

Stranger than Fiction

"This is a story about a man named Harold Crick... and his wristwatch. Harold Crick was a man of infinite numbers, endless calculations and remarkably few words. And his wristwatch said even less."

-- The Narrator

After ten years of painstaking work, novelist Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson) is nearing completion on her latest, and potentially finest, book. Her only remaining challenge is to figure out how to kill off her main character, Harold Crick. Little does she know that Harold Crick (Will Ferrell) is inexplicably alive-and-well in the real world, and suddenly aware of her words. Fiction and reality collide when the bewildered and hilariously resistant Harold hears what she has in mind and realizes he must find a way to change her (and his) ending. Columbia Pictures and Mandate Pictures' *STRANGER THAN FICTION* is a heartfelt comedy about taking the life you have and making it the one you've always wanted.

SYNOPSIS

One morning, a seemingly average and generally solitary IRS agent named

Harold Crick begins to hear a female voice narrating his every action, thought and feeling in alarmingly precise detail. Harold's carefully controlled life is turned upside down by this narration only he can hear, and when the voice declares that Harold Crick is facing imminent death, he realizes he must find out who is writing his story and persuade her to change the ending.

The voice in Harold's head turns out to be the once celebrated, but now nearly forgotten, novelist Karen "Kay" Eiffel (Emma Thompson), who is struggling to find an ending for what might be her best book. Her only remaining challenge is to figure out a way to kill her main character, but little does she know that Harold Crick is alive and well and inexplicably aware of her words and her plans for him. To make matters worse, Kay's publisher has dispatched a hard-nosed "assistant," Penny Escher (Queen Latifah), to force Kay to finish her novel and finish off Harold Crick.

Desperate to take control of his destiny and avoid an untimely demise, Harold seeks help from a literary theorist named Jules Hilbert (Dustin Hoffman), who suggests that Harold might be able to change his fate by turning his story from a tragedy into a comedy. Professor Hilbert suggests that Harold try to follow one of comedy's most elemental formulas: a love story between two people who hate each other. His suggestion leads Harold to initiate an unlikely romance with a free-spirited baker named Ana Pascal (Maggie Gyllenhaal).

As Harold experiences true love and true life for the first time, he becomes convinced that he has escaped his fate, as his story seems to be taking on all the trappings of a comedy in which he will not, and cannot, die. But Harold is unaware that in a Karen Eiffel tragedy, the lead characters always die at exactly the moment when they have the most to live for. Harold and Kay find themselves in unexplored territory as each must weigh the value of a single human existence against what might just be an immortal work of art: a novel about life and death — and taxes.

Columbia Pictures and Mandate Pictures Present A Three Strange Angels Production *STRANGER THAN FICTION* starring Will Ferrell, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Dustin Hoffman, Queen Latifah and Emma Thompson. The film is directed by Marc Forster (*FINDING NEVERLAND, MONSTER'S BALL*) and written by Zach Helm (*MR. MAGORIUM'S WONDER EMPORIUM*). The producer is Lindsay Doran (*SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, NANNY MCPHEE*). The executive producers are Nathan Kahane (*THE GRUDGE, THE GRUDGE 2*), Joe Drake, (*LORDS OF DOGTOWN, THE GRUDGE*) and Eric Kopeloff (*STAY, MONSTER'S BALL*). The director of photography is Roberto Schaefer, ASC (*FINDING NEVERLAND, MONSTER'S BALL*). The production designer is Kevin Thompson (*54, FLIRTING WITH DISASTER*). The editor is Matt Chessé, A.C.E. (*FINDING NEVERLAND, MONSTER'S BALL*). The costume designer is Frank Fleming (*The WOODSMAN, MONSTER'S BALL*). The music is by Britt Daniel and Brian Reitzell. The music supervisor is Brian Reitzell.

STRANGER THAN FICTION has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for Some Disturbing Images, Sexuality, Brief Language and Nudity.

STRANGER THAN FICTION will be released by Columbia Pictures on November 10, 2006.

**WRITING A STORY ABOUT WRITING A STORY:
THE GENESIS OF STRANGER THAN FICTION**

*"Truth is stranger than Fiction... because
Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't."*
-- Mark Twain

"Life is the crummiest book I ever read."
--Lyric from "Stranger Than Fiction"
by Bad Religion

"It is written!" declares many a spiritual text, and more than one faith proposes that the day of a person's death has been written in stone long before he or she is born. But what if there was an actual writer doing the writing? Not an all-

knowing god-like writer with a clay tablet, but a blocked, irascible, self-destructive writer with a battered IBM Selectric?

It was this thought-provoking comedic premise, combined with the story's deeply felt emotions, that attracted director Marc Forster to newcomer Zach Helm's screenplay. While comedy may seem to be a departure for Forster, exploring the blurry lines between truth and illusion has long been at the core of his work. This is particularly true in the Academy Award®-nominated *FINDING NEVERLAND*, Forster's poignant exploration of "Peter Pan" author J.M. Barrie's magical imagination. What he immediately loved about *STRANGER THAN FICTION* was that, in the midst of Harold Crick's unusual and unlikely predicament, is a hilarious yet deeply moving inquiry into how we shape our realities. "I saw *STRANGER THAN FICTION* as the story of a man who's been asleep for most of his life and suddenly wakes up and realizes he has very little time left and that he has to do something we all would like to do in some way – change our story," says Forster. "I thought it was a fantastic script, a very funny comedy with heart and soul."

"I'd always wanted to try something comedic, but I also try to make films that are not just entertaining, but also emotional and inspiring," he continues. "I was fascinated by *STRANGER THAN FICTION* because I think we all have a narrator in our lives. We all have inner voices in our heads that tell us what to do and how to be – and what Harold Crick discovers in the midst of these incredible events is how to escape all that and really begin to enjoy every second of his existence."

Forster's long-time producing partner Eric Kopeloff, who first worked with the director on *MONSTER'S BALL*, was equally enthralled by Helm's script. "Marc has always made such interesting choices and this film was a wonderful story that he had never told before," he says. "Creatively, he's always looking for a fresh road to travel and *STRANGER THAN FICTION* was definitely that."

The inspiration for *STRANGER THAN FICTION* began in 2001, when the then 26-year-old writer Zach Helm flashed upon the idea of a man who finds himself accompanied day and night by a relentless narrator only he can hear. Helm brought the idea to producer Lindsay Doran, with whom he was already collaborating on another project, and as they talked about the best direction for the story to take, Helm decided the narrator should say that the man is about to die.

“I wanted to tell the story of a man who found his life just before he lost it,” recalls Helm. “There’s something very poetic in the understanding of one’s place in the world and the meaning of one’s life, but it’s far more dramatic when such understanding occurs only days before that life ends.”

As Helm began to imagine the various characters and elements of Harold Crick’s world, it became clear that they would all be deeply intertwined. “From Kay to Professor Hilbert to Penny to Ana to the wristwatch, each one of the characters ends up doing little things to help them save one another,” observes Helm. “There’s an underlying theme that the people and things we take most for granted are often the ones that make life worth living and actually keep us alive.”

Producer Doran was immediately intrigued by what she and Helm then referred to as “The Narrator Project.” Drawn to fantastical stories – her producing credits include the acclaimed *DEAD AGAIN* and *NANNY MCPHEE*, and as a studio executive she supervised *GHOST*, *PET SEMATARY* and other tales of love and death – Doran helped Helm develop his concept into a tightly structured comedic narrative.

Comments Doran: “I think that in any fantasy you have to make a promise to the audience that if they’ll just believe in this one impossible thing, everything else will be very real and true. And I thought we had to make the story feel as much

as possible like a thriller. In the end, this is a story about a man trying to prevent his own murder, and Zach and I both wanted it to have that kind of suspense.”

Through a series of spirited conversations between Helm and Doran, the details of Harold Crick’s fantastical story began to unfold. “The process was a lot of fun because it let Zach’s extraordinary imagination run wild,” recalls Doran. “I would ask him questions such as ‘What would happen if ...’ or ‘Would it be more real if...’ and then Zach would write a beautiful scene or a hilarious line to address the question.”

Says Helm: “Having Lindsay as my muse was just great. She’s very specific and very smart and she likes things to be as funny and as human as possible — so everything worked towards those two directions.”

A devotee of riddles and puzzles, Helm especially enjoyed lining the script with subtle clues and twists. Even the street names, business names, and the characters’ last names are significant – Crick, Pascal, Eiffel, Escher, Baneker, Kronecker, Cayly, etc. are all mathematicians who focused on the innate order of things. There is even a playful salute to mathematician David Hilbert and the 23 questions he put forth at the International Congress of Mathematicians of 1900.

Helm views details such as these to be a vital part of his writing process, a process that he believes is consistent with a larger Post-Modern movement. “From Pirandello, to Brecht, to Wilder, to Stoppard, to Woody Allen to Wes Anderson, we can see the progression of a contemporary, self-aware, reality-bending and audience-involving wave in dramatic literature,” says Helm. “I love to see Homer Simpson reacting to his creator, Matt Groenig, or the cast of ‘Urinetown’ complaining from the stage about their own title. *Stranger Than Fiction* is simply my abstraction of it — to take a story-telling device and to make it, in fact, the story. It’s great that we can invite the audience to emotionally participate, not only in the story being written, but in how the story is being

written. And, aside from all of the highfalutin' theory, it always leads to some great jokes."

As Helm proceeded, he finally had to confront the biggest question of all: Was Harold Crick's story ultimately tragic or hopeful? "That's the big crux, not only for Harold Crick, but for everybody," admits Helm. "Of course, we all have to die eventually, but the real question is whether you perceive your life in the end as mostly tragic or mostly filled with love and joy ... and comedy."

Doran was thrilled with Helm's solution. "One of the things I really like about Zach's writing is his rare ability to mix strong jokes with equally strong emotions," she says. "Out of some of the film's deepest questions come some of its funniest moments, and the final sequence is a beautiful tribute to the little things in life that are, in the end, our salvation."

When the screenplay was completed, word about it quickly began to spread around Hollywood. Although Doran had originally intended to bring the script quietly to a few choice directors, her phone was suddenly ringing off the hook. The response was extremely enthusiastic all around – but two executives began pursuing Doran with dogged tenacity: Joe Drake and Nathan Kahane of Mandate Pictures.

"They wouldn't take no for an answer," recalls Doran. "At first it was amusing. Then it was annoying. Then it was intriguing. And then it was a deal. They really listened to our ideas and they truly understood that you can't ever compromise the intelligence of this kind of material just for the entertainment value. Or vice versa."

The deal was sealed when director Marc Forster came onboard. Although many prominent directors had expressed interest, once the producers saw Forster's then-unreleased *FINDING NEVERLAND*, they knew they'd found the right

sensibility to bring Harold Crick's comic fable to life. "I would say within the first ten minutes of watching FINDING NEVERLAND, I felt very, very strongly that Marc should direct this movie," Doran recalls. "I'm not exaggerating. I felt such a sense of enchantment watching that film. And even though the tone is very different from *STRANGER THAN FICTION*, I was convinced that Marc had an understanding of that magical side of life which was the key to transforming Zach's script to the screen."

"Marc's take on the film couldn't have been more exciting," continues Doran. "His vision accommodated all the elements of the script — the comedy, the drama, the love story, the spiritual journey of Harold Crick — as well as the look and even the sound of the various scenes. So many directors were focused on just one aspect of the film; Marc was focused on them all."

**ONE CHARACTER IN SEARCH OF HIS AUTHOR:
WILL FERRELL MEETS HAROLD CRICK**

"It's not schizophrenia...It's just a voice in my head. I mean the voice isn't telling me to do anything, it's telling me what I've already done. Accurately, and with a better vocabulary."

-- Harold Crick

Harold Crick is the foundation on which the entire structure of *STRANGER THAN FICTION* is built, and that rare comedic character whose story involves an almost spiritual quest. So, from the beginning, the filmmakers of *STRANGER THAN FICTION* knew that the casting of Harold Crick was of paramount importance to the success of the film. Harold is the kind of anonymous guy you might pass on the street without noticing, but underneath his almost drab exterior is a soul bursting with emotional colors and desires and dreams that he has never allowed himself to face – and quite likely never would have faced were it not for the strange sequence of events that befall him.

Enter Will Ferrell, the former “Saturday Night Live” star who has transformed himself into a top-flight comedic leading man in such motion pictures as *ELF*, *OLD SCHOOL*, *ANCHORMAN: THE LEGEND OF RON BURGUNDY* and *TALLADEGA NIGHTS: THE BALLAD OF RICKY BOBBY*. Ferrell had never tackled anything remotely like *STRANGER THAN FICTION* before, but after the filmmakers met with him, they couldn’t imagine anyone else in the role.

“When I met Will Ferrell, I sensed a man who was very humble, very smart, very down-to-earth and very introverted – and I instantly knew he was Harold Crick,” says Forster. “I felt very lucky because Will brought the very same vision of Harold I had in my head fully to life. He has a natural gift that allows him to do things in this film that no one has seen him do before — subtle comedy and equally subtle drama. He approached the role soulfully and yet made Harold feel like a real human being, not just a screen character. I don’t believe there is anyone who could have brought all those nuances to the role.”

Adds Doran: “You had to have an actor in this role you’d really believe as an IRS agent, a charismatic actor who didn’t feel too much like a glamorous movie star. What’s wonderful about Will is that he’s so completely believable in this world. In spite of all the extroversion we’ve seen in his other films, he really is this shy, self-effacing character, and he makes Harold so funny and so moving.”

Though Ferrell’s life would seem to have little in common with the regimented, colorless life of a tax auditor, the actor says he felt an immediate sense of kinship to Harold Crick. “There is something about Harold’s quiet solitude and the way he has to step outside of that to really live his life for the first time that completely resonated with me, because I have that kind of quiet side, too, and I need that kind of impetus to step out of it.”

Also, Ferrell admits, he relished the challenge of transforming himself into the mild-mannered Harold Crick. “Almost everything I’ve done so far has been out-

and-out straight comedy. This was a big change, not to mention that it's one of the best scripts I'd ever read. It examines big themes with beautiful touches of humanity and humor."

To achieve the out-of-the-ordinary experience of being Harold Crick, Ferrell traced the evolution of the feelings the character might undergo upon discovering that he is "being followed by a woman's voice" – from comic shock to deep despair to a determination to try to change his fate. "I think, at the start, Harold is generally freaked out by the whole thing," laughs Ferrell. "He's worried, upset and doesn't know what to think, because he's not sure if what's happening to him is real or not. His reactions are typical of those most of us would have. The comedy comes from his attempts to maintain his composure so no one thinks he's crazy."

On set, Ferrell was able to *literally* re-create the experience of having a voice in his head because Emma Thompson had pre-recorded her narration, which was then played to Ferrell through an ear-piece during his scenes. "Emma has such a great voice," he remarks. "It was great fun to have her in my head, and also weird for all the right reasons."

Ferrell also worked diligently on his character's transformation while trying to keep Harold's mild-mannered essence intact. "Harold starts out with all these routines. He takes a 45.7-minute lunch break and a 4.3-minute coffee break and he's always counting everything because that's his way of maintaining control over his life," the actor observes. "Then, that's all taken away from him when he realizes someone else has seized control. But after Harold has lost that control, some interesting things begin to happen to him. Once Harold figures out that there might be no going back and no escaping, he starts to really live his life and explore everything he had taken for granted or didn't even know existed. It changes everything and everyone around him – but underneath he's still Harold."

The casting of Ferrell was the catalyst that brought all the other elements of *STRANGER THAN FICTION* together. “He was the key piece of the puzzle, and once we cast him, everything else fell into place,” observes executive producer Kopeloff.

**ONE AUTHOR IN SEARCH OF A MEANS TO KILL HER CHARACTER:
EMMA THOMPSON AS NOVELIST KAREN “KAY” EIFFEL**

*“Harold suddenly found himself beleaguered
and exasperated outside the bakery...
cursing the heavens in futility.”*

-- Narrator

*“No I'm not! I'm cursing you, you stupid voice!
So shut up and leave me alone!!!”*

-- Harold Crick

The voice of Karen “Kay” Eiffel nearly drives Harold crazy as it relentlessly chronicles his every thought and move. But Karen Eiffel, as it turns out, is not just a comedic device. She is a fully fleshed-out character, an obsessive, self-destructive artist who is desperately trying to find an ending for a book that’s taken ten grueling years to write.

It was Doran who first envisioned Emma Thompson in the role. Having collaborated with Thompson over 15 years on three previous films – *DEAD AGAIN*, *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* and *NANNY MCPHEE* – Doran couldn’t help but hear Thompson’s unmistakable voice whenever she read Kay’s lines. She also suspected the actress would relate to Kay since Thompson is also an acclaimed writer (she is the only person to ever win Oscars® for both acting and writing), as well as an adroit comedic performer.

“Emma is one of the great actresses of our generation,” says Forster of the decision to offer Thompson the part of Kay. “She’s a sensitive and brilliant

actress, and she's also a very intelligent woman. I knew she would bring not only her skill as an actress to the part, but also that intelligence."

Thompson easily sums up why she was attracted to *STRANGER THAN FICTION*. "It was the best script I'd read in years and years," she states. "It was one of those rare instances where you think, 'Yes, absolutely, I'll do anything to serve this writing.' The way in which Zach Helm created a fictional reality and a real fiction — going both ways at once — is one of the most remarkable things I've encountered. There's nothing better than a combination of serious human inquiry and good gags."

"Emma said yes to the part on page 22," laughs Doran. "I had to force her to finish the script before I called Marc and Zach to let them know she'd agreed. But she finished it and she just kept loving it more and more."

Thompson knew she would enjoy embodying the author's eccentricities. "Kay is borderline bonkers," she laughs. "She has this bizarre and disgusting habit of putting out her cigarettes with a saliva-moistened tissue. She can't figure out how to kill her main character so she spends her days imagining all manner of death and destruction. You could say we meet her right at the end of her tether."

But Kay is in for an even bigger crisis when she learns that the fictional character she has been writing is somehow also a real person. "Suddenly, Kay's fictional world becomes reality," says Thompson. "And the big question for her is whether she's going to sacrifice her art and her creative soul for this very real man."

For Forster, Thompson was the perfect person to evoke that miraculous yet unsettling tension that arises at the moment when the narrator meets the character over whom she has the power of life and death. "What Emma brought to that sequence and to the film as a whole was beyond even my greatest expectations," he says.

The appreciation between actress and director was mutual. "Marc is a true filmmaker with a very, very specific vision," says Thompson. "And he's a bit like me in the sense that I think we both like the subtleties rather than anything too big. So we tend to communicate almost telepathically. It's a great treat."

THE MAN OF NUMBERS MEETS THE MAN OF WORDS:
DUSTIN HOFFMAN AS PROFESSOR JULES HILBERT

*"I'm an expert in literature and I gotta tell you,
thus far there's not a single literary thing about you."*
-- Professor Hilbert

Harold Crick's search for answers begins in a psychiatrist's office, but when that doesn't get him anywhere, he seeks emergency advice from the brilliant and eccentric English professor, Jules Hilbert. Professor Hilbert, who describes himself as "an expert in literature theory," becomes Harold's guide in the classic tradition of the archetypal figures who guide literary heroes on their epic journeys. As he attempts to understand and change Harold's story, the professor pushes Harold towards some new and often unsettling experiences: a rule-breaking romance with a woman he is auditing, an admission of a secret dream to play the guitar, and perhaps most terrifying of all, a day off from work. And it is Professor Hilbert who urges Harold to take advantage of his tragic situation by learning to savor his life for the first time.

Professor Hilbert is one of *STRANGER THAN FICTION'S* most colorful, comical and emotionally complex characters, and Forster immediately knew the actor he wanted to play the part — Dustin Hoffman, the two-time Oscar®-winning veteran star who had played a small but key role in Forster's *FINDING NEVERLAND*. "I had fallen in love with Dustin then and wanted to continue the romance," laughs the director. "He's a wonderful collaborator and he has such incredible passion. As I read the part of Professor Hilbert, I thought, 'Oh, that's Dustin.'"

Doran was in complete agreement. “There aren’t that many actors whom you could believe as somebody who knows that much about literature and even fewer who can be both so smart and so funny at the same time,” she says. “Dustin brings all his intelligence to the part, but never at the expense of the humor or the sensitivity. Hilbert is a hilarious character, but like Harold, he has a secret longing that is uncovered by the end of the story.”

Hoffman responded viscerally to the screenplay. “It’s rare to find a script that has even half the weight that this one has,” he says. “When I read it, I was completely overcome with emotion.”

Once on set, he was equally moved by Ferrell’s performance. “I was enchanted by Will because I had been expecting someone with those qualities that the public has fallen in love with,” Hoffman continues. “Instead, I found him to be rather shy, introverted and quiet. He is very right for this role, because Harold Crick seems to be guileless, and just in the short time I’ve known Will, he seems guileless to me. He’s the only person that I’ve met in recent years, over the age of 10, who still says ‘Gosh’ a lot.”

Says Ferrell of the experience of working with Hoffman: “I didn’t want those weeks to end. To work with someone you admire as much as Dustin Hoffman and to have him be so friendly and warm and giving as an actor was just more fun than anyone should be allowed to have at work.”

Regarding the question Harold wants Professor Hilbert to answer – Is life a tragedy or a comedy? – Hoffman has his own take. “I think if you had to define life, you might say that it’s a very serious comedy,” he summarizes, “and that’s what this film is as well.”

**THE ANARCHIST BAKER MEETS THE IMPERIALIST SWINE:
MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL AS TAX EVADER ANA PASCAL**

*“Anarchists have a group? They assemble?
Doesn’t that completely defeat the purpose?”*
-- Ana Pascal

An unexpected happenstance that arises in Harold’s quest to change his life story is his first encounter with true love. A dedicated loner since a failed relationship with a co-worker (an auditor who left him for an actuary), Harold doesn’t expect to connect with anyone, let alone an anarchist tax evader. But that’s exactly what happens when he encounters an unusual bakery owner named Ana Pascal.

Ana is a vivacious, rebellious and completely compelling character – which is why the filmmakers turned to Maggie Gyllenhaal to play her. When Forster and Doran met with her, there was simply no doubt she was the embodiment of Ana Pascal.

“She was just ideal,” Forster remembers. “The most important quality for Ana had to be her deep passion, and Maggie has that in her soul. She’s able to give of herself on screen in a way few actresses can.”

“When we met with Maggie, she read the scene in which Ana talks about why she became a baker, and by the time she was through, we were all actually hungry,” recalls Doran. “The way she talked about the almond glaze and the zesty peach icing, we were completely entranced, the same way we knew Harold would be.”

Gyllenhaal is always drawn to iconoclastic characters, but she notes that Ana was unlike any other character she’d previously tackled. “She felt like more of an adult woman than anyone else I’ve played on screen before,” she says. “Yet

she's radical and alive in the way a very youthful person would be. I was drawn to that. Ana's provocative, but she's not just a brash punk rocker. She's wilier than that, and more graceful, and I found that extremely appealing."

When it came to her onscreen relationship with Ferrell, Gyllenhaal enjoyed the process of moving it along from barbed banter to true romance. "At first Ana hates Harold and that was a lot of fun to play with," she says. "But what was so interesting is that they start with something really closed-off and fueled by anger and wind up with something truly lovely. I think Ana spots a little tendril of life in Harold and, ultimately, that's why she falls for him."

Working with Ferrell was especially rewarding for Gyllenhaal. "Will was constantly surprising me," she comments. "He would just do little things that would take me off my track, which is exactly what you want when you're acting. There's a lot of life to him and I found that intoxicating."

A SPY IN THE HOUSE OF EIFFEL:
QUEEN LATIFAH AS PENNY ESCHER

*"I do not like loud music. I do not abide narcotics.
And I will gladly and quietly help you kill Harold Crick."*

-- Penny Escher

In casting Penny Escher, the "author's assistant" dispatched to make sure Karen Eiffel finishes her book, the filmmakers made an unexpected choice — music-star-turned-leading-actress Queen Latifah. Forster was looking for someone who would be the polar opposite of Emma Thompson's character, a strong, healthy, grounded, no-nonsense woman who must try to impose discipline on the fiercely unreceptive author.

"Emma Thompson and Queen Latifah come from two completely different worlds," says Forster, "Emma from the British stage and Queen Latifah from popular music. And I thought having them play opposite one another would make for an interesting alter-ego dynamic."

Queen Latifah was drawn in not only by the story and the director, but also by the stellar cast. “The chance to work with Emma Thompson, Will Ferrell and Dustin Hoffman, all in one movie, really excited me,” she says. She also got a kick out of the role of Penny, a kind of publisher’s “fixer,” who will use any means necessary to make sure an author finishes a long-stalled book. “Penny’s the person who comes in when a writer’s life has gotten out-of-control and has become a total mess,” she explains. “Her approach has to be very determined and very firm because these authors can often be quite crazy.”

Penny at first assumes that Kay will be just one more neurotic writer she has to bring into line, but there’s something about Kay’s odd encounter with her main character that affects Penny and ultimately changes her. “When Penny starts out, she just wants to get the job done, to kill off this Harold Crick and get the novel finished,” says Latifah. “But I think Kay touches Penny in a way she’s not used to. Penny starts to care about Kay, and I think she realizes that what Kay really needs is to learn how to care about herself again, which in turn makes her care more about the lives of her characters.”

Latifah especially enjoyed working closely with Thompson. “We clicked from day one,” she remarks. “It was really fun for us to work together, to be these total opposites yet still be there for each other. She was also fantastic to watch – it was just great to see how she came up with these little idiosyncrasies that made Kay so interesting and so nuts.”

Thompson was equally admiring of her co-star: “Penny has to be practical, wise, kind and very, very strong – and Queen Latifah just nailed it,” she says.

TWO DOCTORS AND A TAX COLLECTOR:
THE SUPPORTING PLAYERS OF *STRANGER THAN FICTION*

“What if what I said was true? ... What would you suggest I do?”

-Harold

"I would suggest you take prescribed medication."
Dr. Mittag-Leffler

Rounding out the cast are two veteran film actors and a relative newcomer — Oscar® winner Linda Hunt (*The Year of Living Dangerously*), Tom Hulce and Tony Hale.

In a brief but vital role, Hunt brings a comic gravitas to Dr. Mittag-Leffler — an upscale psychiatrist who finds herself at a loss to diagnose Harold Crick's unusual "symptoms" as anything other than outright schizophrenia.

The script came to Hunt's attention through her longtime friend Doran, and she was instantly smitten. "A good screenplay is a hard thing to find and you know it when you see it," says the veteran actress of screen and stage.

On set, Hunt had an intriguing experience with Will Ferrell. "I had been told that Will was the sweetest guy on earth and the funniest guy on earth in that order," she recalls. "But what impressed me even more is that he seemed to be so moved by this character. He had such a lovely stillness about him and everything he did was wonderfully underplayed. I'm usually quite good at underplaying the other guy, but with Will it was hard to out-underplay him because what he was doing was so concentrated and beautiful."

Hunt was also particularly admiring of her director: "I'll tell you the thing about Marc that's just extraordinary — he sits in the room with the actors and watches the *actors*. Most directors these days watch the monitor, which is, you know, like sitting and watching TV. Marc sits and watches you. And he closes his eyes and he listens to you. This is old-fashioned, but it's brilliant and there's never been a better way of doing it."

Also joining the cast, in the role of IRS Human Resources counselor Dr. Cayly, is Tom Hulce. Best known for his tour-de-force, Oscar®-nominated performance as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Milos Forman's *Amadeus*, Hulce ended a 13-year hiatus from film acting to take the part after Marc Forster, a long-time fan, doggedly pursued him. "Tom Hulce is one of those great actors who sort of suddenly decided he didn't want to act anymore," Forster says. "We met with him and we had to try to convince him."

Recalls Doran: "Marc essentially said to Tom, 'There are five open parts in this script. Some of them are women. Some of them are men. Here's the list. Take your pick. You can do whatever you want.'"

It worked. Hulce was utterly charmed by the screenplay. "There is something about the ambiguity of the story that I found really fascinating in that, as potentially comedic as it is, it's also quite beautiful and moving," he says. "We talked about me playing several different parts, but I think we all agreed that Dr. Cayly was the answer. He's been employed by the IRS to make sure no one goes off the deep end as people in these kinds of jobs often do. He's an unexpected oasis in the middle of this incredibly bureaucratic territory."

Returning to a movie set after years away was a thrill for Hulce. "I haven't been in front of a camera for a long time, so just to be sitting in a room with Will Ferrell was delightful," he says. "It was especially fun to be playing opposite somebody who is so beautifully comedic in his essence even when he's being serious."

Completing the supporting ensemble is Tony Hale in the role of Dave, Harold Crick's fellow IRS employee with a hidden desire to attend Space Camp. Although well known for his role on the acclaimed television series "Arrested Development," he had never appeared in a feature film before being cast in *STRANGER THAN FICTION* (though he subsequently appeared in a small role in *RV*, released earlier this year). "I really loved the character," says Hale of his

initial reaction to the screenplay. “I loved that he and Harold are these two awkward outcasts who develop such a great friendship.”

Forster felt that Hale perfectly embodied the character as Helm had written him. “There’s a tremendous reservoir of innocence and sweetness in the character of Dave, and when Tony came in and read for the part, it was all there,” he says. Doran agrees: “There was this sort of boy-man quality in everything he did – not just in the lines about Space Camp, but even when he’s simply saying hello. You get a sense of someone who hasn’t quite grown up yet, but in an incredibly endearing way.”

Ironically, Hale’s wife was formerly a makeup artist on “Saturday Night Live” and already had encountered Ferrell on numerous occasions. “I’d heard all these great stories about Will – about how he was so hilarious yet down to earth, and now that I’ve gotten to know him, I realize that everything they said about him was true,” says Hale. “He’s a really normal, nice guy who happens to be incredibly talented.”

For Hale, the entire experience of *STRANGER THAN FICTION* was strangely wonderful. “You hear all these nightmare stories about how Hollywood is filled with egos and jaded people and cynics, but the people on this film could not have been nicer, harder working or more interested in serving the story. Marc, Lindsay, Will — everyone just seemed to share the same vision. I’m almost afraid to do another film because the bar was raised so high on this one.”

**THE LOOK OF (STRANGER THAN) FICTION:
ABOUT THE FILM’S VISUAL DESIGN**

*“We must remember that all these things, the nuances,
the anomalies, the subtleties which we assume only accessorize our
days, are in fact here for a much larger and nobler cause.
They are here to save our lives.”*

-- The Narrator

Playing out as it does in the zone between comic fable and stark reality, the script for *STRANGER THAN FICTION* called out for a singular visual look. That was one of the primary reasons the producers were keen on having Forster direct the project. “I knew Marc would bring visual excitement to the story,” says Doran. “It’s not just that the film looks beautiful, or that the compositions are all so interesting, or even that the color scheme is so specific. All that is true, of course, but it’s the way he brings everything together that is so indescribable and so thrilling.”

Forster brought with him a team of highly skilled design artists with whom he had previously collaborated, including director of photography Roberto Schaefer, ASC, production designer Kevin Thompson and costume designer Frank Fleming. He presented each of them with a considerable challenge: to visually demonstrate how a man slowly uncovers the fact that his reality is in fact a product of fiction. “I like to give each of my collaborators an overall vision of how I see the film and then encourage them to come up with their own ideas,” explains Forster. “It works very well with such a versatile team.”

As further aesthetic inspiration, Forster turned to a 1967 French classic, Jacques Tati’s *PLAYTIME*, a near-silent, slapstick comedy about the strangeness of modern life that unfolds amidst a visually stirring realm of towering skyscrapers, impersonal city streets and sterile offices. “When I first read the script, and thought about how I would approach it, *PLAYTIME* was one of the first films that came to mind,” says Forster. “I always loved that film, especially how Tati went about creating a world. I thought it really fit in with having to fashion the IRS office with its little, gray cubicles going on forever, a view of a life without escape, where no one can break out of their routine.”

Forster branched out visually from there. “There are many other worlds in *STRANGER THAN FICTION* that have nothing to do with *PLAYTIME*,” he continues. “There’s Ana Pascal’s laid-back bakery world, Professor Hilbert’s

academic ivory tower, and Karen Eiffel's writer's space. In the film, each of these worlds had to have its own visual style and point of view – and yet they all had to be connected with one another by various visual threads and details.”

STRANGER THAN FICTION is set in a kind of nameless, iconic Big City, America, but when it came to choosing a shooting location, the city that kept coming up was Zach Helm's college town of Chicago. With its classic urban architecture and colorful neighborhoods, the city seemed a perfect match for the film's tone. Such locations as the Hancock Building, the Art Institute of Chicago, the University of Illinois campus, the historic Little Village and Daley Plaza seem to speak to the geometric, regimented world of Harold Crick, the isolation of Karen Eiffel, and the unflappable spirit of Ana Pascal.

Observes executive producer Kopeloff: “We evaluated a number of cities, including San Francisco and New York, but we were just so taken with Chicago and its architecture. It screamed out to us that it was right for this film.”

Once in Chicago, production designer Kevin Thompson began his work in earnest. “This film was a great job for a production designer because it's not just a naturalistic world Marc is trying to capture, but one that is always slightly heightened and stylized,” he says. “I approached the design through the obvious contrast between Harold and Ana. Harold lives in this very rectilinear, grid-like world with pale, monochromatic shades and clean, straight lines until Ana brings curves and colors into his life.”

Thompson especially enjoyed bringing a restrained creativity to Harold's apartment, which was built from scratch on a sound stage, as well as to his IRS office, which was re-created on an empty floor of a glass-and-steel Chicago office building. “Everything in Harold's world is very austere, mundane, concrete – so the idea was to depict a much lower level of detail than you would have in real life,” he explains.

The IRS office space was further enhanced by visual effects supervisor Kevin Tod Haug, who extended the office's gray, warren-like cubicles into a repetitive pattern stretching into infinity. The theme of grids was then reprised in the hauntingly austere archives room. For this set, Thompson researched a variety of archival spaces around the world. "We ended up being inspired by an archive we found in Europe," he recalls. "It was a huge room that had one strikingly beautiful visual element: a man in the space who appeared tiny relative to all this stuff around him. I also photographed a city municipal building archive in Manhattan that had all these stark white boxes on the shelves, which also wound up informing the design. The idea was always to slightly exaggerate the look that surrounds Harold Crick."

Thompson found a different challenge at the other end of the *STRANGER THAN FICTION* design spectrum — Ana's bakery, which is defined by its jazzy fluidity and bursts of color. Thompson explains: "With Ana, the challenge was to create how Marc envisioned her, which was someone who was almost a storybook kind of princess on the one hand, and a kind of punk rock rebel on the other. So my focus was to create a balance between soft and hard, between punk and nice. Ana's world is vitally important to the story, because it is she who introduces sensuality to the film and opens Harold's eyes to a whole new kind of life experience."

Finally, to marry the magic of *STRANGER THAN FICTION* with a dash of inner logic, Thompson needed to ensure that Karen Eiffel's literary style permeated the film. "We always had to be mindful that Kay is imagining all these worlds, so for every different location there was a similar kind of language and certain overarching rules that we had to keep the same," he comments. "You see certain visual themes repeated over and over, suggestive of the fact that this is all coming from one single imagination."

Those same visual motifs are also reflected in the work of costume designer Frank Fleming, whose designs, Forster says, were vital to enhancing the film's alternately comic and dramatic performances. "What I like about Frank is that he really understands characters and how to use his work to help the actors give even better performances because of how they are presented visually," comments the director.

Fleming started with Harold Crick's clothes, which at the start are regimented and nearly colorless urban uniforms. Then, slowly, Harold begins to break out of the mold. "For Harold's outfits, I was always trying to convey a sense of rigidity and repetition," Fleming says. "Only in the last act does he break his self-imposed conformity and allow more light into his life, which we suggest with a subtle shift in terms of the clothing's color and structure."

Shifting gears, Fleming concentrated on the far more liberating clothes worn by Ana Pascal – who also sports tattoos created by makeup artist department head Lisa Layman. "With Ana, we wanted to balance her sensuality with her toughness," explains Fleming. "It was important to convey her strength of character and yet also make her seem aesthetically approachable and warm, so that you could imagine Harold Crick falling in love with her."

Fleming depicted the other characters' nuances through his creations as well — from Karen Eiffel's rumpled, un-self-conscious garments to Penny's put-together fashion pieces, and especially the wardrobe of one of his favorite characters, Professor Hilbert. "In terms of Dustin Hoffman's character, what was important to me was to convey a sense of worldliness, and also to step outside of the way audiences might expect to see a professor," Fleming continues. "The palette for Dustin is very soft and monochromatic, with elements of light, which perhaps offer a slight glimmer of hope."

The job of conveying the film's design on screen was the job of director of photography Roberto Schaefer, who has worked with Forster on all of his films. The script for *STRANGER THAN FICTION*, however, was different from the others, according to Schaefer. "I thought it was very funny, very clever and had a lot of visual ideas that we could play with that would make it really interesting cinematically."

Once he and Forster began discussing the film in depth, Schaefer was particularly excited about the inspiration of Tati's *PLAYTIME*. "Story-wise, *PLAYTIME* and *STRANGER THAN FICTION* have little in common. What we were really responding to was the idea of using architecture, urban environments and all the symbols of modern society to create the feeling that Harold was completely at odds with the world around him," he notes. (Only later did Schaefer and Forster learn that *PLAYTIME* is one of screenwriter Helm's favorite films.)

Schaefer also utilized Chicago's reflective steel and glass towers to further explore the metaphor of reflecting on life and one's place in the world. "The city of Chicago itself was a great influence," he says, "because it's absolutely gorgeous. Sometimes it was a challenge to shoot with so much glass around, but I think it really worked out well and makes a definite architectural statement."

Although *STRANGER THAN FICTION* is far from an effects-driven comedy, visual effects do enter the picture in the sequences in which Karen Eiffel places herself – much to Penny's horror – into various scenes of sudden death, including a shocker of an underwater car crash. "It was really important for those scenes to feel one-hundred percent real," comments Kopeloff, "and Kevin Haug's effects team made it look simple."

Another technically daunting sequence is that in which Harold's apartment is suddenly attacked by a massive wrecking claw. "We originally contacted some Chicago demolition companies to see if there was an appropriate building that

was scheduled for demolition during our shooting period, but when we couldn't find one, we had to come up with another plan," recalls Kopeloff. "I think it worked out really well in the end. We ended up designing a kind of Lego®-like wall structure for Harold's apartment that weighed about 5,000 pounds and then we brought a real wrecking crane onto the stage to remove that section of wall. In this way we were able to create the dramatic effect of a wrecking grapple coming through the apartment and ripping the contents of Harold's life to shreds — a pivotal turning point in his story."

Perhaps the most memorable visual effects in the movie are the graphics used throughout the film to reflect the workings of Harold's mathematical mind. The technical name for the white-line numbers and designs that appear around Harold is "graphic user interfaces" or "GUIs" (pronounced "gooeys"), and they were among the first visual effects that director Forster discussed with Haug. "The intent was to translate Harold Crick's compulsive habits from script to screen," says Forster. "The GUIs were a way to visually see inside Harold's mind to learn more about him and his routine." Haug describes them both technically and playfully: "The graphics are simple two-level composites of 2-D graphics, cleverly tracked and lit to fit into the shots as seamlessly as possible. The GUIs are Harold's super-power, and like a good super-hero, he doesn't tell anyone about them, not even his best friend."

Each of Harold's scenes was examined by Forster and Haug to see whether a GUI was appropriate for illustrating what Haug calls "the graphable/quantifiable aspects of Harold's thought process." For example, in designing the graphics that accompany Harold as he runs for the bus, Haug and his team designed two separate versions. "Both times, the GUIs show Harold counting his steps and quantifying, in four dimensions, when and where he is vis-a-vis today's bus and how this trip relates to all the trips on all the buses he has ever taken. But the second time, Harold gets distracted by the narrator and loses count for the first time in his life. Chaos descends on his GUI, causing him to abandon it as he runs

for the bus, resulting in the GUI crashing to the street behind him.” As the story progresses and Harold becomes less and less compulsive about numbers and order, we see fewer and fewer GUIs until the crash of the wrecking grapple sweeps them from his life forever.

Throughout the film’s production, the main focus of the effects, set design, costumes, cinematography and performances was always on telling the story of Harold Crick, which in turn is really the story of Karen Eiffel, which in turn is an allegory for the stories we all tell about our lives, which in turn comes right back to the sweetly funny yet deeply emotional story of Harold Crick.

As Doran sums it up: “Even as the film was shooting, Marc and I were continually talking about the emotions that lie at the heart of the story, because no matter whether it was an actor’s performance or a certain lighting choice or the design of a set, we were always trying to strike that life-like balance between comedy and tenderness.”

ABOUT THE CAST

Will Ferrell (Harold Crick) has become one of the film world’s most popular performers following his hilarious tenure as a versatile cast member of television’s “Saturday Night Live” for seven memorable seasons from 1995 to 2002. Concentrating on the big screen, he has excelled as the star of such recent successful comedies as *Elf*, *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, *Bewitched*, *Old School*, *Kicking & Screaming* and *The Producers*, for which he was nominated in 2005 for a Golden Globe as Best Supporting Actor in a Musical or Comedy. He also recently worked with director Woody Allen on *Melinda and Melinda* and voiced the Man in the Yellow Hat in the animated hit *Curious George*.

Born in Irvine, California, he attended the University of Southern California and studied sports information, working occasionally as a sportscaster on a local cable channel. He decided to enroll for improvisational comedy classes at the famed Groundlings Theatre in Los Angeles and became a regular performer soon thereafter. Within a short time, he auditioned for "Saturday Night Live" and became one of the series' most valuable cast members.

Small parts in television series ("On Our Own," "Grace Under Fire," "Living Single") led to roles in such films as *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*, *The Thin Pink Line* and *The Suburbans* before he starred with "SNL" alumnus Chris Kattan in the screen comedy *A Night at the Roxbury*, which they co-wrote featuring two of their most popular TV characters, nightclub hoppers the Butabi Brothers.

He went on to appear in the films *Dick*, *Superstar*, *Drowning Mona*, *The Ladies Man*, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, *Zoolander* and *Boat Trip* before breaking through as aging frat brother Frank the Tank in the film comedy *Old School* and the naïve Santa's helper Buddy in the boxoffice blockbuster *Elf*. He soon followed with his portrayal of stuffed-shirt 1970s newscaster in *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (which he co-wrote), further cementing his status as a top leading man in major films.

Upcoming for Ferrell are *Blades of Glory* co-starring Jon Heder and Will Arnett and *Old School 2*, reuniting him with director Todd Phillips and co-stars Luke Wilson and Vince Vaughan.

Maggie Gyllenhaal (Ana) is one of the best young actresses of her generation. After receiving rave reviews at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival for her starring role opposite James Spader in Lionsgate's *Secretary*, she went on to receive a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress in a Comedy or Musical, an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Actress, a Chicago Film Critics'

Award for Most Promising Performer, a Boston Film Critics' Award for Best Actress, a National Board of Review Award for Breakthrough Performance and an IFP/Gotham Breakthrough Performance award.

Gyllenhaal was nominated for a 2006 Independent Spirit Award for her role in Don Roos' *Happy Endings* opposite Lisa Kudrow and Tom Arnold. She recently starred in *Trust the Man* with Julianne Moore, Billy Crudup and David Duchovny, Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* starring Nicolas Cage and Maria Bello and Columbia Pictures' motion capture film *Monster House*. She will also be seen in the 2006 Sundance hit *Sherrybaby* as a female convict struggling to overcome her drug addiction and regain custody of her daughter.

In the past few years, Gyllenhaal has appeared in John Sayles' *Casa De Los Babys* with Daryl Hannah and Lili Taylor and Mike Newell's *Mona Lisa Smile* in which she co-starred with Julia Roberts, Julia Stiles and Kirsten Dunst.

Also accomplished on stage, Gyllenhaal starred as Alice in Patrick Marber's award-winning "Closer" at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles for director Robert Egan, and prior to that at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre. In 2004, Maggie starred in Tony Kushner's play "Homebody/Kabul" both in Los Angeles and at Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Gyllenhaal made her feature film debut in 1992 alongside Jeremy Irons and Ethan Hawke in *Waterland*. It was followed by a memorable performance as Raven, the Satan-worshipping make-up artist in John Waters' quirky Hollywood satire *Cecil B. Demented*, which led her to a co-starring role in *Donnie Darko*, a fantasy-thriller about disturbed adolescence.

Gyllenhaal is a 1999 graduate of Columbia University, where she studied Literature.

Dustin Hoffman (Jules Hilbert) is a two-time Academy Award® winner and seven-time nominee whose arrival in Hollywood helped usher in a new and revitalized approach to filmmaking. He continues to add singular performances to a career rich with characters that have obliterated the line previously dividing the archetypes of "character actor" and "leading man."

Hoffman caught the world's attention with his role as Benjamin Braddock in Mike Nichol's Academy Award®-nominated film *The Graduate*. Since then, he has been nominated for six more Academy Awards® for such diverse films as *Midnight Cowboy*, *Lenny*, *Tootsie* (a film he also produced through his company, Punch Productions) and *Wag the Dog*. Hoffman won the Oscar® in 1979 for his role in *Kramer Vs. Kramer* and again in 1988 for *Rain Man*.

Besides *Stranger Than Fiction*, Hoffman also co-stars in Tom Tykwer's *Perfume* in which he plays Guisseppi Baldini, a perfume maker in the slums of 18th-century Paris whose apprentice is born with an amazing sense of smell but no scent of his own. His obsession turns to murder when he seeks to bottle the scent of a beautiful young virgin. The film is based on the 1981 novel by Patrick Süskind. *Perfume* is tentatively slated for a December 8, 2006 release.

Hoffman recently completed production on *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium*, written by and featuring the directorial debut of *Stranger than Fiction* screenwriter Zach Helm. The fantasy comedy co-stars Natalie Portman as the manager of a toy store that seems to come alive when infused by the spirit of the eccentric Mr. Magorium (played by Hoffman), a white-haired and wide-eyed man who is 243-years-old but doesn't look a day over 200. Magorium has owned the store for almost 114 years, bringing marvel and magic to kids of all ages, but the time has come to pass on his bewitching baton. This film is a Mandate Pictures production.

Hoffman was most recently seen in the blockbuster comedy hit *Meet the Fockers*, the sequel to *Meet the Parents* opposite Ben Stiller, Robert De Niro, Barbara Streisand, Blythe Danner and Teri Polo. Directed by Jay Roach, the film has grossed more than \$500 million worldwide to date.

Hoffman starred in David O. Russell's comedy *I ♥ Huckabees* with Jude Law, Naomi Watts, Mark Wahlberg, Lily Tomlin and Jason Schwartzman. Additionally, Hoffman was seen in Marc Forster's *Finding Neverland* opposite Johnny Depp and Kate Winslet.

Previously, Hoffman starred in Gary Fleder's *Runaway Jury* opposite John Cusack, Gene Hackman and Rachel Weisz, James Foley's *Confidence* opposite Edward Burns and Rachel Weisz and Brad Silberling's *Moonlight Mile* opposite Jake Gyllenhaal and Susan Sarandon.

His other film credits include: *The Lost City*, *Racing Stripes*, *Little Big Man*, *Straw Dogs*, *Papillon*, *All the President's Men*, *Marathon Man*, *Straight Time*, *Agatha*, *Ishtar*, *Dick Tracy*, *Billy Bathgate*, *Mad City*, *Hero*, *Sleepers*, *Sphere*, *American Buffalo*, *Hook* and *Outbreak*.

On stage, Hoffman has had an equally impressive career. His first stage role was in the Sarah Lawrence College production of Gertrude Stein's "Yes is for a Very Young Man." This performance led to several roles Off-Broadway, such as "Journey of the Fifth Horse," for which he won the Obie and "Eh?," for which he won the Drama Desk Award for Best Actor. His success on stage caught the attention of Mike Nichols, who cast him in *The Graduate*. In 1969, Hoffman made his Broadway debut in Murray Schisgal's "Jimmy Shine" and in 1974, Hoffman made his Broadway directorial debut with Schisgal's "All Over Town." In 1984, Hoffman garnered a Drama Desk Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Willy Loman in the Broadway revival of "Death of a Salesman," which he also produced. In addition to starring in the Broadway production, a special

presentation aired on television for which Hoffman won an Emmy Award. Additionally, Hoffman received a Tony Award nomination for his role as Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice," which he reprised from his long run on the London stage.

As a producer, Hoffman produced Tony Goldwyn's feature film *A Walk on the Moon* starring Diane Lane, Viggo Mortensen, Liev Schreiber and Anna Paquin. He also executive-produced "The Devil's Arithmetic," which won two Emmys.

Hoffman was born in Los Angeles and attended Santa Monica Community College. He later studied at the Pasadena Playhouse before moving to New York to study with Lee Strasberg.

Queen Latifah (Penny Escher) is a respected musician, television and film actress, label president, and entrepreneur. Blessed with style and substance, Queen Latifah has blossomed into a one-woman entertainment conglomerate.

Latifah has had amazing success in Hollywood in recent years. She received rave reviews, an Oscar® nomination for Best Supporting Actress, a Golden Globe nomination and a SAG Award nomination for her portrayal as Mama Morton in Miramax's *Chicago*. Following *Chicago*, Latifah starred in Disney's box office hit *Bringing Down the House*, on which she also acted as executive producer, and last year appeared opposite Jimmy Fallon in Fox's *Taxi* and *Beauty Shop*. Earlier this year she starred in *The Last Holiday* opposite LL Cool J and lent her voice to the blockbuster animated hit *Ice Age: The Meltdown*. She is currently filming HBO's "Life Support," based on the true story of a mother who overcame her drug addiction to crack to become an AIDS activist and role-model. She will next star in the film version of the Broadway smash hit musical *Hairspray*.

Last year, Latifah returned to the music scene with her platinum-selling album “The Dana Owens Album,” a collection of timeless classics. As Latifah demonstrated on screen in *Living Out Loud* and *Chicago*, her vocal talent is as impressive as her acting.

Queen Latifah is also one of music’s most well respected rappers. From her groundbreaking 1989 debut “All Hail the Queen,” which set the visual and contextual standard for female rappers, to her bold foray into R&B, Latifah continues to define what a woman in the music industry should be. She has earned four Grammy nominations, as well as a Grammy Award for Best Solo Rap Performance in 1994.

Flavor Unit Entertainment, her production company, which she runs with partner Sha-kim Compere, is based in New Jersey, and quickly established itself with the box office hit *Bringing Down the House* and *Beauty Shop*, as well as films in which she didn’t star, such as *The Cookout* and the upcoming *Kidnapped*.

Latifah is also not a stranger to the small screen. Her first television series, “Living Single,” was a huge success and is currently in syndication.

Since her screen debut in Spike Lee’s *Jungle Fever*, she starred in *Set It Off*, which earned her a nomination for a Spirit Award in the Best Actress category, co-starred in *The Bone Collector* directed by Phillip Noyce and starring Denzel Washington, and appeared opposite Taye Diggs and Sanaa Lathan in *Brown Sugar*.

Queen Latifah’s concern for others is evidenced by the generous amount of time and money that she donates to worthwhile charitable organizations. Every year, she serves as co-chairman for the Lancelot H. Owens Scholarship Foundation, Inc. Established by her mother, Rita Owens, to perpetuate the memory of a

loving son and brother, the foundation provides scholarships to students who excel scholastically, but are limited in financial resources.

Emma Thompson (Karen Eiffel) was born in London. Her father was theater director Eric Thompson, also the creator of the successful children's series "The Magic Roundabout." Her mother is actress Phyllida Law and her sister is actress Sophie Thompson.

She read English at Cambridge. While there, she made her debut as Aladdin in the Footlights pantomime, toured in the Footlights Revue and became vice-president of Footlights, appearing on BBC-TV's "Friday Night, Saturday Morning."

In 1983, Thompson received wide acclaim for her performances in the TV series "Alfresco," Jasper Carrott's "Election Night Special," "The Crystal Cube" and "Celebration." She also appeared in her own show, "Short Vehicle," at the Edinburgh Festival.

Thompson played opposite Robert Lindsay in the original cast of the musical "Me and My Girl" on London's West End, and starred in her own TV special "Up For Grabs." She wrote and recorded her own BBC series, "Thompson," and went on to star in the comedy feature *The Tall Guy* co-starring Jeff Goldblum and Rowan Atkinson. She returned to the BBC in "The Winslow Boy." She then won her first Best Actress BAFTA award for her performances in *The Fortunes of War* and *Tutti Frutti*.

In 1988, she appeared in *Henry V* directed by and co-starring Kenneth Branagh. The following year she played Alison Porter in "Look Back in Anger," which was filmed for Thames TV. In 1989, she starred in James Lapine's *Impromptu* opposite Judy Davis, Hugh Grant and Mandy Patinkin.

Thompson then joined the Renaissance Theatre Company to play Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and The Fool in "King Lear" and toured the world in both productions.

In 1991, Thompson starred in *Dead Again*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Peter's Friends*, all directed by and co-starring Branagh.

She won her first Oscar® for *Howards End* and was again nominated for *The Remains of the Day*. Both films co-starred Anthony Hopkins and were directed by James Ivory. She received a Supporting Actress nomination for Jim Sheridan's *In The Name of the Father* opposite Daniel Day Lewis.

For *Howards End* she also won the Golden Globe, the New York, Los Angeles and National Film Critics Awards, and the BAFTA Award. For *The Remains of the Day* and *In The Name of the Father*, Thompson was nominated for Golden Globe Awards for both Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress, respectively. For her work in *Much Ado About Nothing*, she was nominated for Best Female Lead by the Independent Feature Project West (the Spirit Awards) and Best Actress by the American Comedy Awards. She also won the London Film Critics Circle Award as Best Actress for her performances in both *The Remains of the Day* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Thompson starred in and wrote the screenplay adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* for director Ang Lee, winning an Academy Award® for Best Screenplay, as well as a Golden Globe, the USC Scriptor Award and Best Screenplay awards from the Writers Guild, the Boston Society of Film Critics, the Broadcast Film Critics, the Chicago Film Critics, the Los Angeles Film Critics and the New York Film Critics. She also received a nomination from the British Academy of Film and Television. Her performance in *Sense and Sensibility* earned her a third BAFTA and National Board of Review award for Best Actress, along with Academy Award®, Golden Globe and SAG nominations.

Thompson followed that with starring roles in a succession of films, including *The Winter Guest*, shot on location in Scotland and co-starring her mother Phyllida Law, *Primary Colors* with John Travolta, Billy Bob Thornton and Kathy Bates for director Mike Nichols, and the independent feature *Judas Kiss* with Alan Rickman.

More recently, Thompson starred in the HBO telefilm "Wit," for which she received a Screen Actors Guild, Golden Globe and Emmy Award nomination. She also received (as the film's co-screenwriter) The Humanitas Award.

She subsequently starred for "Wit" director Mike Nichols' in his HBO Emmy-winning adaptation of "Angels in America" co-starring Meryl Streep and Al Pacino, which brought her an Emmy nomination. She also starred in writer/director Christopher Hampton's film adaptation of *Imagining Argentina* opposite Antonio Banderas, the hit romantic comedy *Love Actually* written and directed by Richard Curtis (for which she received a BAFTA nomination), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and the hit family film *Nanny McPhee*, which she also wrote.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Marc Forster (Director) has established himself as one of the most visionary directors working in Hollywood today. With the critical and commercial success of *Monster's Ball* in 2001, Forster solidified himself as a director at ease with the metaphorical and lyrical language of cinema.

Careful to take on new projects with a fresh palate and boundless creativity, Forster followed his hit *Monster's Ball* with *Finding Neverland*, a drama about the life of J.M. Barrie and the timeless legend of Peter Pan. *Finding Neverland*

became one of the most acclaimed and beloved films of 2004. Critical praise and worldwide box office success was followed by scores of awards and nominations. *Finding Neverland* was nominated for seven Academy Awards®, including Best Actor for Johnny Depp and Best Picture, winning one award for Best Score. The film was also nominated for 11 BAFTA Awards, seven BFCA Awards, and five Golden Globes, including Best Director. Forster was also nominated by the Directors Guild of America.

Always eager to take on new and unfamiliar genres and material, Forster followed *Finding Neverland* with *Stay* starring Ewan McGregor, Naomi Watts and Ryan Gosling, a drama about a psychologist whose suicidal client makes bizarre predictions that begin to come true.

The seeds of Forster's often moody, reflective aesthetic were sown in his second film, *Everything Put Together*, which he also co-wrote. A creeping, subversive piece of psychological horror about a woman (Radha Mitchell) who finds herself alienated and haunted after her newborn baby dies of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, *Everything Put Together* premiered at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival before earning Forster the Movado Someone to Watch/Independent Spirit Award.

Born in Germany and raised in Switzerland, Forster came to the U.S. in 1990 to attend NYU Film School, graduating in 1993.

Forster currently resides in Los Angeles.

Zach Helm (Written by) makes his feature film debut with *Stranger Than Fiction*. Helm studied theater at the prestigious Chicago Theatre School of DePaul University before moving to Los Angeles to begin his career as a screenwriter. His plays include "Last Chance For a Slow Dance" and "Good Canary."

Helm is making his directorial debut with *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium*, which he also wrote, for Mandate Pictures and Walden Media. It is due for release in 2007 and stars Dustin Hoffman, Natalie Portman and Jason Bateman.

Lindsay Doran (Producer) is best known for her work nurturing scripts she characterizes as “funny dramas” and “comedies that make you cry.” She has supervised the development of two Academy Award®-winning screenplays (*Ghost* and *Sense and Sensibility*), and as a producer tries to ensure that the vision of a screenplay is happily balanced with the vision of its director.

Doran grew up in the movie business. Her father, D. A. Doran, was a studio executive for nearly 50 years, spending most of his career at Columbia Pictures and Paramount Pictures. As a child, she visited the Paramount lot every week and often observed the filming of the movies her father was supervising. She read scripts from an early age and saw films at different stages of the editorial process. She and her father talked about every aspect of the movies they saw together, from the truth of the performances to the structure of individual jokes.

After college, Doran moved away from Los Angeles, first to London, then to State College, Pennsylvania, where she wrote and produced documentaries and children's programs for PBS station WPSX-TV. In 1979, she returned to Los Angeles and to her love of film. Her first job in the movie business (if you don't count her part-time college job selling popcorn and candy at the Crest Theater in West Los Angeles) was assistant to the director of Creative Affairs at Avco Embassy Pictures. Eventually, the company evolved into Embassy Pictures where Doran advanced to the position of vice president of Creative Affairs. While at Embassy, she received her first film credit – executive in charge of production on Rob Reiner's *This Is Spinal Tap*. She also supervised the development and production of Reiner's second film *The Sure Thing*.

In 1985, Doran joined Paramount Pictures where she occupied an office two doors away from the office her father had worked in for 15 years. [D. A. Doran died in 1978.] While at Paramount, Doran oversaw the development and production of a number of films including *Pretty in Pink*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Planes, Trains & Automobiles*, *The Naked Gun*, *Pet Sematary* and *Ghost*.

Doran left Paramount in 1989 to join Sydney Pollack's Mirage Enterprises. As president of Mirage, she produced *Dead Again* written by Scott Frank and directed by Kenneth Branagh, *Leaving Normal* written by Edward J. Solomon and directed by Edward Zwick and *Sense and Sensibility* written by Emma Thompson and directed by Ang Lee. *Sense and Sensibility* won the Golden Globe Award for Best Picture, Drama and the Academy Award® for Best Adapted Screenplay (by Emma Thompson). In addition, it was nominated for six other Academy Awards®, including Best Picture, and won the Best Film award given by the British Academy of Film and Theatre Arts (BAFTA) and the Golden Bear award for Best Picture at the Berlin Film Festival.

While at Mirage, Doran served as executive producer on *The Firm* and *Sabrina*, both directed by Sydney Pollack. She also served as one of the producers on the Showtime anthology series "Fallen Angels," and produced for that series the episode "The Frightening Frammis" written by Jon Robin Baitz and Howard A. Rodman and directed by Tom Cruise.

In 1996, Doran became president and chief operating officer of United Artists Pictures. While at United Artists, she presided over production of the 18th and 19th installments of the James Bond franchise, *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *The World Is Not Enough*. She also oversaw *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *Ronin*, as well as the remake of *The Thomas Crown Affair*.

In 1999, Doran left United Artists and resumed her career as a producer. She is currently the president of Three Strange Angels Inc., a motion picture production

company based in Los Angeles (and named for a line in a D.H. Lawrence poem). Through *Three Strange Angels* she produced *Nanny McPhee*, written by and starring Emma Thompson and directed by Kirk Jones, released earlier this year, as well as *Stranger Than Fiction*. *Stranger Than Fiction* also marks her fourth collaboration with Emma Thompson, a creative partnership that has lasted 15 years.

Nathan Kahane (Executive Producer) is the creative partner who is responsible for the established relationships with high-level talent for Mandate Pictures and oversees the development and production of the company's growing feature slate. He also oversees the daily creative operations of Ghost House Pictures, Mandate's joint venture with Sam Raimi and Rob Tapert.

While at Mandate, Kahane has produced or overseen the productions of *Trapped*, *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* and the \$188 million box office worldwide hit *The Grudge*. Currently, he is overseeing Sebastian Gutierrez's *Rise* starring Lucy Liu and Michael Chiklis and the *The Messengers* directed by Danny & Oxide Pang, among others.

Kahane started his career at ICM in their agent-training program after graduating from the Hass School of Business at The University of California, Berkeley. Following that, he worked for four-and-a-half years as the Canton Company's Executive Vice President of Motion Pictures.

Joe Drake (Executive Producer) is owner and president of Mandate Pictures, an independent company dedicated to the self-financing, development and production of filmed entertainment. Drake has been the driving force since launching the company (previously Senator International) in 2001, aiming to deliver broad-appeal films to the studios and major independents worldwide. In the company's first four years, Drake greenlit *Stranger Than Fiction* as well as Danny Leiner's outrageous comedy *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*.

Drake also launched Hollywood's preeminent horror label Ghost House Pictures with partners Sam Raimi and Rob Tapert, which produced the box office hits *The Grudge* and *Boogeyman*. Drake also served as executive producer on Catherine Hardwicke's *Lords of Dogtown* and Josh Stern's *Neverwas*.

Formerly president of Lionsgate International, Drake established the division as a premier supplier of theatrical feature films to the independent world. He oversaw worldwide sales and distribution of Lionsgate's international programming and championed such projects as Nicolas Cage's *Shadow of the Vampire*, the highly controversial *American Psycho* and the Academy Award® and Golden Globe nominee *Amores Perros*. Before joining Lionsgate, Drake served as senior vice president of international theatrical at Rysher Entertainment and also held positions at Moviestore Entertainment.

Eric Kopeloff (Executive Producer) rejoins director Marc Forster on *Stranger Than Fiction*, having most recently collaborated with him on *Stay*, a psychological thriller starring Ewan McGregor, Ryan Gosling and Naomi Watts.

With Forster, Kopeloff produced first-time director Renee Chabria's *Sueno* starring John Leguizamo, Elizabeth Peña and Ana Claudia Talancón in a story about a Mexican immigrant (Leguizamo) who, upon moving to Los Angeles, enters into romantic relationships with two very different women.

Kopeloff was an executive producer on *Pretty Persuasion*, Marcos Siega's controversial satire starring Evan Rachel Wood, James Woods, Ron Livingston and Jane Krakowski.

Kopeloff forged his relationship with Forster on the harrowing drama *Monster's Ball*. Starring Halle Berry, Billy Bob Thornton, Heath Ledger and Peter Boyle, *Monster's Ball* earned Berry an Oscar® for Best Actress in a Motion Picture and garnered awards from critics' groups and festivals around the world.

Monster's Ball is one of several films Kopeloff produced for Lionsgate. Last year, Kopeloff produced the controversial supernatural drama *Godsend* starring Robert De Niro, Greg Kinnear and Rebecca Romijn and directed by Nick Hamm. In 2003, Kopeloff was an executive producer on *Confidence* starring Ed Burns, Rachel Weisz, Dustin Hoffman and Andy Garcia. He began his relationship with the studio as an associate producer on *Get Well Soon* starring Vincent Gallo and Courteney Cox.

Additionally, Kopeloff was the associate producer and line producer on *Perfume* starring Jeff Goldblum, Rita Wilson, Mariel Hemingway, Paul Sorvino, Peter Gallagher and Michelle Williams. He co-produced the independent feature *Ropewalk* starring Peter Facinelli and Max Perlich, associate-produced *Home Sweet Hoboken* with Ben Gazzara, and produced an Eric Bogosian monologue "The Wedding Toast" directed by Bob Balaban, which aired on Showtime.

Kopeloff began his career assisting Woody Allen's editor, Susan Morse. He worked with Morse on *Bullets Over Broadway*, *Mighty Aphrodite*, *Everyone Says I Love You* and *Deconstructing Harry*.

Roberto Schaefer, ASC (Director of Photography) majored in conceptual and installation art and minored in photography at art school before transitioning into motion picture production and eventually cinematography, while remaining an avid traveler. Roberto has traveled throughout seven continents for adventure and work, filming documentaries, commercials and movies in places as varied as Mauritania, Ethiopia, New Guinea, Russia, Peru, Tahiti, Australia and Europe.

He began his career as a cameraman shooting feature news for most of the major European news channels on film and video. Moving on to TV commercials and feature films, Schaefer has, on occasion, returned to video to experiment in

new media. These projects have included the Mini DV feature film *Everything Put Together* for director Marc Forster and the NBC TV pilot "Robbery Homicide Division/LA" with Michael Mann and Steven Gyllenhaal.

He continues to alternate between TV commercials and feature films.

Schaefer's other collaborations with Forster include *Monster's Ball*, *Finding Neverland* and *Stay*. He also shot *At Last*, the first film for director Tom Anton, in the spring of 2004 in New Orleans.

Kevin Thompson (Production Designer) embarked on a film career following an impressive stint as an architect and interior designer. In the years since his first feature, Thompson has established himself as one of the most distinct talents in production design.

A graduate of the University of Minnesota School of Architecture, Thompson was instrumental in many New York City Historic Preservation and Historic Conversion projects, including the move of Andy Warhol's factory to a 32nd Street Con Ed sub-station.

Thompson's resume boasts collaborations with some of today's most imaginative and experimental filmmakers. With Larry Clark's first movie *Kids*, he stayed true to the documentary feel of Clark's trademark style. With *Office Killer*, Thompson worked with the celebrated photographer Cindy Sherman on her film debut to transform a typical mundane office space into a breeding ground for murderous thoughts. His designs added a dimension to the colorful, eccentric conglomerate of characters inhabiting David O. Russell's *Flirting with Disaster*. Thompson re-created the proudly ostentatious excess of the late 1970's in Mark Christopher's *54*, based on the rise and fall of Steve Rubell's infamous nightclub. In James Gray's *Little Odessa* and *The Yards*, he was true to the dark, moody and corrupt underworld of the outer boroughs of New York. Most recently, Thompson fused

realism and surrealism in his futuristic, haunting designs for Marc Forster's *Stay*. Most recently, Thompson provided the production design for Jonathan Glazer's drama *Birth*.

Thompson's other film credits include *Party Girl*, *The Proprietor*, *Kicked in the Head*, *Two Girls and a Guy*, *Down to You*, *Igby Goes Down*, *World Traveler* and *Trust the Man*.

Matt Chessé, A.C.E. (Editor) began his editing career in elementary school, making “mixed” tapes for girls he fancied. He evolved this hobby into a fine art, and was pleasantly surprised when he discovered that this skill set he had developed translated directly to film editing. Born into a family of actors, painters, and puppeteers in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chessé was raised on a steady diet of Spike Jones records, J.D. Salinger novels and Preston Sturges films. His love of literature won out over his obsession with films, and he planned on becoming a novelist. He majored in English Literature and minored in photography at San Francisco State University and put himself through college working as a production assistant in the San Francisco Bay Area film business. This led to an invitation to relocate to Los Angeles to assist commercial director Peter Kagan at Stiefel and Co., and then, eventually, an invitation to assist editor Angus Wall at the commercial editorial shop Rock, Paper, Scissors. Cutting anything he could get his hands on, he quickly graduated to full-fledged editor under the tutelage of his mentors David Lee and Lauren Zuckerman. A synthesis of his background in film, theater, music and literature, editing proved to be the perfect vehicle for Chessé to express himself and bring his taste and storytelling chops to the party.

Chessé's partnership with Marc Forster began on the 2000 film *Everything Put Together*. Done as a favor, it has evolved into a life-changing collaboration. Chessé offered his services and resources to Marc to help deliver *Everything Put Together* based on the strength of Forster's self-penned script. This dedication

and commitment earned him a spot on Forster's next film, *Monster's Ball*, which won Halle Berry the Best Actress Oscar®. Next was *Finding Neverland* starring Johnny Depp which was nominated for 11 BAFTA's and six Oscars®, including a Best Editor nomination for Chessé. His other credits include co-producer and editor of the 2005 Sundance film *Ellie Parker* directed by Scott Coffey, and as producer of the documentary *Ben Johnson: Third Cowboy on the Left* by Tom Thurman. In his off hours, he has found time to collaborate with his wife Gillian, and together they have produced two award-winning short girls.

Frank Fleming (Costume Designer) most recently designed the costumes for *Stay*, a psychological drama directed by Marc Forster and starring Ewan McGregor, Naomi Watts and Ryan Gosling.

In another powerful turn as costume designer on *The Woodsman* produced by Lee Daniels, directed by Nicole Kessel and starring Kevin Bacon, Benjamin Bratt, Eve and David Alan Grier, Fleming created a sharpened reality of the solitude of a recently released sex offender (Bacon). Using a narrow palette and a spare wardrobe, Fleming focused on the world as seen by the principal character, emphasizing the repression of the community he inhabits.

Monster's Ball, also designed by Fleming, required a similar approach, although the challenges posed by both films were different in many ways. *Monster's Ball*, directed by Marc Forster, starred Halle Berry (who won an Academy Award® for Best Actress for her role) and Billy Bob Thornton.

Fleming has also worked extensively with directors such as Tim Robbins, Steven Spielberg, John Singleton, Michael Apted, Jodie Foster, Brian DePalma, Ridley Scott and Spike Lee, among others. In particular, early in his career, he participated in the design of *Malcolm X* and *Amistad*, both of which earned designer Ruth E. Carter Academy Awards® nominations. Fleming's experience extends to celebrity styling and commercial ventures, including highly creative

work with Jonathan Glazer (in a series of ads starring Samuel L. Jackson) and Spike Lee.

Britt Daniel (Music) is a vocalist/songwriter/guitarist who, since 1994, has led the Austin, Texas-based art/rock/pop collective Spoon on a journey from mid-90s obscurity to their current post at the top of countless critical and commercial success lists. Widely regarded as one of America's bravest, most challenging rock bands of the past decade, Daniel and Spoon are riding a career high after releasing a trifecta of modern-day classic rock 'n roll albums (2001's "Girls Can Tell," 2002's "Kill the Moonlight" and 2005's "Gimme Fiction") that have appealed to fans on both sides of the independent/mainstream divide. Daniel's original compositions for *Stranger Than Fiction* (written with Brian Reitzell) are his most recent creations, and they precede Spoon's forthcoming sixth album, which is due out in early 2007.

Brian Reitzell (Music, Music Supervisor) has collaborated with writer/director Sofia Coppola on such films as *Marie Antoinette*, *Lost in Translation* and *The Virgin Suicides*. A musician by trade, he has recorded with such artists as Air, Beck, and Turin Brakes, and was formerly the drummer for the beloved L.A. punk/pop band Redd Kross. Reitzell's other credits include Mike Mills' *Thumbsucker*, Peter Berg's *Friday Night Lights* and Roman Coppola's *CQ*.

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