

Defending Your Life ★★★

Year of Release: 1991

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Defending Your Life is an imaginative vision of the afterlife from the twisted mind of writer-director Albert Brooks, who also stars in the comedy.

After dying in a car crash, on his birthday of all days, Brooks wakes up in Judgment City, a satirical rendition of purgatory where higher beings evaluate the lives of newly deceased earthlings. Brooks has five days to convince two judges that he's worthy of passing on to higher plains of existence. Enter Rip Torn as the slick lawyer who defends Brooks in court against prosecutor Lee Grant. During his "trial," Brooks must view episodes of his life on a movie screen, and these

scenes are both hysterically funny and painfully poignant. It's impossible to resist chuckling (and cringing) at Brooks as he and Torn try to explain away his cowardly behavior on earth. Torn, in particular, is in vintage comic form, and he walks away with the picture.

The movie also features Meryl Streep, appealing as the love-interest, and Shirley MacLaine, who pops up in a hilarious cameo. While the film is uneven, many of its gags are priceless. Take, for example, the food in Judgment City: it's always the most delicious you've ever tasted ... and it's also *calorie-free*—so chow down!

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