



Bette Midler has a winning smile at the blackjack table in Las Vegas, as nightclub singer Bonita, in "Jinxed."



the movies
Louise Snider

Bette Midler tries to make comedy better than script

"Jinxed" (R) belongs to the growing category of gambling movies. However, "Jinxed" has a bizarre twist. It's a black comedy, or at least the middle part is. It's difficult to say what the rest of the movie is supposed to be.

"Jinxed" stars the irrepressible Bette Midler, who can bounce into a room and start sparks flying, whether at the Academy Awards, a concert hall or a movie set. Her energy keeps "Jinxed" lively and entertaining, but it doesn't hold this movie together or even lend it continuity.

Midler plays Bonita, a nightclub singer living with Harold (Rip Torn), a mean-tempered, woman-beating professional gambler. Harold makes a living from the money he wins from Willie (Ken Wahl), a luckless blackjack dealer whom Harold keeps beating fair and square.

Wherever Willie goes — Tahoe, Vegas, Reno — Harold follows. Harold's peculiar power over Willie doesn't make points with Willie's bosses, and Willie is driven from one casino to another as he tries to find a job and lose Harold.

WHEN SOMEONE suggests to Willie that the only way to break the jinx is to take something from the person who is jinxing him, Willie goes after Bonita.

In a scene spiked with heavy innuendo, Willie presents himself bare-chested at Bonita's trailer door, flexes his pectorals and asks for water for his overheated radiator.

Once the Bonita-Willie romance gets under way, the movie becomes a black comedy as, at Bonita's urging, they conspire to murder Harold for his insurance money. Picture, if you will, "Double Indemnity" or "The Postman Always Rings Twice" made into a comedy as the lovers encounter one hitch after another in trying to dispose of the corpse.

It's funny in a strange sort of way, but it doesn't connect with the rest of the movie, which takes off in another direction as Bonita engages in a scavenger hunt for some hidden money.

This is one of the two major problems with "Jinxed" — an incoherent, inconsistent script, as changeable as the Michigan weather.

THE OTHER MAJOR problem with the movie also happens to be its greatest asset, Bette Midler. She taunts and teases and says things outrageously candid. She is never dull, but neither is the credible in the first part of the film. Can you believe this vital, irrepressible spirit cowed by the weaselly Harold?

Midler is all glitz and strut and sass. Torn would have to develop a character a lot more menacing than Harold to convince us of Bonita's plight.

As for Ken Wahl, he's a good-looking hunk of man who plays his character a little slow, a little dull, which works out to be a good foil for the high-spirited Midler.



Willie (Ken Wahl) and Bonita become lovers and plot to kill her old lover, when "Jinxed" takes a black-comedy turn.

what's at the movies

AMITYVILLE II: THE POSSESSION (R). Another family experiences the horrors of that demonic Long Island house, but this version proceeds with a strange and serious shift in tone and produces a very different effect than the initial movie.

ANNIE (PG). The successful Broadway musical is expanded and brought to the screen by director John Huston, with talented Alleen Quinn as Annie and Albert Finney and Carol Burnett.

THE BOAT (R). Realistic and powerful drama of experience of a German submarine crew during World War II.

CHIAN IS MISSING (PG). Wayne Wang's black-and-white comedy mystery about two cabbies searching for a business partner who disappeared in San Francisco's Chinatown.

THE CHOSEN (PG). Dramatization of Chaim Potok's novel about father-son relationships, the interlocking lives of two teenage friends and the faith that divides and unites them.

DIVA (R). New wave film from France is a comedy, a thriller and a romance. Written by Jean-Jacques Beineix, directed by Philippe Ruellet.

DON'S PARTY. The acclaimed director of "Breaker Morant," Bruce Beresford, is back with an outrageous comedy.

STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN (PG). Admiral Kirk and the whole Enterprise crew — Spock, McCoy, Scotty, Sulu — are back and on a perilous mission against an old enemy (Ricardo Montalban).

TEX (PG). S.E. Hinton story of struggles and conflicts of two teenage brothers growing up in the Southwest.

TRICK OR TREATS (R). A web of suspense and horror is woven as a boy's practical jokes and the activities of an escaped lunatic merge on a Halloween night.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP (R). Robin Williams excels as young writer T.S. Garp in succession of off-the-wall adventures.

XICA. From Brazil and Carlos Diegues comes an exotic comedy set in the second half of the 18th century.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
- PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
- R Restricted. Adults must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.

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