

GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

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MOVIES

Fans of 'Friends' will enjoy Schwimmer in 'The Pallbearer'

BY DOLORES BARCLAY
AP ARTS EDITOR



Comedy: Gwyneth Paltrow and David Schwimmer in Matt Reeves' 'The Pallbearer.'

NEW YORK (AP)—Meet Tom Thompson, a dull, nerdy-looking guy who lives with his mother and can't seem to find a job. Actually, you probably won't want to meet Tom—he's that boring.

But at least one character in Matt Reeves' "The Pallbearer" finds him simply scintillating and that's the vampy queen Ruth Abernathy (Barbara Hershey), whose son has just died.

Ruth asks Tom (David Schwimmer), who she thinks was her son's good friend, to be the pallbearer and to otherwise "help out"—a request that takes on interesting ramifications as the movie progresses.

But there's one big problem: Tom doesn't have even the slightest glimmer of an idea who the guy was.

His friends, played by Michael Rapaport, Toni Collette, Bitty Schram and Michael Vartan, think he's nuts when he agrees to carry out the mother's wishes. And they're not help, either: They also have no idea who the dead kid was. When Tom checks the yearbook for clues, across from the guy's name is just a blank square.

But Tom's mind veers away from matters funeral when his pals throw a party and invite Julie DeMarco (Gwyneth Paltrow), his high school crush.

Tom and Julie get together, of course, in what has gotten to be one of the most awkward date scenes on film. And it's somewhat sweet to watch two adults tip-toe around a man's apartment because they don't want to

awaken his eccentric mother (Carol Kane).

Meanwhile, Ruth ups the ante: Tom now must give the eulogy. This turns out to be one of the highlights of the movie, a rib-cracking laughfest. Then Ruth drops the other shoe—and the everything else. Yes, you get the picture.

Dimitri that he is, Tom goes along with the seduction, jeopardizing his budding romance with Julie.

Reeves, who wrote "The Pallbearer" with Jason Katims, has crafted a bunch of characters we don't really care much about. They're nice, but they're all fairly vapid.

But the screenwriters make up for it with Ruth Abernathy, and Hershey certainly steals the show as Ruth. Paltrow is lovely

and lithe, but still gives off such a wraith air that doesn't give you much to hold onto. It would be interesting to see what this young actress could do with a well-developed, meaty role.

Rapaport, a dynamic young actor, is wasted in this movie. He's miles above Schwimmer and Vartan, but has little to do. Collette, fresh from the very wonderful "Muriel's Wedding," also isn't allowed to stretch.

Schwimmer, who shot to TV stardom in the sitcom "Friends," is least fascinating. He's perfectly cast for the role of Tom, but hardly a compelling presence.

"The Pallbearer" makes a perfect date movie for TV fans, and probably will perform smashingly when it hits video stores. It was produced by Jeffrey Abrams and Paul Webster.

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Limit stories to no more than 250 words.

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