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Primer movie plot

Primer is a long-lost film that has only one cult sequel. It was made by Shane Carruth who also wrote the story and acted in it. He also produced, edited and worked on production design. Heck, he even made the music for the movie. He also had a budget the size of a pea for the film. No CGI, nothing. Yet it happened to create one of the most complex time travel films that requires a 6-page explanation with chronology diagrams. Shane Carruth's second film was Upstream Color which was a pretty cool concept too. This article is going to be an entirely textual explanation because the schematic representation of the chronology will have to be in 3 dimensions. In fact, I'm lazy to create one, but I threw in a timeline diagram between the two to explain the dynamics of time travel first. Here is a detailed analysis of the plot and the end of the movie Primer explained, spoilers to come. This is Barry, You can rent or buy Primer by clicking below. In case you are new to the site, here's how it works. If the article doesn't answer all your questions, leave me a comment or an FB chat message, and I'll get you the answer to your question. You can find other movies using the search option at the top of this page. Content Here are links to the key aspects of the film: The insignificant bits in Primer: The movie starts with 4 friends who are working on side projects outside of their day jobs. Aaron, Abe, Robert and Phillip are the four people. Ignore Robert and Phillip, they'll be gone soon. We only care about Aaron and Abe and the multiple instances of them in time we will try to follow. Primer explained: Story happens After a fall, Abe and Aaron decide to team up on an invention that aims to reduce the gravitational effects on objects. Indeed, reduce the weight of objects. However, things do not go according to what they envision. Abe meets Aaron on a park bench one morning and tells Aaron that if he skips work, Abe will show Aaron the most important thing any living organism has ever seen. Abe shows Aaron the object that has been in the machine for a few days, but has the build-up of protein that occurs over many years. Abe gets Aaron to put a watch in the machine to see the time expired for the watch. Abe wants Aaron to confirm the results. They essentially end up creating a device that sends the object put inside back and forth through time. They also notice that objects tend to make about 1300 round trips. The explanation for this is not given attention to, something about the probabilities that lead to the outputs of the time loop only after a minimum of Loops. Abe then explains the A-to-B loop. Start: Explanation of A -B that is drawn on paper When the machine is on for a while, say 1 min, the object put inside after 1 min begins to come and go in time. If the machine was started at 12:00 p.m. and the object is put inside at 12:01 p.m., the object returns at 12:00 p.m. and then returns at 12:01 p.m. It looped this way about 1300 times before it passes the 12:01 p.m. time. By the time the object came out shortly after 12:01, it has already spent more than 2600 minutes (due to the back and forth - 1300 x 2) inside the machine. 12:00 PM is the end A. 12:01 PM is the end B. Thus, the watch discarded at the end A and exited on end B, travels a total number of trips from A to B to B to A and finally to B. The total is odd. If the watch is launched at end B, it travels a total number of trips from B to B to A... and finally to B. The total is even. Start: Time Travel Works Abe tells Aaron how the machine seems to work, also adds that if the object was smart, it could enter the B end and calculate an output at the end A. This means that the smart object can travel back in time. Being an intelligent object - a human being. Abe proceeds to take Aaron to a place and tells him what Aaron was going to witness was not a prank or a practical joke of any kind. Abe hands Aaron a pair of binoculars and Aaron sees another Abe walking towards the building with an oxygen tank. Basically showing Aaron that Abe has already traveled through time. Primer: Explanation of time travel Classically, we are used to instant time travel. Person at once t1 is just transported instantly at T2 time (such as in Predestination, Looper or Timecrimes). This is not how time travel works in Primer. To travel back in time here is what one has to do: 1) Start the machine at a t1 moment (end A), say 12.00PM 2) Wait for the machine to work, say 6 hours. Buy an oxygen tank. 3) Enter the machine after letting it run for 6 hours, it will be time t2 (end B) 4) Be in the machine for 6 hours, while in the machine you travel back in time. You come back at the rate of 1 minute per minute of your watch. Set the watch at 6 o'clock. 5) Use the oxygen tank to help you breathe for 6 hours in the box. 6) When the insurrator goes down to zero, it's time to get out of the box. When you leave the box, you will exit at end A, which is T1 time, which is 12:00 PM. Unlike other time travel movies, you can't travel to a point before the machine has been turned on. The time travel window is limited to the time the machine was turned on. What's with the 15min timer on the machine? Imagine you go out at end A at the T1 time which is 12,00 PM in the scenario above (step 6). You will come across your past self that would turn on the machine (step 1). Running in your past self is not a good idea if you set a 15min update on the machine. This ensures that Step 1 will occur 15min after turning on the update. This gives you enough time get out of the area and your future self will not show up in you. Note: If you happen to get out of the box before reaching end A, then the chances of your brain being fried are high. We'll come back to that later. Primer: All the chronologies explained Aaron is blown away, realizes that the Abe he's been with all day is a 6-hour Abe in Future. The Abe he sees using binoculars is the Abe of the current chronology. Aaron asks Abe what he did before entering the machine at the end B. Abe explains that after starting the cheony, he checked into a hotel and disconnected from the world, no phones, no television, nothing. After 6 hours, he returned to the machine and entered. Now we start counting deadlines, every time someone travels back in time, it leads to a new calendar. Events in one calendar may not be different from another, but it is nevertheless a new calendar. Primer Timeline 1: Abe starts the machine, drives into his car and checks into a hotel. Aaron is not bothered, so ends up going to work (They talk about it, but is not shown in Primer). Abe checks the stock price and returns to the warehouse 6 hours later and enters the machine at end B. Primer Timeline 2: Abe gets out of the box at the A end, is carless and takes a taxi and prevents Aaron from going to work, both of them watching abe from chronology 1 enter the storage facility using binoculars. Aaron now wants to do exactly what Abe did. They are working on another box for Aaron and the next trip is set up - maybe the next day. Aaron and Abe both go to the warehouse, start taking time and head for the hotel room. They register and stay there. They look at the share price so that, when they go back in time, they can trade on the right deeds to make money. They return 6 hours later to the warehouse and enter their boxes at end B. Primer Timeline 3: Abe and Aaron go out in the morning. Aaron goes out a little fast to get a zap. They go back and start filling the lives of Aaron and Abe who are in the hotel room. They know which shares to buy and they buy. Later that day, in the evening, Aaron and Abe talk about what they want with their lives. Aaron mentions how he would go to meet his boss, punch him in the face, then go back and tell himself not to hit the boss. That way, no one would be hurt, the accident would not happen, but he would have the impression that it is hitting his boss. Abe tells Aaron that he can't do that, no changing history; this would lead to a paradox. Aaron's wife also asks if Aaron called pest control, she feels there are rats in the attic. We'll come back and see the rats in the attic. They go through their next days to do the thing time travel: We will ignore the deadlines they end up creating, nothing major there. They continue to make money on stocks. They also decide not to tell the other two friends Robert and Phillip. So you can't ignore Robert, Phillip can be ignored. On a day when Aaron bleeds from his ears, it may be all the time to travel. The night Abe and Aaron make their first trip back in time. Robert throws a birthday party and Rachel's ex-boyfriend walks in with a shotgun over an argument they have. Aaron intercepts Rachel's boyfriend and saves the day. One morning, Robert said this to Abe is angry at Aaron for putting his life on the line without taking care of his wife and child. Abe mentions that Rachel is stupid to get into these scenarios. Aaron explains how the whole trip in time was cool in his head and he wasn't going to let Rachel's ex scare people like that. They continue to travel the next day. They start on the 44th and head for the hotel room. When they are in the hotel room, Aaron gets a call because he forgets to turn off his cell phone. He takes the call. He talks to his wife and hangs up. They get to the machine and get into the end B. Primer Timeline 4: (ignoring the multiple other times they may have traveled back, there is nothing hectic and the deadlines are not changed from the original by many): When they travel back at the beginning of the day, Aaron's phone sounds like it is still in his pocket. Aaron does not choose and it is a source of concern, breaking the symmetry. They check if the other one feels good. Explanation for the mobile phone bit: That day, let's say Aaron and Abe start the 44th at 11:45 for 15min and leave at the hotel. At 12:00, the machine starts. When in the room, say around 2:00 p.m., Aaron gets a phone call. He picks it up. At 6:00 p.m., Aaron and Abe get into their machines and return in time until 12:00 p.m. Now, when they reach the 2:00 p.m. time, Aaron (who traveled back) rings his phone. The concept of phone towers is that when a call is made to a phone number, a wise grid search for that phone is done, the first grid that finds the phone, rings the phone. Since the Aaron in the street received the call, Aaron in the hotel room, would not have received this call, hence that talking with his wife would not have taken place. It's the break in symmetry. But the call is not very important and therefore does not radically change the chronology. Messing With Paradoxes: That night, Aaron and Abe are woken up by a bunch of kids hitting cars with sticks putting out car alarms all over the road. They both stand in the kitchen and talk. Abe suggests an idea of playing with a paradox. Abe and Aaron can leave Aaron's boss right away, punching him in the face. Then enter their boxes and travel back to focus in the night when the kids are hitting the cars. They're scaring the kids away. This will make sure they are not awake, they never have the conversation they have, they would keep waking up in the morning and prepare the box and travel the usual 6 hours. This action, however, would leave two sets of Aarons and Abes in the next timeline. But they don't talk about that, the paradox is what they want to play with. Aaron asks Abe how they should get back to the point that the machine is On. Abe admits he left the machine running at 5:00 p.m. So the two went to experiment. On the way to the warehouse, they notice Rachel's father in a sitting car and just look away. Aaron mentions that earlier in the day, his father was clean-shaven, near, this one in the car had a three-day thatch. This means that the guy in the car went back to that timeline. They call Rachel's father's house number and he

comes on the phone. This confirms that the guy in the car is of a future moment. They chase him, and Rachel's father of the future eventually faints. They take it home and hide it in the guest room. Abe and Aaron go to the facility to see if the machines are okay, and they are. They begin to wonder if they have ever planned to talk to Rachel's father about the machines in time. They both deny having such a thought. They think of a hypothetical situation where there is an emergency, but they cannot point the finger at anything. The permutations were endless. It looked like he got out of the box too fast and ended up zapping his brain as we mentioned earlier. Rachel's father was in a coma and vegetative. Abe is worried about what he may have changed. For example, if they had not seen him sitting in the car, they would have been at the boss's house and punching him in the face. But instead, they're at home talking about the comatose father. Aaron thinks nothing could have changed. No other explanation is given for how Rachel's father was able to use the time machine. The point of interest is that, the deadlines are terribly messed around and that scares the daylight out of Abe. Abe decides that the consequences of this time travel is simply too dangerous. He talks to Aaron about another machine that Abe left before his very first trip back in time. This is called the Failsafe. Abe's Failsafe has been running from the start. Abe plans to induce a long sleep and return to the beginning and prevent himself from traveling back in time. In this way, everything would go back to what they were supposed to be and would go back to schedule 1. No time travel, no problems. Primer Timeline ??? Abe uses the Failsafe and returns to timeline 1 or at least he thinks it is. He drugs the original Abe from the chronology in his sleep. This ensures that its original self of the chronology does not travel through time. After that, Abe-from-the-Failsafe lands on the park bench to meet Aaron. His plan is to have a general conversation with Aaron and let him go to work. In this way, neither Aaron nor Abe of the original chronology make their first journey back in time and everything will be undone. But the long-ass time-travel in the Failsafe made Abe weak. What he also notices is that Aaron continues to have the same conversation they have in timeline 2 regardless of what Abe says. As Abe falls to the ground, it is revealed that Aaron on the bench is simply as a result of a recorded conversation that they had from chronology 2. This means that Aaron is also and just tries to re-act on a conversation that's already been between him and Abe. Therefore, it is not chronology 1 or timeline 2, it is a kind of modified calendar ??? We'll have what timetable it is. After Abe-from-the-Failsafe wakes up, he wants to know how it happened. Aaron explains how he noticed the warehouse manifest with two bedrooms under Abe's name. How Aaron already found the Failsafe machine. How Aaron realized it was the all resets set box. As Aaron doesn't have that. Primer Timeline 1.1 Aaron decides to travel back in time using the Failsafe box (before Abe) until the beginning. However, he takes with him the foldable version of the box with him back at the beginning. Taking back foldable boxes also means that it may end up doing more time travel tricks in the same time window. If there was only one box, it can only be used by one person between end A and end B. This is because between end A and B, the machine has the person in it and cannot be turned off; it can kill the person inside, the person inside is yourself, you don't want to kill yourself. Taking a box every step back will give the ability to set up another machine once you leave. This gives the opportunity to make another trip back using the extra box. Aaron, after using The Failsafe, drug the Aaron of the original chronology (drugs milk carton). This drugged Aaron is the person who's supposed to be on the park bench. But instead, he drugged and dumped in the attic. Remember the rats in the attic? It would be aaron, the first and original Aaron. Aaron-from-the-Failsafe now replaces Aaron-in-the-attic on the park bench (we never see this in Primer, it's deducted). He also decides to record all the conversations of the day. Important thing to note here is that this Aaron-from-the-Failsafe is the one that tells the story. He said, And that's where I would have made history. Or out, depending on your reference. Primer Timeline 1.2 Aaron-from-the-Failsafe, narrator Aaron, uses the extra box to return at the beginning of the day. Aaron-from-the-extra-box tries to bring down Aaron-from-the-Failsafe (who drugged the original Aaron). Aaron-from-the-extra-box has traveled extensively in time and is tired and is unable to subdue Aaron-from-the-Failsafe. However Aaron-from-the-Failsafe and Arron-from-the-extra-box talk about it. Aaron-from-the-extra-box has already experienced the day and recorded the events of the day, that's what Aaron-from-the-Failsafe intended to do (and he does it in chronology 1.1). Aaron-from-the-Failsafe understands that Aaron-from-the-extra-box accomplished more in their common goal, from where Arron-from-the-Failsafe leaves. Aaron-from-the-extra-box now meets Abe-from-the-Failsafe while he was on the park bench, listening to the conversation that should have occurred according to 1.1 timeline. But faints instead. Timeline??? from above is basically Timeline 1.2 and is what can be seen in the movie. And that's why we hear a recording of the headset dialogues. The recording is from Timeline 1.1. Primer: What does Abe do in timeline 1.2? 1.2? Didn't Abe go back until he got back? After all, he used the Failsafe. Aaron who uses the Failsafe before Abe decides he'll come back to the beginning. After Aaron uses the Failsafe, he also makes sure he puts in a double Failsafe in place of the original Failsafe. Let's call the original Failsafe as Abe's Failsafe. He was replaced by Aaron's Failsafe. While Abe's Failsafe is running all the way from the beginning, before all the travel time, Aaron Failsafe is running from a few hours after Abe's Failsafe. These few hours are given so that Abe does not notice that the machines have been switched. The gap of a few hours is also enough for Aaron to drug his past and go to the park bench and pretend. Abe is not aware of this change that Aaron has made. Abe also doesn't know that Aaron used Abe's Failsafe. Abe thinks he's using Abe's Failsafe, but ends up using Aaron's Failsafe instead. Abe finally arrives a few hours after Aaron. By this time, Aaron has already created Timeline 1.1 followed by a Timeline 1.2 - where he is on the bench listening to the conversation on the headphones. In chronology 1.2 there are 3 Aarons 1) The original Aaron of the chronology that is drugged and thrown into the attic. 2) Aaron-from-the-Failsafe who decides to leave, the narrator. 3) Aaron-from-the-extra-box who is on the park bench listening to conversations on headphones. In timeline 1.2 there are 2 Abes 1) The original Abe of the chronology that is drugged and thrown into a bathroom. 2) The Abe-from-the-Failsafe that comes to the park and faints. Abe-from-the-Failsafe returns to consciousness and Aaron-from-the-extra-box explains how he discovered the Failsafe and made the switcheroo (essentially everything described above). He also gives Abe-from-the-Failsafe recording and descends on the basketball court to talk to Will. Will's cousin is Rachel's boyfriend. According to the original timeline, Aaron ends up inviting Will and his cousin to Robert's party. So Aaron-from-the-extra-box invites Will according to the original events, the only change is that he fails to shoot the basket that changes the conversation a bit but doesn't change the result. Aaron-from-the-extra-box also convinces Abe-from-the-Failsafe why he needs to invite Rachel to the party. Abe-from-the-Failsafe finally agrees and calls Rachel to Robert's birthday party. Here's something unknown. Aaron-from-the-extra-box may have returned again and again at the beginning of the day to relive the day, to make sure the events in the game go as planned. Which also means that more and more Aaron hang out in this chronology—no mention is made of what all Aarons do. Finally, the scene in Primer shows an Aaron with Abe from Failsafe at the labor party to perfection. aaron-from-the-extra-box came back? Three? Four? Twenty? I have no idea. However, in the film we see the scene of the party with a final Aaron. He will be called Aaron-the-Final. Au Au they open the car and sabotage the ex's shotgun by removing the bullets. When the moment of conflict occurs, Aaron-the-Final springs to the shooter (the ex) and saves the day. The next scene is at the airport. Aaron-the-Final and Abe-from-the-Failsafe talk about what happens next. Aaron-the-Final says they (Aaron-the-Final and Abe-from-the-Failsafe) don't belong to the timeline in which they are and they should just flip through the passports of the original Abe and Aaron and just leave it to another part of the world where no one knows them. Aaron-the-Final also suggests that they can make a copy of his wife and child and go with them. Abe-from-the-Failsafe is annoyed by Aaron-the-Final and asks him to leave and never come back. Abe-from-the-Failsafe plans to sabotage the efforts of the original Abe and Aaron in creating and using the time machine. Abe-from-the-Failsafe hopes that the first Abe and Aaron will give up and move on to other projects. Aaron the Last is leaving. Primer Ending Explained: Timeline Unknown The end of the primer shows an Aaron in a place building a gigantic version of the machine. We can only assume that this is the second Aaron from Timeline 1.2, the narrator, the Aaron-from-the-Failsafe. It is left open, there is no closure given to the multiple Aarons and Abes that have been spawned. While some of them might seize to exist due to changes in the calendar, others may cause other disorders to occur to create even more complex calendars. We don't know, we never will. Barry is a technologist who helps start-ups build successful products. His love for film and production led him to write his well-received film explanation and analysis articles to help everyone better appreciate films. He is regularly available for chat on his website and consults on storyboarding from time to time. 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