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Forfeit

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***Forfeit* puts a noirish twist on a morality tale.**



Forfeit is a moral thriller in the mold of a film noir.

The flick starts with Karen (Sherry Stringfield) in jail. She gets a notice that her lawyer is here to see her. When she arrives to the visitation area, Karen discovers that the visitor is not her lawyer but Frank--a former beau dressed as a counselor who is assumed dead. She exclaims that if he is alive then she can be cleared of the unnamed crime. Frank tells her no and then we are taken back four weeks.

Frank O'Neal (Billy Burke) is trying to right his life. This former con has moved back to his old hometown and landed a new job at an armored car company, a company that hires ex-cons for nefarious reasons. Now Frank wants to make another connection with his former love Karen. Even though he, as a teen, killed his stepfather, Frank professes to be a man of God and daily listens to an unnamed TV preacher (Gregory Itzin).

But the world of Frank may not be what it seems. He watches and asks questions of his employer, plotting some grand scheme. Karen is very hesitant in letting Frank back in her life to the point of swinging a baseball bat at him and hiding a part of her past from him. Karen's father is a retired cop; a man who

believes that Frank has not changed and has him investigated. And the TV preacher seems to be talking directly to Frank.

The crux of the story is that Frank plans to rob the armored car company and frame Karen for an indiscretion in their past. He contrives and schemes, with a few wenches thrown in, but manages to accomplish his goal. Unfortunately, the payoff isn't exactly what he expects as he falls deeper and deeper into the well of despair. It is the plan of Frank and the realizations that his assumptions are not correct that drive the story of *Forfeit*.

This film almost begs to be in black-and-white, with harsh tones and bleak lines. By setting it in the perpetual sunshine of LA, one almost gets the idea of absence of color. Director Andrew Shea delivers a solid punch with John Rafter Lee's script, finding idiosyncratic beats with the cast. He never tries to overpower the cinematic experience with flashy camera moves and other cinematic tricks. By letting the script and actors just perform, he delivers a stellar piece of work.

But it is the cast that makes a flick like this work. Gregory Itzin shows that his turn as President Logan in *24* was no acting fluke. Even though the part is small, it is pivotal to the story arc. He comes across more as a personification than a person, which is what the role demands. The singsong delivery of his Preacher character makes the lines flow like a lullaby. He is comforting and creepy at the same time. Simply put it is a stunning bit of work.

Billy Burke shows a quirky side in the role of Frank. His mannered performance is just to the left of eerie but never breaks away from full crazed. The hardest part about playing an insane character is to realize that the character does not see them as insane.

Sherry Stringfield comes off a bit lost in the screenplay. As our put upon character, she comes off more as a sketchy thought than a full-blown three-dimensional being. The same criticism should be leveled at the role of her father, another instance where the writing fails the role.

Wayne Knight gives a strong reading to a small part. He has always played various roles on the big and small screen and never disappointed. As the flunkey for the big boss, he does the balance between good and bad. He is just another man caught in forces beyond his control. As a modern morality tale wrapped in the noir, *Forfeit* delivers. For the USA Festival, it is a highlight film.