

= Big Fish =

Big Fish is a 2003 American fantasy drama film based on the 1998 novel of the same name by Daniel Wallace . The film was directed by Tim Burton and stars Ewan McGregor , Albert Finney , Billy Crudup , Jessica Lange , and Marion Cotillard . Other roles are performed by Helena Bonham Carter , Matthew McGrory , and Danny DeVito among others . Edward Bloom ( Finney ) , a former traveling salesman in the Southern United States with a gift for storytelling , is now confined to his deathbed . Will ( Crudup ) , his estranged son , attempts to mend their relationship as Bloom relates tall tales of his eventful life as a young adult ( portrayed by Ewan McGregor in the flashback scenes ) .

Screenwriter John August read a manuscript of the novel six months before it was published and convinced Columbia Pictures to acquire the rights . August began adapting the novel while producers negotiated with Steven Spielberg who planned to direct after finishing *Minority Report* ( 2002 ) . Spielberg considered Jack Nicholson for the role of Edward Bloom , but eventually dropped the project to focus on *Catch Me If You Can* ( 2002 ) . Tim Burton and Richard D. Zanuck took over after completing *Planet of the Apes* ( 2001 ) and brought Ewan McGregor and Albert Finney on board .

The film 's theme of reconciliation between a dying father and his son had special significance for Burton , as his father had died in 2000 and his mother in 2002 , a month before he signed on to direct . Big Fish was shot on location in Alabama in a series of fairy tale vignettes evoking the tone of a Southern Gothic fantasy . The film received award nominations in multiple film categories , including four Golden Globe Award nominations , seven nominations from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts , two Saturn Award nominations , and an Oscar and a Grammy Award nomination for Danny Elfman 's original score .

= = Plot = =

At Will 's wedding party , Edward Bloom recalls the day Will was born , claiming he caught an enormous catfish using his wedding ring as bait . Will , having heard these stories all his life , believes them to be lies and falls out with his father . Three years later , Edward is stricken with cancer , so Will and his pregnant French wife Joséphine return to his childhood home in Alabama to spend time with his father . Edward 's life is told through flashbacks , beginning with his encounter with a witch in his hometown , Ashton . She shows him his death but he reacts to it without fear . As he grows into adulthood , he finds his home too confining , and sets out into the world with a misunderstood giant , Karl , who has come to town with a traveling circus .

Edward and Karl find a fork in the road and travel down separate paths . Edward follows a path through a swamp and discovers the secret town of Spectre , the cheery locals claiming he was expected . There , he befriends Ashton poet Norther Winslow and the mayor 's daughter Jenny . However , Edward leaves Spectre , unwilling to settle down but promises Jenny he will return . In the present day , Joséphine speaks to the bed-ridden Edward and asks him to tell her the story of how he met his wife Sandra , with Will listening outside the door . Returning to his reminiscences , Edward reunites with Karl and they visit the Calloway Circus , where Edward falls in love with a beautiful woman . Karl and Edward get jobs in the circus where the ringmaster Amos Calloway reveals to Edward one detail about the woman at the end of every month .

Three years later , Edward discovers that Amos is secretly a werewolf but shows no ill will towards his employer . Amos , upon returning to normal , reveals the woman is Sandra , and she attends Auburn University . Edward confesses his love to Sandra , but she declines his wedding proposal despite numerous romantic gestures . He then learns she is already engaged to Don Price , a fellow Ashton citizen . Don beats Edward in a fight , prompting Sandra to break off their engagement and marry Edward . Shortly after , Edward is conscripted into the army and sent to fight in the Korean War . He parachutes into the middle of a North Korean military show , steals important documents , and convinces Siamese twins Ping and Jing to help him go home in exchange for making them celebrities .

Upon returning home , Edward becomes a travelling salesman and crosses paths with Winslow , unwittingly helping him rob a failing bank , inspiring the poet to work on Wall Street . In the present , Will investigates the truth behind his father ' s tales and travels to Spectre . He meets an older Jenny , who explains that Edward rescued the town from bankruptcy and rebuilt it with help from his friends from Calloway Circus . Will suggests that Jenny had an affair with his father , but she reveals while she loved Edward , he remained loyal to Sandra . Will returns home but learns Edward has had a stroke and stays with him at the hospital .

Edward wakes up but , unable to speak much , asks Will to narrate how his life ends . Though struggling , Will tells his father of their imagined daring escape from the hospital to the nearby lake , where everyone from Edward ' s past is there to see him off . Will takes Edward into the river , where he transforms into the giant catfish and swims away . A satisfied Edward dies , knowing Will understands his love for storytelling . At the funeral , Will and Joséphine are surprised when all the people from Edward ' s stories come to the service , though each one is a slightly less fantastical version than described . Will , finally understanding his father ' s love for life , passes on Edward ' s stories to his own son .

= = Cast = =

Ewan McGregor as young Edward Bloom  
Perry Walston as 10 @-@ year old Edward Bloom  
Albert Finney as old Edward Bloom  
Billy Crudup as Will Bloom  
Grayson Stone as 6 ? 8 @-@ year old Will Bloom  
Jessica Lange as Sandra K. Bloom , Edward 's dream girl and wife  
Helena Bonham Carter as Jenny Hill . Bonham Carter also plays an elderly witch who gives a young Bloom a vision of his future death in her evil eye .  
Hailey Anne Nelson as 8 @-@ year @-@ old Jenny Hill  
Alison Lohman as the young Sandra , née Templeton  
Robert Guillaume as Dr. Bennett , the family doctor  
Karlos Walkes as young Dr. Bennett  
Marion Cotillard as Joséphine Bloom  
Matthew McGrory as Karl , the misunderstood giant  
David Denman as Don Price , Sandra Templeton 's boyfriend when Edward meets her  
John Lowell as 12 @-@ year old Don Price  
Loudon Wainwright III as Beamen , the mayor of Spectre , and Jenny 's father  
Missi Pyle as Mildred , Beamen 's wife  
Ada Tai and Arlene Tai as Ping and Jing , conjoined twins who perform as singers for soldiers in North Korea  
Steve Buscemi as Norther Winslow , a poet from Ashton who supposedly went missing , having never left the idyllic town of Spectre  
Danny DeVito as Amos Calloway , a circus ringmaster and werewolf  
Bevin Kaye as River Woman ( Fish )  
Miley Cyrus as 8 @-@ year @-@ old Ruthie ( credited as Destiny Cyrus )  
Daniel Wallace as Economics teacher  
Deep Roy as Mr. Soggybottom , the circus clown and Calloway 's attorney  
George McArthur as Colossus , former giant in the circus , replaced by Karl

= = Themes = =

The reconciliation of the father @-@ son relationship between Edward and William is the key theme in Big Fish . Novelist Daniel Wallace 's interest in the theme of the father @-@ son relationship began with his own family . Wallace found the " charming " character of Edward Bloom similar to his father , who used charm to keep his distance from other people . In the film , Will believes Edward

has never been honest with him because Edward creates extravagant myths about his past to hide himself , using storytelling as an avoidance mechanism . Edward 's stories are filled with fairy tale characters ( a witch , mermaid , giant , and werewolf ) and places ( the circus , small towns , the mythological city of Spectre ) , all of which are classic images and archetypes . The quest motif propels both Edward 's story and Will 's attempt to get to the bottom of it . Wallace explains : " The father 's quest is to be a big fish in a big pond , and the son 's quest is to see through his tall tales . "

Screenwriter John August identified with Will 's character and adapted it after himself . In college , August 's father died , and like Will , August had attempted to get to know him before his death , but found it difficult . Like Will , August had studied journalism and was 28 years old . In the film , Will says of Edward , " I didn 't see anything of myself in my father , and I don 't think he saw anything of himself in me . We were like strangers who knew each other very well . " Will 's description of his relationship with Edward closely resembled August 's own relationship with his father . Burton also used the film to confront his thoughts and emotions concerning the death of his father in 2000 : " My father had been ill for a while ... I tried to get in touch with him , to have , like in this film , some sort of resolution , but it was impossible . "

Religion and film scholar Kent L. Brintnall observes how the father @-@ son relationship resolves itself at the end of the film . As Edward dies , Will finally lets go of his anger and begins to understand his father for the first time :

In a final gesture of love and comprehension , after a lifetime of despising his father 's stories and his father as story @-@ teller , Will finishes the story his father has begun , pulling together the themes , images and characters of his father 's storied life to blend reality and fantasy in act of communion and care . By unselfishly releasing the anger he has held about his father 's stories , Will gains the understanding that all we are our stories and that his father 's stories gave him a reality and substance and a dimension that was as real , genuine , and deep as the day @-@ to @-@ day experiences that Will sought out . Will comes to understand , then , that his father ? and the rest of us ? are our stories and that the deeper reality of our lives may , in fact , not be our truest self .

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

About six months before it was published , screenwriter John August read a manuscript of Big Fish : A Novel of Mythic Proportions ( 1998 ) by author Daniel Wallace . August read the unpublished novel following the death of his father . In September 1998 , August convinced Columbia Pictures to acquire the film rights on his behalf . August worked hard to make the episodic book into a cohesive screenplay , deciding on several narrators for the script . In August 2000 , producers Bruce Cohen and Dan Jinks began discussions for Steven Spielberg to direct . Spielberg planned to have DreamWorks co @-@ finance and distribute Big Fish with Columbia , and planned to have filming start in late 2001 , after completing Minority Report ( 2002 ) .

Spielberg courted Jack Nicholson for the role of Edward Bloom , Sr. and towards this end , had August compose two additional drafts for Nicholson 's part . August recalls : " There was this thought that there wasn 't enough for Jack Nicholson to do in the movie so we built new sequences . Pieces got moved around , but it wasn 't a lot of new stuff being created . It ended up being a really good intellectual exercise in my explaining and defending and reanalyzing pieces of the story . " Spielberg eventually left Big Fish when he became distracted with Catch Me If You Can ( 2002 ) , and DreamWorks also backed out of the film .

With Spielberg no closer to committing , August , working with Jinks and Cohen , considered Stephen Daldry as a potential director . " Once Steven decided he wasn 't going to do it , we put the script back to the way it was , " recalls Jinks . " Steven even said , ' I think I made a mistake with a couple of things I asked you guys to try . ' " August took his favorite elements from the previous drafts , coming up with what he called " a best @-@ of Big Fish script . " By the time we approached

Tim Burton , the script was in the best shape it had ever been . "

Burton had never been particularly close to his parents , but his father 's death in October 2000 and his mother 's in March 2002 affected him deeply . Following the production of Planet of the Apes ( 2001 ) , the director wanted to get back to making a smaller film . Burton enjoyed the script , feeling that it was the first unique story he was offered since Beetlejuice ( 1988 ) . Burton also found appeal in the story 's combination of an emotional drama with exaggerated tall tales , which allowed him to tell various stories of different genres . He signed to direct in April 2002 , which prompted Richard D. Zanuck , who worked with Burton on Planet of the Apes , to join Big Fish as a producer . Zanuck also had a difficult relationship with his own father , Darryl F. Zanuck , who once fired him as head of production at 20th Century Fox .

= = = Casting = = =

For the role of Edward Bloom , Burton spoke with Jack Nicholson , Spielberg 's initial choice for the role . Burton had previously worked with Nicholson on Batman ( 1989 ) and Mars Attacks ! ( 1996 ) . In order to depict Nicholson as the young Bloom , Burton intended to use a combination of computer @-@ generated imagery and prosthetic makeup . The director then decided to cast around for the two actors in question . Jinks and Cohen , who were then working with Ewan McGregor on Down with Love ( 2003 ) , suggested that Burton cast both McGregor and Albert Finney for Edward . Burton later compared McGregor 's acting style to regular colleague Johnny Depp . Viewing Finney 's performance in Tom Jones ( 1963 ) , Burton found him similar to McGregor , and coincidentally found a People magazine article comparing the two . McGregor , being Scottish , found it easier performing with a Southern American English accent . " It 's a much easier accent to do than a standard American accent because you can really hear it . You can get your teeth into it . Standard American is much harder because it 's more lyrical . " The same dual casting applied to the role of Bloom 's wife , Sandra , who would be played by Jessica Lange and Alison Lohman . Burton commented that he was impressed with Lohman 's performance in White Oleander ( 2002 ) . Burton 's girlfriend , Helena Bonham Carter , was also cast in two roles . Her prosthetic makeup for The Witch took five hours to apply . " I was pregnant throughout filming , so it was weird being a pregnant witch , " the actress reflected . " I had morning sickness , so all those fumes and the make @-@ up and the rubber ... it was hideous . "

Burton personalized the film with several cameos . While filming in Alabama , the crew tracked down Billy Redden , one of the original banjo players from Deliverance ( 1972 ) . Redden was working as a part @-@ owner of a restaurant in Clayton , Georgia , and he agreed to reprise his role in the Spectre vignette . As Edward Bloom first enters the town , Redden can be seen on a porch plucking a few notes from " Dueling Banjos " . Burton was pleased with the result : " If you 're watching the film and don 't recognise the solitary , enigmatic figure on the porch , that 's fine . But if you do ? well , it just makes me so happy to see him and I think other people will feel the same way . " Original Big Fish author Daniel Wallace makes a brief appearance as Sandra 's economics teacher in the " Courtship of Sandra Templeton " scene .

= = = Filming = = =

Burton planned to start filming in October 2002 , but principal photography in Alabama did not begin until January 13 , 2003 . Apart from filming in Paris for one week in May , Big Fish was entirely shot in Alabama , mostly in Wetumpka. and Montgomery ( such as the Cloverdale neighborhood ) Brief filming also took place in Tallassee and on the campus of Huntingdon College . Scenes for the town of Spectre were filmed on a custom set located on an island in Lake Jackson between Montgomery and Millbrook , Alabama , adjacent to the Alabama River . Principal photography for Big Fish in Alabama continued until the first week of April. and is estimated to have generated as much as \$ 25 million for the local economy .

Burton filmed all the dramatic hospital scenes and most of those involving Finney first , before moving on to the McGregor section of Bloom 's life . Although McGregor was on set from the

beginning of filming , Burton chose to shoot all Finney 's scenes first . Location filming in Alabama was delayed by inclement weather ; during the Calloway circus scenes filming , a tornado watch was issued and flooding on the set interrupted filming for several weeks . Despite the delays , Burton delivered the film on budget and on schedule .

The director attempted to limit the use of digital effects . However , because he wanted to evoke a Southern Gothic fantasy tone for Big Fish , color grading techniques were applied by Sony Pictures Imageworks . Stan Winston Studios , with whom Burton worked with on Edward Scissorhands ( 1990 ) and Batman Returns ( 1992 ) , designed Helena Bonham Carter 's prosthetic makeup and created the animatronics . Scenes with Karl the Giant were commissioned using forced perspective filmmaking .

= = = Music = = =

The soundtrack was composed by regular Burton collaborator Danny Elfman . Burton approached Pearl Jam during post @-@ production to request an original song for the soundtrack and closing credits . After screening an early print of the film , Pearl Jam vocalist Eddie Vedder wrote " Man of the Hour " , completing the demo by the next day . It was recorded by the band four days later . Guitarist Mike McCready stated , " We were so blown away by the movie ... Eddie and I were standing around talking about it afterwards and were teary @-@ eyed . We were so emotionally charged and moved by the imagination and humanity that we felt because of the movie . "

= = Release = =

Columbia Pictures planned to wide release Big Fish in the United States on November 26 , 2003 before pushing it back to December 10 for a limited release . The film premiered on December 4 , 2003 at the Hammerstein Ballroom in Manhattan . The domestic wide release in the US came on January 9 , 2004 , with the film appearing in 2 @,@ 406 theaters and earning \$ 13 @.@ 81 million in its opening weekend . The film eventually grossed \$ 66 @.@ 81 million in U.S. totals and \$ 56 @.@ 11 million in foreign countries , with a total of \$ 122 @.@ 92 million worldwide .

= = = Critical response = = =

Big Fish received positive reviews from film critics . Based on 212 reviews collected by Rotten Tomatoes , 77 % of the critics positively reviewed Big Fish , for an average score of 7 @.@ 2 / 10 . Metacritic calculated an average score of 58 / 100 , based on 43 reviews .

Observations modeled the film after Forrest Gump ( 1994 ) . " Big Fish turns into a wide @-@ eyed Southern Gothic picaresque in which each lunatic twist of a development is more enchanting than the last , " Owen Gleiberman of Entertainment Weekly wrote . " It 's like Forrest Gump without the bogus theme @-@ park politics . " Peter Travers from Rolling Stone magazine praised Burton 's direction , feeling it was a celebration of the art of storytelling and a touching father ? son drama .

Mike Clark of USA Today commented that he was most fascinated by the casting choices . " Equally delightful is the Alison Lohman character 's evolution into an older woman ( Jessica Lange ) . It 's a metamorphosis to equal any in screen history . " Internet reviewer James Berardinelli found the fairy tale approach reminiscent of The Princess Bride ( 1987 ) and the films of Terry Gilliam . " Big Fish is a clever , smart fantasy that targets the child inside every adult , " Berardinelli said , " without insulting the intelligence of either . " Roger Ebert , in a mixed review , wrote " there is no denying that Will has a point : The old man is a blowhard . There is a point at which his stories stop working as entertainment and segue into sadism . " Richard Corliss of Time magazine was disappointed , finding the father @-@ son reconciliation storyline to be over @-@ dramatically cliché . " You recall The Boy Who Cried Wolf ? Edward Bloom is the man who cried fish . " Big Fish was # 85 on Slant Magazine 's best films of the 2000s .

= = = Home media = = =

The Region 1 DVD was released on April 27 , 2004 , and Region 2 was released on June 7 . The DVD features a Burton audio commentary track , seven featurettes and a trivia quiz . A special edition was released on November 1 , 2005 , with a 24 @-@ page hardback book entitled Fairy Tale for a Grown Up . The film was released on Blu @-@ ray Disc on March 20 , 2007 .

= = Accolades = =

Big Fish received four nominations at the 61st Golden Globe Awards ( but no winners ) for Best Motion Picture ( Musical or Comedy ) , Best Supporting Actor ( Finney ) , Best Original Score and Best Original Song ( Pearl Jam 's " Man of the Hour " ) .

At the 57th British Academy Film Awards , the film received seven nominations from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts , including Best Film , Best Direction ( Tim Burton ) , Best Adapted Screenplay ( John August ) , Best Actor in a Supporting Role ( Albert Finney ) , Best Production Design ( Dennis Gassner ) , Best Visual Effects ( Kevin Scott Mack , Seth Maury , Lindsay MacGowan , Paddy Eason ) as well as Best Makeup and Hair ( Jean Ann Black and Paul LeBlanc ) .

Finney received another nomination for Best Actor at the 30th Saturn Awards , where the film was also nominated for Best Fantasy Film .

At the 76th Academy Awards , Danny Elfman was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Score . In 2005 , Elfman received a nomination at the 47th Grammy Awards for the Best Score Soundtrack Album for a Motion Picture .