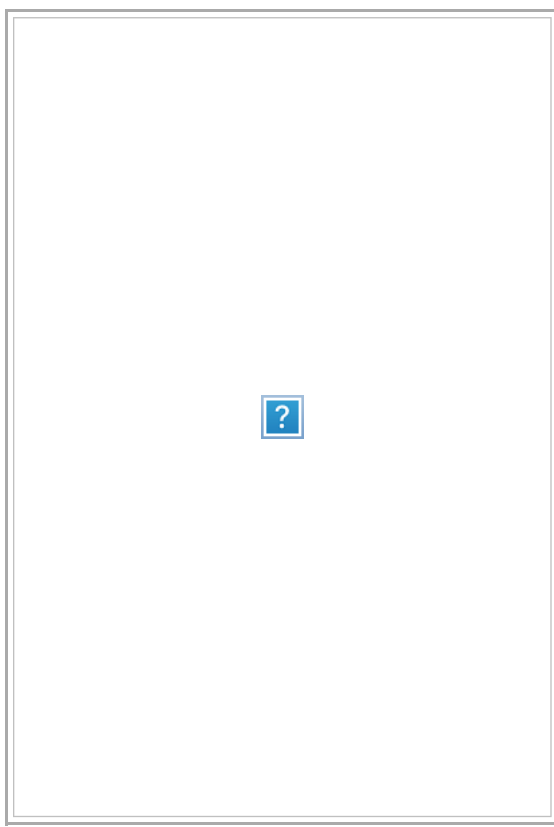


‘Wasted on the Young’ might be an understatement

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Wasted on the Young

Directed by Ben C. Lucas

Written by Ben C. Lucas

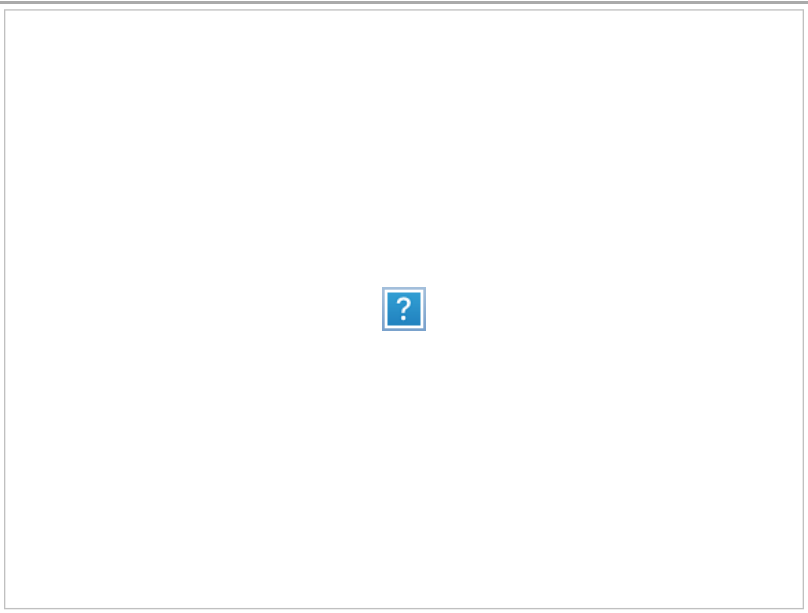
2010, Australia

In the wake of the success of a certain Fincher picture, a bevy of slick movies will clamour for the chance to be *the other* generation-defining would-be masterpiece. *Wasted on the Young* doesn’t clamour, it claws. Having had its world premiere last June, Australian writer-director Ben C. Lucas’ first feature could make a definite claim for originality. The excess and ennui of youth, social networking, neo-narcissism...these are

certainly not Fincher-Sorkin patents. Here however, the text and the tweet almost single-handedly propel proceedings towards a vicious climax that stops just short of exploitation. Unfortunately, rather than being part of the social ether, they become something of a storytelling crutch, a mode of convenient exposition; an assertion of relevance. Ultimately though, this is not a story solely about Facebook updates and emoticons.

Wasted seeks to explore the hermetic world that the teens at an unnamed elite Western Australian high school create for themselves replete with sex, drugs, hormones and

drama, rules and power structures, and the dangerous possibility of technology becoming a tool for social coups and communal crimes, or even justice. Strengthened by a noteworthy visual quality, the movie balances a heightened surrealism with an *unreal* detachment, very nearly creating the impression of being the sinister cousin of UK show *Skins*. Narratively though, it’s a precarious balance which Lucas sadly seems to lose a handle on.



Leading an eager young cast, not so young Oliver Ackland plays (perhaps a little too persuasively) the brooding Darren, a gifted but awkward loner soon to be seduced by the romance of vigilante justice with a tech bent: think Travis Zuckerberg’s shadow. Conversely, Darren’s rich and privileged step brother Zack (a coolly assured Alex Russell) is a homecoming king of sorts, swim team captain, exam cheat, drug lord...the list only worsening. The two find themselves in a triangle of desire with the radiant Xandrie (Adelaide Clemens), whose affections are directed at the brother less likely to make a move. Zack’s ego and sense of entitlement culminates in a very unsavoury event at a house party, one of many such sequences of revelry awash with strobe, saturated in slow-motion and shot with a heady mix of anthropological curiosity and grandiose trashiness. From here on, the story hurtles down an alleyway of violence, lost innocence and wall posts, undone by formulae and a screenplay with delusions of complexity.



To steal from one of its sharpest lines, *Wasted* isn’t so much a film as it is “an idea, a concept,” and one in which it is doubtful Lucas has a sliver of confidence. Admittedly engaging, *Wasted* is still a bit of a tonal trifle, trying to be everything from paranoid

techno-thriller to *Gossip Girl* episode, revenge drama, art-house slow burner, and Rian Johnson’s *Brick* with shades of *Saw*. Doubly frustrating are the rare moments of genuine promise – fine turns by Clemens and Russell, a haunting image of a beached girl, a striking scene suggestive of real directorial flair and restraint – all of which are promptly undercut by garish post-production, the seeming signs of a filmmaker who doesn’t trust the material to be engaging in its own right, which is a shame.

Rumour has it that Australian cinema is flirting with something of a renaissance of late. True as it may or may not be, hopefuls are probably best searching elsewhere for *Animal Kingdom 2* or patiently awaiting the next big festival surprise lest they find themselves wasting their time.

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