

Newspapers have always headlined some of Hollywood's best works

by David L. Coddon

Director David Fincher was deadly serious about re-creating the newsroom of the San Francisco Chronicle, circa late '60s, for last year's serial-killer drama "Zodiac."

PRESS CLUB - Hollywood has always been fascinated with newspapers and with those who chase the truth. Here is a scene from 'All The President's Men.' CNS Photo. From the dull overhead lighting, sterile partitions and marble floors down to the precise pencils and notebooks reporters used at the time, the Chronicle brought to fruition by Fincher and art director Francois Audouy evoked not only the era of pre-Watergate newspapering, but also a grittier, less technological time when print was the king of all media: Radio had discovered the possibilities of FM. Television was embracing "Happy Talk" news. The Internet was no one's wildest dream.

Almost from its beginnings, Hollywood was fascinated with newspapers and with those who made them not merely purveyors of information but also guardians of truth that both reported on and reflected society. Orson Welles, creator of arguably the greatest of all "newspaper movies," 1941's "Citizen Kane," envisioned papers as towering institutions of social and political import and influence. A decade later, Bogey fearlessly took on a racketeer in "Deadline USA." And in between, everyone from Tracy and Hepburn to Cary Grant to Kirk Douglas portrayed newspaper editors or reporters, because the profession brought glamour and excitement and a palpable degree of nobility to the screen.

The acme was "All the President's Men," released two years after Richard Nixon resigned in the Watergate firestorm. Talk about marquee ingredients: The political scandal of the century. A hit best-seller. Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman. How could it be topped?

Whether it was - by "Absence of Malice" or "The Mean Season" or even "Zodiac" - depends on what movie critic, or moviegoer, you ask. One thing we do know: Print may not be the king of all media any longer, but moviemakers still care about newspapers.

STOP THE PRESSES

Here's a history of this love affair from selected movies with newspaper themes (in chronological order, from most recent):

"A Mighty Heart" (2007) - Angelina Jolie plays the real-life character of Mariane Pearl, a French-Cuban public radio and television journalist whose husband, The Wall Street Journal's South Asia bureau chief, Daniel (Dan Futterman), is kidnapped and killed.

"Perfect Stranger" (2007) - A journalist (Halle Berry) goes undercover to prove a wealthy businessman (Bruce Willis) is really her best friend's killer.

"Spider-Man" series (2007, 2004, 2002) - The successful franchise focuses on the web-slinging superhero and his alter ego, newspaper photographer Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire).

"Zodiac" (2007) - The San Francisco Chronicle's Robert Graysmith (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) becomes obsessed with tracking down the notorious Bay Area serial killer known as Zodiac.

"Superman" series (2006, 1987, 1983, 1980, 1978) - The classic comic book has inspired several movie versions, all highlighting the Man of Steel, otherwise known as mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent.

"Message in a Bottle" (1999) - A Chicago newspaper researcher (Robin Wright Penn) uses her professional resources to track down the sender of a wistful message in a bottle (Kevin Costner).

"The Paper" (1994) - This comedy-drama starring Michael Keaton, Robert Duvall and Glenn Close shows a day in the lives of a group of hard-working New York City newspaper employees.

"The Pelican Brief" (1994) - In this adaptation of the John Grisham novel, Denzel Washington plays a reporter at a Washington, D.C., paper who is contacted by a law student (Julia Roberts) in danger because of her legal brief about the assassination of two Supreme Court justices.

"Cry Freedom" (1987) - Set in apartheid South Africa, journalist Donald Woods (Kevin Kline) seeks to write a book about his friend, activist Steve Biko (Denzel Washington), and his death in police custody.

"The Mean Season" (1985) - A serial killer contacts reporter Malcolm Anderson (Kurt Russell), who ends up using him as an exclusive source. With each killing, the murderer gets front-page attention, as do Anderson's stories. When he becomes the bigger celebrity, the killer kidnaps the reporter's live-in girlfriend (Mariel Hemingway).

"The Killing Fields" (1984) - Sam Waterston plays New York Times correspondent Sydney Schanberg, who covered the invasion of Cambodia with the help of Dith Pran, a local journalist and translator (former refugee and Cambodian Haing S. Ngor).

"Absence of Malice" (1981) - A Mafia boss' son (Paul Newman) becomes the front-page story in the local newspaper, implicated in a murder he did not commit by an overzealous prosecutor and an unethical reporter (Sally Field).

"All the President's Men" (1976) - Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman play Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who broke the story of the Watergate scandal.

"The Front Page" (1974) - In this re-conceptualization of "His Girl Friday" (see below), Jack Lemmon is a disenchanted reporter ready to turn in his typewriter. Walter Matthau's scheming editor tempts him to write one last story about a murderer's pending execution.

"The Parallax View" (1974) - An ambitious reporter (Warren Beatty) gets in over his head and uncovers a vast conspiracy while investigating a senator's assassination.

"Teacher's Pet" (1958) - This romantic comedy centers on the relationship between a hard-boiled newspaper editor (Clark Gable) and an idealistic journalism professor (Doris Day).

"Deadline USA" (1952) - With only three days left before his newspaper is sold, editor Ed Hutheson (Humphrey Bogart) tries to complete an expose on a local gangster.

"Ace in the Hole" / renamed "The Big Carnival" (1951) - An early look at the "media circus" phenomenon, this controversial film features Kirk Douglas as a down-on-his-luck reporter who happens upon a man trapped in a mine, then conspires to keep him there until the story can build to national proportions.

"Woman of the Year" (1942) - Two reporters (Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn) fall in love and get married, only to find the hectic newspaper life interfering with their relationship.

"Meet John Doe" (1941) - When reporter Ann Mitchell (Barbara Stanwyck) is fired, she angrily writes a piece about an idealist named John Doe, the Average Joe who is pushed around by everyone above him. In a Mitchell-written letter to the paper, Doe says he'll leap from City Hall on Christmas Eve.

"Citizen Kane" (1941) - In an attempt to figure out the meaning of a newspaper tycoon's last dying word, a reporter tracks down the people who worked and lived with Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles).

"His Girl Friday" (1940) - A comic remake of a 1931 film version of the Broadway play called "The Front Page," this quintessential newsroom film features a crafty editor (Cary Grant) scheming to keep his ace reporter and ex-wife (Rosalind Russell) from leaving the paper and him for good.

"It Happened One Night" (1934) - Claudette Colbert plays a runaway heiress, Ellie Andrews, whose father puts up a \$10,000 reward to get her back. Peter Warne (Clark Gable), a recently fired reporter, recognizes her and thinks his scoop will get him back his job.

(Jenna Rohrssen and Beth Wood contributed to this story.)

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