

The Screen Savor: A 'Break-Up' that's Weighed Down

by Kimberly_Gadette

It's a shame that Vince Vaughn went to such great lengths to gain 50 pounds in order to portray the character of Gary. Redundant, really. The script of the "The Break-Up" is so ponderous, no one needed to add so much as a feather to this elephantine creation. Go on a diet, Vince, but first things first: Lose this flick.

"The Break-Up" is billed as a comedy. Wrong. Comedies about couples inflicting punishment upon each other, such as "War of the Roses," need to be clever yet dark. Comedies about couples at verbal odds with each other, such as "The Odd Couple," need to be extremely witty. This film is neither dark nor witty. We've all had to suffer through an occasion in which a favorite couple suddenly transforms a perfectly civil time into a highly uncivil war. Occasions that make ice-pick lobotomies pale in comparison. Consider "The Break-Up" one of these occasions. Consider yourself warned. This "comedy" is anything but.

Opening with a Cub game in progress at Wrigley Stadium, the film shows Gary (Vaughn) doing a meet-cute with Brooke (Jennifer Aniston). The audience is then treated to opening credits over a long montage of photographs of the happy couple—dozens upon dozens of snaps of them kissing, laughing, with friends, at holidays, at home, in bed, as giddy as a couple could be on this earth, this southside of heaven. The problem: That couple is NEVER seen again. Instead, there's an immediate breakup, followed by the decision to stay together for the happiness of their condo. If Neil Simon had been the screenwriter, instead of Garelick & Lavender and Vaughn, the premise might have worked. Especially if there were an ensuing story, instead of scene after scene of "you hurt me," and "you don't appreciate me." Per director Peyton Reed, on finding the right tone for the film's ending: "We shot a lot of stuff. We shot a lot of different versions, with the assumption that we'd find it in the editing room." Note to Mr. Reed: If it ain't in the script, it's probably not gonna be among any celluloid slop on some cutting room floor. Next thing, you'll be looking for that proverbial pony in a room full of manure.

A subplot would have been nice. Especially since the production attracted the likes of Judy Davis, Vincent D'Onofrio, Jason Bateman, John Michael Higgins ("Best of Show") and Joey Lauren Adams. Heck, even Ann-Margret showed up for a scene, and never returned. Maybe she changed her mind. As Marilyn Dean (a crimson-dipped, Cruella DeVille-esque art gallery boss), Ms. Davis warns her employee, the depressed Brooke, that she dare not "blaspheme in the synagogue of Marilyn Dean." Ah, how I wished for more luminescent Davis, and less mopey Aniston!

Playing siblings, John Michael Higgins as Richard, the sexually-confused chorus boy and D'Onofrio as Dennis, the anal business partner sporting suits two sizes too small, these superb actors were treated more like props than flesh-and-blood characters who might have added some virtual poundage to this lightweight minor-piece. Ditto for the marvelous Joey Lauren Adams as Brooke's best friend and confidante.

On the other gland, Jon Favreau as Gary's best friend, Johnny O, is simply a muddle. In one scene, he's a Neanderthal reflection of Gary, hating Brooke. In another scene, he's a Dr. Phil-esque therapist. In yet another scene (the only decent spark between Favreau and Vaughn), he's out for Soprano-like blood. The creative team needed to make a decision. But since they couldn't decide on a tone, a plot or an ending, how could we expect more from the lumpy character of Johnny O?

As for our star couple: Oops. Vaughn forgot that childlike lout or no, the audience needed to care about Gary. There were such few glimpses of the funny, wonderful man that Brooke supposedly fell in love with, I was clueless as to why she was clueless about moving on. And then there's Aniston. As Vaughn said in an interview "â€ she was the only actor that I had in mind because she's so good with comedy." Treated as if she were a doll, the filmmakers dressed her up in skin-tight clothes and paraded her out to pose in front of the cameras in pretty-girl make-up, hair and sky-high heels. What happened to her brilliant comedy? This was, once again, another hefty helping of squandered opportunity. (Catty aside: No matter what the season, though every other actor showed up in skin tones of white to ghostly pale, Aniston glowed with a deep, dark tan, as if she'd just returned from a month-long, naked photo shoot in Hawaii. Perhaps her Coppertone coating might have worked if her day job were changed from art gallery manager to outdoor water park hostess. Yeah, that's it. In Chicago, in the middle of winter. Given all the other nonsensical plot turns, this would have fit right in.

Vinceâ€™s added weight is over. Soâ€™s the wait for a good comedy called â€œThe Break-Up.â€• With a heavy heart, I'm suggesting that this is a 105-minute exercise that's all pain, no gain.

Grading this movie on the curve of the Deschutes River: D

Production Credits "The Break-Up" Cast: Vince Vaughn, Jennifer Aniston, Joey Lauren Adams, Jon Favreau, John Michael Higgins, Vince D'Onofrio, Judy Davis, Jason Bateman, Ann-Margret Directed by Peyton Reed. Screenplay by Jeremy Garelick & Jay Lavender Story by Vince Vaughn & Jeremy Garelick & Jay Lavender Rated: PG-13 Running Time: 105 minutes Bend Oregon Central Oregon

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