

## Chris Pine, Elizabeth Banks in Moving 'People Like Us'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 29, 2012 - 8:20am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – “People Like Us” is an old-fashioned tearjerker with everything that phrase implies. It’s undeniably manipulative and sentimental but it’s also somewhat refreshing to see a drama that isn’t laced with irony, cynicism, or some form of postmodern commentary on the genre. “People Like Us” is a film that wants you to be moved; it wants you to cry; it wants you to feel something. Some audiences will be turned off by the blatant melodrama but the honest approach works for me and the strong performances from the cast clearly enlivened by the material elevates it beyond processed cheese.

Sam (Chris Pine) is a charismatic salesman, a guy who has made a unique success of himself by selling overstock from one company to another. But Sam has made a big mistake, the kind of disaster that could not only cost him his job but force legal action. As he’s done with so many problems in his life, he chooses to ignore it; to run away from his problems. He’s a smooth character with a gorgeous girlfriend (Olivia Wilde). He can talk his way out of anything.



People Like Us

Photo credit: Disney Pictures

Sam’s bubble bursts when his father dies. While Hannah encourages him to go home and deal with the issues surrounding his distant patriarch, Sam pushes back in passive-aggressive ways like leaving his ID in the car at the airport so they miss the flight and the funeral. This

kind of childish behavior was what clearly created the rift between him and his pop and mother Lillian (Michelle Pfeiffer) is particularly tired of Sam's nonsense. It looks like he'll end up leaving home and probably not seeing his own mother again for years, if ever.

And then he gets a package from his dad (through his attorney played by Philip Baker Hall) and everything changes. The toiletry kit contains \$150k and Sam's dad wants his only son to get it to the sister he never knew existed. Frankie (Elizabeth Banks) is a waitress and a single mother to the troubled Josh (Michael Hall D'Addario), a kid who is getting in increasing degrees of detention at school. Sam works his way into their life, too scared to tell Frankie who he really is until, of course, everything has to come to the surface.



People Like Us

*Photo credit: Disney Pictures*

"People Like Us" has about nine emotional climaxes. It's one of "those" movies, a film designed to keep you reaching for the Kleenex as revelation tops revelation tops breakdown and so on. You probably know straight off if that's something that interests you or not. If you're proud of the fact that you don't cry at movies, don't waste your time. It would be like someone who pukes at the sight of blood seeing a slasher flick. I'm not saying you need to be completely emotional to appreciate "People Like Us," but my more cynical readers should be warned. Go see "Ted" or "Magic Mike."

However, I think there's a place for movies like "People Like Us," films that unapologetically try to tap an emotional vein in their viewers. And this one is too well-made to dismiss. In particular, Chris Pine is allowed a range that he hasn't been allowed to display lately and he's matched by the always-underrated Banks and the why-doesn't-she-work-more Pfeiffer (who's the best she's been in a very long time). D'Addario feels a bit forced at times and it's a shame because I think the most honesty in writer/director Alex Kurtzman can be found in the Sam-Josh dynamic. Sam sticks around because he sees himself in Josh. In many ways, Sam is just like him, a guy bucking against authority because of emotional baggage.



People Like Us

Photo credit: Disney Pictures

"People Like Us" surely could have been more effective by being a bit less melodramatic. The truth of the small moments between Pine & Pfeiffer or Banks & D'Addario carry the film over the moments that feel less honest. It could have been a bit smarter and a bit tighter but I think that comes with Kurtzman's debut status as a director and the personal aspect of his attachment to the story (it grew from his own background with a half-sibling he never knew).

The fact is that Kurtzman has long been involved in a genre of filmmaking that tries to present viewers with larger-than-life spectacles that they've never seen before (he wrote "Star Trek" and "Transformers"). Those films tried to stand out in the Summer season by showing viewers something the competition didn't offer. Ironically, Kurtzman may have switched genres but he has once again delivered something that isn't common in our age of irony – heartfelt emotion.

*"People Like Us" stars Chris Pine, Elizabeth Banks, Michelle Pfeiffer, Olivia Wilde, Mark Duplass, Philip Baker Hall, and Michael Hall D'Addario. It was written and directed by Alex Kurtzman. It is rated PG-13 and opens on June 29, 2012.*



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