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LOS ANGELES ■ MONDAY, MAY 23, 2005 ■ VARIETY.COM

## FILM REVIEW

### Lost

A SilverCrest Entertainment release and presentation. Produced by Paul Emami, Kevin Matossian. Executive producers, Ralph Winter, John J. Kelly, Matossian. Co-producer, Bob Joyce.

Directed, written by Darren Lemke. Camera (color), Paul Emami; editor, Bob Joyce; music, Russ Landau; production designer, Shane Richardson; art director, Alex Panov; costume designer, Robert Constant; set decorator, Kevin Dowdee; sound (Dolby Digital), Erik H. Magnus; sound editors, Guy Tsujimoto, Eric Williams; sound re-recording mixers, Mark A. Rozett, Kelly Vandever; stunt coordinator, Jeff Wolfe; associate producers, Matt Kuiper, Andy Massagli, Christopher Wilmot, Peter D' Alessio; line producer, Craig Ayers; assistant director, Chad Hilber; casting, D' Alessio. Reviewed at Mann Glendale Exchange 10, Los Angeles, May 15, 2005. Running time: 84 MIN.

Jeremy Stanton ..... Dean Cain  
Judy ..... Ashley Scott  
Archer ..... Danny Trejo  
Cora Stanton ..... Irina Bjorklund  
Chester Gould ..... Justin Henry  
Tyler Stanton ..... Griffin Armstorff

By JUSTIN CHANG

**A** man gets stuck in the desert for eight hours and finds himself terrified at every turn in "Lost," a road-trip thriller that turns out to have one very tightly plotted itinerary. Schlocky yet resourceful, pic reps an unerringly paced and strikingly confident — at times overconfident — debut feature for writer-helmer Darren Lemke. Returns look potentially profitable for this low-budgeter.

Businessman Jeremy Stanton (Dean Cain) is already lost on a dusty Nevada highway as the film opens, en route to meeting his wife and son (Irina Bjorklund, Griffin Armstorff). The family has just relocated from Los Angeles, and Stanton is the stereotypical Angeleno yuppie — he wears shades, tosses rubbish out his car window and barks condescendingly into his cell phone at Judy, a cheerfully clueless Road-Aid operator (voiced by Ashley Scott) trying to navigate him back to civilization.

In short, he's due for a comeuppance, and he gets one. As every mile leads Stanton further into the desert, his radio buzzes ominously about a group of thugs that robbed a California bank that very day and remains at large.

How Stanton crosses paths with the thugs — as of course he must — comes to light in a genuinely inspired twist that ratchets up the interest level considerably while confounding the aud's identification with the protag.

From there, the story slides into a rote but ruthlessly efficient cat-and-mouse game between Stanton and the armed-and-sadistic Archer (Danny Trejo), whose face is kept off camera to the very end. (All we see are rings and Native American tattoos.) Archer evinces an alarming if not always plausible ability to track Stanton wherever he goes, threatening him by phone and doling out nasty surprises with an unnervingly even hand.

Fast, propulsive and mildly overcaffeinated, Lemke's direction exhibits more than a few symptoms of first-film syndrome. The script frequently substitutes profanity for wit, and every new scene — even the end credits — is introduced with a sardonic directive ("Proper planning is the key to a successful road trip") from the fake but cleverly assembled Road-Aid guide manual.

Easily the most jarring element in this otherwise lean and stripped-down suspenser is its jittery habit of following almost every line with a sudden cut to a memory from Stanton's recent and not-so-recent past, accompanied by the crack of what could be lightning or a gunshot (maybe both). Lemke's zeal for jump cuts is practically Godardian, but his method of filling out Stanton's backstory — and even referencing moments that unspooled a mere half-hour ago — quickly becomes assaultive.

"Lost" is basically a one-man show for Cain. Stanton never loses his golden-boy swagger or his sense of entitlement, and early on, the threat of a gruesome end doesn't seem entirely unwelcome. But Cain's performance gains in sympathy as the film goes on, and cinematographer Paul Emami draws his lens tighter and tighter on the thesp's increasingly sweaty face, heightening the paradoxical sense of a man trapped in a wide-open landscape.

Pic's look is surprisingly polished for its budget and is enhanced by a Russ Landau score.

## LOST



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