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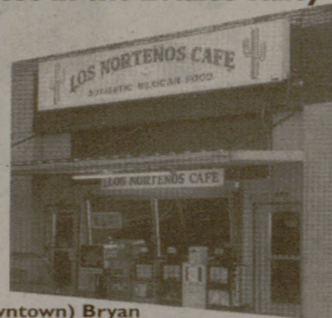
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'White Oleander'
 Pfeiffer's newest film debuts today

(KRT) - With moms like Michelle Pfeiffer, who needs enemies?

White Oleander is the latest movie in which Pfeiffer plays a pinched, brittle character who is toxic to the people around her. As Ingrid, who commits murder and dooms her teen-age daughter to a life in foster homes, Pfeiffer is excellent - tough and sarcastic. But she might want to rethink her attraction to this sort of woe, Intimate Human Drama With a Message, lest audiences forget the wit and pleasure she brought to earlier roles in *Batman Returns* and *Married to the Mob*. She is in danger of becoming tastefully gray.

Her newest shade of gray is pitched at fans of the Oprah novel on which it's based. *White Oleander* brings no new insight to Janet Fitch's book about how a tow-headed young woman named Astrid (Alison Lohman), banded from one mother figure to the next (Pfeiffer, Renee Zellweger, Robin Wright Penn - it's the blond leading the blond, and the too-skinny leading the too-skinny), learns something from each until she's more empowered than any of them could be on her own.

Fans of the novel will miss the stuff that's been trimmed, especially the non-blond character of an African-American mother figure who opens up our heroine to her sexuality, a key aspect of Astrid that the movie ignores.

Most of the darker parts of the book have been brightened up, making the movie feel shallow. Interesting themes are still here -



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. Michelle Pfeiffer stars as Ingrid, a brilliant poet created for killing her lover, in *White Oleander*.

beginning with the idea of the damage a selfish woman can inflict if she becomes a mother - but the movie provides a sunnier, blander picture of Astrid and everyone in her orbit. That's especially true of her mom who, as played by carefully made-up Pfeiffer, languishes in jail but, somehow, never misses a step in her beauty regimen.

White Oleander

Directed by: Peter Kosminsky
 Starring: Alison Lohman, Michelle Pfeiffer
 Rated: PG-13, for strong language and sexual themes

Should you go? If you already love the book this is a competent, intelligent re-telling.

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Oscar-winning film-maker dies

WASHINGTON (AP) - Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Charles Guggenheim died Wednesday of pancreatic cancer. He was 78.

Of the dozens of films Guggenheim produced and directed, one of the most memorable and effective was a biography of Robert F. Kennedy made shortly after the presidential candidate's assassination in 1968.

After *RFK Remembered* was

shown at that year's Democratic National Convention in Chicago, emotional delegates marched around the hall and sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." In 1969, *RFK Remembered* won an Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Subject. Guggenheim won his first Academy Award in 1964 for producing and directing *Nine from Little Rock*, about the integration of Arkansas schools. He also received Oscars for *The Johnstown Flood* (1989), which commemorated the

100th anniversary of the Pennsylvania disaster, and *A Time for Justice* (1994), a history of the civil rights movement. Overall, he was nominated for 12 Oscars.

The libraries of Presidents Truman, Kennedy and Johnson all feature film biographies produced by Guggenheim.

He also produced campaign films for Adlai Stevenson, John Robert and Edward Kennedy and George McGovern.

In 2000, Guggenheim received the Career Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association.

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