



Epic: The Story God Is Telling

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Life, for most of us, feels like a movie we've arrived to forty minutes late.

Sure, good things happen, sometimes beautiful things. But tragic things happen too. What does it mean? We find ourselves in the middle of a story that is sometimes wonderful, sometimes awful, usually a confusing mixture of both, and we haven't a clue how to make sense of it all. No wonder we keep losing heart.

We need to know the rest of the story.

For when we were born, we were born into the midst of a great story begun before the dawn of time. A story of adventure, of risk and loss, heroism . . . and betrayal. A story where good is warring against evil, danger lurks around every corner, and glorious deeds wait to be done. Think of all those stories you've ever loved—there's a reason they stirred your heart. They've been trying to tell you about the true Epic ever since you were young.

There is a larger story And you have a crucial role to play.

Epic: The Story God Is Telling Details

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Mary says

I love that this little book does what we teach at our school: reminds us that the Bible is one, big true story, and that every believer has a part to play in God's story. It also illustrates another truth emphasized at our school: that every good story in our world contains elements of the BEST story - God's story of creation-fall-redemption. Beyond that, this little gem is chock-full of literary references (and movie references) that I love. It's like the author peeked at my shelf of favorite stories as he wrote the book. I usually associate John Eldridge with a kind of pop-psych mentality which doesn't interest me, but I really liked "Epic".

Mark says

John really has a way with words. His descriptions can make you feel like you are there and a part of it. Biggest drawback was all the movie references that he bounced back and forth between them. A couple of the movies I had never seen and another one I saw partially but couldn't get into. Made it tough for me but might be easier for someone else.

Overall, the story is excellent and very well written. If you have seen the movies talked about it would be beneficial.

Mark Jr. says

I get so tired of books.

That break up paragraphs.

To make them seem.

That.

Much.

More.

Dramatic.

This is a device which should be used sparingly. But I think John Eldredge read the memo backwards, because "normal" paragraphs almost seem to be the exception in his epic (but tiny) book. Epic but tiny. And that's just it: Eldredge wants to make every sentence in this small book breathless (see the last sentence on page 80). His topic justifies that desire, but his treatment of it does not.

And my complaints aren't done. Here's one that seems minor but isn't, given how often it shows up: I just don't think evangelical books need to assume that their readers have watched all of the most popular R-rated movies in the modern canon. (11–12) Many, many illustrations rely on the reader's knowledge of these films.

But references to people's common experience are part of what a popularizer does, and here comes something nice to say: Eldredge knows how to popularize. I don't frown on this ability. It's an essential role needed throughout the body of Christ.

Eldredge also popularizes some truths that ought to be more popular:

- He ties together the personality of God and the way creation reflects not relativity but personality. (21)
- He shows that at the foundation of all reality is a community, "a fellowship of hearts," the Trinity. (22)
- He argues that the very stories we tell show that, deep down, we know there is a malevolent villain in this world. (29)
- He argues that the very stories we tell show that, deep down, we know there is a rescuer coming to put the world right. (61)
- The problem of evil points to the existence of that same wicked being. (39)
- The problem with the world infects us, too; our own sin is heinous and frequent. (57)
- The greatest sin in is to break the Greatest Commandments. (58)
- Creation and humanity in it will one day be restored to what God intended. (87)
- Humanity was created to rule the earth and will one day do so. (94)

And I really liked these lines:

- "Rescuing the human heart is the hardest mission in the world." (62)
- "I mean, really. We have dreamed better dreams [in our popular movies] than God can dream? We have written stories that have a better ending than God has provided? It cannot be." (80)

But my problem with this book is that Eldredge is popularizing some of the wrong ideas.

- Robert Alter is brilliant, but he's wrong to say that Genesis 1:1 should be translated, "When God began to create..." (18)
- I don't think Philip Yancey's point about the relationship between love and free will accounts for all the scriptural data, particularly Romans 9. (51–52)
- The kinds of people Eldredge likes to quote just aren't the most reliable theological voices. Most lean toward the left side of the evangelical spectrum, if not further.
- God is pictured as a wounded lover shackled by my free will from doing what really needs to be done. (64)
- Eldredge says God needs us. (102) Scripture says God is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything" (Act 17:25 ESV).

And worse, Eldredge minimizes or ignores some essential ideas:

- Israel doesn't seem to play a role in this story. We skip straight from Adam to Jesus.
- My personal holiness—and what Christ's death has to do with it—don't seem to play a role in this Epic, either.
- The life and death—and life again—of Jesus don't rise to the top of this Epic like they do in the Bible. I could not give this book to a non-Christian and expect him or her to get the gospel out of it. Even though one of the last lines on the last page of the book is "This is the gospel," I did not see the gospel. I'm left extremely uncertain about what in the world Eldredge is trying to say.

Fundamentally, you won't read this book and come away with greater ability to make sense of your Bible. You'll get some good (truly good) one-liners, you'll collect some good (truly good) Narnia allusions, and you'll be confirmed in your decision to view some movies you shouldn't, but you won't know that the Bible tells one story.

If you want to catch a vision for the sweeping epic that is the story of Scripture, and you want to do it in a

small space, and you want the author to demonstrate that what he's doing actually comes from the Bible, read Vaughan Roberts' God's Big Picture instead.

Justin Ferguson says

"Epic" by John Eldridge is an abstract sized version of his full length novel, "Waking the Dead." What makes "Epic" unique is that he's arranged the book into four acts. Each act takes a part of the hero journey and related the spiritual lessons to many of the famous heroes in literature: Frodo, Maximus, Neo, and others.

While I liked the fleshed out version of Eldridge's view on God's involvement in our heroic journeys, this condensed version was a good refresher but the four acts arrangement made me see Eldridge's ideas in a different light.

As a Christian and a reader sometimes these two worlds meld and I can see some spiritual themes while I'm reading secular works and sometimes the two worlds are separate. I'm ok with that. What Eldridge does is challenge the notion that God cannot be found in the heroic journey of any tale. Instead, he seems to argue that God is the basis for all stories ergo we can find God in these quests if we just look hard enough.

One encouraging peace I enjoyed was in "Act Three". This is in the low point of the journey. Frodo doesn't think he can make it to Mt. Doom. Maximus is stabbed before his final fight. Things look grim for our hero. The same goes with our spiritual journey. We have an adversary, Satan, who is doing his best to make sure we don't complete our quest. We don't often acknowledge the role the devil plays in our "stories" but he's the reason why bad things happen. It's up to us to decide what to do once those bad things happen.

Just like with our heroes, when things seems hopeless sometimes the sheer act of continuing anyways gets us to focus outward instead of inward. We suddenly recognize the people who can help us or the path becomes crystal clear as to what needs to be done. Once we remove ourselves from the equation we allow God to become an active player in our story. This doesn't mean everything will be perfect in the end. Frodo loses a finger and still has his wound from Weathertop. Maximus never makes it out of the arena. Were their journeys in vain? Hardly. Sometimes the journey is the point. And sometimes we won't know the meaning in what's happening until we get where we need to go.

Jessica says

A fairly quick read. I thought that throughout the book John Eldredge did a good job relating the points he was trying to make with the reader, and did a fabulous job in drawing the reader in through modern films and stories.

My favorite point made in this book is how many of us do not like the idea that in heaven all we do is sing worship songs all day, and how the author explains there is so much more to heaven than even our minds can imagine, as we cannot fit God into the box of faulty human minds.

Allyssa Bloomfield says

I bought it a month ago and my jaw dropped. First deception? In the site looked bigger. 100 pages in a tiny

lil book. Second? Its a religious book, not a historic novel as they kinda sell it. Giving it a chance tho. Its really short

Update: Pure crap. If i could put zero stars id do it

Nicolas says

Instead of reading this book watch the Lord of the Rings, Gladiator, and Apollo 13. Then read Donald Miller's Million Miles in a Thousand Years. It will take longer, but you'll be better for it.

Pattib says

We are in the middle of a story that is sometimes wonderful, sometimes awful.

We have a crucial role to play in the larger story.

Justin says

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Tracey says

Have you ever heard someone refer to the Bible “God’s love story”? Sure it sounds good, but what does it really mean? Eldredge does a nice job describing exactly why the Bible IS, in fact, God’s love story: how a God who was already in perfect relationship chose to create people who are free to rebel against Him and through time God continues to love, pursue, and rescue these rebellious people.

However, the full book title is “Epic: The Story God Is Telling and the Role That Is Yours to Play,” and I think Eldredge fails on conveying “the role that is yours to play.” He devotes a paltry six pages at the end of the book to suggest that the reader embrace his/her role in God’s story, without really explaining what that means. If the reader is interested to find out more, they are directed to read “Waking The Dead,” written by, you guessed it, John Eldredge, or go to a website (which I didn’t bother to do.)

The gimmick of this book is that Eldredge pulls together a variety of cultural references (mainly recent films) and uses the scenes from these films to describe the "epic" story of God. To a certain extent, this is an effective literary device, but after a while gets a bit annoying when there is reference after reference to Titanic, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, etc, etc, etc. It felt almost as if Eldredge has elevated these films to be somehow "Christian." I do understand that he intends to use these scenes as archetypes to demonstrate that there is in every person some kind of innate longing to be a part of the story of God. But I did particularly bristle at the fact that he uses scenes from "Titanic" and "Lord of The Rings" (pp 48, 70) to describe God's wooing and rescue of humankind, when the characters are actually engaging in sexual sin and not according to God's standard of "not even a hint of sexual immorality" (Eph 5:3).

I felt quite engaged upon reading the first half of this book, but the second half fell flat. Overall, the impression I am left with a day after reading this book is one that is quite forgettable.

Walt Walkowski says

I enjoyed this book. Nice that it's short. Not sure I entirely agree that the Gospel is the entire story Eldredge points to, but I get his point. Also, I don't think I'm his target audience, but it was a decent read anyway.

Ethan Pollard says

Epic is "the story God is trying to tell us". I personally am a big fan of John's writings because they say a lot to me, and where I have been in life. That being said, if your looking for deep bible based things, then this is not the place to look. Eldridge compares the story that God created for us to many popular movies of heroism and altruistic behaviors among people that we hold in high regard. He claims this is because the story of God is in every person, and it gets expressed in things like these famous movies (Brave Heart, Gladiator, etc..). I feel that he may be on to a really neat perspective on why those types of films hit home emotionally with so many people, but this is a book based mainly on experiences and personally views so dont look for anything else in it. All in all, a fun and interesting read.

Ron says

Something of a ripoff. Is excerpts from previous works, all of which I'd read. Not so identified. Disappointed.

Joel Mitchell says

John Eldredge launches his fresh look at Gospel with this quote: "I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into" (J. R. R. Tolkien, LOTR). Christianity is not a series of rules and church attendance, but the opportunity to participate in "the story God is telling."

Eldredge draws frequent parallels with various books and movies to show that our best loved stories reflect God's great true story because "eternity is written in our hearts." This short book is both thought-provoking and beautiful.

J.J. Richardson says

Great for men.
