

“ODDYSEY”

By Jerry Rees, based on a story by Joseph Ekers

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Logline: HOMER, a downtrodden dust mite, and his companion, BAUDELAIRE, a well-read ‘book’ worm, embark on an epic adventure of microscopic proportions, within a suburban home.

Synopsis: HOMER, a common dust mite, inhabits the carpet world of a teenage girl’s bedroom in a typical suburban household. He is a lowly scavenger for his house mite community, gathering useful junk from the ‘forest’ that surrounds their village, which is woven from strands of micro-fibers. The anthropomorphized mites have established their homes at the edge of a ‘clearing’ – the result of a stray cigarette butt landing there. Watching over the village is an enormous Barbie doll, which the house mites believe is a divine idol, symbolizing their teenage Goddess, ANGIE.

Homer is the hard-working father of twenty-six children and carries the burden of fatherhood like his daily bundle of stinky fungus. He grumpily tells his young children that he has no stories of adventure to tell them before bed. Tired of being at the bottom of the pile, Homer yearns for a break in his daily routine – an adventure, in which he can prove his worth. Following an argument with his wife, PENELOPE, Homer takes a walk alone in the forest, and falls asleep beneath the Giant Barbie doll, wishing for “one lousy adventure”...

As day breaks in the bedroom, Angie’s MOTHER steps in and uses a portable vacuum to clean up crumbs on the carpet. Homer is sucked up into the dust-buster, and dumped in a trashcan inside the household garage. Seen from the mite’s point-of-view, Homer finds himself in a strange world, far from his home in Angie’s upstairs bedroom. A DRAMATIC VOICE, reciting a health warning from a drug advertisement, is revealed to be an overweight, verbose ‘book’ worm, named BAUDELAIRE, whose passion is quoting from the books and magazines he’s eaten. Shocked at the sight of Homer, Baudelaire almost chokes on a paper scrap, but is saved by the heroic mite. Indebted, Baudelaire becomes Homer’s sidekick and source of knowledge, explaining the vast world beyond the carpet ‘forest’. Reluctantly, Homer must rely upon his talkative, flatulent companion to get home to his family. If only Homer’s family could see him now, on a real-life adventure. Baudelaire becomes Homer’s chronicler, an “imbedded journalist” along for the ride.

Baudelaire has ‘consumed’ the house plans and knows the route Homer must take, but first they must find a way out of the trashcan! Baudelaire suffers from a fear of heights, but Homer ties a ‘safety line’ - a human hair - to his companion and pushes him over the edge. Freed at last, they begin their odyssey to the second floor.

Homer, like his Greek mythological namesake, confronts all manner of dangerous monsters along the way, with Baudelaire as his unlikely guide. Captured by Termite

'Guards', they are taken to the Termite Queen (a hideous bug with one giant eye) to be sacrificed. But Baudelaire uses Homer as a sword to stab at the Cyclops, and they make their escape. With each successive danger, Homer's heroism is tested, and Baudelaire reminds him of his purpose. A larger world opens up for Homer, and he finds a deeper understanding of his role in it, both as a hero, and as a father.

As the duo cross the kitchen bench, Homer rescues a helpless Cockroach Nymph, kidnapped by a Root Weevil. A procession of bugs, drawn to a nearby candy dish, gathers around Homer. Among his admirers is SIREN, a seductive female mite, who invites him to her home, behind a Mona Lisa cookie jar. But Baudelaire distracts Homer before he makes a mistake, pretending to choke on tin foil. As they argue, a swarm of GIANT ANTS descends upon the candy dish and picks up Baudelaire, carrying him away with them. An exciting sequence follows, as Homer chases after his friend, running and jumping over the backs of the much larger insects, as they stampede across the counter and down the side vertically, then underneath the refrigerator. Like Steve McQueen hopping rail cars, Homer reaches the Ant clutching his friend and helps him wriggle free. But as they escape, a storm of giant droplets - Raid - begins falling from above, as Angie sprays the floor to kill the ants!

At home, Homer's children believe their father is on a great adventure, but his wife Penelope fears the worst has happened. Homer's biggest believer is his youngest child, ZESTOR. CTESSIPUS, the strongest mite in the village, has eyes for Penelope, but she declines his offers to comfort her. Homer's separation from his family reminds him what matters most, strengthening his resolve to return home. Whilst Baudelaire acts as a guide and advisor, Homer instills confidence in his friend, the 'spineless' worm, talking him through numerous close calls.

From the top of the refrigerator, Homer and Baudelaire make a frightening discovery. A post-it note, which Baudelaire has been eating for breakfast, declares: "CARPET CLEANERS, ANGIE'S ROOM, THURSDAY, 9:00AM". With only one hour to save his family and entire community, Homer must leave Baudelaire and go it alone. But the stubborn worm refuses to tell Homer which direction to take. Baudelaire feels taken for granted, mocking Homer's belief in the Barbie idol. As they argue over whom is responsible for helping Homer get this far, a giant SPIDER grabs the chubby worm in its jaws and tries to eat it! Homer is undeterred, shouting at the spider to release his friend. The spider shoots web at Homer and he dives over the edge, the web catching a spinning ceiling fan! All three characters are flung around the kitchen and land in the family pooch's bed. There, they meet FLEA, an insect taxi driver who speaks the dog's language, "The mutt thinks I'm a little voice inside his head". He helps them escape on the nose of a Chihuahua, which bounds up the stairs toward Angie's bedroom. But a larger CAT hisses at the dog, its claws narrowly missing the heroes. Flea suggests they bail and he leaps free of the dog, which crashes into the nearest bedroom. The canine smashes into a bag of Doritos and sends Homer and Baudelaire flying! They land on the surface of a fish tank, floating on a Dorito chip. Hungry fish surround them, eating their 'life raft' from below, like giant SEA MONSTERS from the deep. Suddenly, they are sucked under the water as a huge fish takes the last piece of the chip to the bottom of the

tank. As the other fish follow, Homer and Baudelaire hide in a toy beneath the surface, finding an air pocket. They see the Carpet Cleaners through the glass, setting up their equipment in the room across the hall. Homer sees his route home – a yellow power cord attached to the cleaning machine. He climbs the water filter to the surface and leaps out, lands on the cord and starts running.

As the mites in Homer's village look on in terror, the giant steam-cleaning machine begins grinding through the Carpet Forest. They cower beneath the Barbie idol, as a LADYBUG swoops down and chases Homer with mouth wide. Baudelaire calls out from the edge of the fish tank and wiggles his fat bottom; the flying insect turns toward him. Grabbing hold of the Bug's legs, Baudelaire avoids being eaten and instead maneuvers the insect like a kite toward Homer. They soar over the village and swing a yo-yo string down to the mites, who scurry up the line to the safety of the bed. They watch as the Carpet Cleaning machine reaches their village far below and in what appears to be a fateful turn of events, the Barbie idol gets stuck in the machine, jamming the motor and saving the village.

In a final sequence, the villagers have become one big family, and Homer and Baudelaire are declared the official village storytellers. They delight a crowd of children with stories of their adventures, among them, Homer's proudest son, Zestor. Baudelaire finds his calling and Homer gains his sense of worth.

Comments: "Odyssey" is fast-paced, funny, and cleverly conceived adventure story that would work well as a computer-animated family film. With plenty of action and characters that are, for the most part, well constructed and easily relatable, the story is a mix of classic Greek mythology, and survival in a hostile new world. The "Carpet Forest" setting of a suburban home, where the scale of many insects is dramatically varied, allows for a variety of zany, breakneck action sequences and oddball characters.

Establishing Homer's devotion to his family early on, the story maintains its focus on his character throughout. Homer's ego, pride, and instinct to return to those he loves, are constant motivations, and these internal obstacles pose equal challenges to the external ones. Baudelaire and other supporting characters, like Penelope, each face moments of truth, which test their faith in others and in themselves. The story poses many emotional dilemmas, dealing with important moral issues like faith, integrity and friendship.

The dialogue is loaded with all manner of classic literature references, and a good dose of pop culture jabs as well. At times, the references and dialogue are skewed a little too much toward adults, which may cause younger viewers to tune out occasionally.

However, there is an almost constant flow of physical gags and inter-character tension to keep things lively and amusing. I was reminded of "A Bug's Life" and "Antz", among other recent Pixar films, in mostly positive ways. But this story also brings something new and educational to the equation, aiming to inspire and reveal the universality of life, even beneath our feet. The self-deprecating Homer is an average 'guy', trying to raise a family and find himself at the same time. He learns to trust and to lead by example, and finally, to pass on that knowledge through storytelling.