THE FISHERMAN'S DREAM

The lake never gives. It lends.

A FEATURE FILM · SSESE ISLANDS, PRESENT DAY



When the lake starts filling a young fisherman's nets while eleven boats come home empty, he takes everything it gives, until it comes to collect his dead father's debt from the person he loves most.

At dawn on a failing landing site on Bugala island, eleven boats come home empty. The twelfth comes in low with Nile perch. It belongs to KITUMBA, twenty-four, who pays his debts early in front of witnesses and tells NAMUGGA, who weighs the catch in a school exercise book, about the iron-roofed house he will build. His brother SSEMWANGA, twelve, pushes the wheelbarrow and counts the weeks until he is old enough for the boat. Their father left the island nine years ago and never came back.

One evening, alone past the point where the water turns from brown to black, Kitumba hears the island go silent. A woman stands waist deep where the lake is thirty metres down, holds his eye, and sinks without breaking the surface. His net comes up too heavy to count. Soon he stops laying nets at all: he sits on the black water and the hull fills by itself. In the bar he tells the whole island, "The lake knows my name."

KAGGWA, who mends nets on his drowned son's overturned boat, steps into his path. "You did not catch those. My son did not catch his." In her mother's old exercise books Namugga finds the son's column: five months of rising weights, then nothing. The island turns away from Kitumba, and when Ssemwanga comes down the beach bloodied by the rumours, Kitumba hits him. NNALWOGA, who keeps the tree on the islet, says that Kitumba's father brought the last one.

At first light Namugga finds Kitumba on the rocks above a slow turning of the water and brings him down with the only lie she has ever told him: "Ssemwanga is at the boat." He stops going out. He raises the frame of the house with his brother, and Namugga writes his name back into her book. Then his honest net, set beside the fleet, brings up his father's rubber boot.

Frightened, he books Ssemwanga on the morning ferry to their aunt, and is short of the fare. He goes past the point one more time while the boy watches his brother's hand fill with the lake's money, then drinks it away and sleeps across the doorway. Before dawn Ssemwanga takes an old canoe out to the black water and lays a line, saying his brother's words. They find the canoe against the reeds, empty, and on the second morning the boy on the shore of the islet.

After the burial Kitumba waits on the water to answer for it, and nothing comes. Under the fig tree Nnalwoga tells him his father's account never closed; it waited, then gave to the son. She will not name the price. He sets his net with the twelve boats, buries his father's boot beside his mother and his brother, and at the dawn haul the woman comes alongside closer than ever, the water turning, Namugga's lamp lit on the shore. One hand over the side would fill the boat. He hauls his own net instead, and it comes up empty.

The fleet comes in loud and full. His boat comes in high and dry. He stands in front of Namugga with nothing on the scale, and she writes his name in the book with a dash beside it, under eleven weights.

FORMAT	Feature · 92 pages · present day
GENRE	Folk horror
TERRITORY	Bugala island, Ssese Islands, Lake Victoria, Uganda
LANGUAGE	English
BUDGET	Estimated $1.8M to $2.5M
COMPARABLES	The Babadook · First Cow · Pan's Labyrinth

WHY NOW

The fish of Lake Victoria are going, and every family on the shore counts what the water gives. The only story anyone tells is about the boat that comes in full. THE FISHERMAN'S DREAM builds its fear from silence and debt, never names what is in the water, and plays as a restrained horror film rooted in a real Ugandan fishing community.

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