7,000 budget. I would have never guessed.

2nd star for innovative ideas regarding time travel and the recursive nature of the film with multiple intertwining trips to the same moment in time.

3rd star for the captivating time travel chase sequence that ends the movie.

Didn't get the 4th star, because the movie isn't internally consistent regarding time travel and never explains away the discrepancies.

Didn't get the 5th star, because the movie is just too confusing. One of the early trips back in time causes some kind of problem. I don't know what that problem was (now even after the movie is over), and I don't know how it was solved if it ever was.

In the short term, I found Primer to be a very satisfying time travel movie, but it doesn't explain time travel in general or the specific assumptions this movie makes about time travel (causality, etc.). Basically, I think it actually got some common sense issues regarding time travel wrong. I didn't notice this in the moment, but when I started going over the movie in my head, more and more discrepancies rose to the surface.

Bottom line, if you're not intrigued by time travel movies, don't waste your.

I don't have much to say about the \$7,000 budget, except that you know this is a lie of sorts. I'm sure they only spent \$7,000 in cash, but all that means is that where a \$7,000,000 movie would have paid for certain things, the producers of this movie got it for free. Somebody did the editing. In a \$7,000,000 movie they would have been paid, whereas at \$7,000 you can be sure they

didn't. Likewise in a \$7,000,000 movie you pay for props, catering, wardrobe and locations. At \$7,000, you take what you can get for free, and if that means you shoot the movie in your parents garage, then that's what it means. In the end though, you'll never notice. The film is of professional quality.

I don't know about the writing though. If you're interested in time travel, then read the rest of my review. If you're not into time travel, then read the rest of my review and you'll know why the movie might not be for you...

At some point, I want a movie explained to me. Primer never does. There is some incident. I think it's a gunfight, or a murder, but I'm not really sure. To change this event our heroes go back in time to change things, only I don't know what they are changing, or whether the incident was their fault or not. As far as I'm concerned this is never revealed in the movie.

While they are working on the resolution of this problem, our two heroes, Abe and Aaron (And could you make the two leads names any harder to differentiate from one another?), get into a time travel pissing contest, "I can go back farther than you." "No, I can." "No, I can." It's not set out explicitly in the film, but it starts as one going back in time to help the other, who then has to go back and help the first, and then we find out maybe they're not really helping in the first place. OK. Not a bad idea, but I'm confused.

To make matters worse, the time machine appears to work differently, with no explanation as to why, when it is transformed from the experimental version to the man sized version. In the experimental version, the time machine is on for a minute and an egg ages upwards of 2-5 years. In the final version, they are in the machines for literally hours, and they age an equivalent number of hours. Huh? I guess continuing that fact was inconvenient or maybe the writer forgot.

It's a small thing, and I could forgive it, but the last scene really bugged me. Our two heroes are going to catch a plane and

get out of dodge. The presumed reason is so their doppelganger selves, the ones they saved, can stay behind and enjoy their lives. The reason we know there is another set of selves is because there is a discussion about stealing their own passports and how “they,” their doubles, wouldn’t need them, because “they” aren’t going anywhere. Time travel machines are not cloning devices. The machines in this film are of amazingly limited duration, only allowing one to go back in time as long as you’ve had the machine on, which in the movie’s case is about a week. Implying that there are two versions of Abe or Aaron is idiotic. And don’t ask me which one it is, because I don’t know. Maybe both. Maybe neither. This to me is an unpardonable sin for a time machine movie.

So, bottom line, if you are into the genre you will enjoy it. It is slow moving at first, but ends in a crescendo of time travel excitement, but don’t expect it to make any sense. The final 15 minutes is a do it yourself project. At the end of the movie, I don’t know:

The problem they went back to solve.

Whether they solved or caused this problem.

The total number of time machines involved, all the more complicated since you can put a time machine inside another time machine.

And finally, the number of times they go back to effect the past. They go back at least three times, but towards the end, it almost seems like Groundhog Day.

I enjoyed the movie and plan on loading it up and viewing it again, but I honestly believe at its core the movie is a mind bending IQ puzzle that doesn’t come complete with an answer. The true enjoyment from which comes in rewriting the movie, as it should have been done the first time, which leads me to believe maybe I should go back in time and take off one of those stars I gave it. Maybe take away the star I gave them for a \$7,000 budget. In the end, I’m thinking they should have paid the writer a little more.

{I believe -- but shall not bother to fact check -- that the guy who wrote/directed this, also wrote Looper. And since I review both in this series of articles, it shows I like the genre. But I suppose, liking the genre, I have very specific ideas about the genre -- the rules and laws of time travel, as it were -- and so, am unwilling to accept certain outcomes or plot devices that run counter to both my expectations AND THE WAY THINGS ARE. So, um, does that come out conceited enough?}

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