

# PRIMER

Winnaar Grand Jury Prize Sundance 2004  
Vertoning IFFR

**Een film van Shane Carruth** (scenario, hoofdrol, regie, camera, productie,  
muziek,....)

**Met Shane Carruth, David Sullivan, Casey Gooden**

Vier mannen in een garage. In de avonduren zijn ze bezig met een ingewikkelde constructie. Het is niet geheel duidelijk wat hun uitvinding behelst. Misschien weten ze het zelf ook niet zo goed, want ze lijken verrast door de bijwerkingen van hun apparaat. *What happens if it actually works?*

Wie zegt PRIMER in één keer door te hebben is een genie of een leugenaar. Opgebouwd als een lome thriller ontwikkelt de film zich tot een duizelingwekkende puzzel zonder weerga.

**Te zien in de filmtheaters vanaf 26 mei 2005**

Premièretheaters:

Kriterion (Amsterdam)  
Haags filmhuis (Den Haag)  
Lantaren Venster (Rotterdam)  
't Hoogt (Utrecht)  
Plaza Futura (Eindhoven)

**[www.primer-film.nl](http://www.primer-film.nl) [www.primermovie.com](http://www.primermovie.com)**

**Distributie**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Vier mannen in een garage. In de avonduren zijn ze bezig met een ingewikkelde constructie. Ze spreken bevlogen over een mogelijk patent, maar eerst moet het prototype stabiel worden. Het is niet geheel duidelijk wat hun uitvinding behelst. Misschien weten ze het zelf ook niet zo goed, want ze lijken verrast door de bijwerkingen van hun apparaat. Maar die bijwerkingen wijzen in de richting van iets veel groters dan ze ooit hadden kunnen vermoeden. Ineens wordt de inzet van hun werk exponentieel verhoogd en komt de vriendschap onder druk te staan.

*What happens if it actually works?*

Wie zegt PRIMER in één keer door te hebben is een genie of een leugenaar. Opgebouwd als een lome thriller ontwikkelt de film zich tot een duizelingwekkende puzzel zonder weerga. De soberheid van de personages en de mise-en-scene staan in schril contrast tot de complexiteit van het plot. Voor de meeste stervelingen zit er maar ÉÉN ding op: koffie halen en opnieuw beginnen.

## **Regie**

Shane Carruth

## **Script**

Shane Carruth

## **Cast** (in volgorde van verschijning)

Shane Carruth - Aaron

David Sullivan - Abe

Casey Gooden - Robert

Anand Upadhyaya - Phillip

Carrie Crawford - Kara

Jay Butler - Metaalbewerker

John Carruth - Man op bank #1

Juan Tapia - Man op bank #2

Samantha Thomson - Rachel Granger

Jack Pyland - Aaron's collega

Keith Bradshaw - Technicus

Ashok Upadhyaya - Technicus

Brandon Blagg - Will

Jon Cook - Will's neef

David Joyner - Rachel's date

Eric De Soualhat – Vertaler

## **Productie**

Shane Carruth - producer

**Muziek**

Shane Carruth

**Camera**

Shane Carruth

Anand Upadhyaya

**Film montage**

Shane Carruth

**Geluid**

Reggie Evans

**Andere medewerkers**

Daniel Bueche - Camera operateur

James Russell - Assistent camera

David Sullivan - Produktie assistent

Anand Upadhyaya - Camera operateur

**Shane Carruth (Aaron)**

Shane Carruth werd geboren in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Als zoon van een onderofficier van de luchtmacht bracht hij zijn jeugd door op diverse plaatsen in de Verenigde Staten. Shane studeerde af in wiskunde maar kon zijn draai niet vinden in de betrekkingen die hij vond als wiskundige. Reeds op jonge leeftijd had hij een voorliefde voor verhalen. Hij leerde zichzelf zoveel mogelijk over filmmaken, wat resulteerde in zijn debuut PRIMER.

**David Sullivan (Abe)**

David werd geboren in Longview, een middelgrote stad in Texas. Als sociaal en vindingrijk kind leidde zijn nieuwsgierigheid hem al op jonge leeftijd in de richting van het toneel. Op de middelbare school speelde hij eenakters. Hij bleek een talentvol acteur te zijn. Er werd hem een beurs voor de toneelschool aangeboden. Ondanks dat ging hij na de middelbare school bedrijfskunde studeren aan de Universiteit van Baylor. Ondertussen bleef zijn interesse in toneel bestaan. Zijn acteertalent bezorgde hem rollen in de toneelproducties van de universiteit. Na zijn studie stond hij aan beide zijden van de camera in lowbudget-filmproducties van zijn vrienden. In PRIMER speelde hij zijn eerste hoofdrol.

## **AWARDS and NOMINATIONS PRIMER**

2004 Sundance Film Festival: Grand Jury Prize

2004 Sundance Film Festival: Alfred P. Sloan Prize (for a film dealing with science and technology)

2004 Nantucket Film Festival: Best Writer/Director

2004 Gotham Awards Nomination: Best Feature

2005 London International Festival of Science Fiction: Best Feature

2005 Independent Spirit Award Nomination: Best Feature

2005 Independent Spirit Award Nomination: Best Director

2005 Independent Spirit Award Nomination: Best First Screenplay

2005 Independent Spirit Award Nomination: Best Debut Performance (David Sullivan)

## **ABOUT THE STORY**

PRIMER is set in the industrial park/suburban tract-home fringes of an unnamed contemporary city where two young engineers, Abe and Aaron, are members of a small group of men who work by day for a large corporation while conducting extracurricular experiments on their own time in a garage. While tweaking their current project, a device that reduces the apparent mass of any object placed inside it by blocking gravitational pull, they accidentally discover that it has some highly unexpected capabilities--ones that could enable them to do and to have seemingly anything they want. Taking advantage of this unique opportunity is the first challenge they face. Dealing with the consequences is the next.

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## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

PRIMER is a mesmerizing thriller that introduces a gifted new filmmaker with an exciting new sensibility. Thirty-one-year-old Shane Carruth, a former engineer who spent three years teaching himself filmmaking, conceived, wrote, directed, edited, and scored PRIMER and also plays one of the lead roles. His impressive feature debut – set in the very world Carruth abandoned to make movies -- tells the story of two engineers who stumble upon a remarkable invention which changes their lives in unimaginable ways. Engrossing and provocative in its exploration of the dark side of human nature and science, PRIMER electrified audiences at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, winning the Grand Jury Prize and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Award for films dealing with science and technology.

The story of the making of PRIMER is as unusual as the movie itself. Carruth, who had a degree in mathematics and worked briefly at three engineering companies, was unhappy with his career choice and decided he wanted to become a writer. He tried his hand at short stories and was halfway through a novel when he realized that he was more interested in working with images than with words. At this point, he made up his mind to pursue a career in film, even though he had no background in the subject.

Fortunately, Carruth's extensive training in math and science had made him proficient in problem-solving. He cleverly applied these skills to the study of filmmaking. "A lot of math isn't just the numbers," he explains. It's the fact that there is this problem that is seemingly unsolvable in front of you, and yet if you take it apart, it can be solved." Devising his own lesson plan, he taught himself screenwriting, directing, cinematography, sound mixing, editing, and acting. "I read a lot of scripts, just to see what they're supposed to look like, and I went to town writing," he recalls. To learn the basics of film production, Carruth visited production houses in his native Dallas, watched carefully, and asked lots of questions. He experimented with cameras and lighting and devised his own form of storyboarding. Most importantly, he worked on his script.

The inspiration for PRIMER came to Carruth at a time when he was reading books about discoveries. He observed that "whether it involved the history of the number zero or the invention of the transistor, two things stood out. First, the discovery that turns out to be the most valuable is usually dismissed as a side-effect. Second, prototypes almost never include neon lights and chrome. I wanted to see a story that was more in line with the way real innovation takes place."

While developing the concept of two engineers caught up in a realistic and life-changing discovery, Carruth saw ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN for the first time and was both amazed and inspired. As he watched the little clues and pieces of the investigation converge into a larger conspiracy, he knew he could develop his story in this way. "I had a car accident that laid me up for about a month, and I found myself watching a lot of Turner Classic Movies," he recalls. "For the first time, I watched films like THE CONVERSATION, NORMA RAE, ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN -- and I was amazed. ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN, in particular, is a procedural -- all the drama is in the revelation, not some actor pushing it over the top. It's about how these small details are revealed to make up the bigger picture. That validated for me that PRIMER could be a compelling narrative without neon or special effects or smoke screens. I don't care much for the aesthetic of lasers and aliens and that kind of thing. Science Fiction is one of the best tools that any writer has available because it allows you to freely address universal themes, qualities of being alive on this planet -- and that's what's incredibly interesting to me."

His concept in place, Carruth spent a year developing and writing PRIMER's screenplay. From the start, he wanted his dialogue to sound absolutely authentic. The only way to accomplish this goal was to immerse himself in the study of physics -- the shared fixation of his characters -- until he became "conversant" in it. "I had never taken a physics course," recalls Carruth. "but I read a lot about it and consulted graduate student research projects I had found online." In the movie, conversations among the characters are extremely realistic: they talk to each other using the kind of techno-speak that would come naturally to work-obsessed scientists.

In fact, Carruth faced quite a challenge in finding actors who could manage his low-key, conversational dialogue. "That was a terrible process -- trying to break actors of the habit of filling each line with so much drama," he recalls. Dallas-based actor David Sullivan was cast in the role of Abe, while Carruth, who had no acting experience, decided to play Aaron himself. "By that point," he explains, "I had memorized the script anyway. And I

figured I could count on myself to be there every time we shot!” Carruth conducted month-long rehearsals, going through each scene hundreds of times before the camera started rolling because there was no room for retakes in his frugal budget.

The fact that he had very little money for his production might have prompted Carruth to follow the lead of cost-conscious independent filmmakers who economize by making digital films. But he had very definite ideas about the way he wanted PRIMER to look and knew he could not accomplish it by shooting digitally. “I knew early on that I didn’t want to go digital,” he explains. “It’s not something that, aesthetically, I think is there yet. It works for a lot of subjects, and perhaps it could have worked for PRIMER. But what I wanted, in terms of how the images looked, was pretty straightforward. Because the story gets so fantastical, I didn’t want to be experimental when it came to the medium itself.” Carruth shot PRIMER on Super 16mm, which was later blown up to 35mm. The finished film has a distinct visual style, a flat, contemporary, cold, and intentionally over-exposed look that pays homage to Carruth’s favorites from the 1970s.

Carruth was determined to make PRIMER sound as realistic as it looked. When creating the hum of the time travel machine, for example, he used a mechanical grinder and a car, among other machines. “I knew whatever it was, it couldn’t be a digital sound made in a computer,” he says. “It had to be something that sounded very analog and realistic and felt like it might explode.”

Amazingly, given the film’s impressive production values, PRIMER cost about \$7000, or, as Carruth says, “the price of a used car.” Consequently, the crew was very small and very versatile. Like their multi-talented director, members of the production team had to wear many different hats, operating sophisticated equipment one day and moving furniture the next. The film was shot over a period of five weeks in Dallas, where Carruth depended on the kindness of family homes and friends’ apartments for his locations,

Ironically, Carruth’s maverick yet retro approach to filmmaking -- deriving inspiration from the 1970’s, and avoiding digital effects in what is essentially a science-fiction thriller -- has produced a work that is utterly cutting edge. Described by Film Comment Magazine as “a succession of brainstorm, held together by a nearly sublime overlay of sound effects and music,” PRIMER is a fast-moving brain-teaser that challenges its audience to be smart, alert, and open to new experiences. The plot is, at times, confounding, but in a way that leaves the viewer wanting to know more yet comfortable with not always knowing. The sense that facts, information, and what we refer to as “truth” are, in fact, ephemeral, hard to grasp, and frequently just out of reach, characterize both the form and the content of PRIMER.

The film is about one of those turning points in life after which nothing is the same. Carruth has experimented, and many will say he has succeeded, in making a work of art that is itself just this sort of turning point. Following a viewing of PRIMER -- and it may not be one’s last viewing of the film -- nothing about the experience of watching movies is likely to be the same.

## **Q&A WITH DIRECTOR/WRITER SHANE CARRUTH:**

**Q:** What was your inspiration for writing a script and how did the idea for this story come to you?

**A:** "It took about a year to write. I found myself reading a lot of books that had to do with discoveries. Whether it involved the history of the number zero or the invention of the transistor, two things stood out to me. First is that the discovery that turns out to be the most valuable is usually dismissed as a side-effect.

Second is that prototypes almost never include neon lights and chrome. I wanted to see a story play out that was more in line with the way real innovation takes place than I had seen on film before. I knew what I wanted to accomplish thematically well before the plot was devised. I was interested in how trust wears down between people when the stakes are raised and the complexity involved."

**Q:** Explain the relationship between Aaron, Abe, Robert and Philip.

**A:** "Like the majority of people that I know, these are guys that do one thing during the day and in their free time work on what they are passionate about. They have built a small business of selling error-checking devices for computers through mail order. However, they are constantly working on new ideas. They each take turns with a two month period where the group as a whole pursues the individual's idea. I have always imagined them as little kids in a club and the garage is their fort. They have a logo, a motto ("building the device that's missing most") and a set of rules for voting on purchases: Basically everything a six-year-old would think was cool about having his own company. Even the fact that they are constantly wearing ties comes from the image of prep school kids in uniforms that almost never fit their outdoor activities."

**Q:** This film is most accurately described as an intellectual thriller. Why was this the genre that you pursued when setting out to make a feature film?

**A:** I don't know if I ever chose a genre. I was interested in seeing the process of invention take place on a small, non-professional level and I knew thematically where I needed the story to go so those two things dictated the type of film it would be. It was really just a matter of setting up a premise and following it to a logical conclusion in an interesting way.