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Hundreds of Beavers

Hundreds of Beavers is a 2024 American slapstick comedy film directed by Mike Cheslik and written by Cheslik and Ryland Brickson Cole Tews.^[3] It was inspired by the slapstick comedy of 1920s and 1930s artists. The film stars Tews as an applejack maker in a conflict with beavers, trying to win the hand of a merchant's daughter.^{[4][5]}

Cheslik and Tews, who previously collaborated on multiple projects, developed the idea for *Hundreds of Beavers* in October 2018. The film was shot in rural Wisconsin and Michigan across twelve weeks in the winter of 2019 and 2020. Editing and post-production was completed by 2022.

Hundreds of Beavers premiered at Fantastic Fest on September 29, 2022. The film was self-distributed and received a video on demand release on April 15, 2024. It has received widespread acclaim from critics.

Plot

Successful 19th century applejack salesman Jean Kayak has his farm destroyed when a beaver eats one of the support beams of a giant keg, which rolls into his fireplace and explodes. Jean awakens in winter, repeatedly failing to catch food. He finds a group of beavers collecting logs to build a structure and attacks a pair, but is easily beaten by them. He catches fish by making his fingers bleed and using them as lures, and when he sells them to a local merchant, he notices a fur trapper turning an immense profit.

Jean buys a knife with the fish and cuts his shirt into rope. When he realizes the rabbits use a tunnel system, he rigs an exit with the rope and lures them into it, but raccoons eat his catches before he can get to them. He cuts up his pants to hoist the rabbits in the air and out of their reach. Jean catches a raccoon and runs into a Native American, who trades him snowshoes for the knife, and the merchant's daughter skins the raccoon and makes it into clothing for Jean.

<i>Hundreds of Beavers</i>	
 <div>Theatrical release poster</div>	
Directed by	Mike Cheslik
Written by	Mike Cheslik Ryland Brickson Cole Tews
Produced by	Kurt Ravenwood Matt Sabljak Ryland Brickson Cole Tews Sam Hogerton
Starring	Ryland Brickson Cole Tews Olivia Graves Wes Tank Doug Mancheski Luis Rico
Cinematography	Quinn Hester
Edited by	Mike Cheslik
Music by	Chris Ryan
Production company	SRH

Jean breaks his leg when he falls into a pit made by the trapper, who rescues him and takes him on as his protege. Wolves start killing the trapper's dogs, and when the pack attacks in full, the trapper gives Jean his trapping guide before being killed. Jean erases it and starts a new guide as he begins to master the area, finding creative ways to trap the area's animals, selling them to the merchant and trading with the Native for better gear. He and the merchant's daughter develop a mutual attraction, but the merchant demands hundreds of beavers for her hand in marriage. A Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson-esque pair of beavers begin investigating Jean's traps.

Release date	September 29, 2022 (Fantastic Fest) April 15, 2024 (VOD)
Running time	108 minutes
Country	United States
Budget	\$150,000
Box office	\$385,471 ^[1] ^[2]

Jean realizes the wolves in the area are hoarding a large collection of beaver carcasses. When the detectives report back to the beavers, who have built a massive dam, they send a large squadron after Jean. He lures them into the wolf cave and seals the entrance with icicles, allowing the wolves to slaughter them. He brings the bodies back to the merchant's cabin, only for it to be a cardboard cutout made by the detectives, who take the bodies to be buried.

Jean sneaks into the dam, but is eventually caught and put on trial for his beaver killing. He is found guilty and set to be skinned and made into a coat, the same thing having happened to the trapper. Jean narrowly escapes his restraints and beats up the group trying to kill him. While trying to escape, he notices the beavers building a rocket ship out of one of his kegs. He accidentally pushes a beaver into it, causing it to malfunction and launch in the wrong direction, breaking the dam and creating the Green Bay with the flood.

Jean rolls the bundle of beaver bodies into a snowball, which he rides as the beavers climb on top of each other to form a giant figure and chase him. The Native latches onto the rocket with a grappling arrow and launches it at the beavers, destroying the figure. The snowball stops at the merchant's cabin, and Jean is allowed to marry the daughter.

Cast

- Ryland Brickson Cole Tews as Jean Kayak
- Olivia Graves as The Furrier
- Wes Tank as The Master Fur Trapper
- Doug Mancheski as The Merchant
- Luis Rico as The Indian Fur Trapper

Production

Mike Cheslik and Ryland Tews met at Whitefish Bay High School and came to collaborate on film projects.^[6] The duo made *Lake Michigan Monster*, a black-and-white film that cost \$7,000, in 2018.^[4]^[7] The idea for *Hundreds of Beavers* was created by Cheslik and Tews while at a bar in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in October 2018. Cheslik directed, wrote, edited, and created the visual effects for the film while Tews played the lead role.^[8]

The black-and-white film had a budget of \$150,000. It was shot over the course of twelve weeks by a six-person crew during winter in 2019 and 2020.^{[8][4]} Nine weeks of filming was done in Stephenson, Michigan, and the northern Wisconsin towns of Manitowish Waters, Pembine, Superior.^{[9][8]} The crew stayed at a cabin in Manitowish Waters.^[10] The beaver suits were purchased online from a Chinese mascot website, with the teeth being modified by the filmmakers.^[11] Over 1,500 visual effects were made using Adobe After Effects. Editing and post-production took two years to complete.^{[8][4]} Tews' father composed and performed songs for the film.^[10]

Inspiration was drawn from the Mario video games, America's Funniest Home Videos, and the slapstick comedy of Abbott and Costello, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and The Three Stooges.^[8] Ernst Lubitsch's *The Wildcat* also inspired the film. Tews based his movements in the film on Jackie Chan. A scene in *Seven Chances*, in which Keaton is chased by a horde of angry women, is referenced in the film.^[6] The second act of the film was designed to be like watching a let's play.^[12] *Hundreds of Beavers's* poster is similar to the poster for *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*.^{[10][13]}

Release

The film premiered at Fantastic Fest in 2022. Cheslik and the producers chose to distribute the film themselves and Kurt Ravenwood oversaw the promotion campaign. They were aided by Jessica Rosner, a former executive at Kino Lorber. It was shown at fourteen independent theaters in the Great Lakes region, including the Music Box Theatre.^[14]

It premiered in Canada at the 2023 Fantasia International Film Festival.^[15] The film received a video on demand release on April 15, 2024.^[16]

Reception

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 96% of 69 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.3/10. The website's consensus reads: "Sustaining a zany premise with stylistic bravura and inspired gags, *Hundreds of Beavers* is a comedic gem that gives a dam."^[17] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 80 out of 100, based on nine critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[18]

Dennis Harvey, writing in *Variety*, praised the film's editing as it could "milk every gag without belaboring it", the soundtrack was "equal to the visual imagination on display", and that the "ingeniously home-made lark never runs out of steam".^[4] Nick Schager, writing in *The Daily Beast*, declared the film "a marvel of slapstick invention that in terms of pure unbridled creativity puts most big-screen comedies to shame" and

"an overstuffed live-action homage to the golden age of animation that's bursting with ingenuity and personality."^[19] Joseph Johnson, writing in *The Harvard Crimson*, gave the film 4.5 stars and praised it as "a groundbreaking technical achievement" due to the large amounts of complex animations.^[20]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Kansas International Film Festival</u>	2023	Best Narrative Film	<i>Hundreds of Beavers</i>	Won	^[15]
<u>Phoenix Film Festival</u>	2023	Best Director	Mike Cheslik	Won	^[21]

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External links

- [Official website \(https://www.hundredsofbeavers.com/\)](https://www.hundredsofbeavers.com/)
 - *Hundreds of Beavers* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12818328/>) at IMDb
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