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MELBOURNE

(AUSTRALIA)

A UIP (Australia) release of an Australian Film Finance Corp. presentation of a Green Light production, in association with the NSW Film and TV Office, Australian Film Commission. (International sales: Beyond Films, Sydney.) Produced by Jonathon Green.

Directed by Daniel Nettheim. Screenplay, Anthony O'Connor. Camera (Movielab color), Tristan Milani; editor, Martin Connor; music, David Thrussell; production designer, Tara Kamath; art director, Kylie Rose McLean; costume designer, Jackline Sassine; sound (Dolby Digital), Andrew Belletty; assistant director, Richard McGrath. Reviewed at Melbourne Film Festival. July 22, 2000. Running time: 85 MIN.

Dean Sam Lewis Jade Jessica Napier Ian Justin Smith May Abi Tucker Mole Luke Lennox Heather Lara Cox

By DAVID STRATTON

hough it covers familiar territory — the romantic and sexual hang-ups of urban twentysomethings — Daniel Nettheim's first feature is a sympathetic, engaging comedy reminiscent of a French relationship pic. An excellent ensemble cast of attractive actors portrays a bunch of wounded characters trying to sort out their lives in a confusing world. Though young, hip auds will enjoy this assured, minor-key film, the lowbudget "Angst" will face an uphill battle against higher-profile Yank product, with overseas chances probably limited to fest exposure and, later, ancillary.

Dean (Sam Lewis) shares a small apartment with his best friend, Ian (Justin Smith), and his ex-girlfriend, Jade (Jessica Napier), for whom he still has a yen and with whom he shares a passion for schlock and horror movies (posters for "Four Flies on Grey Velvet" and "Dawn of the Dead" adorn the walls).

Recently dumped by his middleclass girlfriend, Heather (Lara Cox), because he inadvertently ejaculated on her favorite stuffed piglet, Dean is helping Jade end her relationship with a nerdy lover. Ian, meanwhile, gathers material for a standup comedy routine. Also residing in the apartment is the trio's cat, Cronenberg. Dean works part time in a video

store specializing in schlock, and it's there he meets the Goth, punkish May (Abi Tucker), who stops by to rent a copy of "The Crow." It's attraction at first sight, but May proves elusive at first and Dean is still hung up on Heather, though

she's now planning a fashionable wedding.

While floundering through life fearing he may end up like the homeless old men he sees every day on the streets (depicted almost zombie-like creatures, in keeping with Dean's obsession with George Romero pics), Dean makes a halfhearted attempt to find a sexual partner via the Internet but, in a particularly funny scene, his

blind date with cyber-slut Barbarella results in a highly embarrassing en-

counter. Eventually May helps him exorcise his demons, in a mutually satisfying

fashion. Ian, meanwhile, has found

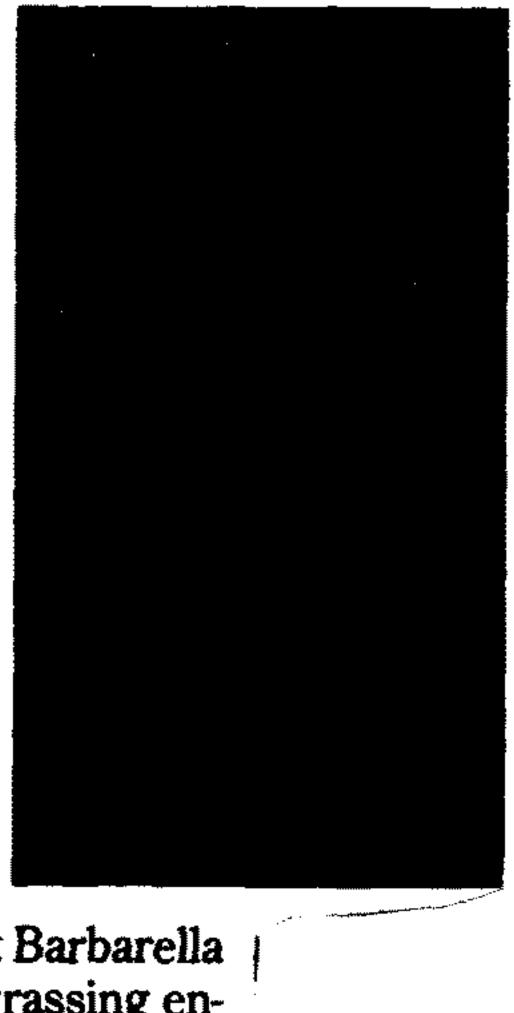
the confidence to try out his comedy

routine before an audience, and Jade has become motherly toward Mole (Luke Lennox), a homeless 16-yearold who tries to rob Dean's vidstore.

Filled with sexually explicit dialogue, mostly about oral activity (at which Dean claims peculiar expertise), the film zips along with a freshness and vigor and a sharp ear for pithy modern language. O'Connor's Anthony screenplay succeeds in its relatively modest aim of exploring the angstridden lives of characters who get off on the fear and horror they experience while continually watching gorey pics.

A bright young cast enlivens the proceedings, with Lewis an engaging, if perhaps rather too good-looking, lead, and Smith tremendously sympathetic as his buddy. As the well-contrasted femmes, Napier and Tucker (latter warbles attractively over the end credits), are delightful.

All technical credits, starting with Tristan Milani's polished camera work, are on the button. A couple of sequences in which some predictable action is fast-forwarded, as if on video, amusingly help to cut to the chase.



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