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## CRITIC'S VIEW

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# Movie of "Vanished" Looks Like Big TV Hit

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United Press International

HOLLYWOOD — If a major Hollywood theater screening last weekend is any indication, NBC-TV may have a considerable hit when it broadcasts a four-hour presentation of Fletcher Knebel's bestseller, "Vanished," in two segments, March 8 and 9.

The story concerns the mysterious disappearance of the top adviser (and closest friend) of the president of the United States, with Richard Widmark playing the nation's chief executive in his television debut.

And if "Vanished" can hardly be called the "Gone With the Wind" of video, nevertheless Universal Studios can be said to have turned out the "Airport" of the home screen.

### Novels on TV

"It's much too early, of course, to review this very large-scale television production, which is the first of NBC-TV's ambitious attempts to "novelize" certain adaptable works on video, with the lengths and methods of presentation logically varying according to the projects.

And one only hopes that the regrettable action of the Federal Communications Commission in cutting back on the networks' prime time doesn't discourage such major projects in the future.

But if one were to give an idea of the style of "Vanished," which will undoubtedly attract millions of viewers March 8 and 9, one could put it like this: It is the kind of film likely to remind the audience of a small-screen version of the works of movie producers like Otto Preminger and Ross Hunter.

### Audience Hooked

The audience at the weekend screening of "Vanished" seemed hooked on the movie, accepting it at its own level of popular entertainment about the machinations of men in high places, sitting through about three hours and 15 minutes of film (the length without commer-

cial) and then applauding at the end.

Most television shows are given screening in rooms at the networks or stations. For "Vanished," NBC-TV and Universal took over the Directors' Guild Theatre, and got a pretty full house.

One reason for the turnout was the genuine industry interest in this project. For a start, there was interest in the fact that a video network had done what movie studios usually do — buy a best-selling novel and turn it into a big, long film.

The audience indicated that the presold value of the book's title was a viewer lure, as in past movies. And there was natural curiosity about how good a property Universal will have when it undoubtedly releases the film as a movie overseas.

### Stars Attracted

More and more movie stars are working in television as the barriers between the two media rapidly being vanish, and I couldn't help noticing the rapt attention given "Vanished" by Anthony Quinn, who sat in front of me at the screening.

I don't know what he thought of it — but he had bothered to be there, a major movie star going to a theater to watch a television show. There is no question, of course, that video movies have arrived, and there is increased interest in them around town.

Would the home audience rather see a four-hour show straight through than have it split into consecutive night offerings of two hours each, as with "Vanished?" Those connected with "Vanished" felt splitting it up would be palatable — but now the statistics on CBS-TV's "Ben Hur," which ran more than four hours Feb. 14, have come in, showing it to be a tremendous No. 1 hit in the 70-city ratings.

And it is understood some executives involved with "Vanished" now regret not having gone all the way with a four-hour blockbuster approach. All I can tell you is that Anthony Quinn and I stayed for the whole movie at the weekend screening.