

reel reviews

★ ★ ½ *Angel Heart* Royal Park

Director Alan Parker once said he wanted to make a film in every genre. His latest, a combination of detective stories and the occult, kills two birds with one stone, but it never flies.

The story takes place in the mid-50s and concerns a seedy private eye named Harry Angel (Mickey Rourke) who is hired by a mysterious gentleman (Robert DeNiro) to track down a once-famous singer named Johnny Favorite.

Angel's leads take him straight into Louisiana and the world of the occult. Everyone he speaks to seems to have something to hide, and many of them are mysteriously killed soon after he speaks to them. Naturally, the police begin to grow suspicious.

But Harry Angel has more important things to worry about. He is slipping deeper and deeper into darkness, and Angel's cool, laconic facade begins to crack as he comes face-to-face with forces beyond his imagining.

The film's intent was to have

its supernatural elements seep into the grainy and realistic world of the '50s, slowly taking control until Harry — and the audience — is overcome. But it doesn't work.

Perhaps it has to do with *Angel Heart's* attitude towards the occult. Unlike *The Exorcist*, which made demonic forces all too real, this movie never examines the dark practices that are at its center. It never lets us believe. In *Angel Heart*, voodoo isn't something to understand, it's something for Harry to stumble upon in the middle of the night and gawk at stupidly.

Still, the movie does have its merits. Rourke and Lisa Bonet are quite good. Even Robert DeNiro, who's saddled with awkward lines, manages to be spooky. But a few exciting and powerful moments — all of which involve violence and the occult — only set the rest of the film in sharp relief.

Two of those moments are especially interesting. The first is the much-ballyhooed love scene between Rourke and Bonet. It's an intense combination of the erotic and the surreal that cer-

tainly stands as a highlight.

Ten seconds had to be cut from the love scene to gain *Angel Heart* an R rating. Apparently, all we've missed is a shot of Rourke's bare rump. While the extra seconds would certainly have made the scene even more powerful, they don't seem to have been crucial to the film as a whole.

The second telling scene is the conclusion. The ads claim, "Nothing will prepare you for the ending of *Angel Heart*," but that's far from the truth. It's rather easy to tell what direction this movie is headed in from early on.

That shouldn't have spoiled the fun. In fact, a sense of doom and inescapable fate would have added greatly to *Angel Heart's* power.

But the ending — which I wouldn't dream of revealing — is a botched affair. Suffice to say that it shows a shocking lack of judgment. *Angel Heart* is not a complete failure, but for a director who's made such films as *Midnight Express*, *Fame* and *Birdy*, it certainly constitutes a minor fall from grace.

By Michael Giltz