

Movie Review: 'Ratatouille'

by David_Elliott

Only one letter separates pet from pest, and that "s" attaches to the tiny hero of "Ratatouille" like a stigma.

After all, Remy is a rat. And he is in Paris, a great rats' city but also the capital of French cuisine. And never the deux should meet, as Remy discovers when he rises from the alleys and sewers to high cuisine (though raised on trash, this rodent has Remy Martin tastes).

'RATATOUILLE' - In 'Ratatouille,' a young rat, Remy, lives in a famous Paris bistro and dreams of becoming a chef. CNS Photo courtesy of Disney and Pixar Animation.

Inspired by the fabled cookbook of the late, five-star chef Auguste Gusteau, who lives large in Remy's imagination, the little hero finds his way to Gusteau's restaurant, which has fallen to three stars. Only Remy can fix that, allied with the clean-up boy Linguini, a shy teen probably related to the late Gusteau but not a cookery natural.

In the new Pixar animation comedy, Remy first dazzles with a superbly improvised soup. He scampers its elements into a bubbling pot, and every bit of food or spicing seems to flavor the film. "Waitress" is a fine slice of pie, but "Ratatouille" is a gourmet occasion.

Once perched (but hidden) in the chef's hat donned by Linguini, who gets credit for the soup triumph, Remy can revive Gusteau's. He can rat out the profitable but demeaning fast foods a la Americaine, a sideline hustle of chef Skinner, a sneaky snob with a pencil moustache and vile temper.

The plot gets stretched. The time frame mixes vintage cars and Old Patee skyline empty of high-rises with a cop pursuing modern DNA analysis. But meals arrive as gluttonous stars, and for French dressing there is Colette, the young and feminist poultry chef smitten with Linguini.

Pixar computer style, a kind of showboat realism featuring lavishly detailed backdrops and snacky grace notes, is just the recipe for a food comedy. The robust vegetables, the simmering sauces, the wines poured as libations from paradise, make a wonderful contrast to such elements as Skinner's skinny comb-overs.

Amusingly fine voices include Patton Oswalt as Remy, Lou Romano as Linguini, Janeane Garofalo as Colette, Ian Holm as Skinner and Brian Dennehy as Remy's dad, named for Django Reinhardt. If a bit long for a cartoon feature - probably a sign that its makers fell in love with it - "Ratatouille" is the eighth and one of the best Pixar features.

Not since George Sanders preened as Addison DeWitt, theater critic and raptor wit in "All About Eve," has the critical trade been so stylishly zinged. Parisian dining critic Anton Ego is a snob's snob - he spits out, covertly, any food he doesn't love - who finally eats humility at Gusteau's. His closing, critical credo is rather fatuous, but who's to question the pontifical and RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) conclusive voice of Peter O'Toole?

No film critic has had such an honor. Probably none will. But Ego, a vanity casserole, is one of the top dishes of "Ratatouille."

A Disney/Pixar release. Director: Brad Bird. Writers: Jan Pinkava, Brad Bird, Jim Capobianco. Voice cast: Patton Oswalt, Peter O'Toole, Lou Romano, Janeane Garofalo, Brian Dennehy, Ian Holm. Running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Rated G. 3 stars.

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