

Sweetness & Light is the Character of 'The BFG'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 1, 2016 - 10:07am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – One observation...when 'The BFG' was written in 1982 by iconic children's author Roald Dahl, little did he know that acronyms would become the way we talk. When I first saw that title, I wondered what that "F" stood for. It's "Friendly," by the way, which is perfect for this film.

This is a big, sweet and friendly valentine to the source, both the book and Roald Dahl (who also wrote "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," featuring Willy Wonka), and is directed impeccably by Steven Spielberg. It is a bit of a throwback to the old kid-and-giant-films (like 1958's "Tom Thumb") of Spielberg's youth, because while it's done with the latest computer techniques, there is still use of miniatures and perspective techniques to illuminate the gigantic perspective. Mark Rylance portrays the title character, and does it with a wide-eyed wonder that is never saccharin, which overcomes some dead spots in the story.

Sophie (Ruby Barnhill) is an orphan in 1980s London. She's also an insomniac, and witnesses a shadowy figure walking grandly down the avenues near her orphanage. He is the "BFG" (Mark Rylance), or Big Friendly Giant. He is also a dream catcher and deliverer of those captured dreams, which is why he only works at night.



The Title Character (Mark Rylance) and Sophie (Ruby Barnhill) in 'The BFG'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

The BFG discovers Sophie spying on him, so he captures her and takes her back to his home in Giant Land. There it is found out that he is the only friendly one there, the rest like to eat humans. He is also the smallest giant in Giant Land, and is afraid of his fellow dopier big men. He embraces Sophie into his world, and she wants him to fight back using her world. Naturally, Queen Elizabeth (Penelope Wilton) gets involved.

The film takes a while to warm up, and in that time there is a fear that it might have the same dull sheen as Spielberg's previous animation adaptation, "The Adventures of Tintin." It perks up considerably once the action turns to Giant Land, and the capturing of dreams sequence has a beauty that is uncompromising. And once the BFG makes contact with the Queen, the high comedy kicks into gear.

Mark Rylance, who was nominated for an Oscar in Spielberg's previous film "Bridge of Spies," performs the BFG with a wondrous balance, somewhat perplexed but always assured of his mission with dreams (his big ears also hears everything, which is strange). The character loves the "friendly" part of his nickname, and Rylance keeps that persona front and center. Of all the magic generated in the film, and it all starts and is enhanced through Rylance's BFG portrayal.

The interaction with the Queen is extremely charming, and gets to use one of the main jokes in the story, how an upside down bubble drink of Giant Land produces farts rather than burps. Kids love farts, both in reality and as humor, and "The BFG" provides them. The author Dahl must love gas as well, as it is a key element in the "Willy Wonka" film (he wrote the screenplay) and comes out the other end in "The BFG."



The Giant Lends a Hand in 'The BFG'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

Pacing is an issue, as well as "The BFG" being more of a kid oriented story rather than the multi-layered "Willy Wonka," for example. There is obvious padding in the screenplay adaptation by Melissa Mathison, and the first part moves slow. But the film looks gorgeous, as it is imbued with Steven Spielberg's trademark golden tone, combined with the element of the dreams themselves (flashes of laser-like light). The giant-with-a-kid is as old as cinema itself (the effect can be traced back to 1908), and Steven Spielberg pays tribute to that history by making the film look nostalgic and emotional, and less about the showy CGI effects.

I grew up as the tallest person in the class, and I related to the awkwardness of "The BFG." What I have learned in the intervening years is that people find it necessary to look up to the giants, to try and understand what they see up there. Speaking only for myself, it is a world where all are the same height, and it is their achievements which determine their growth...it's becomes about proportion.

"The BFG" opens everywhere on July 1st, in regular and 3D showings. See local listings for 3D theaters and show times. Featuring Mark Rylance, Ruby Barnhill, Penelope Wilton, and the voices of Bill Hader and Jemaine Clement. Screenplay adapted by Melissa Mathison. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Rated "PG"



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