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OUT AT THE MOVIES

CONTACT

Jodie Foster, Matthew McConaughey, Tom Skerritt
Directed by Robert Zemeckis

It sure would be an awful waste of space," is the running joke in *Contact*. Unfortunately, it applies to the first half of the movie. Ever since *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, Jodie Foster has proven herself to be a stellar on-

many minutes was indistinguishable from *Congo* or *Twister*.
(*Contact* is playing at area Act III theaters.)

WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY

Garance Clavel, Renée Le Calm, Olivier Py
Directed by Cédric Klapisch

In a media society, a place where all the media stumble over one another vying for our attention, it's calming to watch a film that barely acknowledges the audience.

Chloe (Garance Clavel) entrusts her cat, Gris-Gris (played by Clavel's cat, Arapimou), to Madame Renée (Renée Le Calm) during her vacation. Chloe returns to a distraught Mme. Renée and a missing cat. Therein lies the framework for Cédric Klapisch's *When the Cat's Away*.

Originally, Klapisch planned to film a short based on actual events. He knew someone who lost a cat that Le Calm had been watching. Le Calm, like so many other actors in the movie, plays herself, giving *When the Cat's Away* a

Cinema

screen presence. Excusing her horrendous though thankfully brief appearance in *Siesta*, Foster is a pleasure to watch. Because of the strength she usually brings to her roles, it's distasteful to watch her act like a simp.

Foster, as Professor Ellie Arroway, spends a good portion of the film's first hour running



Olivier Py (right) and Garance Clavel in *When the Cat's Away*

around Puerto Rico's Arecibo Observatory in a tank top—scenes that recall Laura Dern's slack-jawed, perma-smile *Jurassic Park* days. Even when scenes do call for Arroway to get her dander up, the director seems to have found a way to deflate Foster's acting in an apparent attempt to soften the edges around Arroway—*The Early Years*.

It's not until the plot unfolds to a point where Foster is facing unparalleled challenges that she's allowed to cut loose and be the Foster that adoring fans will recognize from *Silence of the Lambs* or *The Accused*: Oscar-quality Foster.

When the time comes for Foster to step up as star of the show, it's fireworks. The intensity of her acting combined with the intensity of the special effects is dizzying. There's nothing new about the effects; they're just used more creatively than usual. And there's nothing new about Foster's intensity—but we shouldn't have to wade through an hour of mediocrity to get to it.

Money and time could've been saved if the only part of *Contact* that had been made was Dr. Arroway's Wild Ride, shot on IMAX film for viewing on gigantic screens. Angela Bassett, James Woods and John Hurt aside, it seems Foster is wasting time when anchored to the acting abilities of those she shares scenes with.

Carl Sagan wrote a powerful book with vision. Robert Zemeckis made a movie that for very

documentary feel. Really it's a post-modern/industrial/French-traditional folk tale with shades of Victor Hugo, Robert Altman and Mike Leigh—for lack of better labeling.

Klapisch's indulgence is setting and characters. That's really all there is. He created the film day by day. His creative process was ad-libbed chaos, which he describes as the same system used by cities themselves.

From a decidedly queer perspective, the character to watch is Michel (Olivier Py). Chloe's gay roommate. As such, he's expected to be both the gay sensibility used to find clarity amid typical straight girl syndrome (TSGS) and the comic relief. As the script is nearly nonexistent, he doesn't have any remarkable lines. Nevertheless, his enthusiasm, gestures and patent French goofiness are endearing. His gratuitous sex scene doesn't hurt, either.

Klapisch manages to work in some statements about misplaced people, the destruction of traditional neighborhoods, global culture, injustice, sexism and love—among other things. *When the Cat's Away* also has an amazing soundtrack: jazz, piano, hip hop and more that plays well with a Gay Paree backdrop.

(*When the Cat's Away* is playing at KOIN Center Cinemas, Southwest Third Avenue and Clay Street, call 225-5555, ext. 4608, for show times and prices.)

Reviews by Will O'Bryan