

'Epic' is No Epic, Though a Fun CG Action-Adventure Comedy

It's been said that you don't judge a book by its cover. In the case of *Epic*, the 20th Century Fox's 3D toon flick from Fox Animation Studios and Blue Sky Studios, don't judge a movie by its title.

Epic is far from an epic, despite its grand-sounding title. For starters, the animated movie is not based on *The Leaf Men and the Brave Good Bugs*. Only the *Leaf Men* characters are inspired by William Joyce's book, which introduced the Samurai-like warriors.

Touted as "wholly original," *Epic* borrows elements from other CG films, such as *The Secret World of Arrietty*, *Antz* and *A Bug's Life*. Like Pixar's *Brave*, it features a female heroine.

But this doesn't mean the movie is an epic failure. Besides its gorgeous animation, *Epic* is fun and family friendly, for the most part, extolling the importance of family, courage and self-sacrifice.

The film begins with the Leaf Men, a courageous race of tiny archers who fly around on hummingbirds guarding the forest from "the spread of rot," created by gargoyles with rat-skin coats, called Boggans, who ride bats.

After a defeated Boggan plunges, screaming, from the sky during a battle with the Leaf Men, the villain splatters harmlessly on the windshield of a taxi carrying teen Mary Katherine, or MK (voiced by Amanda Seyfried). After the recent death of her mother, MK is being forced to live in the woods with her father, Professor Bomba (Jason Sudeikis), a geek who alienated his family due to his obsession with "an advanced society of small people living in the woods."

"Just because you haven't seen something doesn't mean it's not there," he tells his daughter.

However, the tiny creatures' world is about to be turned topsy-turvy during a mythic succession of power, with the forest Queen Tara (Beyoncé Knowles) selecting a flower bulb that she will use to transfer her regenerative power. She is guarded by a named warrior Ronin (Colin Ferrell) and his arrogant, rebellious surrogate son, Nod (Josh Hutcherson).

Meanwhile, the Boggans' leader, Mandrake (Christoph Waltz), desires the bulb for his nefarious purposes. "The forest belongs to the darkness," he proclaims.

But when MK finds herself transported during a battle between the forces of good and evil, she is shrunk down to their size and is forced to band together with a rag-tag group of characters in order to save their world—and hers.

"You're here for a reason," Queen Tara tells MK. "Sometimes the connections aren't clear, but they're always there."

Ronin adds, "If our world dies, your world will die too."

Far from a faith-based flick, *Epic* features spiritual themes of bravery and trust. Featuring a gentle, eco-friendly message on caring for the forest, director Chris Wedge should be commended for not going overboard on the magic stuff and light on the potty humor.

Mub (Aziz Ansari) and Grub (Chris O'Dowd), a spirited pair of slugs in the vein of Timón and Pumba sidekicks, as well as Nim (Steven Tyler), a six-legged caterpillar, offer plenty of chuckles.

My 10-year-old son, Andrew, perhaps described *Epic* best: "It wasn't epic. It was funny. It was scary, and it was everything a kid would like."

Content Watch: *Epic* is rated PG for mild action, some scary images and brief rude language. There is lots of sword-

fighting and cartoon-like violence, but no blood. The animated movie is family friendly, for the most part, but creepy gargoyle villains and bats could be very scary for small children, so caution is advised.