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'President's

By William Hogan

There is the dark, ominous, pre-war Berlin atmosphere of the capital where, late at night, the Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward suspects he will be ambushed or shot by an agent of one of the Watergate figures he is investigating.

Washington is photographed brilliantly and in varying moods in the film "All the President's Men," an intelligently made newspaper story as well as a political thriller of almost Costa-Gavras intensity. (It's at the North Point.)

There are fascinating architectural shots, exteriors and interiors (reporters checking files in the Library of Congress). There is the gleaming Washington Post newsroom (reproduced as a \$450,000 set in Burbank) where on a television screen at one point Richard Nixon, at his second inauguration, is solemnly swearing to uphold the Constitution.

Screen writer William Goldman ("Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid") and director Alan J. Pakula ("Klute") took a semi-documentary approach to their film, based on the book by Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Yet the film is loaded with highly charged drama and suspense, even though an audience is aware of the story's outcome all along.

My only quarrel with this otherwise clean, sharp and engrossing picture is that Goldman and Pakula didn't know how to end it. They settled for an abrupt, oddly unsatisfying final scene. But don't let that keep you away; the rest of it is wonderful.

"President's Men" is basically a story of two young reporters, desperate for a break, who are assigned to a minor crime story, the mid-1972 breakin at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex.

Woodward and Bernstein begin checking, knocking on doors, spending hours on telephones. They march up blind alleys, confront scared, clammed-up bureaucrats. Yet they are on to something. In spite of skepticism and uneasiness in their own editors they begin to sense a story of massive corruption reaching higher and higher into the Nixon administration, even the erosion of the Constitution itself.

Robert Redford as Woodward and Dustin Hoffman as Bernstein, ideally cast, deliver riveting performances as the dogface infantrymen of this journalistic campaign. Hoffman is the chain-smoking, nervous investigative reporter given to scribbling notes on matchbook covers, almost embarrassed as he interrogates a despairing, speechless bookkeeper at the Committee for Reelection (Jane Alexander) who knows too much about the Committee's vast slush fund.

Redford is the ivy-league Wasp turned ferret who runs across a secret source in the Watergate developments, presumably a government official, perhaps a disgruntled FBI agent, known as "Deep Throat," the ultimate underground man. He is played in deep shadows by Hal Holbrook.

Everyone in this large cast turns in a sharp performance, most notably Jason Robards as the meticulously professional (if larger-than-life) Ben Bradlee, the Post's executive editor, who puts his newspaper out on a limb as he smells what could be the greatest story of his career.

Goldman and Pakula wisely kept the major Administration figures in the story off the screen. Stephen Collins plays the repentant Hugh Sloan and Robert Walden is seen as the minor dirty trick artist, Donald Segretti. Nixon and Ronald Ziegler are glimpsed and heard in what by now are ironic

Men' Is High Drama



ROBERT REDFORD AND DUSTIN HOFFMAN
It is their picture all the way

television clips (although the film is always a newspaper drama, not an anti-Nixon polemic).

It is Redford and Hoffman's picture all the way.

They do their damndest in a risky, iffy, almost unthinkable motion picture project which many suspected could not be brought off convincingly. But it works.