

Field of Dreams ★★★

Year of Release: 1989

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Field of Dreams almost defies description. Although it's about baseball, it's not a baseball movie. Although the film is extremely spiritual, it's not about religion. And although *Field of Dreams* is melodramatic, it's not a tearjerker. To really understand what *Field of Dreams* is all about, you have to see it.

In the film, Kevin Costner plays Ray Kinsella, a baseball fan, '60s Berkeley graduate, and Iowa farmer. One day as he is standing in the middle of his expansive corn fields, Ray hears a voice; it tells him: "If you build it, he will come." Then Ray has a vision and somehow concludes that if he builds a baseball field in the middle of his corn, Shoeless Joe Jackson will arise from the dead to play ball once again. And even though it depletes his family's savings and his neighbors think he's crazy, Ray clears away the corn and builds a baseball field, complete with bleachers and flood lights. "If you build it, he will come." And lo and behold, Shoeless Joe does come—bringing with him several of his dead teammates.

And then Ray hears The Voice again; it tells him to "ease his pain." Ray thinks this means that he must travel to Boston to meet Terence Mann, an influential and radical novelist from the '60s who has since stopped writing and dropped out of society. With great aplomb, James Earl Jones plays the disillusioned author who joins forces with Ray and embarks with him on a magical and spiritual journey.

The cast in *Field of Dreams* is excellent, especially Costner in the lead role. Costner gives a quiet,

subtle, and moving performance as a man who before building the baseball field had done nothing crazy or spontaneous in his entire life. Costner gives Ray just the right mix of enthusiasm and idealism to make us believe in his mystic visions and swallow this wondrous fairy tale.

Amy Madigan gives a fine supporting performance as Ray's feisty and loving wife, who against her better judgment supports her husband's crazy ideas. In her most impressive scene, Madigan vehemently argues against book burning at a PTA meeting, displaying the sincere passion of a '60s Berkeley radical. Ray Liotta is appropriately eerie and awe-inspiring as the ghost of Shoeless Joe, the legendary batter who was suspended from baseball for his involvement in the 1919 Chicago "Black Sox" Scandal. And finally, Burt Lancaster is memorable in a small, but important, role as a small town doctor whose professional baseball career was limited to only one inning.

Field of Dreams is a touching fairy tale full of life, wonder, mystery, spirit, and humor. For the most part, it succeeds in capturing our emotions and suspending our disbelief. Kinsella's spiritual quest in pursuit of his dreams proves to be moving and miraculous. But while *Field of Dreams* generally avoids excessive melodrama, it unfortunately does at times go overboard, and by the end it gets down-right sappy. In general, however, *Field of Dreams* is an emotionally satisfying fantasy—one I can recommend to everyone but unromantic cynics.