



WARNER BROS.

Harrison Ford plays a prosecuting attorney who must defend himself against accusations that he murdered a lover in *Presumed Innocent*.

★ ★ ★ *Presumed Innocent*
Oaks Four West, Plaza

The essential problem with a mystery-thriller is that they're rarely worth a second viewing. Once you've found out who the killer is, the thrill is gone. Some movies, like *Jagged Edge*, throw in a little violence to spice things up. Others, like *Murder on the Orient Express*, use an all-star cast and catty dialogue to make getting there half the fun.

But *Presumed Innocent* director Alan J. Pakula doesn't seem to have any particular approach in mind. He simply delivers an understated, stolid mystery that is wonderfully cast and competently presented.

Of course, it's based on the best-selling novel by Scott Turow, so several million moviegoers already know who-done-it. But for the rest of us, the story of Rusty Sabich is a new one.

He's a prosecutor (played by Harrison Ford) who walks into work one day to find that a beautiful co-worker named Carolyn has been murdered. Rusty's boss (Brian Dennehy) is in the middle of a re-election campaign and urges him to "get me a bad guy."

It quickly becomes clear that

Rusty himself might be the bad guy. He had a tempestuous affair with Carolyn — until she dumped him. Rusty continued to call her on the phone, and he was even at her apartment on the night of the murder.

As the circumstantial evidence mounts, Rusty becomes the prime suspect. In flashbacks, we come to understand how obsessive his relationship with Carolyn was. And so the question remains: Did he or didn't he?

Naturally, it's not answered until the final minutes of the movie. But the key to making this an interesting question is Ford's performance. He gives a tense, almost-in-control edge to Rusty.

It's clear that he's waging an internal battle. But is it because Rusty is distraught over the death of a former lover or simply fears being punished for an act of rage? Ford's intelligent portrayal is true to both the character and the ambiguous plot structure. Without "cheating," it lets you believe Rusty is either guilty or innocent at any point of the movie.

He's also surrounded by a top-rate supporting cast that is the main reason this movie is worth seeing. Dennehy is predictably

good as Rusty's boss, and Bonnie Bedelia is very fine as Rusty's wife, a woman who must watch her husband pine for the person he was unfaithful with.

But the real standouts are Paul Winfield and Raul Julia. Winfield is very amusing as Judge Larren Lyttle, a no-nonsense man who refuses to waste the court's time with silly legal maneuvers. And Julia is superb as Rusty's defense attorney. He brings authority and keen insight to his meetings with a client who may or may not be guilty.

The courtroom scenes Julia is featured in are refreshingly straightforward and accurate. Only one outburst from a riled defense attorney seems forced and theatrical.

Pakula co-wrote the screenplay, so he deserves credit for not playing tricks with the audience. But he seems so worried about tipping his hand that he forgets to do anything else. His visual style is flat and the inherent tension of the story is undercut by the slow, thoughtful pacing. It's certainly intelligent and well-acted, but for a suspense movie, *Presumed Innocent* is surprisingly unmoving.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ