

MOVIES



BYRONNE HANOVER

Heartwarming story: Whoopi Goldberg and Haley Joel Osment star in "Bogus," now playing at metro Detroit movie theaters.

'Bogus' engaging family movie

BY DOLORES BARCLAY
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What an unfortunate idea to title a movie "Bogus." It makes the work such an easy target. And that's too bad. Because the new Warner Bros. release, though shabby, a bit forced and at times downright irritating, is otherwise an engaging and harmless family movie.

The story is centered around a 7-year-old named Albert (Haley Joel Osment) and the imaginary friend who comes to life when his mother dies.

Albert lives in Las Vegas where his unmarried mother Lorraine (Nancy Travis) works as a showgirl. His world — and his family — are the sequined stages of the strip's casinos and pleasure palaces. He hangs backstage with the performers and learns all about magic from illusionist Mr. Antoine.

Then his world explodes. His mother is killed in a car crash. Albert thinks the other performers will gladly take him in and he will be able to maintain some sort of tie to the only "family" he's ever known, but that's not to be. Lorraine had left a will, naming her foster sister Harriet (Whoopi Goldberg) as Albert's guardian in the event of her death.

Big problem. Harriet lives

clear across the country in the claustrophobic environs of Newark, N.J.

Albert reluctantly boards the plane and while doodling with a play book the stewardess has given him, a drawing of a big, round face comes to life and starts to talk to the troubled child. The face soon takes on more shape and that of a body, too. It turns into a large, sweet Frenchman named Bogus (Gerard Depardieu).

Bogus is Albert's imaginary friend and companion and only Albert can see him. It's a device that worked so charmingly with Jimmy Stewart in "Harvey," but is played here for contrived laughs.

Back in Newark, the frenetic Harriet races through her work day to meet the youngster at the airport. She's stressed and full of attitude, and the last thing she wants or needs in her single life is a child.

Harriet and Albert spend much of the movie struggling to find a common thread, other than Lorraine. Of course, they finally do and by necessity, Bogus must disappear.

relationship movie. Yes, Albert does try to run away; yes, Harriet does go after him; yes, they fight over most things; yes, Albert's magic tricks pop up.

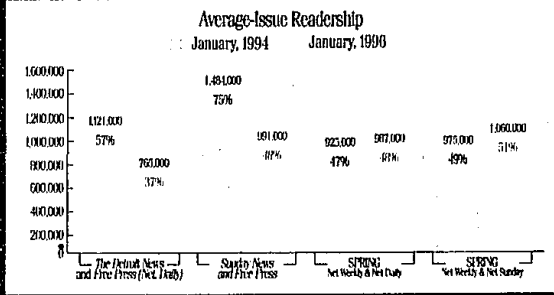
But the worst device in the movie comes when Harriet is able to see Bogus, thus destroying the fragile world of imagination. When he enters her psyche, the film slips to melodrama, because, as it turns out, Harriet also had a difficult and troubled childhood.

And that's the biggest problem with the Norman Jewison movie. Harriet is a complex character who remains undeveloped and largely unknown. She's almost more of the story than Albert and Bogus, and far more interesting. But she's a flat Hollywood stencil. Too bad.

Jewison, an admirable filmmaker of such classics as "The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!" "In the Heat of the Night," "The Thomas Crown Affair" as well as the comedy "Moonstruck," manages to pull lovely performances from his actors, but they're all working with flimsy material.

"Bogus" is produced by Jewison, Rothberg and Arnon Milchan and is rated PG. You can bring the entire family, but older, more sophisticated children might be bored.

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