

The Epoch Times

A tense, character-driven science fiction thriller

By Joe Bendel

The Epoch Times

Jun 12, 2009

Movie Review: 'Cryptic'



Younger Jessie: Jadin Gould in 'Cryptic'. (Courtesy of Brooklyn International Film Festival)

They are considered white elephants—those obsolete cell phones stashed in drawers and closets, seemingly waiting for phantom signals. Jessie Graver's first clunky cell was her last birthday gift from late mother, so she keeps it for sentimental reasons. However, it might offer her an opportunity to undo wrongs of the past in John Weiner & Danny Kuchuck's *Cryptic*, which screens during the twelfth annual Brooklyn International Film Festival (BIFF).

Shortly after giving Jesse her ninth birthday gift, Jesse's

mother died in a freak accident. Soon thereafter, her father remarried the flirtatious neighbor lady, greatly straining his relations with his daughter. The next ten years would be difficult for the increasingly bitter and alienated Jesse. Spending a moody nineteenth birthday with her pseudo-boyfriend, Jessie comes across her old phone. When she punches in the phone number of their old house, somehow her nine year-old self answers it.

When Jesse realizes she is talking to herself on that fateful day, she desperately tries to convince her not to let her mother in the pool. As she explains the impending disaster, her younger self notices her father's dubious behavior, which the older Jesse then consequently remembers. Suddenly Jesse must contend with her suspicious father at ages nine and nineteen, with both timelines in a state of flux. Time is going to get messy, and so is her family life.



Older Jessie: Julie Carson in 'Cryptic'. (Courtesy of Brooklyn International Film Festival)

Though it makes no serious attempt to explain its magic cell-phone Macguffin, *Cryptic* navigates the minefields of time-travel's inherent logical contradictions reasonably well. Unlike the thematically similar film starring Dennis Quaid, *Frequency*, *Cryptic* is far more convincing in its treatment of Jesse's substantial revisions of history.

Though obviously shot on a shoestring, *Cryptic* makes a virtue of necessity. Its stark HD look actually helps ground the film in reality. The sound quality of her calls is also effectively modulated, clear enough to be understood, but with a level of distortion sufficient to maintain a

degree of mystery, particularly with regards to that unsettling third voice nineteen year-old Jesse thinks she hears during her calls to the past.

As Jesse Graver, at ages nineteen and nine respectively, Julie Carson and Jadin Gould both give smart, intense performances nicely selling the film's outlandish circumstances. Toby Huss is also suitably creepy as dear old dad. Unfortunately, Johnny Pacar is a dull, petulant screen presence as Jesse's on-again-off-again boyfriend (depending on the timeline).

Though the premise is obviously preposterous, Weiner and Kuchuck have constructed a tense, character-driven science fiction thriller. It is a clever film that will probably appeal more to indie audiences than genre fans. It screens again at BIFF at the Brooklyn Heights cinema on Henry Street this Friday (6/12) at 6:00 p.m.

©2009

<http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/content/view/18062/>

<http://www.brooklynfilmfestival.org>