

Jake Gyllenhaal, Michelle Monaghan Star in Thrilling ‘Source Code’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 31, 2011 - 5:00pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Duncan Jones announced his arrival on the sci-fi scene with such authority with the excellent “Moon” that genre fans were naturally concerned about a sophomore slump. Worry no more. “Source Code” may first feel like a more traditional thriller but it’s clearly cut from the same cloth as “Moon” in that it takes the impossible and makes it human, even spiritual. Like the best sci-fi, “Source Code” is both entertaining and thought-provoking. It’s a great slice of entertainment that you’ll want to relive as soon as it’s done playing.

“Source Code” will bring back memories of such unusual inspirations as “Groundhog Day” and “24,” but it mostly feels to this critic like what a classic thriller director like Alfred Hitchcock would have done with an episode of “The Twilight Zone.” Everything about the production, including the very Hermann-esque score, feels like an old-fashioned thriller with a futuristic twist. And the film goes from purely entertaining to something more in its final act when writer Ben Ripley and director Duncan Jones transcend mere science fiction for a spiritual commentary on what matters in life and maybe even in death.



Source Code

Photo credit: Summit Pictures

Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) wakes up on a train bound for Chicago on what seems like an average morning commute. He sees a beautiful woman named Christina (Michelle Monaghan) seated across from him. Christina speaks to Colter like she knows him but he does not recognize her and matters are complicated much further when she called him Sean. He opens his wallet to find another man’s face on his driver’s license, one that matches the one he first sees in his window and then in the bathroom mirror. As Colter/Sean is trying to determine

just what kind of dream or incredibly-realistic simulation he’s partaking in, the train explodes.

Colter wakes up strapped into a capsule and his memories are jogged via a series of exercises administered by Goodwin (Vera Farmiga). She eventually explains to him, along with the help of a superior named Rutledge (Jeffrey Wright), that he is a part of an amazing new program called Source Code. You know how a light bulb retains a bit of incandescence after its turned off? Apparently, so does the human brain. Using that, the government has created an amazing program in which one man can literally jump into the last eight minutes of a life. This morning, a bomb was detonated on a Chicago-bound train. This afternoon, a dirty bomb will go off in the city itself if Colter can’t find the bomber using Source Code. The specifics of Colter’s situation along with the practical and spiritual implications of the program will be revealed as the movie progresses and, of course, it’s a pretty good thriller at the same time.

“Source Code” could have disastrously underlined its themes of spiritual redemption (if you think about it, it really is one big reincarnation parable in which a man gets to try again and again until he “gets it right”) and “what really matters” if you only have a few minutes to live, but Jones brilliantly balances the deeper issues at play with his ability to entertain. One viewer of “Source Code” will latch on to the deeper themes at work while the person next to them might enjoy the film purely as entertainment. Like only the best science fiction, it works either way.



Source Code

Photo credit: Summit Pictures

It helps that Gyllenhaal hasn’t been this entertaining in years, giving a performance sure to be underrated as he goes through a wide range of emotions in what is essentially a compressed plot. The first time Colter wakes up, he has no idea where he is or what’s going on. As the film progresses, he goes through different motivations including merely accomplishing his assignment to eventually trying to save not just the girl across from him but arguably himself. Gyllenhaal works completely, never hitting a false note and proving that, despite the disastrous “Prince of Persia” arguing otherwise, that he could be an action star in the right material.

Despite Gyllenhaal’s work, this is not a one-man show. Michelle Monaghan is effective, striking just the right balance to make her character believable with a limited number of scenes. And she has great chemistry with Jake. As for Farmiga and Wright, if you need two characters to essentially offer the exposition to keep the audience up with exactly what’s going on, you couldn’t do much better than these great actors.

I wish “Source Code” ended about two minutes earlier than it does. There’s three endings to the film and I love the first one, like the second one, and am not a fan of the last one. But, until then, the film is a thrilling ride that simply works on every critical level. The performances, the technical details, the ambition of the writing, the pacing — it’s all here and it all adds up to a film that I expect will be thoroughly embraced by both genre fans and those outside it for years to come.

“Source Code” stars Jake Gyllenhaal, Michelle Monaghan, Vera Farmiga, and Jeffrey Wright. It was written by Ben Ripley and directed by Duncan Jones. It is rated PG-13 and opens on April 1st, 2011.



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