

American dream found not in heaven — 'Iowa'

★ ★ ★ 1/2 Field of Dreams
Oaks Four West

When you're standing alone in the middle of a cornfield and a mysterious voice tells you to do something, you really should do it. That's what happens to Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner), a farmer in Iowa who harbors more love for baseball than plowing a field.

A quiet but powerful voice only Ray can hear keeps saying, "If you build it, he will come." Ray soon believes this to mean that if he builds a baseball diamond in the middle of his cornfield, Shoeless Joe Jackson will come to play on it.

Shoeless Joe was one of the members of the Chicago Black Sox, the team convicted of throwing the World Series in 1919, thus leaving a blot on America's pastime and ending our age of innocence.

One of the greatest players the game has ever known, Shoeless Joe was banned from ever playing again, even though no one could prove he didn't play his heart out. And one other thing — Shoeless Joe died over 30 years ago.

Despite this minor point, Ray is convinced of what he must do — even though the baseball diamond will take up valuable crop land and threaten his small farm's survival. But there is more than a loopy vision at work here. Ray confesses to his good-humored, playful wife (Amy Madigan) that he is afraid of becoming old and staid like his father, a distant man who died before Ray could ever reach out to him.

So the baseball field — which neighbors gawk at and joke about — comes to represent Ray's rebelliousness and refusal to

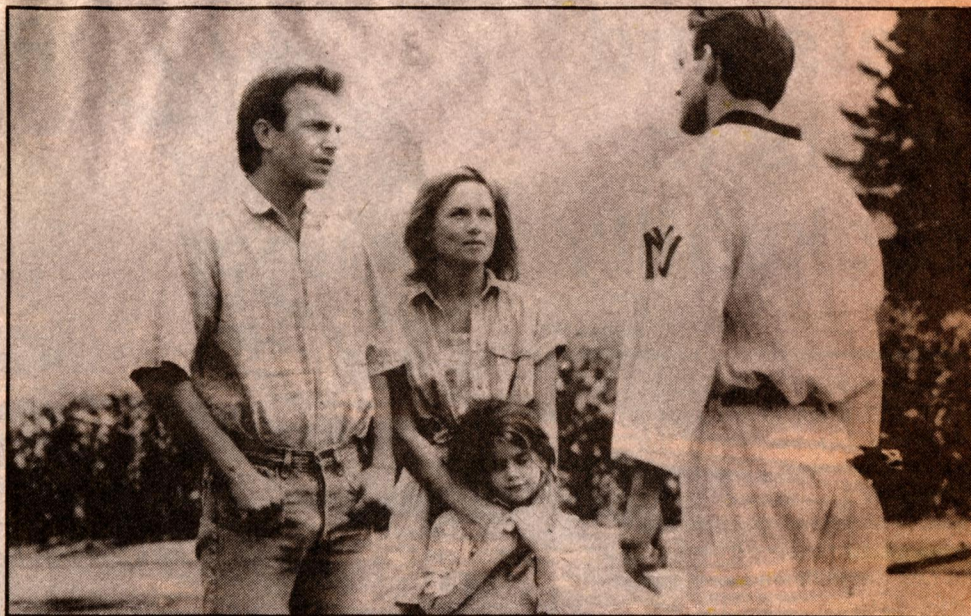
grow up. When the bizarre sight of a baseball diamond in the middle of an Iowa cornfield finally comes to pass, Ray says, "I've just created something totally illogical," and smiles at it goofily.

Maybe not so illogical, because it isn't long before the ghost of Shoeless Joe (Ray Liotta) steps out of the cornfield to play a little catch. Soon other people are drawn to the cornfield: the ghosts of ballplayers eager for another chance to play the game and such living figures as Terence Mann (James Earl Jones), a '60s activist and writer who has cut himself off from the world for the past 20 years.

All of this unfolds in a believable, low-key manner. The movie has the spirit and optimism of a Frank Capra fable — with an '80s twist of course. Ray is honest and good, but he also relishes the strangeness of what is happening. When the baseball players vanish after a day's practice, Ray walks away with a look of quiet delight, saying, "This is so cool."

Field of Dreams has everything and nothing to do with baseball. The love of the game is shared by almost everyone onscreen, and fans will delight in the inside jokes and quiet respect it is shown.

But it's really about having faith in your dreams and the longing for a more innocent time when fathers played catch with their sons and America was good. It's also



This isn't just another baseball movie.

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uniquely American in championing the individual. In *Field of Dreams*, even death can't keep a good man from achieving his goals.

The film was directed by Phil Alden Robinson, who wrote the screenplay based on the book *Shoeless Joe* by

screen, much as he did in last year's *Bull Durham*. He occupies his character with such unaffected ease that we never question the rather bizarre events happening to Ray.

Ray Liotta plays Shoeless Joe with an unnerving intensity. Though Joe eventually lightens up, he treats his first opportunity to play ball again with solemn dignity. And James Earl Jones is marvelous as Mann, the '60s radical who grew tired of having so much expected of him. "I was the East Coast distributor of involved," Mann mutters with a weary air at one point.

But it is his burly good humor and witty banter that sparks *Field of Dreams* and gives it a sharp, modern edge. Without it, the movie might have fallen into a corny wholesomeness. That doesn't happen. More accomplished films will be released this year, but none will be so warm, open-hearted and distinctly American as this.

by michael giltz



★ ★ ★ ★ one of the year's best
★ ★ ★ good with minor flaws
★ ★ basically poor but not worthless
★ a waste of celluloid
0 if it's really late and this
movie comes on TV,
change the channel

W.P. Kinsella. He also directed *In The Mood*, an overlooked gem that shares this movie's gentle charm.

While there are minor quibbles — such as a P.T.A. meeting that is funny but unconvincing — Robinson has crafted a delightful movie filled with wonderful performances. Costner simply inhabits the