

VARIETY

Preston Tylk

By KEN EISNER

A Next Generation (Burbank) production, in association with Cutting Edge Entertainment. Produced by James Frey, Dan Glasser, Roni Eguia. Executive producers, Brian Sullivan, Kevin Morris. Co-producers, Marty Cohen, Lisa Hope. Directed, written by Jon Bokenkamp.

Preston - Luke Wilson

Jonathan - Norman Reedus

Dick - Dennis Farina

Emily - Mili Avital

Smooth psychological thriller has smart performances and a potent mood, dominated by omnipresent Northwest rain. "Preston Tylk" is lacking a certain oomph in both action and character payoffs, though, and may have a hard time edging more polished fare off crowded screens. Helmer Jon Bokenkamp's current turn as a scribe for "The Blair Witch Project" sequel could help give pic a profile of sorts.

"Bottle Rocket's" lank-haired Luke Wilson, who usually plays slacker wiseguys, here plays mild-mannered Preston Tylk, an ordinary Seattlite shocked to discover that his beloved wife, Emily (Mili Avital), has been having an affair. After storming off to his favorite coffee shop, he returns to an even bigger bummer: She's been brutally murdered and everything points to the mysterious lover as the murderer! Enraged, Tylk follows what few clues he has to the b.f.'s crummy house; he gets inside where a man attacks him and in the ensuing fight he ends up killing the man. Too bad it's not the person he was looking for. So the real interloper, Jonathan (Norman Reedus), starts chasing after him. The police meanwhile don't

know what to think, and, pretty soon, both men are on the run, from the law and each other.

Cornered, Preston turns to a low-rent private eye, unfortunately called Dick, who's hit hard times of his own. Happily, he's played by Dennis Farina, turning in his best screen perf in many a moon. His thorny, gat-wielding old-timer, in fact, is the only central character given anything like a back story.

The picture's otherwise sketchy characterization --- a narrative choice that's intended to make main players emblematic --- backfires when it comes to Emily; the only hint Preston is given as to why Emily bailed on him is in an inflammatory tape he finds at Jonathan's, in which (along with some squirm-inducing sex) she's heard complaining that "the newness wore off" her marriage. From that info, it's hard to say whether wifey was a stunningly superficial person or this is merely slapdash writing. Either way, it lowers our investment in Preston's plight, by softening the aud's anguish over his loss. In the same tape, she claims her hubby's too absorbed in his work to notice her absence, but we're never told what that work is, nor do we see Preston doing anything other than running --- which he does pretty well.

Wilson is good at providing Preston with the shadings needed to make him seem real; former model Reedus is less convincing, but his role is basically that of goading the hero into action. That's why a sudden shift of focus at the end --- an apocalyptic coda showing what happens to Jonathan --- feels both forced and inappropriate. Still, most of what happens along the way is gripping, with lenser Joey Forsyte's use of unusual Washington locations full of surprises. Kurt Kuenne's score, a clever update on churchy choral music, adds to a memorable atmosphere of mixed dread and hope.

Camera (color), Joey Forsyte; editor, Ann Truelove; music, Kurt Kuenne; production designer, Chris Eguia; art director, Dave Percas; set decorator, Ingrid Sisson-Dooley; costume designer, Enid Harris; sound, Elanor Rimassa; assistant director, Chris Roberts; casting, Randi Hiller. Reviewed at Seattle Film Festival, June 6, 2000.

Running time: 93 MIN.

With: Vincent Kartheiser, T.J. Thyne, Larry Boothby.

Mon., Jul. 10, 2000