

An Unnatural Approach to Romance in 'What If'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 8, 2014 - 6:02pm

- [Adam Driver](#) [2]
- [CBS Films](#) [3]
- [Daniel Radcliffe](#) [4]
- [Dumbledore](#) [5]
- [Elia Kazan](#) [6]
- [Harry Potter](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [Mackenzie Davis](#) [9]
- [Megan Park](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [12]
- [Rafe Spall](#) [13]
- [Romantic Comedy](#) [14]
- [What If](#) [15]
- [Zoe Kazan](#) [16]



Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “What If” is a really bad title, but that is the least of the film’s concerns, apparently, as the old can-man-and-women-be-friends canard rears its indecisive but predictable head (snicker). This time it’s interpreted through Harry Potter and Elia Kazan’s granddaughter, if this is to be believed.

Whenever the man and woman friend question pops up in a romantic comedy, it’s almost certain that the couple are made for each other, which makes the exercise in speculating the question futile. The victims in this one are Daniel Radcliffe and Zoe Kazan, and they are game to tackle the mush-mouth dialogue, but as it leads to its inevitability, the speeches and banter gets increasingly annoying. This is a new generation “When Harry Met Sally...,” but it finds no new territory in the subject, and chooses to go high concept to make up for its lack of natural authenticity. And...there are no Dumbledore references.

Wallace (Daniel Radcliffe) has been recently dumped by his medical student girlfriend, which also made him drop out of the same study. His mooning for her includes sitting on the roof of his house, in which he lives with his sister and nephew. He meets Chandry (Zoe Kazan) at a party, and the two hit it off, but alas she is beholden to her boyfriend Ben (Rafe Spall).



Wallace (Daniel Radcliffe) and Chandry (Zoe Kazan) Are Fired Up in 'What If'

Photo credit: CBS Films

The friendship of Wallace and Chandry begins, and even though Chandry's comely sister Dalia (Megan Park) has the hots for Wallace, the boy can't consummate due to his pining for the other. To make matters worse, his best friend Allan (Adam Driver) is constantly cooing with his soul mate Nicole (Mackenzie Davis) and all the love in the air is giving Wallace fits. When Ben takes an assignment overseas, will Chandry follow?

First, wouldn't a film called "Wallace and Chandry" – starring Harry Potter! – been so much more alluring for the marketing staff? Why doesn't anyone think of the marketing staff? "What If" is so lazy, preferring easy solutions in dialogue (the "meet cute" banter of W and C is suppose to be clever), other boyfriends (Ben is basically a d-bag in comparison with the dewy-eyed W), skin baring (W and C have a tendency to be half-dressed or nude around one another, I kid you not) and the worship of a sandwich Elvis liked (are you serious?).

Would exploring some new ideas in the man and woman "friend game" been too much to ask? The internets say the trend today for mating twentysomethings is group dates, hook-ups and sexting. None of that was reasonably discovered in this film, although Wallace does fend off Chandry's lovely sister Dalia, which by all evidence makes him an idiot. Later in the film, he has supposed-to-be-warm dialogue with the same sister while she wears only a towel. How convenient, and yet again nothing happens.

The two leads are appealing, and Radcliffe's foray into independent-type films is a good strategy post Harry. The film might have been better if Wallace and Chandry would have had a series of small encounters within the larger picture, instead of debating the friend-versus-lover thing right away. The pacing of that emotional destiny was way off, so it's best to send Ben to London – he's an international patent lawyer, of course – then show the real stupidity of realizing that someone may be made for you, but the timing is not right.



Wallace and Chandry Discuss Their Roles in 'What If'

Photo credit: CBS Films

The supporting players don't get much to work with as well, and Adam Driver (Lena Dunham's boyfriend in "Girls") is fast approaching that shark jumping ramp if he continues on playing one note as an actor. The carnal hots of the characters that he and Mackenzie Davis portray lead to insipid domesticity, if only Wallace had a gun and an itchy trigger finger, it again might have been a better film.

Think of "What If" in this way. What if you had an alternative choice besides this film, and what if it was called "Wallace and Chandry"? I think what happens is a better story, with better dialogue and maybe even a mercy killing. I tell you, the marketing folks are always right.

"What If" opens everywhere on August 8th. Featuring Daniel Radcliffe, Zoe Kazan, Megan Park, Adam Driver, Mackenzie Davis and Rafe Spall. Screenplay adapted by Elan Mastal, based on a play by T.J. Dawe and Michael Rinaldi. Directed by Michael Dowse. Rated "PG-13"



[17]

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