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10 THE TRILLIDO (PCETS)
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WHI



Reese Witherspoon plays Melanie, a rising star on New York's fashion designer scene in the new movie Sweet Home Alabama.

## Hammy diaglogue, sitcom sour in Sweet Home Alabama

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE

Sweet Home Alabama is so wildly uneven, it should have been called Sweet and Sour Home Alabama.
For every moment that rings true, there are 10 others that clang in a broad, sitcommy

way.
For every scene that allows
the reliable supporting actors
to spring to life, there are others in which they're relegated
to serving as two-dimensional

there was a vulnerability

underneath.
Here, as up-and-coming
New York fashion designer
Melanie Carmichael, she's just
flat-out selfish and materialis-

Although she's become America's sweetheart - and she is undeniably cute and

to serving as two-dimensional types.

And for every time the eminently likable Reese Witherspoon overcomes the sappy dialogue and predictable twists, far more often she gets mired in mediocrity. Witherspoon proved last year in Legally Blonde that she could take potentially cringeworthy dialogue and make it tolerable.

Here, there's no hope for hammy lines about giving away your heart a long time ago and finding your soul mate at a get 10.

away your neart a long time ago and finding your soul mate at age 10.

Although she's become
America's sweetheart — and she is undenitable cute and charming — Witherspoon is actually stronger here when she's asked to be ugly.

She may have been annoying as the interminably perky
Tracy Flick in Election, but there was a vulnerability

tic.
Melanie has just staged her first runway show to rave reviews, and gotten engaged to one of the city's biggest catches, Andrew Hennings (Patrice Dempsey), who surprised her by proposing after hours at

charming - Witherspoon is

actually stronger here when she's asked to be ugly.

Tiffany's and letting her pick whichever ring her pretty little heart desired. But before she can marry

But before she can marry him, she must go back home to Alabama and divorce her redneck husband, Jake (Josh Lucas), whom she abandoned for the big city seven years ago. In New York, Melanie has presented herself as a Southern debutante who was raised on a plantation. When she returns to Pigeon Creek, Ala., we learn the truth: She grew up in a doublewide trailer, the child of blue-collar parents Earl and Pearl (Pred Ward and Mary Kay Place). Director Andy Tennant (Anna and the King) never misses an opportunity to

misses an opportunity to depict the folks in Melanie's deplet the folks in Melanie's hometown as quaint, small-town hieks — which automatically makes them better than the people in New York, because Sweet Home Alabama is one of those movies, like Doe Hollywood, in which small town equals good and big city equals bad. This is best exemplified by Andrew's mother, Kate (Candiec Bergen), the politically ambitious New York mayor, though it's practically the same role as the conniving ageant director she played in

pageant director she played in

www.observerandeccentric.com

Miss Congeniality.

Kate never approved of Melanie as a match for her son, who was clearly modeled after JFK Jr., down to the thick wavy hair and classic, understated wardrobe. (Dempsey, not surprisingly, played a young John F. Kennedy Sr. in a 1993 minseries) But ever the Democrat, she insists upon learning of Melanie's past:

"There's nothing wrong with poor people. I get elected by poor people. I get elected by poor people. The supply whe wants to hang onto the marriage is the biggest mystery of—C. Jay Cox's porous script. And that's a problem, since it's the movie's premise.

The paperwork snag keeps Melanie in town longer than she anticipated, and — guess what? — she gets her twang back, learns to appreciate teafish festival, and finds that maybe she still bas a soft spot for that beer-diriking lug after all.

Melanie and Jake have a

Melanie and Jake have a couple of convincing fight, and a scene in which she gets drunk and tells of ther old friends in a honky-tonk is believable. (Another in which she visits the grave of her dead dog, Bear, and apolgizes for being absent in his final years will tug at the hearts of dog people in the audience; I'll admit, it got to me.)

But the changes of heart happen too quickly and things wrap up far too neatly for any of those real moments to matter. n. Melanie and Jake have a

er. Sweet Home Alabama, a Touchstone Pictures release, is rated PG-13 for some language and sexual references.

## Rings preview to debut on AOL

NEW YORK (AP) \_ The trailer for The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers will premiere on America Online on Monday.

Starting at 12:01 a.m., fans Starting at 12:10 thin, mass can download images for the second film in the adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy trilogy. A day later, the trailer will appear on the movie's Web site. The film, which reunites

Elijah Wood, Sean Astin, Ian McKellen, Cate Blanchett and the rest of the east from The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, is due in theaters Dec. 18.

The trailer will start appearing in North American theaters on Cet. 4 and will go worldwidthroughout the month.

When the trailer for last year's The Fellowship of the

Ring went online in April 2000, it was downloaded an estimated 1.7 million tiles in the first 44 hours Amelien Washington and the first 44 hours Amelien washington and won four the third lilm. The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King is acheduled to come out in December 2003. All three movies were shot simultaneously.

## Premier dining guide now rating movies

NEW YORK (AP) - The Godfather — not Citizen Kane — is the greatest movie of all time, according to a new Zagat survey. The Zagat Movie Guide, which comes out this week, is a collection of the top 1,000 movies, as rated and reviewed by 5,338 movie fans.

Casabianca is No. 2 on the list, followed by Star Wars, Gone With the Wind and The Shawshank Redemption. Citizen Kane, which film critics and historians often proclaim as the best movie ever, come in eighth.

The book follows the same format as Zagat's

guides to restaurants, shopping and nightlife, with ratings broken down in terms of acting, story, production and overall quality.

"The most popular entertainment is still The most popular entertainment is still dinner and a movie — now we can finally say we have both activities covered, said Tim Zagat, the chief executive officer and co-chairman of the Zagat Survey.

Lawrence of Arabia was voted the best action film, Psycho is the best horror flick, High Noon is the favorite Western and The Wizard of Oz is the top musical.