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★ ★ Chances Are
Plaza

Robert Downey, Jr. is one of those charmed actors who always seems better than the movie he's appearing in. Like Michael Caine — another fine actor who has appeared in a remarkable amount of duds — Downey has a flair for romantic comedy and an easygoing rapport with the camera.

While Downey caused a stir and even talk of an Oscar nomination for his performance as a heroin addict in *Less Than Zero*, he has more frequently been seen making his way through clunkers like *Johnny Be Good* and *1969*. But regardless of a film's quality, Downey always manages to remain in our good graces.

That track record continues with *Chances Are*, a cumbersome romantic comedy directed by Emile Ardolino, who is hot off the inexplicable success of *Dirty Dancing*.

The basic premise is intriguing enough. Downey plays Alex Finch, the reincarnation of a man who died in a traffic accident 23 years ago. He stumbles upon his wife, who has remained faithful all these years, and the daughter he never knew.

Fresh out of college, Finch must contend with flashbacks that begin to explain why he is so attracted to a woman old enough to be his mother, while fending off the amorous advances of a classmate whom he soon realizes is his daughter.

Unfortunately, it takes half an hour just to get the plot rolling and Downey on-screen. Once he's there, some amusing events occur, but it's too little, too late.

Mary Stuart Masterson has some nice moments as the daughter who can't understand why a college chum would treat her like a little girl, but the film depends on Downey for most of its appeal. We might as well get used to his being the most dependable part of undependable movies.

By Michael Giltz