

## Spirituality, Zac Efron Overcome Plot Holes in 'Charlie St. Cloud'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 29, 2010 - 11:44pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The rise of Zac Efron has been one of the more interesting movie stories of the past year. Fresh from his notable role in "Me and Orson Welles," Efron takes the lead in "Charlie St. Cloud," with veteran actors Ray Liotta and Kim Basinger. This journey into afterlife issues highlights some nice acting chops from Efron.

Zac Efron is Charlie St. Cloud, a middle class kid in a rich yachting town near Puget Sound in Washington state. He is helping to raise his younger brother Sam (Charlie Tahan) with his single mother Claire (Kim Basinger). His talents on the sailing team in high school has landed him a scholarship at Stanford (now that's an endowment!) and the future is as bright as his gleaming teeth.

Charlie and Sam have a brilliantly close relationship, having grew up with each other after their father ran out on them. They bond over baseball and Sam's unrivaled love for the Boston Red Sox. On an ordinary night in which Charlie is driving Sam to a friend's house, a freak automobile accident occurs and Sam is killed. Or is he?

Charlie is revived from death in the ambulance, by a heads-up paramedic (Ray Liotta) and the guilt over not protecting Sam from his fatality wears on Charlie shortly after he recovers. After the funeral the distraught Charlie runs into the deep woods near the cemetery, where he beholds a vision of Sam, ready to participate in their everyday-at-sunset game of catch.



Sage Advice: Zac Efron as Charlie and Ray Liotta as Florio in 'Charlie St. Cloud'  
Photo Credit: © Universal Pictures

Five years later, Charlie has refused his scholarship and taken a job as the cemetery caretaker. He continues to meet with his brother Sam for their game of catch at sunset. Even the interest of the fair Tess (Amanda Crew), a sailing companion from his high school days, cannot revive Charlie St. Cloud from the cycle of mourning.

This derivative of "The Sixth Sense" has enough variations to avoid a lawsuit, but a person who sees dead people can't help but remind us of the previous film. Based on a novel, the screenplay by Craig Pearce and Lewis Colick keeps the guessing going throughout the narrative. Is Charlie having visions? Does he actually see the dead? Is he in another plane himself?

The cast is engaged and uplifts some trite situations and dialogue. Ray Liotta, in a very small part as the paramedic Florio, still knows how to embody a character and make an impact with the smallest of gestures. Donal Logue, a familiar character actor, takes the cranky sea salt and injects some sensitive best friend. Amanda Crew, a dead ringer (pun intended) for Molly Ringwald, takes the girlfriend role and toughens it up as the girl who sails the world.

Efron continues to evolve as an actor. It's apparent he observed much on the Welles set, because he handles many emotions in a realistic and forthright way. He's confident about the performance, and is asked to handle many vague notions as to what is going on with Charlie. It is to his credit that he never seems lost with the character or the circumstances and he carries the film like a star.

The writers and director Burr Steers gets points taken away with their indecisiveness regarding what Charlie is experiencing. The notion of seeing the dead people blows with wind – sometimes he's seen talking to himself, other times the secondary world is noted by folks on his "plane." Whether it's a power, a vision or a dream, the indistinct seams in the sessions with Sam distracts from the rest of the production, and the overall narrative suffers.



Sailing Takes Her Away: Amanda Crew as Tess in 'Charlie St. Cloud'  
Photo Credit: © Universal Pictures

But there is enough, just enough, to make Charlie St. Cloud a different kind of choice for a moviegoing experience. I was especially thinking of those who I know that have suffered tragic loss. Would a film like this comfort them or remind them of mourning? The fact that it contained divergent feelings like that is exemplary.

This is also a good coming out for Zac Efron the star. Better scripts will come his way if this type of vehicle can do box office in his name, and as an early resume film to carry on his shirtless back this does "leave 'em wanting more," shirtlessness included.

*"Charlie St. Cloud" opens in everywhere July 30th. Featuring Zac Efron, Charlie Tahan, Amanda Crew, Donal Logue, Dave Franco, Kim Basinger and Ray Liotta. Screenplay by Craig Pearce and Lewis Colick, directed by Burr Steers. Rated "PG-13"*



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