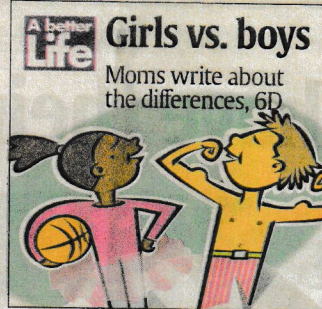


USA  
TODAYLife  
SECTION D

## It's a Marvel



'Halo' morphs into comic, 4-5D



## Girls vs. boys

Moms write about the differences, 6D

By Sam Ward, USA TODAY; His cover by Marvel

much overdue business trip to  
Shanghai on American Airlines: \$1100(putting a face to a voice after  
six years: priceless)

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Wednesday, May 10, 2006

## Lifeline

## Boys Town on 'Idol'?

Chris Daughtry: A  
pinted performance.

For the last two episodes of *American Idol*, the remaining contestants may just be able to make it in. Based on Tuesday night's performances of Katharine McPhee, the only woman in the final four, it will be a boys' club from now on.

A night of Elvis Presley songs proved generally successful. Six of the eight song choices were strong, and only Taylor Hicks' hyperactive *Jailhouse Rock* verged on Elvis-impersonator territory — but then you can't sing *Jailhouse Rock* in a chair. And

Hicks countered his rock-out with a soulful *In the*

netto. Chris Daughtry was impressively restrained on *Sus-cious Minds*, but *A Little Less Conversation* is a trifle — and his performance was a trifle tedious. Elliott Yamin red worse, choosing the worst song of the night — the bloated ballad *If I Can Dream* — and lacking the aster needed to sing it. He was also less than convincing trying to belt the blues on *Trouble*.

Still, McPhee placed herself in the most jeopardy, rbling part of *All Shook Up* (which she medleyed with *Hound Dog*) and oversinging the gorgeous ballad *Help Falling in Love* to within an inch of its life.

One contestant — I'd guess McPhee — will be sent home tonight (Fox, 9 ET/PT).



See more of music editor Ken Barnes' analysis and weigh in yourself in the *Idol* Chatter blog at [americanidol.usatoday.com](http://americanidol.usatoday.com).

## Britney's late-night news: She's pregnant



After weeks of speculation in celebrity tabloids that Britney Spears, 24, is expecting her second child, the pop singer made a surprise appearance Tuesday during a taping of CBS' *Late Show with David Letterman* and confirmed the rumors. Spears

## In public's eyes, Tom's less of a Top Gun

## Cruise flames out in opinion poll

By Susan Wloszczyna  
USA TODAY

Ex-wife Nicole Kidman still loves him, or so she told the *Ladies Home Journal*.

But according to a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll over the weekend when *Mission: Impossible III* opened to \$47.7 million, about \$12 million less than expected, the public has lost its loving feeling for Tom Cruise.

When 1,013 adults were asked their opinion of Cruise, 35% were favorable and 51% unfavorable. Nearly a year ago, when *War of the Worlds* opened on July 4 weekend to \$77 million, the rating was 58% favorable and 31% unfavorable.

(Sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.)

His popularity with women seems most affected: 56% were favorable in 2005, compared with only 35% now. No surprise to Fiona Sutton, 34, of Virginia Beach, who took Cruise's beating of Brooke Shields' treatment for postpartum depression to heart: "As a woman who has dealt with postpartum depression and has taken antidepressants in the past, I have no desire to line Mr. Cruise's pockets with any of my hard-earned cash."

Given that the new *Mission* received rave reviews and one of the widest openings ever in 4,054 theaters, many respondents point to Cruise's antics over the past year — his promotion of Scientology, the couch-bounce on *Oprah* — for the dip. Says Bradley Jacobs, *Us*



By Mario Anzuoni, Reuters

**Losing firepower?** Tom Cruise at a screening of *Mission: Impossible III*, which has been less than stellar at the box office.

movie editor: "The mystique is gone. People take offense at his seeming arrogance. He is still the biggest star in the world, but it is different."

Other factors, such as the six-year lag between *Mission: Impossible II* and *III* and the latter's

non-holiday opening, could have hurt ticket sales. But, says Dave Karger of *Entertainment Weekly*, whose current cover story asks whether Cruise is still worth his nine-figure payday, "A lot of people came up to me and said, 'I don't want to

support this movie's first weekend.' They made a conscious choice to avoid it."

Except for buying a sonogram machine for at-home monitoring of his baby with fiancée Katie Holmes (leading to a California bill to ban such sales), Cruise's most notable antics were while stumping for *War of the Worlds*. Arnold Robinson, his publicist, blames the media for the lower poll results.

"The only thing new in his life is this movie and his baby with a woman he loves," he says. "The public has been besieged with these images. Whose fault is that? Tom hasn't done anything."

If Cruise wants to do some damage control, Karger says, "he should focus on his family and disappear a little bit."

► Pals defend Cruise, 2D

## Keys to the circus

Some of the keys to Cirque du Soleil's success, according to executive producer Lyn Heward:

► **Sharing of ideas:** "We argue about anything — what costumes to use, what athlete to hire. Our first idea is almost never our last."



## Cirque ignites 'Spark'

Self-help author finds something new under the sun