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MOVIE REVIEW

'Lost' finds the perfect role for Dean Cain

The actor plays a man facing an increasingly nightmarish situation in a smashing debut from a first-time director.

By KEVIN THOMAS
Times Staff Writer

"Lost," a taut thriller in the best B-picture tradition, has a title that has more than one meaning. It's soon clear that Dean Cain's Jeremy Stanton, a Santa Barbara bank vice president, has not only lost his way in the Mojave Desert because of a maze of flood-closed roads but also lost his bearings as a man.

If there's any justice, this should be a breakthrough film for Cain, who since the end of his "Lois & Clark" TV series has appeared in some venturesome independent movies. "Lost" comes close to being a one-man show, with Cain on camera virtually throughout and only passing glimpses of others. He carries the film with ease and holds viewer interest with a strong, complex presence.

In good time, inventive writer-director Darren Lemke, in a sure-footed feature debut, lets the viewer know that Jeremy is not just another guy on his way to meet his wife and son at a new residence in Nevada. It becomes clear that there's an urgent reason that he has to reach his destination within eight hours but that the journey should take only three, yet those detours keep piling up as in a Kafkaesque nightmare.

Ever so gradually, Lemke deftly lassoes in his audience while, bit by bit, revealing what Jeremy is really up to and then introducing a growing element of menace. "Lost" is consistently clever, amusing — and scary.

Lemke has come up with an array of devices and techniques to engage and sustain interest and to build suspense slowly but with ever-increasing intensity. He skillfully teeters on the edge of plausibility but is a strong enough storyteller to make this approach seem unsettling rather than merely credibility-defying, thus earning the viewer's crucial willingness to suspend disbelief.

Jeremy is constantly on his cellphone to a road-service operator, Judy (voice of Ashley Scott), for directions that are none too clear and definitely out of date. He also listens to the tapes of the Audio Guru (Paul Boehmer), who offers baldly self-evident advice, reiterated in chapter headings. The more Lemke reveals about Jeremy and the more frustrated he becomes, the more it triggers flashbacks that fill in the story.

In short, Lemke keeps lots going on and conjures up lots of mainly frustrating incidents for Jeremy to encounter, which allows Cain to create a memorable, life-size portrait of a young man with no shortage of arrogance and impatience whose decisive, take-charge manner hides a desperate individual who has lost all sight of right and wrong in his pursuit of the American dream. Cain digs deep enough into this man to uncover a vulnerability that makes it possible to hope that everything turns out all right for Jeremy — even though he's actually not deserving of such a happy fate.

The occasional moments when "Lost" seems a bit padded or overextended ultimately are not detrimental. Heard more often than seen but nonetheless strongly felt are Danny Trejo as an erstwhile colleague of Jeremy's, Irina Björklund as Jeremy's increasingly distraught wife and Justin Henry as Jeremy's hapless friend and co-worker.

"Lost" is a real find.

'Lost'

MPAA rating: Unrated

Times guidelines: Adult themes, intimations of violence

A SilverCrest Entertainment presentation.
Writer-director Darren Lemke. Producer Paul Emami. Cinematographer Paul Emami. Editor Bob Joyce. Running time: 1 hour, 26 minutes.
Exclusively at the Fairfax Cinemas, 7907 Beverly Blvd. (at Fairfax Avenue), (323) 655-4010, and at One Colorado, 42 Miller Alley, Pasadena, (626) 744-1224.

LOST



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