

Film Review: Matt Damon Closes Deal in 'We Bought a Zoo'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 22, 2011 - 11:19am

- [Angus Macfadyen](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Cameron Crowe](#) [4]
- [Colin Ford](#) [5]
- [Elle Fanning](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [John Michael Higgins](#) [8]
- [Maggie Elizabeth Jones](#) [9]
- [Matt Damon](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Patrick Fugit](#) [12]
- [Scarlett Johansson](#) [13]
- [Thomas Haden Church](#) [14]
- [We Bought a Zoo](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Cameron Crowe's "We Bought a Zoo" is an undeniably manipulative crowd-pleaser but there's something about being manipulated in such an expert manner that makes the tugging on the heartstrings easier to take. We know what we're in for when we buy a ticket for a movie about children grieving the loss of their mother, endangered animals, and the healing process through talking to tigers. Most movie goers are smart enough not to expect a deep dose of subtlety.



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

So it comes down to how expertly the confection is produced. Is it too sweet? "We Bought a Zoo" borders on being a great Christmas treat, only held back a bit by a ridiculous running time, a stereotypical adolescent character, and a few too many tugs to make the final ones as resonant as they could have been. Still, you won't find a more well-made or moving crowd-pleaser this season (presuming you don't find Swedish misogyny crowd-pleasing).



[Read Brian Tallerico's full review of "We Bought a Zoo" in our reviews section.](#) [16]

Based on the autobiographical book by Benjamin Mee (adapted by Aline Brosh McKenna ("The Devil Wears Prada") and Crowe), "We Bought a Zoo" is basically about how unimaginable grief can force us to make a serious change in our lives. What do you do when you lose the love of your life? How do you break yourself out of stasis when every action reminds you of her? And how do you make sure your kids live as close to a normal life as possible without their mother? These are the questions faced by Mee (Matt Damon) and the reason he picks everything up and decides to move far out of town.

While house-shopping with an only-in-the-movies real estate agent (J.B. Smoove) and Mee's precocious daughter Rosie (Maggie Elizabeth Jones), Ben stumbles upon an amazing property, a beautiful old house that also happens to be on the grounds of a worn-down zoo. Much against the will of his morose teenage son Dylan (Colin Ford), Mee buys the zoo and relocates his family. Of course, he gets a second family with the workers at his zoo including zookeeper Kelly (Scarlett Johansson), a love interest for Dylan named Lily (Elle Fanning), and workers played by Angus Macfadyen, Patrick Fugit, and Carla Gallo. Thomas Haden Church plays Mee's at-first-skeptical brother and John Michael Higgins truly over-acts in a few scenes as the zoo inspector who could shut the whole operation down before opening day. He's so over-the-top that he could be inserted in "Doctor Dolittle 6" without a single reshoot.



[Continue reading for Brian Tallerico's full "We Bought a Zoo" review.](#) [16]

"We Bought a Zoo" stars Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson, Thomas Haden Church, Maggie Elizabeth Jones, Colin Ford, Elle Fanning, Angus Macfadyen, Patrick Fugit, Carla Gallo, John Michael Higgins, and J. B. Smoove. It was written by Aline Brosh McKenna and Cameron Crowe and directed by Crowe. It will be released on December 23rd, 2011 and is rated PG.



We Bought a Zoo
Photo credit: Fox

Source URL (retrieved on Sep 22 2024 - 1:48am):

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- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cameron-crowe>
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- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/movie-review>
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- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/thomas-haden-church>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/we-bought-a-zoo>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/16860/matt-damon-closes-deal-in-we-bought-a-zoo>