

Frivolous fantasies offer innocuous entertainment

NEW YORK (NC) — "Chances Are" (Tri-Star) is a delightful piece of fantasy fluff that takes romance one step beyond to the twilight zone.

Young newlyweds Louie (Christopher McDonald) and Corinne Jeffries (Cybill Shepherd) are madly in love but doomed. Lawyer Louie is unceremoniously bumped off in a suspicious hit-and-run accident, leaving pregnant Corinne devastated.

Twenty years later, Corinne is a successful Smithsonian curator and mom to spunky Yale law school grad Miranda (Mary Stuart Masterson); but Corinne's still mourning for Louie. When a young, aspiring journalist shows up at her door claiming to have been Louie in his past life, all hell breaks loose.

For reasons only understood in celluloid heaven, Alex Finch (Robert Downey Jr.) has retained memory of his past life and is compelled to pick up where Louie left off 20-odd years ago.

Identity problems arise in quick succession. Alex is passionately drawn to beautiful Corinne, a woman twice his age. He rebuffs Miranda's obvious charms because she was once his daughter, but he easily connects with Louie's best friend, *Washington Post* reporter Philip Train (Ryan O'Neal). Philip has watched over Louie's family for years, stifling his secret love for Corinne.

Filed in soft focus by director Emile Ardolino ("Dirty Dancing"), "Chances Are" is a pleasant diversion with gorgeous sets and delightful performances. Minus

her shrill "Moonlighting" persona, Shepherd is a real surprise as the exquisite, vulnerable Washington matron still pining for her lost love. O'Neal is charming as a man who pines stoically for Corinne, and Downey is believable as a young man clumsily attempting to live out someone else's destiny.

This is innocuous fantasy in the tradition of such richer efforts as "Heaven Can Wait" and "Back to the Future." But what it lacks in originality and substantive humor, it transcends with class. For those who are entranced by attractive, well-mannered characters, designer sets and true love in the old Hollywood tradition, "Chances Are" will be welcome film entertainment that also squeezes in a feeble message about the healthy necessity of moving on after the death of a loved one.

Due to some sexual innuendoes and an implied illicit liaison, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'Baron Munchausen'

Audiences will be so distracted by the fabulous special effects in Terry Gilliam's "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen" (Columbia), that they will have a hard time zeroing in on the bloated plot line.

By rights, children as well as adults should find this epic fantasy thrilling. But in retelling the tall tales spun by the obscure adventurer Karl Friedrich Hieronymus, the Baron von Munchausen



Robert Downey Jr. and Cybill Shepherd star in "Chances Are." The U.S. Catholic Conference describes the film as a "delightful piece of fantasy fluff that takes romance one step beyond the twilight zone."

(1720-97), director Gilliam gets too caught up in the look and sound of the baron's incredible fantasy universe and fails to provide a comfortable sense of focus. The baron, after all, is no longer a household name. That he was notorious for his exaggerated stories of war heroism is hardly common knowledge today.

While kids may stare wide-eyed at the magical visuals, they may have difficulty following the baron's initial recollections, which set the stage for the rest of the action. Claiming responsibility for a Turkish siege that is riotously wrecking an 18th-century European city, the baron (John Neville) attempts to set the record straight to a company of actors badly portraying his exploits in the town's theater.

To prove his point, he sets off with 10-year-old Sally Salt (Sarah Polley), the

daughter of the acting impresario, in a hot air balloon fashioned out of ladies' bloomers. This whimsical image will soon be matched by others as the baron and Sally search for his four old friends who'll confirm his tales and help him put an end to the Turkish siege once and for all.

"Baron Munchausen" is a hodgepodge of rich images reminiscent of those found in paintings by Hieronymus Bosch; stories about Gulliver; and such films as "Alice in Wonderland," "Pinocchio" and "Peter Pan." The end result is staggeringly beautiful to look at, with lots of sound and fury signifying just about nothing.

Due to minimal sexual innuendo, a flash of nudity and much comic-book violence, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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