

HELEN (2009)

Starring Ashley Judd, Goran Visnjic, Lauren Lee Smith **Director** Sandra Nettelbeck **Rated** MA15+ **Out Now Rent**

CHRONICLING THE DEPTHS OF CLINICAL

depression is a hard sell (except to Sundance who, very unsurprisingly, included this in their 2009 fest), and *Helen* won't be anyone's idea of breezy.

Ashley Judd plays the eponymous role, a music professor whose family doesn't know her history of suicidal depression, so is unprepared for the emotional devastation of her relapse.

Though it is insensitive to say, *Helen* is really difficult to like. Her disease manifests early and drives her so far inward she's incapable of caring about anyone's angst but her own, even as it pushes her very relatable loved ones to despair.

Judd is magnificent (so is everyone else, especially a fellow depressive played by

The cupcakes had burned once again.



Lauren Lee Smith), but it's hobbled by *Helen* being a tough slog with a meagre pay-off.

EXTRAS None.

LACHLAN HUDDY

FILM ★★☆☆☆ **EXTRAS** ★☆☆☆☆

A DEAL IS A DEAL (2008)

Starring Mackenzie Crook, Colm Meaney, Imelda Staunton, Gemma Arterton **Director** Jonathan Gershfield **Rated** MA15+ **Out March 11 Rent**

LIKE A MENTALLY CHALLENGED PUPPY, THERE'S

something endearing about this film, even if it is relentlessly stupid.

Paul (Crook) is a London train driver who

has accidentally killed two people while on the job. However, he learns that if he takes out a third within the month, he'll get early retirement and a huge severance package.

He searches for someone suicidal, and finds homeless Tommy (Meaney), only to get involved with his attempts to redeem himself with his family (represented by estranged wife Staunton and daughter Arterton).

These two bring some authenticity, but then things get silly again, only to culminate in a corny and illogical ending. Frustrating.

EXTRAS None.

DAN POOLE

FILM ★★☆☆☆ **EXTRAS** ★☆☆☆☆



Downey Jr prepared for *Tropic Thunder 2*.

THE DINNER PARTY (2009)

Starring Lara Cox, Ben Seton, Jessica Turner, Sam Lyndon **Director** Scott Murden **Rated** MA15+ **Out Now Rent/Buy**

TOUTING ITSELF AS CANBERRA'S FIRST FULL-

length feature, this promising indie debut from writer-director Scott Murden runs with a grim true story, alternately sprinting and shuffling.

Loosely based upon a notorious Canberra crime involving a uni student murdering her boyfriend via overdose, *The Dinner Party* has the titular event attended by reasonable randoms who have heard that openly certifiable Angela (Cox) plans to end the night by killing herself and her man, Joel (Seton).

Murden sagely avoids horror or black-comedy, but some tidy performances, uneasy mood and Oonagh Sherrard's excellent score are skewered by the nonsensical actions of



Tiny extra did her best to be involved.

many characters. Why Angela isn't instantly institutionalised weakens what follows.

EXTRAS Commentary, more. (Unpreviewed)

JUDE ALLDER

FILM ★★★☆☆



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