

Story Can't Match Eye-Popping Visuals of 'Passengers'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 24, 2016 - 10:31am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The use of science fiction for all kind of stories is one of the hottest go-to genres for Hollywood today. “Passengers” is a love story, and adds the visual glory of modern special effects...but the soapy tale of a star-crossed (literally) couple is problematic and cliché ridden, and breaks at the end with heroics that are shoehorned into the rest of the scenario.

The premise is intriguing, a starship heads to a new colony planet – sponsored by a corporation – and a gaffe in the automated system allows for a male engineer to “wake up” from suspended animation too early...the journey to the new planet takes 90 years. Alone in a massive ship, and faced with a long period of loneliness, he comes up with a solution. Chris Pratt portrays the lonely dude, and his performance chops are not conducive with the more subtle parts of the situation he finds himself in. Also the complexities of the story wants some simple solutions, including a crew member who miraculously awakens as well, to figure out how to get out of this mess. Coupled with a super sci-fi hero ending, the narrative structure breaks down with the ship.

Jim Preston (Chris Pratt) is an American engineer heading to a planet called Homestead II, with 5000 other fellow travelers. They are in suspended animation pods, since the journey will take over 90 years. Jim’s pod opens, but he discovers it is too early, and he has no way to get back to his suspended state. He is now cursed to grow old on a ship still 80 years away from its destination.



Jim (Chris Pratt) and Aurora (Jennifer Lawrence) on the Starship Avalon in 'Passengers'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

After about a year, with a robotic bartender (Michael Sheen) his only friend, Jim decides to take some matters into his own hands. He has accidentally opened a profile on an American author named Aurora (Jennifer Lawrence), and falls in love with her through her writings. He decides to release her from the suspended state, and their subsequent relationship determines the ship's fate.

The visuals are superb eye candy. The beauty of the current digital era is that production designers can create art in the movement of a starship through space. Inside, the cool interior has nods to Stanley Kubrick – especially the barroom right out of “The Shining” – and the loss of gravity during the story elicits one of the wildest images of the year...Jennifer Lawrence unable to swim her way out of a water droplet created from a gravity-free pool.

Lawrence handles the chore of her put-upon character much better than the floundering of Chris Pratt. Granted, the script by Jon Spaihts has Pratt's character all over the map, but the actor has a hard time with subtlety and romance. It needed a spark he couldn't provide. Lawrence is a much more focused and nuanced performer – she could probably do announcements at the subway and get more people to ride.



Luckily in Outer Space There is Enough Lip Gloss in 'Passengers'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

The story was many complex problems that searched for simple solutions. Jim is an engineer, and is able to interpret the automated starship manuals, but he cannot get back to suspended animation. This unlikeliness is never fully explained, but somehow he can figure out the core power reactor that is causing problems. He also miraculously gets help from a conveniently awakened crew member (Laurence Fishburne), who is there just long enough to provide the path to the hero's end. The love story, meanwhile, ebbs and flows based on the ship's conundrum, which gets a bit maddening.

Is the film worthy for the holiday weekend? Why not. The visuals – which are also available in 3D – do create a worthwhile atmosphere, and the soap opera story is adventurous enough to alleviate the glaring problems. But like Michael Sheen's robot bartender, you made need a reboot afterward.

"Passengers" opened everywhere on December 21st in 3D, IMAX and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D/IMAX theaters and show times. Featuring Jennifer Lawrence, Chris Pratt, Laurence Fishburne, Michael Sheen and Andy Garcia. Written by Jon Spaihts. Directed by Morten Tyldum. Rated "PG-13"



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