

Passengers delivers the Christmas turkey

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
Friday, 23 December 2016 05:43



Rating: « *out of 4 stars*

Running Time: 116 min.

Occasionally, you see a bad movie with so much talent in front of and behind the camera, you begin to wonder where exactly it all went wrong. There's plenty that is calamitous with the big-budget, sci-fi/drama, *Passengers*. My only guess is some kind of interference or unnecessary rewrites on a script to make it more genial threw this project off the rails. Whatever the case, one couldn't have possibly read this screenplay and not believed that there weren't major problems.

One of the biggest is the main character, Jim Preston (Chris Pratt). He's a technical engineer (essentially, a mechanic) resting in a sleep chamber on an enormous spacecraft traveling to a distant planet. He and 5000-plus others are making the 120 year journey to a new home. When an asteroid shower damages the ship, his pod malfunctions and he rises too early. 90 years ahead of time, to be exact, leaving him as the sole person who is awake on the ship. Strangely unable to use his technical skills to do anything productive, the lonely Jim begins to obsess over a still-sleeping passenger named Aurora (Jennifer Lawrence). In the end, our hero can't help himself. Soon the pair are together trying to make the best of a bad situation.

The production design and special effects are impressive, showcasing a large, cavernous spacecraft that is part *2001: A Space Odyssey* and part Carnival cruise ship. But that's about where the compliments end. This story has so many plot holes and logistical issues that the mind is constantly wondering why and how instead of becoming invested in the characters themselves.

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There are constant references to how the sleeping pods are flawless, can't fail and can't be reset. We're just supposed to accept this. However, after introducing Aurora, she states that she is a writer who is traveling to the new colony for a year to write about life before returning to Earth to show her findings. Doesn't the fact that she's heading home so soon suggest that these mechanisms *can* be reset?

It's also amusing that the ship has one sole android (Michael Sheen). What purpose does he serve? He's a bartender. Faceless machines already serve food and coffee choices based on the class of passengers, but the engineers of this craft felt that an android was the only option to serve alcohol (instead of having it solve problems or provide maintenance that may arise on the ship). I suppose we aren't supposed to think about it, but these questions continue to pop up.

Pratt is a charismatic actor and I generally like him, but there's little to salvage in this character. One would expect Jim to be good on his feet and be able to reprogram or reset things like the hyper-sleep chamber and doors, but he consistently fails. Admittedly, his plight is unfortunate, yet his behavior is akin to a creepy stalker. Strangely enough, after Aurora enters the picture he appears much more capable, reprogramming little robots to deliver love notes.

Yes, the movie attempts to redeem Jim towards its close, but further insult is added to injury with the reveal of another solution that no one previously considered. Had the movie been darker and its characters a little more devious, this all could have been fun. What's to stop the leads from obsessing and awakening another sleeper when trouble arises or falling prey to other personal ticks and flaws? The screenplay never goes down that road.

Ultimately, the tone of this movie is completely inappropriate. It wants us to feel like the leads are deeply in love and ultimately belong together. I get it, you've got two of the biggest stars in Hollywood and you want to play up the romance angle. But with this particular story, it comes across all wrong. The moral appears to be that if you're really taken with a woman, get her alone and just wear her down - eventually she'll come around and notice you're a good person deep down. It's flat out creepy.

As mentioned, everyone involved in the film is talented, including director Morten Tyldum (*The Imitation Game*

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Headhunters

). There must have been something going on behind the scenes that led to the final product feeling so awkward and, at times, kind of demented. It is certainly no fault of the cast or crew, but the only thing

Passengers

ends up delivering is the Christmas turkey.

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