



# Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 14  
Issue 2 October 2010

Article 12

6-2-2016

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John S. Vassar

Louisiana State University - Shreveport, [john.s.vassar@lsus.edu](mailto:john.s.vassar@lsus.edu)

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### Recommended Citation

Vassar, John S. (2016) "You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol14/iss2/12>

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# You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger

## **Abstract**

This is a review of *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (2010).

The utility of religious faith and the construction of significance in life are important themes in *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, the most recent of Woody Allen's films. This work narrates the story of two married couples and how they navigate attempts to find a meaningful life. Faith plays a significant role in their respective attempts to generate purpose and direction in this life.

The first couple is Alfie and Helena. After a long marriage, Alfie has an epiphany one night that makes him acutely aware of his mortality. He consequently decides that he must work out incessantly in an attempt to stay healthy and avoid death. Helena is first amused by, then discouraging of, his new-found vitality and he elects to divorce her and live the life of a single swinger. His attempts at single living are not as successful as he imagined until he hires the services of a prostitute named Charmaine, with whom he is quite taken, and consequently marries soon after meeting.

Helena responds to her divorce with a nervous breakdown that is helped only by frequent visits to a local fortune teller, who is "much less expensive than my psychiatrist." The clairvoyant shares relentlessly positive news with Helena and encourages her that her romantic life will soon improve. Later she meets Jonathan (Roger Ashton-Griffiths) who operates an occult bookstore and seems to be a perfect match for her newfound spirituality.

Alfie and Helena have a daughter named Sally (Naomi Watts). Sally feels locked in a loveless marriage with an author named Roy (Josh Brolin). She is an art historian who gets a job as a gopher for Greg (Antonio Banderas), the handsome curator of an upscale art gallery. Sally's frustration with her marriage grows as Roy displays an ever-greater unwillingness to have children.

Roy, in turn, wrestles with the completion of his second novel and finds himself attracted to the beautiful Dia (Frieda Piento) who lives in the apartment across the street. His relationship with Dia waxes as his marriage to Sally wanes. His writing struggles until he finds a novel solution.

Allen deftly juggles these multiple relationships. Each of the main characters fails to build relationships with others, while seeking to construct meaning in their solitary lives. Alfie confronts death through physical exertion and living like a younger man. Helena copes with death by finding certainty in the comforting words of a soothsayer. Roy attempts to stave off mortality through literary creation while Sally pursues romantic companionship.

Each of them realizes that their mortality is approaching and that they cannot rationally cope with it. Life ends in tragedy for all and illusions are our only means of coping with our relentless mortality.

Religion enters into the film primarily through the character of Helena who must fill the vacuum left by her husband's absence. She replenishes this void through constant counsel of her New Age guru. This decision is confirmed when she bonds with her new love over a shared interest in their previous lives.

*You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger* carries within it the core elements of the Allen oeuvre . The polyvocal language of the title reflects both the amorous and the deadly as Romance and Death - the "Tall Dark Strangers." The film's setting and plot focus on complicated urban relationships and fascination with such topics as aesthetics and death and will be familiar to any veteran Allen watcher.

The film proffers the view that religion is helpful, but not efficacious. Faith is one option, but an option superior to no others. At an important point in the film, Roy is chided by Sally for his suggestion that her mother's faith in the fortune teller is irrational and a mere illusion. Sally replies that "sometimes the illusions work better than the medicine." In Allen's conception it is faith, rather than the object of faith, that is the most significant component of a meaningful existence.