



Hollywood beat

De Niro and Penn: Angels of lightness

By DAVID GIAMMARCO
Robert De Niro and Sean Penn together in a film, playing escaped prisoners disguised as priests, sounds like a great comedy. And it is...almost.
De Niro and Penn are two con-

victs who are forced to participate in a prison break and consequently find themselves having to fend for themselves out on the lam. They slide into a small New England bordertown famous for a weeping Virgin Mary statue and



Robert De Niro (left) and Sean Penn trying to sneak over the Canadian border in a scene from "We're No Angels."

so fittingly enough, disguise themselves as priests, figuring two more won't stand out in a town full of men of the cloth. And amazingly enough, everyone falls for it.

And I think the only place where two brash, hardened criminals could be mistaken for priests would in fact be in a small New England town or else perhaps the Ozark Mountains.

So it is at a local monastery that these two pseudo-priests sneak in and get accepted into the ranks as two famous theologian authors, Father Reilly (De Niro) and

Father Brown (Penn). And nobody second guesses them. Only a latin translating priest (Wallace Shawn) thinks there's something funny about them.

Yeah, this town is real MENSA material.

Meanwhile, De Niro and Penn are biding time trying to figure out strategies to get across the police-infested border into the neutral zone of Canada. And they try, and try, and try.

Their hijinks are mildly amusing, but certainly not hilarious. Robert De Niro is executive

producer of "We're No Angels" and to his credit, does everything humanly possible to make this film work. And he does somewhat. He of course gives a brilliant performance and can tackle comedy quiet successfully, proving it last year through his much-acclaimed role in "Midnight Run." It's always a delight to see De Niro on screen, especially a seldom seen side of his psyche. His scenes of forced humbleness and humility are truly very funny.

Sean Penn is also quite good in a departure role for him, playing a wide-eyed dunce and a rather likeable character at that. But in "We're No Angels," Penn just seems to be floundering around in his under-developed character, not really hitting any mark and consequently grabbing at straws.

But that's not the main problem either.

It has to do mostly with the script. Pulitzer Prize winning writer David Mamet, who has shone with his past efforts, has this time turned in a rather limp screenplay. It starts off great and finishes equally as good, but in-between is a lot of uneven structure and listlessness.

There should have been a lot more to come out of this film, but nonetheless it's still definitely worth seeing, thanks in large part to De Niro who saves the day.

Out of ten, "We're No Angels" rates a six.

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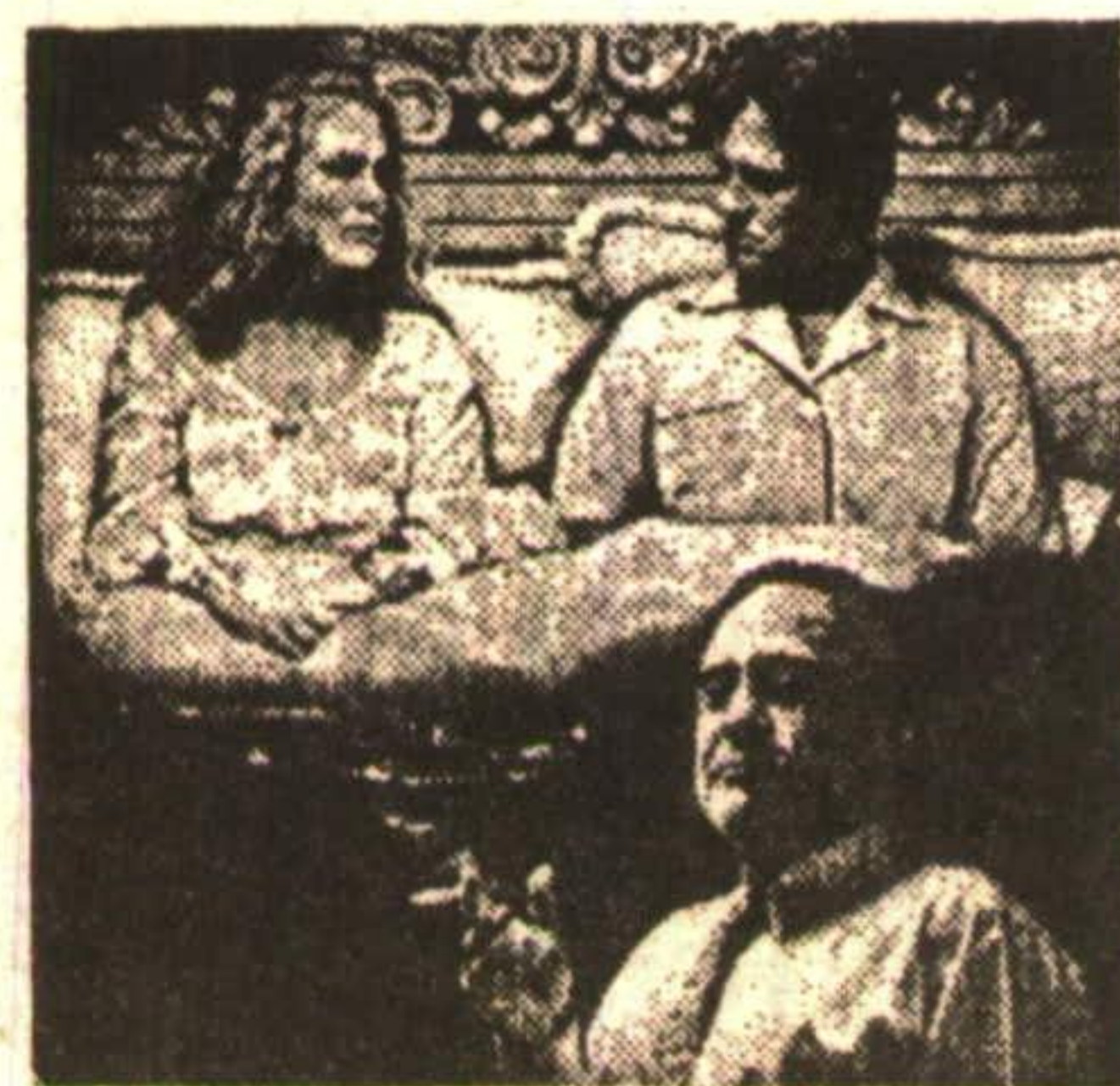
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