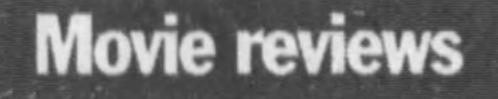


# ungelsequel





# With a likable John Travolta, 'Michael' has wings but doesn't fly

# **By Mark Caro** TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

ichael" stars John Travolta as an angel down for his "last blast" on Earth. The role seems tailor-made for Travolta, an admitted hedonist who has been known to indulge his own lavish whims.

Like the actor these days, Michael apparently can do no wrong, particularly in the dazed eyes of almost every woman he meets. The angel also has a whimsical streak, but it's more along the lines of wanting to check out the world's largest ball of twine and the world's largest non-stick frying pan.

You get the feeling the mortal Travolta has concocted more fantastic experiences-and perhaps performed more extravagant good deeds-than director/cowriter Nora Ephron ("Sleepless in Seattle," "Mixed Nuts") has devised for Michael. Here's an angel who's battled the one and only Lucifer and penned a Psalm, for God's sake. And the best he can do on his very last jaunt on our planet is to smother his breakfast cereal in sugar, chain smoke, hang around with Jean Stapleton and try to get William Hurt and Andie MacDowell together? Is this anyone else's idea of heaven on Earth? Like its title character, "Michael" has wings but never flies. The movie is built around a few striking sight gags-like Travolta with feathers sprouting out of his back—and the good will transmitted by its star, but its zipless direction and writing fail to hide the strings behind the would-be magic. You feel like you're being professionally charmed. When we first meet Michael, he's living in the rural **Iowa** house of an older woman, Pansy (Stapleton), after answering her prayer that an angel come and obliterate the bank that kept her in debt. Frank Quinlan (Hurt), a bottom-feeding reporter for a Chicago-based trash tabloid, receives a letter from Pansy that includes a photo of the angel, and the paper's snarly British boss, Vartan Malt (Bob Hoskins), dispatches Frank and two other reporters to get the scoop. If they succeed, Frank and his bumbling colleague, Huey Driscoll (Robert Pastorelli), get to keep their jobs. If they don't, they're canned, and Malt wins custody of Sparky, Driscoll's mutt terrier famous for being photographed with celebrities. Along for the ride is Malt's new hire, Dorothy Winters (MacDowell), a dog trainer falsely touted as an angel expert.



# and terrific material, 'Star' doesn't shine



Shirley MacLaine is flanked by (from left) Juliette Lewis, George Newbern and Mackenzie Astin, who play her grandchildren in "The Evening Star."

# **By Michael Wilmington** TRIBUNE MOVIE CRITIC

he Evening Star," which continues and concludes the story of Aurora Greenway, Shirley MacLaine's grandly memorable mama in the 1983 Oscar-winner "Terms of Endearment-is

When they first glimpse Michael descending the house's stairs, he's clad only in boxer shorts partially eclipsed by his

Bob Greene is taking the day off.

There's not a lot of magic in "Michael," director/co-writer Nora Ephron's story of an angel (John Travolta) who pays one last visit to Earth.

Michael

Dorothy Winters

Frank Quinlan

Vartan Malt.

Huey Driscoll

Pansy Milbank.

sagging belly. He's scratching his crotch, his long hair is tousled, and he's sucking on a cigarette.

They were expecting someone cleaner and with a halo, perhaps the glued-on kind. "I'm not that kind of an angel," he informs them in his borderline-boozy way; he delivers many of his lines as if stifling a burp.

So what kind of angel is he? Hard to say, really. Aside from his slovenly appearance,

SEE MICHAEL, PAGE 5

a movie that has muffed a glorious opportunity. What wonderful characters. What a brilliant and charming cast. What fantastic possibilities. And what a curiously flat, superficial and even irritating result.

Adapted from Larry McMurtry's 1992 novel, which carries Aurora from 1988-when her deceased daughter Emma's children are grown up and making trouble-to the poignant end of her story, "Evening Star" wastes one of the best casts of the year. And one of the best pieces of material as

Why? McMurtry's second Greenway book was written after the massive movie success of "Terms" in 1983—when that earlier film won Oscars for MacLaine, write director James Brool and Jack Nicholso (as her devilish, po bellied astronaut love **Garrett Breedlove** And the second book

# "Evening Star" \*\*

Directed and written by Robert Harling; photographed by Don Burgess; edited by Priscilla Nedd-Friendly, David Moritz: production designed by Bruno Rubeo; music by William Ross; produced by David Kirkpatrick, Polly Platt. Keith Samples, A Paramount Pictures/Rysher Entertainment release; opens Wednesday. Running time: 2:09. MPAA rating: PG-13.

THE CAST

er-	Aurora Greenway	Shirley MacLain
ks	Jerry Bruckner	Bill Paxto
no		Juliette Lewi
on	Arthur Cotton	Miranda Richardso Ben Johnso
ot-	Rosie Dunlop	Marion Ros
ver		Donald Moffa
	Garrett Breedlove	Jack Nicholso
e).		

works with our memories of the first, almost demands them. We have to recall the "Terms of Endearment" story of Aurora and daughter Emma ("turbulent" Debra Winger): their lifelong feud, Emma's luckless marriage and Aurora's staunch self-sacrifice when her daughter-now a mother with three children-was stricken with terminal cancer.

McMurtry's and Brooks' original Aurora Greenway saga tells one of those stories, both hip and traditionalist, where we discover that the fussbudget, maddening, interfering parent had a point after all. (That isn't a

SEE EVENING, PAGE 4

# World of 'Jerry Maguire' is a fantasy league few sports agents know

"Michael"

\*\*

Directed by Nora Ephron; screenplay by Nora Ephron & Delia Ephron and Pete

Dexter & Jim Quinlan; photographed by John Lindley; edited by Geraldine Per-oni; production designed by Dan Davis; music by Randy Newman; produced by Sean Daniel, Nora Ephron and James Jacks. A New Line Cinema release;

THE CAST

opens Wednesday. Running time: 1:45. MPAA rating: PG.



### **By Mike Conklin** TRIBUNE INC. COLUMNIST

he sequel to "Jerry Maguire," Tom Cruise's nifty new movie about sports agents, should be obvious. The story line will have Jerry parlaying success with Rod Tidwell (Cuba Gooding Jr.), his lone client, into signing more athletes about to enter pro football's draft. His stable of stars will grow to rival that of Sports Management International, his old employer, and the competition to outdo each other will provide frenetic subplots.

Jerry's own business will reach blockbuster proportions.

It will be called Athletes First and, in a cute touch, the logo will be designed by Jonathan Lipnicki, his stepson. Jerry will have dozens of agents in his employ. His payroll will include Marcee Tidwell (Regina King), Rod's wife, who did, after all, take marketing in college.

John Travolta

William Hur

Bob Hoskins

Robert Pastorelli

Jean Stapleton

Andie MacDowell

Eventually, Jerry will hit the wall.

AF has become so big that Maguire, in a greedy search for the "ultimate deal," has lost touch with the daily operation. His company, undercut by his own agents (Marcee has left to start a firm), will flounder.

There's a dalliance with Kelly Preston, his

former fiance, who has become a TV net-

work executive, and a brush with substance abuse. This will bring him to a crash in the same hotel room where he had his catharsis in the first movie.

Enter Renee Zellweger, his wife (estranged, by now) who has been running AF during his absences. She will appear with her son in one hand and the long-forgotten "mission statement"-the paper he wrote to set off the entire chain of events-in the other hand. Together, they'll sit down, reread it, and discover lost values.

Fade to a Pacific sunset. Too cute? Too neat? Too predictable? You could say the same for "Jerry

SEE AGENTS, PAGE 3

'This movie humanizes us. To the public, too often we are seen simply as the guys who drive up ticket prices.' Sports agent Leigh Steinberg (right), the model for Tom Cruise's Jerry Maguire

Chicago Tribune, Wednesday, December 25, 1996 Section 5

# A Christmas message and a wish for '97



ear Readers: In 1955, the year I began writing this column, I wrote an essay for Christmas Day. **Reader response was** extremely rewarding, and [ have reprinted it each year, with topical modifications.

This is my Christmas message for 1996:

# **Ann Landers**

Dear Readers: Today is Christmas. What has happened to peace on Earth, goodwill toward men? In

many parts of the world, there is no peace, and in the hearts of many men, there is nothing that could pass for goodwill.

Our youth insist that we are poisoning the environment, and they are right. They resent living in a world they didn't make, and who can blame them? But what generation ever made the world it had to live in?

# End of forever?

Hair-raising changes could be in store for 'Highlander: The Series'

### **By Allan Johnson** TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

drian Paul may leave his role as Duncan, the swashbuckling Scottish immortal of the clan MacLeod in the hugely popular syndicated action series "Highlander" after the end of this season.

But the really big news is that Paul may. . . get rid of his ponytail!! "It will probably go very shortly. want to cut it off," says Paul of his momentous news.

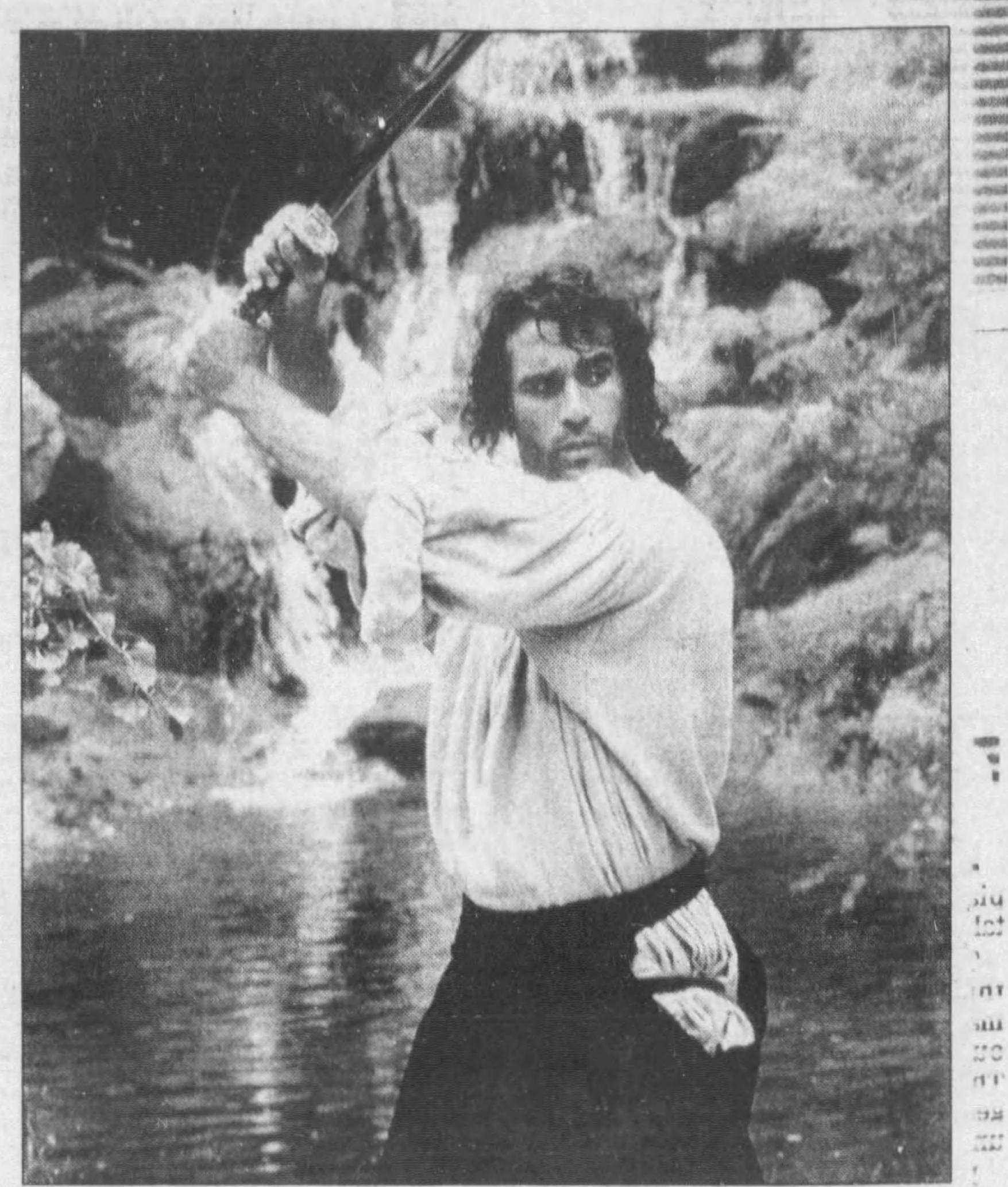
"Getting up in the morning and just running your hand through your hair is really difficult when you've got long hair," adds the man who risks cutting more than his hair when avoiding swords swung by other actors and stunt performers on his show. William Panzer, executive producer of "Highlander: The Series," says he hasn't seen his star in about a month, "so if it's happened, it's happened since then. But I've seen him on film, and that baby is still there." Losing the ponytail would represent a fundamental shift in the entire scope of the series (yeah, right), a spinoff of the cult film about a race of immortals who creep around for centuries trying to chop off each other's heads because it's the only way they can be killed. Has Paul discussed this decision with his producers? "Ha!" he exclaims. "They don't know about it yet. I'm going to cut it off in the middle of an episode, probably. That could cause a cat amongst the pigeons." Whatever that means. "OK by me," says executive producer Marla Ginsburg. "Adrian would look great bald." "They can always give me wigs," cracks Paul. Fans of the series, which is seen at 9 p.m. Saturdays on WPWR-Ch.

# 50, and has gained renewed popularity thanks to weekday repeats on cable's USA Network at 6 p.m., probably would like Paul bald or shaggy, just as long as he stays as MacLeod.

Television

But Paul has said in the past that he would like to move on to other roles. With this being the fifth season of "Highlander," one has to figure the time for him to depart could be now.

"The fifth season is always like the point where people have to make different choices and different decisions," Paul explains. "I've thought about it. It's going to be dependent on a lot of things."



Although our universities are once again places of higher learning, racism abounds on many campuses. Prejudice against minorities is on the increase, and I fear it's going to get worse before it gets better.

Unfortunately, the "war on drugs" has turned out to be a colossal failure. The increase in the number of homicides is staggering, and most of it is drugrelated.

Guns and knives are standard equipment among teenagers. It is not uncommon for a teenager to get shot or stabbed for his jacket or his shoes. Metal detectors in schools help some but not enough.

While alcohol is still the most abused drug of all, marijuana and stronger substances like crack cocaine and now heroin again are commonplace in junior and senior high schools. The dropout rate is appalling. Why should a kid stay in school when he can get rich dealing drugs? This is the message too many young people are getting.

Suicide is the second most frequent cause of death among teenagers in this country. (The first is accidents.) Every 90 minutes, a teenager in America will kill himself.

More bad news is that venereal disease is epidemic, not to mention AIDS, for which there is no vaccine and no cure, although new drugs are providing hope.

We are becoming increasingly desensitized to filthy language, garbage "art" and rotten stuff on TV. Violence, bigotry and talking dirty must be tolerated, we are told, because we dare not endanger "freedom of speech."

I am firmly against censorship, but where is the moral outrage against all the filth? It's almost impossible to find a family movie these days. What has happened to plain, everyday decency?

Because this is an advice column, I spend the greater part of every day with grief and trouble. I am adored by some, despised by others, chastised, castigated and dumped on. Does it depress me? No, it does not.

Panzer, who oversees the lucrative "Highlander" franchise of merchandise, movies, television and animated series with his partner Peter Davis, says negotiations are ongoing with Paul about his continuing another year on the series.

"We're trying to make him feel comfortable both with the direction that the show is going to go in, and with his own involvement," says Panzer. "And obviously, that pesky old money [issue] rears its head."

Adds Ginsburg: "The good thing is the concept itself—much like 'Star Trek'—has a life of its own. ] don't think that the show would ever be the same without Adrian,

but it would be a different show." Paul, who was born in London and has been acting for about nine years, spent his hiatus earlier this year making an action movie, "Rangers," which also stars Michael Biehn of "The Terminator" and "Aliens."

"Once this season is over, I'll be looking to do other films," says Paul, who is coy about his age, an odd thing for a man playing a character who is around 400 years old.

He says he has a few scripts for

Adrian Paul as Duncan MacLeod, the swashbuckling immortal of "Highlander." Paul's feeling the fifth season itch.

romantic comedies. "I just don't want to be categorized as just doing action."

**Rysher Entertainment**, which makes "Highlander," has indicated the show will return for another year.

"I don't think that if I did a sixth season, I would want to be in all the episodes," says Paul, "so it's a question of actually trying to get other films that take me away from being a television actor in 'Highlander.' 'Highlander' film No. 4 is going to happen, that may interest me."

Panzer and Davis have a deal with Miramax to create another movie about the clan MacLeod. Christopher Lambert starred in the first three films as immortal Connor MacLeod (when the TV series premiered, he guest-starred as the

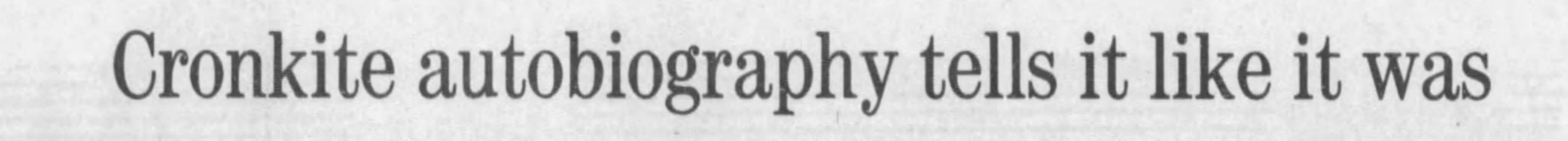
"kinsman" of Duncan).

"We would love it" if Paul could star in the fourth movie, Panzer says. "He would love to do it, I believe he's waiting for us to show him the story."

Paul is very happy with the series this year (he's directing the show's 100th episode), which could make signing up for season No. 6 hard to resist.

"We've had some really good scripts this year that have sort of pushed us a little bit further,' he says. "The show's gone on to a little bit of a metamorphosis, because it has new energy or a new emphasis. So it's been very interesting in that respect to see the quality sort of change."

But to paraphrase "Highlander's" motto: There Can Be Only One. . hairstyle for MacLeod, that is. So don't change it, Adrian!



alter Cronkite was an Everyman during the early and middle days of TV news. He lost an early Texas accent, but not his "gee-whiz" delight in the things he found interesting or his ill-concealed contempt for things that weren't right. When Neil Armstrong took his first steps on the moon, Cronkite's live

comments were: "Oh boy! Whew!

And recalling the Nuremberg trials

in this book, he describes the 21 Nazi

defendants "sullying for all time, as

surely as would atomic waste, the 250

In this highly enjoyable autobiog-

raphy, Cronkite, 80, shows he is a

great storyteller-charming and self-

deprecatory in a way that rings true.

Recalling some pompous teen out-

square feet of space they occupied.

wanted to spit on them."

Boy!"

the time, he says, "Nearly everyone after President Richard Nixon valued a job in the hand more than resigned, for example, a Republican an education in the bush." For the friend said, "I felt so sorry for Pat las next few years, he bounced between night." newspapers and radio stations. He Responded Betsy, "I feel sorry for faked college football play-by-play, as her every night." Ronald Reagan once did with base-Cronkite may have been at the top ball, by reading a telegraph wire. He of his personal powers during the went on TV so early that he, like Vietnam War. Mirroring average most other people, didn't own a set. Americans, he began supporting the The reader feels the awkward war, then reversed himself after he beginner grow in poise and confispent time on the ground there. When dence as he rises to become the CBS Cronkite broadcast an editorial that evening anchorman and begins dealsaid it was time to negotiate a settle ing with world leaders. By 1978, his ment, President Lyndon Johnson told public stature is so great the comic press secretary Bill Moyers, "If I've strip Doonesbury has reporters on a lost Cronkite, I've lost middle Ameri news plane debating whether they ica.' should ask Cronkite to stop the rain. As the early men of TV news grow He was well-matched by his wife of old, we'll be seeing more of their auto 58 years, Betsy, a former reporter for biographies. Cronkite's proves to his United Press International whose wit fans that they were not wrong to like flashes through the book. The day him and trust him.

After 41 years, I still find writing this column immensely rewarding. I realize that many people who write to me don't want advice. They just need someone who will listen.

My column has provided me with an opportunity to shine a spotlight on ignorance and fear, comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. I am well aware that mine is an enormous responsibility, and I try hard, 365 days a year, never to let you down.

You, dear readers, are my friends. You invite me into your homes, and often we have breakfast together. I want to be there for you when you need

So, if you feel the need to unburden yourself, blow your top, register a gripe or tell me off, I'm as close as your mailbox.

God bless you all. I hope 1997 will be your best year ever.

Ann Landers

# **Book review**

Walter Cronkite: A Reporter's Life By Walter Cronkite Knopf, 416 pages, \$26.95

**Reviewed by Judy Rose** Knight-Ridder/Tribune

burst, for example, he notes that it showed "my early predisposition to editorial work-the ability to be both pontifical and wrong."

His early years and jobs were in Texas, Kansas City, Oklahoma. His parents divorced early, and his mother lived to 102 as the belle of many balls, known for her good looks and wit.

During the Depression, Cronkite got a job on the Houston Post at \$15 a week and dropped out of college. At

# TROCALON

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Maguire." A very healthy opening weekend box office gross of \$17.1 million tells us moviegoers obviously liked the way director Cameron Crowe ("Say Anything," "Singles") viewed and packaged the world of sports agents.

**Critics are mentioning Academy** Award in the same sentence they describe Tom Cruise's performance as Jerry. There are excellent supporting performances by Gooding Jr., Bonnie Hunt, Zellweger and King, any one of whom may rate an Oscar nomination. But those in the business of sports had to be left unsatisfied: Crowe, sitting on a motherlode of material, barely scratched the surface in his look at the people who buy, sell and barter athletes. He could push the R-rated envelope by simply reading the newspapers and court dockets for added details.



**'There are no rules** to being an agent. All it takes is a client. Anything goes. You don't even have to be a lawyer.' **Ed Garvey** 

brightest and biggest-and per-

the day we talked he was in a hurry to get home to decorate the Christmas tree with his family at his California home.

"This movie humanizes us," he said. "To the public, too often we [agents] are seen simply as the guys who drive up ticket prices."

Well, yes, that's certainly one image.

Another one that comes to mind is this: Paul Newman, playing a lawyer in "The Verdict," search! ing for business by passing out his card at a stranger's funeral.

### Some real-life characters

Who gets the Norby Walters' role? He's the agent whose trial in U.S. District Court-and conviction—in Chicago convinced many that he engineered the outcome of the 1986 Rose Bowl game.

Who plays Howard Slusher? He's the agent who advised client Todd Bell to sit out an entire year with the Bears, rather than accept their offer, in what turned out to be the Super Bowl season.

Where's the Mike Trope character? He's the agent whose dealings with football stars at Nebraska and Texas Christian in the early 1980s almost destroyed the programs.

If this film truly were art imi-

Cuba Gooding Jr. (left) and Tom Cruise in "Jerry Maguire." Director Cameron Crowe barely scratched the surface in his look at the people who buy, sell and barter athletes.

tating life, it would've started with Maguire making an illegal-according to National Collegiate Athletic Association rules-contact with Tidwell while he still was playing football for Arizona State.

Most likely, Jerry, sitting in a Mercedes XL convertible, would've been waiting for Rod in the stadium parking lot after practice. He would've offered him

a ride home, handed him his car phone, told the impressionable player to call anyone he wanted, and slipped him a pair of new Nikes as he exited.

If Rod was projected to be a first-round draft choice (he wasn't in "Jerry Maguire"), the agent might've offered the athlete a job for his wife at his firm.

Trope, an agent no longer in the business, said he wanted to testify

in the Walters' trial here that 90 percent of the players picked in the first three rounds of the draft every year have agents before their college eligibility expired. This is illegal according to the NCAA.

The filmmaker's passing over of grittier material may have been haps its most Pollyannaish-star today.

Steinberg's client list includes the league's marquee quarterbacks, such as the Cowboys' Troy Aikman, Colts' Jim Harbaugh, 49ers' Steve Young, and Patriots' Drew Bledsoe.

You don't hire him. He hires you.

Aside from the personal ribbing Steinberg has taken over Jerry Maguire's love life in the film—and the fact he is being portrayed by Tom Cruise-Leigh likes the film. "I've been in the business 22 years and, for me, this was 20 years ago," he said. "Some of it was too close."

The love scenes? "Well, when left my law firm to get into this full time, it was draft time, we had four of the first 12 picks, and I was on my honeymoon," he said. "That was not the greatest start to my marriage."

### There are no rules

Steinberg consulted on the project when filming first started in 1994 in Arizona. He attended because Leigh Steinberg was the recent premieres in New York model for Maguire. Steinberg is and Los Angeles, took his office the football sports agent business' staff to the L.A. showing, and on

"There are no rules to being an agent," explained Ed Garvey, for mer NFL Players Association executive director and a Madison Wis., lawyer who also teaches al the University of Wisconsin. "All it takes is a client. Anything goes.

"You don't even have to be lawyer," Garvey added. "In fact, if is better if an agent is a lawyer because then, at least, there is the fear of losing a license to prach tice."

There will be 250 football play! ers selected in the next pro foot ball draft and at least 500 more who think they should be picked, There are at least a thousand peo! ple who'd love to represent them.

Then consider this: We're only talking football. In basketball, the contracts are more lucrative. In baseball, there are even more openings for athletes.

Is it any wonder that, at the end of the film, Jerry Maguire's eyes light up when his 5-year-old sten. son picks up a baseball and impresses everyone with his throw?