

Another 'Minority Report' future: pessimistic but unfortunately plausible

Screenplay by Caspian Tredwell-Owen, Alex Kurtzman

Directed by Michael Bay

Ewan McGregor ... Lincoln Six Echo/Tom Lincoln
Scarlett Johansson ... Jordan Two Delta/Sarah Jordan
Djimon Hounsou ... Albert Laurent
Sean Bean ... Merrick
Steve Buscemi ... McCord
Michael Clarke Duncan ... Starkweather

The first summer I was in the Free State in a little bucolic hill town of New Boston, without Netflix it was easiest to travel half a mile down the old highway to New Boston Pizza and Video... or something like that. Nice folks with a small store that still carried a pretty wide assortment of VHS video tapes. The cover of this movie caught my eye; the studio was trying to sell it as a high-octane action movie.

Which the second half of the movie *is*.

But fundamentally *The Island* is a science fiction movie that deals with some fairly controversial ideas in an intelligent fashion. Unfortunately, it fails to rise above the stereotypical "Don't fool with Mother Nature" attitude toward technologies that promise human life extension and/or life enhancement.

Remember forty and fifty years ago the starter Sci Fi movies in the vein of Ed Wood's *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, you could count on two things: 1) If you messed with nature, you would be smote by the monster, and 2) if you were teenagers making out in the back seat of a convertible you would also be smote by the monster. It was almost Biblical: no fun science and no fun sex.

The concept up for controversy in this movie is cloning for replacement parts, i.e. the idea that as an individual ages or acquires an incurable illness, that individual may have at his or her disposal genetically identical organs grown in vitro (outside the individual). These organs can then replace the defective organs and enable extended life. Genetically identical organs mean some form of cloning, or using the individual's cells to grow an organ or even an entire organism.

That's the premise of *The Island*. A business has sprung up—we're not sure whether the government has a funding role, but probably so—seemingly available only to affluent, self-absorbed types. Merrick, the perfect Sean Bean character, is chairman and CEO. The company finds that it cannot grow the necessary organs without growing the entire organism and, in fact, it cannot grow the organism without giving the organism some elementary human consciousness.

Lincoln Six Echo/Tom Lincoln (Ewan McGregor) and Jordan Two Delta/Sarah Jordan (Scarlett Johansson) are two of these human beings cultivated for replacement parts in a large facility with several hundred others. It's a simple, highly controlled environment: everyone wears white, they sleep in similar chambers, their movements and activities every moment are closely planned. The "Replacements" have been drugged or trained to not acquire anything higher than a young teen mentality... sexual proclivities have been deliberately diverted.

All well and good. Ignorance is a blast.

Most of the Replacements are content, though sensitive to the monotony. When the day of reckoning finally comes the company holds a lottery drawing. The winner believes he/she is going to *The Island*, a tropical paradise free from the pollution damage the Replacements have been told keeps them confined in the colony. Early in the movie the audience sees the reality of this paradise.

Lincoln Six Echo begins to suspect something is amiss. It all starts innocently enough with curiosity, "Why is Tuesday night always tofu night?" he asks. "What is tofu? Why can't I have bacon? Why is everything white?" Then he notices an insect, which should not exist in so sterile an environment. He accidentally comes to know one of the workers in the physical plant, McCord (Buscemi); McCord sort of befriends him, but is naturally wary of anyone in management knowing.

Lincoln confides some of his misgivings to his friend, Jordan Two Delta, of course not fully grasping the big picture. In any case, Lincoln's curiosity and Jordan's emerging awareness are causing some issues with the control people. The controllers try things that only make the situation more unseemly to the two young wonderers. They figure out a way to escape.

Then the second part of the movie, the "big chase," begins. I must say the action sequences are uniquely exciting, especially the flying motorcycles. The character development scenes—both for the fugitives and for the ordinary folks (Lincoln and Jordan are aided by McCord on the outside) of the middle of the 21st century. The humor is intelligent and appealing.

The escapees seek for their genetic twins.

Some interesting ideas, likeable characters, mixed with a high-tension thriller of the bad guys chasing the good guys.

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The Island | Michael Bay | Scarlett Johansson | Ewan McGregor