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Judy  
Soc. Sec. - Vanished

# Epic Thriller Leaves Nothing To Be Desired

By JUDY BACHRACH

If you like your presidents looking like college professors (or Richard Widmark), your senators flamboyant and Southern and your mysteries cat, compact and political, NBC/WBAL-TV's mammoth "Vanished" leaves nothing to be desired.

They say it is based on Lecher Knebel's novel, but alas, this reviewer has read Lecher Knebel's novel, or at least as much of it as she could get through before an unearthly migraine possessed her, and it bears only a story-line resemblance to the original.

If we can go by last night's suspenseful opener—the second and last segment airs tonight—"Vanished" is one of those superpolitical thrillers that borrows from the same ruse, as "Advise and Consent" (the book, not the movie) or "Seven Days In May" (the movie). It is slick, it is highly probable, it forces the viewer to suspend his sense of humor and it is wonderful fun in the way that only American thrillers can be wonderful fun.

## Very, Very Seriously

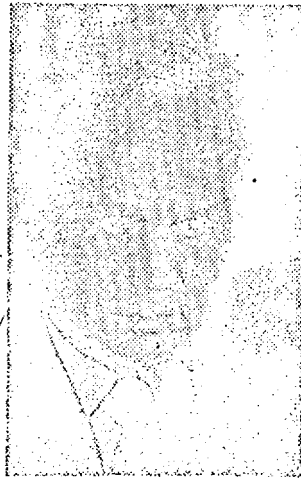
The British are always making fun of themselves in their obvious mysteries, but the Americans take everything

very, very seriously. "Vanished," true to form, has only superheroes and villainous types. The superheroes fall into two categories: the Richard Widmark I-Am-The-President-With-The-Graying-Temples category and the James Farentino-young-brash-idealist category.

The villains, by far the most endearing, are either stuffy philosophers who happen to be CIA directors (E. G. Marshall) or the perennially useful flamboyant Southern senator (Robert Young, surprisingly enough).

"Vanished," predictably enough, takes its title from what happens an awful lot throughout the film. Everyone has the deplorable habit of either turning up dead (which is sort of vanishing in a way, I suppose) or disappearing. First a Red Chinese sailor's body is found on the beach outside President Widmark's summer mansion and next the president's top adviser and close friend (played by Arthur Hill) disappears.

This is a little disconcerting because the top adviser had access to a lot of nuclear secrets and anyway, who wants to lose a close friend? The flamboyant Southern senator, portrayed with astonishing



RICHARD WIDMARK

eloquence by the normally goody-goody Robert Young, is positively gleeful at the prospect of deriving political mileage out of the event.

## Press Secretary

Gossip tears through the capital at a fast clip and a lot of naughty reporters plague the president's press secretary (Farentino) to confirm or deny some naughty rumors.

And for a while, things don't look too good. For one thing, the top adviser and close friend, although he may have looked to you and to me like the kind of guy with unim-

peachable credentials for graying temple-dom, turns out to be a homosexual who takes off from his lush of a wife to rendezvous with a math professor in a motel room.

And for another, the president doesn't seem exactly frantic to pursue the whereabouts of his friend. He assigns the case to the FBI, but specifically forbids the CIA to investigate. E. G. Marshall isn't his bosom buddy, but this seems to be carrying in-fighting a little far.

And that's the news right up to the present, as they say. At the moment, E. G. is acting very self-righteous and extremely peeved. Robert Young is behaving perfectly vicious in a very delightful, magnolia-tree kind of way. The vanished friend's wife (Eleanor Parker) has just tried to do herself in. And the polls look grim for Widmark.

The movie has flaws, of course (now you didn't expect a completely glowing review, did you?). Richard Widmark doesn't seem quite as concerned as he should be, what with his campaign contributions dropping off and the elections coming up in November—and that should give us all an unhealthy clue into what tomorrow portends. And

there are certain unintentionally hilarious and ludicrous moments. E. G. Marshall calls an intelligence meeting, for instance, and addresses all his colleagues not by their Christian names, but as "FBI," "Air Force Intelligence," "AEC," etc. (as in "National Security Agency, what do you think?").

But so what? This is a tight, sophisticated and intricate little thriller; an epic conceived in glamour and executed with some taste and intelligence. The acting is uniformly decent—particularly Young's magnificent but zesty performance as the shrewd politico.

And the scene between the lecherous senator and the club-buxom blond representative was pure delight. It's definitely worth another look tonight, same time, same station.