

REEL REVIEWS

Better Off Dead

Oaks Six

Lane Meyer (John Cusack of *The Sure Thing*) is in love. In fact, he's obsessed. We know he's obsessed, because his room is literally covered with pictures of his girlfriend, Beth (Amanda Wyss). Lane even sleeps with one of her photos.

Unfortunately, many women in high school change boyfriends more often than they change their socks, and Beth is no exception. She drops Lane for another guy, an obnoxiously handsome man who is also a top-notch skier. He's the captain of the snow-ski team, and the only person to ever ski the dreaded 12-K slope and live.

Needless to say, Lane is crushed. Without Beth, he figures he'd be better off dead. But, every time he gets close to committing suicide, Lane stops. He wants to win Beth back. Besides, a pretty exchange student from France just moved in across the street. Her name is Monique (Diane Franklin) and we know she's just the girl for Lane.

Will Lane ever get around to killing himself? Will he and Beth get together again? Will he go through with his challenge to race Beth's new boyfriend down the treacherous 12-K slope? Will Lane finally notice Monique?

That is the rather standard plot of *Better Off Dead*. But, this is not a standard movie. Writer/Director Savage Steve Holland has something more ambitious in mind.

On the one hand, Holland has made a run-of-the-mill, but appealing, romantic comedy. On the other hand, he's made a broad spoof



John Cusack

à la *Airplane*. For instance, Lane is sitting at the dinner table sulking about his lost love when his dinner crawls off the plate! And his little brother only has to fiddle with a toy gun to turn it into a deadly laser.

Quite a few of these gags (especially the gang of newspaper boys who want subscription money) are pretty funny. But, the movie never gels. The problem is that the two parts of the film (romance/spoof) create, at best, an uneasy alliance.

From the very beginning, we know this movie isn't bound by reality. So, we have a lot of trouble concentrating on the very realistic problems of Lane. *Airplane's* plot

was flimsy and secondary. This movie's plot is important and interesting.

We can't become involved in the romantic comedy, because we're always waiting for the next bizarre gag. And we can't enjoy the gags, because they're getting in the way of the story.

Maybe there's a way these two genres could work together. Maybe there's some combination of the two that will allow them to play off each other, resulting in a funny and touching movie. *Better Off Dead* isn't that movie, but I think Savage Steve Holland is just getting warmed up.

By Michael Giltz