

IN REVIEW
FEATURE

Funny money plays a role in 'Chips', 'Check'

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

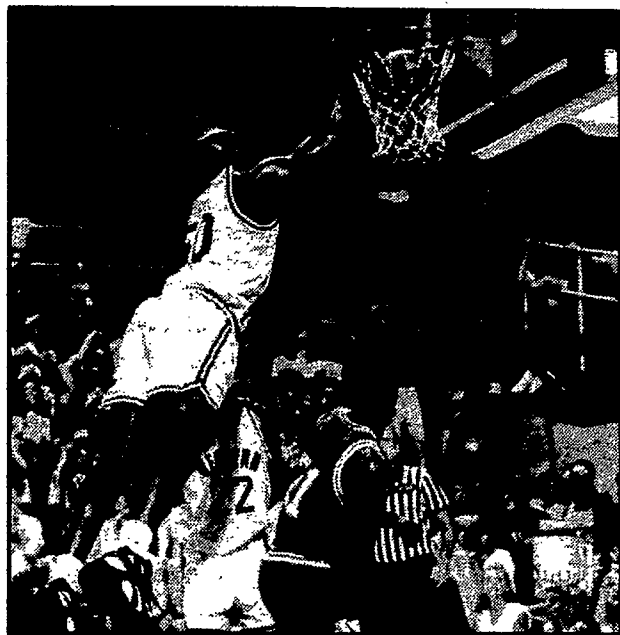
'Blue Chips'

Desperate to add three talented players (Shaquille O'Neal, Anfernee Hardaway and Matt Nover) to his losing college basketball team, a normally straight-arrow coach (Nick Nolte) OKs a wealthy alum's recruitment bribes, but the sweet taste of victory cannot save the coach's conscience in *Blue Chips* (Paramount).

Director William Friedkin's examination of corruption in college sports is undercut by a contrived, melodramatic script and Nolte's scenery-chewing performance. Ambiguous treatment of ethical issues, some sexual references and minimal rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Blank Check'

After taking a blank check from a gangster (Miguel Ferrer) in return for his damaged bike, a resourceful 11-year-old (Brian Bonsall) fills it out to the tune of \$1 million, successfully cashes it and goes on a spending spree, with three buffoonish crooks and an undercover FBI agent (Karen Duffy) in hot pursuit. Director Rupert Wainwright's Disney comedy looks like a commercial for over-size toys and computer gadgets, with plot and characterizations tossed in as



Paramount Pictures
Neon Bodeaux (Shaquille O'Neal) slam dunks the ball in *Blue Chips*, a Paramount Pictures release.



Buena Vista Pictures
Blank Check stars Brian Bonsall as Preston Waters, whose life changes when a crook runs over his bicycle and gives him a blank check to pay for the damages.

an afterthought. Some violence played for laughs and a child's greedy excesses. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

'The Cement Garden'

After their mother (Sinead Cusack) dies, four orphaned youngsters bury her body in the cellar and live on their own as an incestuous relationship develops between teenage brother (Andrew Robertson) and sister (Charlotte Gainsbourg), and their 7-year-old brother (Ned Birkin) takes to dressing as a girl and reverting to using baby bottles. In *The Ce-*

ment Garden (October), British director Andrew Birkin seems interested only in the shock value of a repellent story about self-possessed teenage siblings who are knowing and willful in their sexual appetites and indifferent to their little brother's pathetic deterioration. Graphic depiction of sibling incest, recurring nudity, frequently implied masturbation and much rough language. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. Not rated by the MPAA.

'Reality Bites'

While searching for a job, a novice filmmaker (Winona Ryder) becomes ro-

mantically involved with an ambitious TV programmer (Ben Stiller), much to the disgust of her lethargic musician friend (Ethan Hawke), who can't express his own romantic feelings for her. Also directed by Stiller, *Reality Bites* (Universal) takes a mildly comic look at the twentysomething generation caught between trying to juggle confusing adult relationships and starting careers in an economy with few opportunities. Implied pre-marital affairs. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Diary shows how Archbishop Romero searched his soul

Archbishop Oscar Romero: A Shepherd's Diary, translated by Irene B. Hodgson; St. Anthony Messenger Press (Cincinnati, 1993) and Novalis (Montreal, 1993); 542 pp.; \$24.95.

Reviewed by Joe Wakelee-Lynch
Catholic News Service

Last March, a U.N. committee that investigated atrocities and abuses in El Salvador stated that Archbishop Oscar Romero's assassination in March 1980 was ordered by Roberto D'Aubuisson, the late founder of the ARENA party. The committee's findings come as no surprise. Murder and torture have been legion in El Salvador for more than a decade. Other victims include four U.S. churchwomen and six Central American Jesuits, along with two of their assistants.

A unique glimpse into El Salvador's doleful history now arrives in the form of the diary of Archbishop Romero. *Archbishop Oscar Romero: A Shepherd's Diary* is a record of the prelate's doings in the last two years of his life. The diary ends just four days before his murder while he cel-



ebrated Mass at a hospital where he frequently made pastoral visits.

Archbishop Romero clearly did not intend his diary to serve as an autobiography. The book mostly summarizes the events of his time — celebrating Mass, attending meetings, preparing homilies, and traveling for pastoral visits. Readers wishing to learn more about the fascinating and sacrificial life of this truly holy man may wish to read *Romero: A Life*, by Jesuit Father James Brockman. But much lies within these pages that makes the diary inspiring reading.

Amid the prelate's notes on seemingly countless meetings and visits to con-

vents and parishes, his reflection on two subjects stand out as gripping: the minefield of El Salvador's political arena and the archbishop's summaries of his famous Sunday homilies.

For El Salvador's head bishop to take a stance in the middle of his nation's political instability was especially dangerous. Always seeking a nonviolent path, he frequently found himself between death threats from the right wing and attempts by some on the left to manipulate the church. His diary reveals how thoroughly he searched his soul as he tried to tread across this risky terrain.

That his work also was publicly opposed by several of his fellow bishops made his journey particularly lonely. They spoke out publicly in the media, alleging that Archbishop Romero was siding with leftist rebels and ruining the seminary where priests-to-be were in training. Ironically, his sole supporter among the bishops was Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas, the candidate of many liberals when Romero, who had been favored by conservatives and wealthy persons, was se-

lected for the San Salvador see.

Equally fascinating are Archbishop Romero's notes about his sermons. People flocked to the cathedral in the capital to hear the prelate's weekly homily, and those who could not attend listened religiously by radio. His descriptions of his homilies resound with his earnest desire to make the church's message speak to a society in crisis.

This shepherd's diary makes clear the deep abiding faith of the Salvadoran prelate. Oscar Romero was better understood and loved by his Salvadoran brothers and sisters than his brothers-in-the-cloth in the Vatican. Perhaps his diary will testify in Rome that this good shepherd did indeed lay down his life for his flock.

Joe Wakelee-Lynch is a book columnist for the Ventura Star-Free Press, Ventura, Calif.

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