



DESTINATION TIME TRAVEL: PLAYING WITH TIME IN FILM AND TV

Predestination

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Directed by: Peter Spierig, Michael Spierig
©: Predestination Holdings Pty Ltd,
Screen Australia, Screen Queensland Pty Ltd,
Cutting Edge Post Pty Ltd
Production Companies: Blacklab Entertainment,
Wolfhound Pictures
Developed with the assistance of: Film Victoria
Developed, financed and produced with the assistance of: Screen Queensland
in association with: Screen Queensland's
Professional Attachments Programme
Principal investor: Screen Australia
Presented by: Stage 6 Films, Screen Australia
in association with: Screen Queensland
International Sales: Arclight Films
Executive Producers: Michael Burton,
Gary Hamilton, Matt Kennedy, James M. Vernon
Produced by: Paddy McDonald, Tim McGahan,
Peter Spierig, Michael Spierig
Production Manager: Yvonne Collins
Location Manager: Alistair Reilly
Post-production Supervisor: Harry Avramidis
1st Assistant Director: Jamie Leslie
Script Supervisor: Carmel Torcasio
Casting: Leigh Pickford
Written by: Peter Spierig, Michael Spierig
Based on the short story 'All You Zombies' by:
Robert A. Heinlein
Director of Photography: Ben Nott
Camera Operator: Darrin Keough
Digital Visual Effects: Cutting Edge
Special Effects Supervisor: Brian Pearce
Film Editor: Matt Villa
Production Designer: Matthew Putland
Art Director: Janie Parker
Set Designer: James Parker
Costume Designer: Wendy Cork
Make-up and Hair Designer: Tess Natoli
Special Make-up Effects Designer: Steve Boyle
Music: Peter Spierig
Sound Designer: Chris Goodes
Sound Recordist: Gretchen Thornburn
Re-recording Mixer: Chris Goodes
Supervising Sound Editor: Chris Goodes
Stunt Co-ordinator: Mitch Dean
Fight Choreographer: Marky Lee Campbell
Cast:
Ethan Hawke (*the barkeep*)
Sarah Snook (*the unmarried mother*)
Noah Taylor (*Mr Robertson*)
Christopher Kirby (*Mr Miles*)
Christopher Sommers (*Mr Miller*)
Kuni Kashimoto (*Dr Fujimoto*)
Australia-USA 2013©
97 mins
Digital

The screening on Sat 18 Nov will be introduced by James and Matt from the Journey Through Sci-Fi podcast

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In Greek mythology, it is precisely Oedipus's attempts to avoid murdering his own father and marrying his own mother that drive him to fulfil that predicted fate. Yet in dramatising this clash of free will and determinism, the ancients had only the divine machinery of prophecy to fix the future of their narratives. Set in a more secular age, this film from Australian genre-loving brothers Michael and Peter Spierig (*Undead*, *Daybreakers*) concerns a 'temporal bureau' that uses privileged prescience to stop crimes (specifically terrorist bombings) before they can be committed; yet it replaces the oracles of ancient myth – and the 'precogs' of Steven Spielberg's similar *Minority Report* (2002) – with the speculative fiction of time travel, even if it is still exploring the same age-old questions of how much we are prisoners of our own biology and psychology, our genetic heritage and environmental circumstance. Here characters are constantly confronted with choices that have been massaged and manipulated earlier – often decades earlier – to ensure that only one outcome is possible. With one of its characters a true hermaphrodite, *Predestination* is as much concerned with issues of gender destiny as with the intertwined dynamics of terrorism and counterterrorism – but handles it all with a timely economy.

'See, you'll find out that time has a very different meaning for people like us,' says the Bartender/Temporal Agent at the centre of *Predestination*. He is played by Ethan Hawke, star of *Daybreakers* and seasoned time-traveller (of a different kind) in Richard Linklater's long-game *Before... trilogy* (1995-2013) and *Boyhood* (2014). Time here works in a complicated manner, undermining conventional causality, confounding identities (professional, sexual, familial) and engendering a scenario that is, even for those viewers who imagine they know what is coming, remarkably singular. In keeping with these temporal convolutions, key events taking place in the 70s, 80s and 90s are all at once projected as a strange, not quite recognisable future ('All You Zombies', Robert Heinlein's short story from which this is faithfully expanded, was penned in 1958), and tinged with an alternative-reality nostalgia.

Criss-crossing multiple time periods, the film carefully elaborates an ingeniously looping paradox that 'can't be paradoctored', as the world-weary Bartender and a loquacious young customer (Sarah Snook, astonishingly versatile) struggle to turn damaged pasts into bright futures and end up chasing their own tails. This is a noirish world full of tough bastards and sons of bitches – but it is also closed, almost solipsistic, with very few characters ('I don't get out and meet a lot of new people,' as one of them puts it). The screenplay is tightly constructed, its hidden Sophoclean ironies best appreciated with more than one viewing. But for all the high-concept twists and turns, there are next to no special effects (the time machine, charmingly, looks like a violin case), as this remains very much a tragedy rooted in characters who must learn through suffering, face incestuous home truths and grapple heroically with the inevitable.

Anton Bitel, *Sight and Sound*, March 2015

Predestination is another exploration of time-travel paradoxes, arguably the privileged trope of contemporary science fiction films, whether overtly philosophical or not (cf. *Back to the Future*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, *Looper*, Duncan Jones's *Source Code*; it's also the premise of teen adventure *Project Almanac*, and of video game *Life Is Strange*).

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Predestination

Sat 18 Nov 20:45; Tue 28 Nov 18:20

Lazarus Table Reading

Sun 19 Nov 15:15

The Time Machine

Mon 20 Nov 18:15

Beyond the Infinite Two Minutes Dorosute no hate de bokura + **Felix the Cat Trifles with Time**
Tue 21 Nov 18:30; Thu 23 Nov 21:00

Tomorrow I'll Wake Up and Scald Myself with Tea Zitra vstanu a oparím se čajem + **La Jetée**
Sat 25 Nov 15:00

DESTINATION: TIME TRAVEL AT BFI IMAX

Back to the Future Trilogy

Sun 19 Nov 11:30

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For a long stretch, *Predestination* is that most theatrical of formats, the barroom encounter, as a man (who started life as a woman) narrates his/her flashback-laden biography to a bartender who turns out to be more involved in the story than we first suspect. Based on a concise but vertiginous 1959 short story by Robert A. Heinlein (who's sometimes credited with popularising the term 'speculative fiction'), the Spierigs' film faithfully expands the original to develop its themes of time paradox, gender crisis, narcissism and incest, adding an extra Borgesian dimension in the plot strand of a time-travelling agent's pursuit of the bomber who is, it transpires, his ideal adversary.

Stylishly executed, *Predestination* presents itself as a slice of retro-modernism, set in an alternative version of our past (and Heinlein's imagined future), a world in which space travel is a common career option in the 1960s. There's a pleasing no-frills genre flamboyance to the film, a touch of Roger Corman or Charles Band, and an extraordinary performance from Sarah Snook as the gender-shifting central figure (imagine a butch androgynous love child of Sissy Spacek and Eric Stoltz). The Spierigs package their themes with bracing pulp-novel economy, and have fun not just expanding on Heinlein's story but also riffing on its wordplay: clichés like 'Son of a bitch' and 'I doubt if my mother would recognise me' acquire new resonance, as do Heinlein's philosophical one-liners, such as the notion that a paradox can be 'paradoctored'.

What's new, however, is a post-9/11 dimension in the theme of the pursuit of a bomber in the past: the idea that terrorists enable state security organisations to exist, and that therefore those organisations owe everything to terrorists, without whom they are nothing. This is just one of the ways in which *Predestination* is a perfect, perverse love story.

There's also a dimension in *Predestination* which is arguably always present, overtly or not, in time-travel stories: a meta-fictional dimension relating to narrative itself, and how we make sense of it. Take for example the editing style of *Primer*, which constantly makes us aware how its time travellers seek to re-edit their own history. *Predestination* plays on the idea of history being pre-written and yet possibly open to rewriting; the story is about the problems of controlling the story. In meta-filmic terms, you might see the film's security boss and arch-manipulator Robertson (Noah Taylor, enigmatically feline) as a sort of studio head, determined to stop actors and directors from changing the script.

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk, 2015