

Washington, Streep serviceable in Cold War remake

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

In 1959, when Richard Condon wrote "The Manchurian Candidate," the world was at the height of the Cold War.

His chilling bestseller, set during the Korean War, involved a Communist Chinese plot to brainwash American prisoners-of-war to assassinate a U.S. Presidential nominee. The political potboiler readily resonated with a country already vigilant about the "Red Menace" due to the paranoia generated by the McCarthy Era hysteria.

The book was brought to the big screen three years later by the late John Frankenheimer, legendary director of such screen classics as "Birdman of Alcatraz" (1962), "Seven Days in May" (1964) and "The Train" (1964). His fairly faithful adaptation starred Frank Sinatra, Angela Lansbury and Janet Leigh.

After President Kennedy was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald, an ex-Marine who had spent over 30 months behind the Iron Curtain, "The Manchurian Candidate" was suppressed for the next 25 years out of the fear of inspiring another copycat killer. Today, this substan-



Academy Award winner Denzel Washington teams with cinema veteran Meryl Streep in "The Manchurian Candidate," directed by Academy Award winner Jonathan Demme.

tial overhaul comes courtesy of Academy Award-winning director Jonathan Demme, best known for the relatively riveting "Silence of the Lambs."

"Manchurian" 2004 features a trio of Oscar-winners in Denzel Washington, Meryl Streep and Jon Voight. The famous-faced cast also includes Live Schreiber, Kimberly Elise, Jeffrey Wright, Dean Stockwell, gospel singer BeBe Winans, pantomimist Bill Irwin, Miguel Ferrer, Obba Babatundé, comedian Al Franken, Anna Deavare Smith, author Walter Mosley (Devil in a Blue Dress), director Sidney Lumet, hip-hopper Fab Five Freddy, essayist Roy Blount Jr., movie producer Roger Corman, network news anchor Forest Sawyer, folk singer Tom Chapin and other recognizables.

Perhaps Demme's being distracted by the presence of so many celebs on the set played a part in dragging down the production, but this version simply fails to measure up to the first. The plot has been revised to take place in the wake of Gulf War (Desert Storm) with the scheme being hatched not by Commies, but by an avaricious, power-hungry defense contractor called Manchurian Global, a thinly veiled, Halliburton look-a-like.

At our point of departure, we find insomniac, decorated Army veteran Ben Marco (Washington) devoting most of his days to giving inspirational speeches about the heroics of Raymond Shaw (Schreiber), the Sergeant who saved the day when their platoon was ambushed in the Kuwaiti desert. Shaw, meanwhile, is being groomed for higher political office by his overbearing, megalomaniacal mother (Streep), herself a U.S. Senator.

The problem is that all the soldiers from their unit seem to be plagued by similar nightmares. The question is whether the symptoms are simply Gulf War Syndrome, as suggested by V.A. doctors or evidence of an elaborate, diabolical mind-control scheme to turn the White House into a pawn of big business. Can Ben ignore the voices in his own head long enough to take on the increasingly Machiavellian Manchurian?

Standouts Denzel and Streep carry this careening caper laced with more twists than a Chubby Checker concert. Overall, a film more confusing than compelling and primarily amusing because of all the parallels to present-day politics.

Very good (2.5 stars)

DVD-copying software entity folds

ST. LOUIS - A maker of software that enabled users to copy DVDs and computer games folded Tuesday under the mounting weight of lawsuits by deep-pocketed movie studios and video game producers.

In a posting on its Web site, 321 Studios Inc. quietly announced "it has ceased business operations including, but not limited to, the sale, support and promotion of our products."

The company said that despite its "best efforts to remain in business," unfavorable court rulings by three federal courts this year assured its demise.

"The employees and those associated with 321 Studios sincerely appreciate your support of our company and products over the last couple of years," said the statement by the "321 Studios Team."

The company, based in the St. Louis suburb of St. Charles, warned in June that it could seek federal bankruptcy protection to free itself of copyright-related lawsuits by Hollywood and makers of computer games.

Tuesday's announcement

came just five days after 321 suffered another legal setback. On Thursday, a federal judge in New York imposed a worldwide ban on the production and distribution of 321's Games X Copy software, which had fetched \$60 and let users make what 321's Web site had called "a PERFECT backup copy of virtually any PC game."

The injunction came as part of a June lawsuit by three leading makers of video games, marking a new legal front against a company that already was at odds with Hollywood over the company's DVD-copying software.

Robert Moore, 321's founder and president, long had cast his crusade as a David-and-Goliath struggle, insisting his company's software was meant to let consumers innocently make backup copies of their DVDs and computer games.

Hollywood and the computer-gaming companies — Atari, Electronic Arts Inc. and Vivendi Universal Games — argued otherwise, accusing 321 of violating the 1998 Digital Millennium Copy-

right Act. That law bars circumvention of anti-piracy measures used to protect DVDs and other technology.

Federal judges in New York and California have barred 321 from marketing the questioned DVD-cloning software.

Since those rulings, 321 has shipped retooled versions of its DVD-copying products, removing the software component required to descramble movies.

Messages left Tuesday with 321 were not returned. Repeated calls to the company in recent weeks have gone unanswered.

In announcing what would be the inevitable end of his "magnificent venture," Moore said that in a matter of months this year 321 went from having nearly 400 employees and expectations of doing \$150 million to \$200 million in sales this year to about two dozen workers and less than \$400,000 in monthly income.

In May, Moore told a congressional panel the court rulings in Hollywood's favor have put his company "on the brink of annihilation."

that there was no solution left but war, that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, that Saddam was trying to acquire nuclear weapons, that Saddam was linked to al Qaeda, that Iraq was an imminent threat to the U.S. and that we would be welcomed as liberators.

America's so divided, I suspect that "Bush Must Go" will fail to find its way onto any Republican coffee tables. And when preaching to the choir, this sort of tome tends to sound oh so obvious with the help of 20-20 hindsight. Anybody still undecided?

Review

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Patriot Act; that he sold the country out to crony capitalism; and that he's ruined our standing in the world.

In a chapter entitled, "The War in Iraq," for example, the author shows how the President, Cheney, Rumsfeld and the rest of the White House insiders lied in seven different ways in order to whip the country into an uncritical, paranoid frenzy. According to Press, they deliberately prevaricated when they claimed that diplomacy wasn't working,

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