

*Ernest and Celestine*

Rated: PG

Starring: Mackenzie Foy, Forest Whittaker, Nick Offerman, William H. Macy

Runtime 1 hr 20 min

Reviewed by Cade Carver

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*Ernest and Celestine* is a charming French and Belgian animated film which was nominated for Best Animated Feature at the Oscars in 2014, ultimately losing to a little movie you may have heard of called *Frozen*. Originally released in 2012, the movie was dubbed into English under the production company GKIDS the following year. This English language version features Forest Whitaker (*Last King of Scotland*) as Ernest, a curmudgeonly bear who's down on his luck, and Mackenzie Foy (*Interstellar*) as Celestine, a mouse who is forbidden by her fellow mice to interact with bears yet finds herself interacting with one regardless.

In the opening scenes of the film, we meet our main characters in their separate communities during a snowy French winter. Ernest lives on his own in the woods and spends his mornings trudging into town laden with instruments to perform street music for money which never finds its way to him. Celestine, dwelling with about thirty other mice in an underground orphanage, spends her evenings as audience to horror stories about "big bad bears" from the "Gray One", a strict old mouse voiced by Lauren Bacall (*To Have and Have Not*). Yet, in a strange twist, dentistry is a popular occupation in this world of mice, and interns like Celestine must gather stolen teeth from the bears and bring the incisors to the head dentist (William H. Macy).

Through a comically convoluted set of circumstances, Celestine and Ernest end up helping each other - the little mouse aids Ernest in breaking into a candy shop owned by a Bear named George (voiced by *Parks and Recreation* star Nick Offerman) and Ernest in turn helps Celestine rob teeth from a Bear dentist's office right across the street, run by George's wife Lucienne (Megan Mullally). Before long, Ernest and Celestine are on the run from both the Bear Police and the Mouse authorities (these latter have a way of pursuing perpetrators as a great thrashing wave of blue-uniformed rodents. The animation during these chase sequences is particularly creative).

The film was directed by Stephanie Aubier, Vincent Patar and Benjamin Renner, and adapted from Gabriel Vincent's children's books by Daniel Patar. The story is quite charming; it has the quality of what you expect from a great children's book. Its conflict is often humorous, with rare moments of fright, and the solutions are never too far away. This, along with the film's unconventional but gorgeous watercolor animation give the film a very cozy, comforting aura. The art style is soft and refreshingly imperfect; the colors don't always stay inside the lines, and there is vagueness to some of the backgrounds. To watch the film, we must use our imagination to a degree. It is unlike any American animated film I've seen, although it did call to mind two films by Japanese director Isao Takahata: *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (which we have in our DVD collection at Marshall District Library) and *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (available to order through Mel.org). Having not seen Ernest in its original French, I can't speak to the vocal performances in that version, but the American voice actors do a good job here, especially stars

Whittaker and Foy.

At its heart, the story is about the prejudice between the worlds of bears and mice, and if I have any complaints about the movie, it's that it ends abruptly and its solution to our hero's problems doesn't exactly tie into that theme as well as I would have hoped. The note the film ends on is cute, like the rest of it, but doesn't feel thematically relevant. Still, this is a delightful and unique family film that I would highly recommend due to its humor and charm as well as its striking animation.

8/10 stars.

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