



# The course of true love isn't smooth in uneven rom-com

## FESTIVAL FILM

French Film (M) ★★★  
 Hugh Bonneville, Eric Cantona,  
 Anne-Marie Duff  
 Directed by Jackie Oudney  
 Review: Pier Leach

Imagine having a one-night stand and the morning after having a crisp, high-denomination bill slid across the breakfast table in your direction: you've been mistaken for a pro. Could it be the perfect start to a relationship? Or reason to throw yourself off a bridge?

Actually, either scenario (the hooker or the bridge) could be the start to a successful relationship, according to French film director Thierry Grimandi (played by former French soccer star-turned-actor Eric Cantona, in a film within the film). He is a firm believer that "love is evreeething" and the first meeting of lovers is crucial to a relationship's success. (Saving someone from suicide rates highly, whereas meeting in a bank queue, say, would be destined to failure.)

Ah, that very French obsession with l'amour. That's the focus of this deceptively titled, very English romantic comedy French Film — an uneven first feature from Scottish TV commercial director Jackie Oudney (she has since renamed it A Frenchman's Guide to Love, ahead of its British release).

Across the English Channel, journalist and failed novelist Jed (Hugh Bonneville), who is preparing to interview Grimandi, thinks the Gallic filmmaker is a monumental continental "prat". Then again, Jed's love life is hardly the stuff of Shakespeare's sonnets: he has recently proposed to his long-term girlfriend Cheryl (Victoria Hamilton) and instead of the expected "yes" he gets a frosty "no" and an appointment with a relationship counsellor (French, naturally). Meanwhile, his friend Marcus (Scottish actor Douglas Henshall), whose relationship with Sophie (Anne-Marie Duff) seems perfect, is having second thoughts. Could there be some truth to Grimandi's philosophies?

French Film is set up as a bumbling comedy in the Richard Curtis tradition of Four Weddings and a Funeral and Notting Hill, full of charmingly inept men plagued with some serious foot-in-mouth disease. And it features an appealing conceit — asking if love in the real world can really be like love in the movies.

Unfortunately Aschlin Ditta's script contains only flashes of comedy to support the film's clever premise, and at times it slips into the maudlin. The performances are likable enough, particularly Bonneville as the beleaguered Jed, who times his comic moments to perfection. There just isn't quite enough comic substance to fill the 87-minute running time.

Of all the festival films French Film has among the most enticing trailers — perhaps testament to Oudney's successful background in commercials. It's diverting but it's not among the best on offer.

**French Film is at Joondalup Pines until Sunday.**



**Second thoughts: Douglas Henshall and Anne-Marie Duff in French Film.**