

## The Back-up Plan: J-Lo too old to play Ingenue in stock romantic comedy

Written by Kam Williams

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Before becoming a mommy in 2008, Jennifer Lopez had practically perfected the romantic comedy genre, always in the role of a damsel-in-distress waiting for a dashing knight in shining armor to rescue her from dire circumstances. Whether playing the lowly housekeeper in *Maid in Manhattan*, the underemployed temp worker in *Monster-in-Law* or the perennial bridesmaid in *The Wedding Planner*, J-Lo had a knack for generating the right combo of chemistry and vulnerability to be convincing opposite any leading man.

At 40, Lopez frankly looks a little long in the tooth to resurrect that innocent, coquettish character when there's obviously a lot of maturity etched into her now middle-aged face. Nonetheless, she throws herself into *The Back-up Plan* with an admirable gusto, even if the flick ought to be featuring a considerably younger actress.

Still, worse than the miscasting is the script, which is laced with too much in the way of expletives and slapstick, especially groan-inducing, bodily function humor to qualify as sophisticated adult fare. And the worse culprit in this regard is annoying SNL alum Michaela Watkins who ruins every scene in which she appears as J-Lo's terminally-crude best friend.

The story unfolds in New York City on the very day that Zoe (Lopez) has given up on ever finding a mate, getting married and having a baby. She's decided to implement her "Back-up Plan" which involves being artificially inseminated with sperm from an anonymous donor with the help of Dr. Harris' (Robert Klein).

Then, on her way home from the infertility clinic, she serendipitously locks eyes across an empty taxi with the man she's always been waiting for, when they try to hail the same cab. Despite the fact that she calls Stan (Alex O'Loughlin) "Stupid head!" in the ensuing fight over the

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car, it is painfully obvious, at least to the viewer, that it's only a matter of time before the two will meet again and fall madly in love with each other.

The film follows the tired sitcom "one big secret" formula from this point forward, you know, the one whereby the protagonist tries to hide a simple secret which, if owned up to, would instantly clarify matters. But no, when they start dating, Zoe doesn't want to let on that she's expecting, although her gradually expanding waistline will soon prove impossible to explain.

Stan, a down-to-earth goat farmer from upstate, is the dotting, sensitive sort which makes Zoe's furtive, Three's Company-style hijinks seem extremely silly. Consequently, it's a little anticlimactic when the moment of truth arrives after the cat comes out of the bag (or should I say after the twins come out of the womb). Too bad there was never a doubt from the day these lovebirds met that Stan would eventually get down on one knee to propose.

Brace yourself for an ending that puts the audience out of its misery as opposed to generating that warm and fuzzy "happily ever after" feeling. J-Lo's worst outing since Gigli.

Fair (1 star)

Rated PG-13 for profanity, crude humor and sexual references.

Running time: 106 Minutes

Distributor: CBS Films

To see a trailer for The Back-up Plan, visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FZuNElr7A>