



Passengers: a morally challenged movie

## Description

### Warning: the script of this film contains moral pitfalls

By Luc Archambault

If you have not yet seen **Passengers**, featuring Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence, I would like to warn you that this text contains major revelations about the story and the script of this film is tinged with sexism and clichés.

The script was written in 2007 but remained at the stage of “developmental hell” – a term the media industry uses for projects remaining in a state of limbo without progressing to production – for eight years, until 2015. No wonder, considering the moral pitfalls it evokes. The harassment tactics that this romantic comedy reinforces are by no means new.



The setting: the starship Avalon, with 5000 hibernating colonists on board, is in transit from Earth to the planet Homestead II, a journey that will take 120 years. Thirty years after the spaceship’s departure, Jim Preston’s

(Chris Pratt) hibernation shell accidentally opens after a collision with meteorites, and he wakes up, alone on board except for an Android barman named Arthur (Michael Sheen).

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Realizing that he will be alone all his life and without hope of re-hibernation, Jim starts contemplating suicide until he notices Aurora (Jennifer Lawrence) among the hibernating settlers. For a year, he rummages through all the details of her private life before deciding to wake her, falsely claiming that her pod malfunctioned, as his did. Eventually, loneliness brings them closer together and they soon forge a relationship, both because of their isolation and by mutual attraction.



Time passes, until one day when Arthur the android reveals to Aurora that Jim is responsible for her awakening. Wounded by this revelation and disgusted by Jim's abuse of power on her own destiny, she decides to avoid him at all cost. Then another traveller, Gus (Lawrence Fishburne), the Chief Deck Officer, awakens and the trio quickly realizes that the ship is plagued by multiple system failures as a result of the collision two years earlier. Gus eventually dies from the sequels of his pod's malfunction, but not before giving Jim and Aurora his access card to the crew compartments, thereby allowing them to repair the ship.

Abruptly and out of nowhere, an external incident forces the two characters to face an urgent threat, compelling them to cooperate for survival and binding them back together. After a space sortie to vent the propulsion reactor, Jim dies before being brought inside the vessel by Aurora. Desperate, she somehow manages to bring him back to life thanks to the Autodoc, a medical shell. Jim then discovers that the Autodoc can also put someone back into hibernation, the only hiccup being that someone else has to perform the operation. Jim offers to put Aurora back in hibernation but she decides to stay awake with him since, if she hibernates, she will never see him again.



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Upon arrival at Homestead II, the settlers awake to discover the central hall of the ship covered in thick vegetation. Jim and Aurora have died years ago, having lived the rest of their lives together. So why should this story be immoral? Many commentators have evoked the sordid aspect of the script, even talking about Stockholm syndrome to describe the relationship between Jim and Aurora, a hostage who identifies with her abductor, even falling in love with him.

A critic even goes so far as qualifying *Passengers* as the “interstellar version of social-media stalking”<sup>1</sup> that one sees currently on the social networks. No doubt we can see this morass as the reason why the script stayed so long in developmental hell. And the question remains: why was such a movie made? Of course, for Jennifer Lawrence, the twenty million that were paid to her, plus 30% of the profits after the film had paid off will surely turn any dilemma into a pleasure of gain. Who cares about morality when paid as much?



Even the marketing campaign surrounding the release of the film, including the trailers, suggests that Aurora is awakened due to the malfunction of her shell, hiding Jim's obvious guilt and shame. If this is morally acceptable then Hollywood seems to be on a dangerous slope of endorsing abuse of authority and moral turpitude, especially towards women. And this should be denounced, and not applauded with amazing earnings at the box office.

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I cannot, for my part, endorse such a movie, however pleasant it was for the eyes. And I wonder if it would have been made if the main roles had been reversed. It is much too easy and tolerated nowadays to abuse women, especially in the movies. In this film, it is not only justified it is required by the script, at least according with the pivotal role, played by Jim.

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Pulver: The Guardian, December 15, 2016: *Passengers review – Spaceship romcom scuppered by cosmic creep*

*Images: courtesy of Columbia Pictures*



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