

# Ferrell's funny in 'Fiction'

*Stranger than Fiction makes for a refreshing comedy*

By Jathan Fink  
The News Record

In the new Will Ferrell vehicle, *Stranger than Fiction*, an ordinary man comes to appreciate the beauty in the normal incidents of everyday living. Although the film seeks to teach a rather familiar lesson, Ferrell's character comes to this newfound understanding of his life and the people in it in a most unusual way.

Harold Crick, (Ferrell), is an auditor for the Internal Revenue Service. In the beginning, Harold is a one-dimensional character who literally has only one friend.

Harold complacently goes through the motions of his life and has only numbers to occupy his thoughts as he counts everything from the number of brushstrokes it takes to clean his teeth to the amount of steps it takes to get to the bus stop on his way to work.

And yet, even as he embraces his



Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures  
Will Ferrell plays a troubled IRS auditor in the new comedy, *Stranger than Fiction*

obsessive-compulsive disorder, Harold is thrown off balance when he begins to hear a woman's voice narrate his life.

Karen Eiffel, played by Emma Thompson, is an almost-forgotten novelist who is working on her latest effort in a series of tragic storylines. As she strug-

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gles to write what will be her best book, she is unaware that with every keystroke she makes on her old electric typewriter, she inexplicably manipulates the threads of Harold's fate.

Frustrated with Karen's accurate and persistent narrative, Harold is amusing as he shouts angrily to the heavens. So when he hears the narrator announce his

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looming death, his anxiety level escalates at light speed.

In an effort to explain the unseen voice he hears, Harold soon finds himself in the office of an unconventional English literature professor, Dr. Jules Hilbert, played by Dustin Hoffman.

But Harold doesn't receive solace from Hilbert's explanation of the voice.

Rather, he finds comfort in the form of an insolent and liberal baker, Ana Pascal, whom Harold is sent to audit. Pascal, played by Maggie Gyllenhaal, helps Harold come out of his shell and assists him

in seeing the beauty in the mundane.

Yet even as a romance blooms between the unlikely pair, Harold must still find out how to stop his untimely demise.

Best known for his roles in films like *Old School*, *Elf* and *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, Ferrell initially culled out a career for himself as a slapstick comic. As Harold Crick, Ferrell seizes the opportunity to further develop his acting chops as he takes on a serious and complex role. With *Stranger than Fiction*, Ferrell proves that he has come a long way from his beginnings as the *Saturday Night Live* comic and that he has the capacity for meatier fare.

Thompson has worked as a character actress in films like *Nanny McPhee* and the Harry Potter franchise, but here she

returns to give us a dramatic performance in the tragic role of author Karen Eiffel.

Heartbreaking in her perplexity, Thompson proves that she still has the ability to handle a character with the deft grace and sophistication that has become her trademark.

Gyllenhaal, recently seen in the film *World Trade Center*, rises to the occasion and gives an enchanting performance as Ana.

Here, Gyllenhaal's sweetness shines through in her understated reading of Ana, a woman who is both tenacious and compassionate.

The entire cast, which also includes Queen Latifah, brilliantly work together to create a lovely film that effectively teaches a life lesson that is truly stranger than fiction.