

Myths & Tales:

Yea, we all saw the movie. So? Well, if there weren't more, I wouldn't have an article here, so here's ...the *rest* of the story.

Bambi is a 1942 American animated film produced by Walt Disney and based on an Austrian book. The film was released by RKO Radio Pictures on August 13, 1942, and it was the fifth film in the Walt Disney Animated Classics series. In June 2008, the American Film Institute presented a list of its "10 Top 10"—the best ten films in each of ten "classic" American film genres—after polling over 1,500 people from the creative community. *Bambi* placed third in its category.

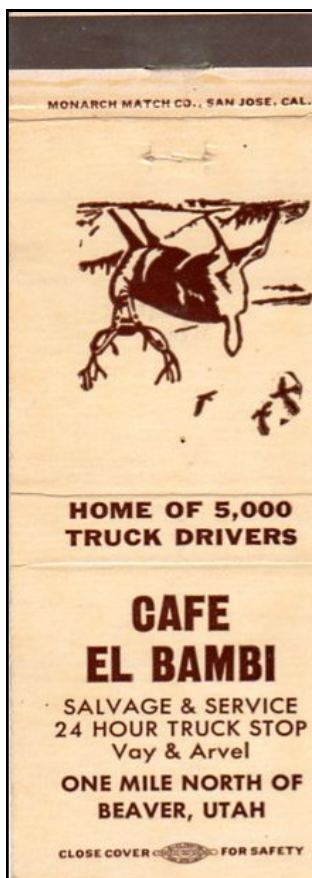
Bambi was released in theaters in 1942, during World War II, and was Disney's 5th full-length animated film. *Bambi* was re-released to theatres in 1947, 1957, 1966, 1975, 1982, and 1988. It was then made available on home video in 1989. Even in home video, *Bambi* has seen multiple releases, including two VHS releases, in 1989 (Classics Version) and 1997 (Masterpiece Collection Version), and most recently a digitally-remastered and restored Platinum Edition DVD. The Platinum Edition DVD went on moratorium on January 31, 2007. *Bambi* was released in Diamond Edition on March 1st, 2011, consisting of a Blu-ray and DVD combo pack.

Bambi lost money at the box office for its first release, but recouped its considerable cost during the 1947 re-release. Although the film received good reviews, the timing of the release, during World War II, hurt the film's box office numbers, and the studio no longer had access to many European markets that provided a large portion of its profits. Roy Disney sent a telegram to his brother Walt after the New York opening of the film that read: "Fell short of our holdover figure by \$4,000. Just came from Music Hall. Unable to make any deal to stay third week...Night business is our problem."

What also hurt box office numbers is the realistic animation of the animals, and the story of their fight against the evil humans in the story. Hunters spoke out against the movie, saying it was "an insult to American sportsmen". The criticism, however, was short-lived, and the financial shortfall of its first release was made up multiple times in the subsequent re-releases.

Today, the film is viewed as a classic. Critics Mick Martin and Marsha Porter call the film "...the crowning achievement of Walt Disney's animation studio". *Bambi* is also listed in the Top 25 Horror Movies of all Time by Time Magazine. *Bambi*, Time states, "has a primal shock that still haunts oldsters who saw it 40, 50, 65 years ago." (!) The off-screen villain ("man") has been placed #20 on AFI's List of Heroes and Villains.

Former Beatle Paul McCartney has credited the shooting death of *Bambi*'s mother for his initial interest in animal rights, an example of what has been called the *Bambi* effect. Soon after the film's release, Walt Disney allowed his characters to appear in fire prevention public service campaigns. However, *Bambi* was only loaned to the government for a year, so a new symbol was needed, leading to the creation of Smokey Bear. *Bambi* and his mother also make a cameo appearance in the satirical 1955 Donald Duck short "No Hunting": drinking from a forest stream, the deer are startled by a sudden



Bambi

trickle of beer cans and other debris, and Bambi's mother tells him, "Man is in the forest. Let's dig out."

In 2006, the Ad Council, in partnership with the United States Forest Service, started a series of Public Service Announcement ads that feature footage from *Bambi* and *Bambi II* for wildfire prevention. During the ads, as the Bambi footage is shown, the screen will momentarily fade into black with the text "Don't let our forests...become once upon a time", and usually (but not always) ending the ads with Bambi's line "Mother, what are we gonna do today?" followed by Smokey Bear saying "Only you can prevent wildfires", as the Smokey logo is shown on the screen. The ads aired on various television networks, and the Ad Council also put them on Youtube.

But what about the book that started it all? *Bambi, a Life in the Woods*, originally published in Austria as *Bambi. Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*, is a 1923 Austrian novel written by Felix Salten and published by Paul Zsolnay Verlag. The novel traces the life of Bambi, a male roe deer, from his birth through childhood, the loss of his mother, the finding of a mate, the lessons he learns from his father and experience about the dangers posed by human hunters in the forest. Considered to be one of the first environmental novels published, an English translation by Whittaker Chambers was published in North America by Simon & Schuster in 1928. The novel has since been translated and published in over 20 languages around the world. Salten released a sequel, *Bambis Kinder, eine Familie im Walde* (Bambi's Children), in 1939.

The novel was well received by critics and is considered a classic. Besides being turned into an animated film by Walt Disney, it was adapted into two Russian live-action adaptations in 1985 and 1986, and a stage production in 1998. A ballet adaptation was written by an Oregon troupe, but never released.

Janet Schulman released a children's picture book adaptation in 2000 that featured realistic oil-paintings and many of Salten's original words.

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