

Caitlyn Barnes

Greg Murray

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### Meeting the Elements

A good story contains multiple elements that keep the viewer interested in the film. These items create suspense and action, and help the audience to believe that the main character's conflict could be real. From plot line to complexity, these elements are essential to a film's impact on its audience. *Stranger than Fiction* easily conquered all of the essentials required to make a good story.

Within the film, all actions in the plot remained entirely interconnected, and each formed a piece that created the whole of the film. Harold's wristwatch is the deepest example of this. Just as the wristwatch guided most of Harold's life for all of his years as an IRS agent, it was also the item that saved him at the end of the film, by blocking a major artery. Similarly, Karen's fan mail shows one of these connections, as it is linked to the professor that Harold finds to help him understand the narration of his life. At the same time, throughout the film, flashes of the African-American woman and the child that seem to make no sense are shown to be connected to Harold's near-death. This unity in the plot creates the sense that every action is important and creates deeper impact for the film.

At the same time, *Stranger than Fiction* remains credible even as it represents a tale that could never actually take place, as the plot takes steps to ensure that the audience, for the duration of the film, believes in Harold's strange life. Harold is first

presented as a basic human—one with all of the unique complexities that make each human different—which at first makes the narration seem to be a normal part of his life. However, once Harold begins to go through the shock of hearing Karen’s voice, the viewer does the same, because the meaning of the narration suddenly changes. While Harold stares at his toothbrush waiting for someone to speak again, the audience can clearly imagine doing the same, because a connection to Harold’s normal life was already established by the narration. As the film provokes similar feelings for both Harold and the viewer, it helps the viewer to believe that the story might be possible.

Elements of a good story also exist within *Stranger than Fiction* as it shows the ability to remain interesting without being overly complex. Though the story could simply be amounted to Harold’s life changing as he realizes that he is actually a character in a novel, the viewer can see complexities in every element of the story. For example, Harold’s mannerisms—such as the way he believes that file folders sound like the tide of the ocean as they are placed into boxes—make him seem more interesting than a simple character that is destined to die. At the same time, foreshadowing creates complexities and suspense, as dialogue such as, “little did he know,” and reoccurring images such as the woman and the child keep the viewer guessing throughout the film. These complexities create suspense; because Harold’s life is not as simple as it might have been, the audience is not entirely sure what will happen to him.

Finally, the film also becomes a good story as it continuously works to handle emotional material and emotions themselves in a way that doesn’t ostracize the audience. The viewer can believe Harold’s emotions as if they were his own, for example, as human qualities are seen in his reaction. When Harold hears of his death, his reaction is a

believable one: he immediately begins having an emotional breakdown and tears apart his bedroom in frustration. At the same time, Harold is humanly awkward in his relationships; he blunders over the cookies and stumbles awkwardly over his statements about wanting Ana. Similarly, the viewer's emotions are not strained throughout the film. Although the suspense of the film is always present, the viewer remains hopeful for Harold's fate, and can be reasonably pleased when he survives.

*Stranger than Fiction* shows all of the elements of a great story. It remains complex while not overwhelming the audience, just as it connects all of the actions within the plot to create a working whole. The film also remained interesting even as it deftly handled the emotions that the audience felt and the emotions that Harold showed. Similarly, the film created a believable experience, even though Harold's life could never truly happen. As all of these elements meet together, the audience remains interested throughout the duration of the film, and can take away the message that the story offers. In this way, *Stranger than Fiction* easily represents a good story.