

Big Fish

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Big Fish is one of those fantasy movies that you either fall in love with or else scratch your head over and say, "Eh?" I fell in love with it.

Directed by Tim Burton, the movie depicts a young journalist's attempt to connect with a father he's never understood, a storyteller named Edward Bloom whose bigger-than-life tales have obscured the reality of the man and his life from his son, William.

News of his father's terminal illness brings William home, ending a three-year silence between father and son—and so begins a magnificently acted drama in which not one, but two tales unfold, converging in a heartwarming and poignant ending.

The reality of Edward's impending death, and William's attempts to finally get to know who his father really is, form a backdrop for Edward's fairytale account of his life. Portraying himself in his early years as a young man full of ambitions too big for the small town where he grew up, Edward weaves a mythical world populated by...

...a witch, who through her glass eye shows Edward his death, thus freeing him to live his life big, free, and full of possibilities.

...an immense, magical catfish which no one has ever managed to catch until Edward lands him—and then releases him.

...a giant, who, like Edward, is too big, too hungry, and too different for Edward's small town.

...a strange, wonderful community called Spectre, where the people are so friendly that no one who visits ever chooses to leave, and where an eerie contentment steals all ambition.

...a mermaid who swims in front of Edward's windshield when his vehicle is submerged in a flash flood.

...a poet who turns bank robber and then businessman.

...a circus ringmaster who is also a werewolf, who helps Edward find the love of his life.

...a beautiful young woman whom Edward woos and wins with remarkable dedication, imagination, and romance.

...two Korean twin sisters, conjoined at the waist, who help Edward escape from behind enemy lines during the Korean War.

The movie approaches its culmination as William, investigating a suspected, past infidelity of his father's, searches out a woman from the town of Spectre, which turns out to really exist. Story and reality begin weaving together as the woman shares with William the remarkable account of how his father saved the town, including her own house, from ruin. The woman confesses her love for Edward. But, she assures William, Edward Bloom always was in love with only one woman, and that was his wife.

In the end, alone with Edward at his death bed, William takes up the role of storyteller to tell his father the final, beautiful tale of Edward Bloom. It is filled with all the unique, colorful characters from Edward's stories—all waiting for him by the riverside, all happy to see him, cheering for him, there to see him off as William carries him in his arms toward his final, great adventure. Kissing his beloved wife, who stands waiting for him in the water ("My girl in the river," he whispers to her), Edward is released into the current, where he is transformed into an enormous catfish and swims away.

"The story of my life," breathes Edward, as William nears the conclusion. They are his last words.

But the story is not yet over. At his father's funeral, William watches as people he has never seen before begin to arrive. A giant. A circus ringmaster. Two Oriental twin sisters. The woman whose house Edward rebuilt, who was also the witch in his tales. The poet-turned-millionaire-businessman. Mythical characters from Edward's tales, come to life. William realizes that

the fantastic stories his father had told were not complete fabrications. In a strange way, in their telling, they had become the life of Edward Bloom.

Big Fish grips me. In its own way, it is as eloquent a parable about the heart of God and the kingdom of heaven as anything I've encountered outside of Jesus' own stories.

You see, I think that each of us in our own way has a Big Fish swimming around inside us. Our lives are bigger than we realize—or, through God's grace, they have the potential to be if we so choose. We little dream of the influence we can have through the simple act of making room in our hearts for the seemingly odd and unusual.

Life is not simple, and every person's life is a story unfolding in a unique way. Many will never give their own story a second thought, though the Author of all stories calls to them throughout every page as it is being written. Such people's endings will be tragedy and waste. But the beauty of God's kingdom is this, that many of the strange, and the offbeat, and the incorrect, and the fearful—in short, the unlikely, coming from all walks of life—*will* hear the Author calling their name, and respond to Him. And in doing so, they will become who they truly are: real, alive, beautiful, fully themselves.

The strange people in Edward Bloom's tales loved Edward for two reasons: because he loved them, and because through his own bigger-than-life life, he helped them discover the possibilities and meaning of their own lives.

I want to be like Edward Bloom, don't you? I want to see and faithfully live out the bigness of my life, small and insignificant though it may seem set against the massive doings of government, business, culture, and world events. I want to love well, even if imperfectly. And I want to affirm others whom God gives me as they discover the meaning of their uniqueness and the full stature of who they are.

The devil and this fallen world conspire to keep us viewing ourselves as small and insignificant, to settle for far less than what we were created for,

for just getting by. But Jesus—ah, Jesus! He is the Great Storyteller, “the *author* and completer of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2) When He writes your life story, no part of it is wasted—and while the world may never understand, He does.

Our significance is not measured by the world's standards in terms of fame, or power, or appearance, or public accolades, or wealth. It is measured by how well we love, and how truly we reflect the character of Jesus in simple ways...unusual ways...fearless ways that call others to their best and highest.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish,” said Jesus. “When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age.”
(Matthew 13:47–49)

Imagine the variety of fish in that net. Some of the strangest fish will make it into the basket; some of the most appealing will be discarded.

You are a fish. You are a bigger fish than you think. You are also a giant, a werewolf, a mermaid, a strange resident of a strange community, a product of the Great Storyteller brought to life as a wondrous tale of His love and grace. Your life may not be easy. Some of it may have been ugly, very ugly. But if you have put your trust in Jesus—not in a religious culture, not in rites, traditions, or codes of conduct, nor yet again in your own personal merits, but in Him—then you are something wonderful. You are seen by Him as you are, and loved for exactly who you are. And there is a bigness to you that you yourself may find it hard to imagine or believe in. May the Lord call it forth and bless it richly—in His glorious name, to His everlasting praise.