



# Stranger Than Fiction

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V-1; L- 3; S/N-3. Running time: 1 hour 53 min.

Harold follows the same exact routine each day. (c) 2006 Columbia Pictures

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

Mark 10:15

But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who moulds it, 'Why have you made me like this?' 21Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?

Romans 9:20-21

It is such a pleasure to report on a fantasy that leads one to think about the film's scenes after the credits and closing song have faded away. Will Ferrell plays Harold Crick, an IRS agent who keeps hearing a woman's voice narrate what he is doing. He is a precise man, brushing his teeth an exact amount of times up and down and back and forth, measuring exactly how many steps it is between his apartment and the bus stop. The voice describes even his thoughts as well as his actions, so Harold, after making sure that his toothbrush is not somehow "broadcasting" the voice, consults a psychiatrist and then, convinced that the voice really is that of an author, and worst of all, one who is trying to figure out how to kill him off, he seeks help from literary expert Jules Hilbert (Dustin Hoffman).

Prof Hilbert puts Harold through some tests to see what genre his story belongs to, and deciding that it must be comedy, he comes up with a list of possible authors that Harold should look into. He

tells Harold that he must make his life into a comedy instead of his present lifestyle of living alone. In the meantime Harold is sent to audit Ana Pascal (Maggie Gyllenhaal), a rebellious tattooed owner of a cookie shop who has withheld the amount of taxes she owes which she figures goes for war expenses.

The more she insults Harold, the more he is attracted to her, and when she finally takes pity on his awkward loneliness by baking him a special batch of her cookies, he finds that for the first time he has something he is passionate about. He even goes and fulfills a boyhood dream, that of owning and learning to play the guitar.

But there is that matter of death hovering over him. It turns out that Prof. Hilbert had it all wrong— Harold's story is to be a tragedy, not a comedy. Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson), once a famous author, has had writer's block, and never more so than now as she struggles to finish what could be her masterpiece. Her concerned publisher has even sent Penny Escher (Queen Latifah) to stay with her and make sure that she keeps working on the novel until it is finished. Will Harold be able to find the author and convince her that should live?

Will Farrell is perfect as the amiable ordinary guy who has always done what he is told or expected to do. In the end he is faced with a dilemma, one like that which Hamlet might have faced were he given a choice of whether to rearrange the play named after him so that he would have lived, thus spoiling a masterpiece, or to submit to it's authors intention and die.

How rare, to find a pensive film about the responsibilities we have to art. "You have to die. It's a masterpiece," Prof. Hilbert declares when he reads a copy of Karen's book manuscript. If Karen Eiffel's novel would be a masterpiece with Harold's death, does he have a right to live? On the other hand, does she have the right to kill him for her work if he is "real"?

For Reflection/Discussion

Warning, the latter questions might contain spoilers>

- 1) How would you describe Harold Crick? More machine than human? Beatles' fans might want to recall their song "Nowhere Man"—how is this a good description of Harold?
- 2) Did you have any difficulty in accepting the fantasy element, that a "made-up" character could be real and alive? How is Karen Eiffel a bit like God (and indeed, all writers of fiction)?
- 3) How does Ana Pascal become an agent of grace for him? What does she have that Harold lacks?
- 4) How is his buying the guitar symbolic of his becoming "like a child"?
- 5) "This is a masterpiece. Harold, you have to die," Prof. Hilbert pronounces after reading Karen Eiffel's manuscript that Harold has obtained. What do you think of Harold's reaction? How is he willing to take up the cross?
- 6) What do you think of what Karen Eiffel does when Harold comes to her? How is she also willing to take up the cross? What do you think of the compromised ending?

A freed-up Harold pursues his dream to play the guitar. (c) 2006 Columbia Pictures