

Review: The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

Stiller's best directorial offering so far may have its flaws, but go with it and you will be rewarded with a film which is both heartfelt and visually stunning. [Kate Barlow](#) reviews

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[waltermitty](#)

Director: Ben Stiller

Starring: Ben Stiller, Kristen Wiig, Sean Penn

Running Time: 114 minutes

Rating: ★★★★★

Ben Stiller's adaptation of James Thurber's short story of the same name is undoubtedly a huge step for Stiller as a director. Still struggling to shake his reputation as Hollywood Frat Pack funny man, taking on *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* may be a step in the right direction. Funny, sentimental and genuinely touching, the film is a welcome change from Stiller's previous directing turns; while *Walter Mitty* still has a comic hue, it lacks the self-indulgence of previous hits *Tropic Thunder*, *Zoolander* and *The Cable Guy*. Although Stiller does still sometimes fall into his old ways, occasionally interspersing a touching moment with a cheap laugh, his eagerness to find emotion manages to shine through.

Walter Mitty, played by Stiller, is a daydreamer. Living a quiet life as a 'negative assets manager' for a dying *Life* Magazine, Mitty fails to take action, be it standing up to a bearded bully or telling his co-worker Cheryl (Kristen Wiig) his feelings. Going unnoticed at work, Mitty instead slips into a dream world, never short of action or heroism, where he dives into burning buildings and takes casual trips to the Arctic with his pet falcon. When a photo goes missing, vital for *Life's* final edition, Mitty goes on a journey to find its elusive photographer. First stop, Greenland.

The key selling point of the film is Mitty's fantasies, often hilarious and oddly familiar: they show us what we wish we could have said, and done, but because of our self-conscious nature we prevent. Others are bizarre, a particular favourite being his re-imagining of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, with himself as a slightly alarming cross between an old man and a baby, being looked after by an adoring Cheryl. However, as Mitty begins his travels these daydreams subside and they are instead replaced by real life antics. His travels take him to Greenland, Iceland, Yemen and Afghanistan, unveiling beautiful scenery that is a sheer delight for the viewer, aided no doubt by cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh.

Given Stiller's comic credentials it is perhaps surprising that this element of the film doesn't always remain strong. While a number of moments sent rippling laughter throughout the cinema, at times the humour falls flat, such as the continuous phone calls with a representative of Mitty's eHarmony dating profile.

Walter Mitty is a film that is purely escapist. Stiller tries, and only sometimes succeeds, in harbouring deeper messages about love, adventure and stepping into the unknown, a theme explored not particularly subtly by the constant referral to *Life's* motto. At times one feels it is trying too hard to be inspirational, giving us a seemingly endless barrage of running sequences to emotive music that it can

become tiring. Nevertheless, this can perhaps be forgiven. After all, it is a welcome sight to see Stiller attempting to create a film with a message at all. If let yourself be entrapped by the film, accepting the ridiculousness of the situations and the sometimes too heartfelt message, it can deliver as a warm and visually striking experience.

While *Walter Mitty* may not be Stiller's masterpiece, it is certainly his best film so far, showing us that he has more to offer, as both an actor and director, than *Blue Steel*.



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