



JOHN SHANNON

Holly Hunter and Richard Dreyfuss outshine their movie, Always.

★★ Always
Oaks 4 West

Pete Sandich is dead. Pete (Richard Dreyfuss) was a hot-shot forest-fire fighter who treated blazes as a chance to pull crazy stunts. It drove his girlfriend Dorinda (Holly Hunter) nuts, until the day he pushed his luck too far and died while saving a buddy.

Following Pete's death, Dorinda sinks into a gloomy mood that even her best friend, Al (John Goodman), can't dispel. Neither can the arrival of Ted Baker (Brad Johnson), a good-looking but klutzy young pilot smitten by Dorinda the first time he saw her.

Don't count Pete out, though. He may be dead, but he's not finished yet. Pete is sent back to earth to be the guardian angel of Ted. What we call intuition or

beginner's luck is really whispered words of encouragement from old pros like Pete. They serve as invisible mentors to the young by passing on their wisdom to unwitting apprentices.

Pete enjoys watching over Ted until he realizes he may also have to watch Ted and Dorinda fall in love. It's a painful irony: Pete wants the love of his life to be happy, but can't bear to see her with another man.

This bittersweet premise is a remake of *A Guy Named Joe*, a minor classic starring Spencer Tracy. Director Steven Spielberg, a passionate fan of that film, says it's the only remake he'd ever consider. Unfortunately, his passion doesn't translate to the screen.

The mature, restrained demands of the story are certainly within his

grasp. Spielberg proved he can deliver finely-tuned performances with his first movie, *The Sugarland Express*, and with more recent dramatic efforts like *The Color Purple* and *Empire Of The Sun*.

The cast Spielberg assembled is certainly top-notch as well. Dreyfuss gives a typically intelligent and endearing edge to Pete, while Hunter is her usual engaging self. John Goodman as their best friend Al has some of the movie's funniest moments.

The problem is the script. The relationship between Pete and Dorinda is given no emotional weight: They seem more like infatuated teen-agers than adults with a deep, meaningful commitment. Still, they make a better couple than Dorinda and Ted would. Ted is just a dumb lug whose most interesting trait is a bad imitation of John Wayne.

We're supposed to think — along with Pete — they should get together, even if it causes him pain. But the living, breathing, handsome Ted is still no match for Pete. It would more enjoyable to have Dorinda reject Ted and pine away for the rest of her life, not realizing Pete is by her side.

Instead, we're given what is supposed to be a bittersweet but happy ending. Because Dreyfuss is a better actor than this weak script, it merely seems disappointing. So does *Always*.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ