



## Mad as Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies

*Dave Itzkoff*

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**Mad as Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies** Dave Itzkoff

**The behind-the-scenes story of the making of the iconic movie *Network*, which transformed the way we think about television and the way television thinks about us**

“I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!”

Those words, spoken by an unhinged anchorman named Howard Beale, “the mad prophet of the airwaves,” took America by storm in 1976, when *Network* became a sensation. With a superb cast (including Faye Dunaway, William Holden, Peter Finch, and Robert Duvall) directed by Sidney Lumet, the film won four Academy Awards and indelibly shaped how we think about corporate and media power.

In *Mad As Hell*, Dave Itzkoff of *The New York Times* recounts the surprising and dramatic story of how *Network* made it to the screen. Such a movie rarely gets made any more—one man’s vision of the world, independent of studio testing or market research. And that man was Paddy Chayefsky, the tough, driven, Oscar-winning screenwriter whose vision—outlandish for its time—is all too real today. Itzkoff uses interviews with the cast and crew, as well as Chayefsky’s notes, letters, and drafts to re-create the action in front of and behind the camera at a time of swirling cultural turmoil. The result is a riveting account that enriches our appreciation of this prophetic and still-startling film.

Itzkoff also speaks with today’s leading broadcasters and filmmakers to assess *Network*’s lasting impact on television and popular culture. They testify to the enduring genius of Paddy Chayefsky, who foresaw the future and whose life offers an unforgettable lesson about the true cost of self-expression.

## Mad as Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies Details

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## From Reader Review Mad as Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies for online ebook

### Carol Storm says

As a total film nut I really had mixed feelings on this book. On the one hand, David Itzkoff fills this book with fascinating gossip on some of my favorite Seventies movie stars, such as William Holden and Faye Dunaway. And the sections that describe how the movie NETWORK was actually filmed and put together are absolutely fascinating. On the other hand, I never bought any of the major arguments that Itzkoff makes in this book. To give you some examples:

I never bought into the premise that NETWORK was a masterpiece on the level of THE GODFATHER or CHINATOWN, to mention just two contemporary classics. To me NETWORK is shrill, heavy-handed, and embarrassingly dated, in spite of a few great performances and some cheap laughs.

Itzkoff completely fails to convince me that Paddy Chayefsky was a literary genius, or a talented writer, or a man of conscience, or anything else. It's revealing that Itzkoff mentions contemporary TV writer Rod Serling exactly one time in this book. Rod Serling was everything Chayefsky only pretended to be. A genuine tough guy, a genuine American patriot, a genuine champion of Civil Rights, a genuinely gifted writer and a man of startling imagination with genuine compassion for the poor. The only thing Rod Serling didn't do is trash talk other celebrities, make a clown of himself, and dramatize every personal failing like it was the ending of western civilization.

MAD AS HELL also failed to convince me that NETWORK was "prophetic" in some profoundly important way. I suppose media types who think the world revolves around them take perverse pleasure in a movie that suggests bad television can bring down a society. But nothing in this book makes that proposition seem very convincing. Indeed, the real irony is that Paddy Chayefsky was largely indifferent to society's real ills, e.g. racism, the War in Vietnam, violence against women.

The real truth Itzkoff never dares to speak (but that the brilliant Pauline Kael made very clear in her quoted review of NETWORK) is that this guy was Archie Bunker in Arthur Miller drag.

David Itzkoff should write a book on Rod Serling next time out!

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### Dave Donahoe says

Read as a first reads selection.

An excellent review of the making of one of the most prescient films ever made. The author uses Network as a springboard to examine the life and career of Paddy Chayefsky, the divisive screenwriter of Network and, 20 years earlier, Marty. Chayefsky was an uncompromising figure with an intense vision of his art, and the world in which he existed.

Itzkoff explains Chayefsky's writing methods and his incredible talent for self editing. He would write comments to himself, as if he had written the script, as means of constantly focusing the action and message of his work. Chayefsky started in television in the early days, moved on movies, Broadway and moved between the three genres when he felt he reached the limit of that medium. This first hand experience gave an additional insight into the world of television. The rest of the story came from Chayefsky's fears, loss of

hope, growing cynicism, and hope regained.

Chayefsky was heavily involved in the making of the film, with influence on the hiring of the director, cast and final approval over the film. Quite an unusual amount of power given to a screenwriter, in a town where movies are often made in spite of the story. The author talks about the director and cast and their relationships with Chayefsky. In many ways, the egos involved should have prevented the film's completion, but the uniqueness of the story allowed everyone to give their best performances.

Howard Beale, the main character of the film, was not Chayefsky. But he was used as a mouthpiece for the screenwriter and one can only imagine that, given enough time in front of a camera, the two may have become indistinguishable. Chayefsky's ego and exacting nature rarely allowed him to compromise, with himself or his vision. He foresaw the incorporation of the media with business ventures, the loss of information, the growth of opinion and the turning of the news into entertainment. He foresaw a world in which trust and truth come at a high cost. And so it has come to be.

And we should all be mad as hell.

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## Geoffrey says

I loved "Mad as Hell." When I first learned that a book had been written about the making of the movie "Network," I was anxious to read it. "Network" is one of my top favorite films of all time. I love the direction by Sidney Lumet, one of my favorite directors. I also enjoy the performances by the cast, especially Peter Finch, Faye Dunaway, William Holden, Beatrice Straight, Robert Duvall, and Ned Beatty. And, I love the brilliant screenplay by Paddy Chayefsky. Because of my longtime enjoyment of "Network" and its elements, I wanted to learn more about the making of the film. Once I read it, Dave Itzkoff's study did not disappoint me. The book provides nice insight into the preproduction of the film, especially Paddy Chayefsky's writing of the script. Mr. Itzkoff's study also explores the production and postproduction of the movie. For example, the book discusses the shooting of the film's most memorable scenes, especially the Howard Beale's character's delivery of his famous "Mad as Hell" speech. The study then explores the commercial and critical success of "Network" during and after its theatrical release. Finally, the book provides nice insight into what many have regarded as the "prophetic" nature of the film. Specifically, the study explores the ways in which the screenplay's commentary on the impact(s) of corporate ownership on the nature of television news has come to fruition in the years since Network's production. Through its elements, Dave Itzkoff's book met my expectations and even exceeded them.

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## F.C. Schaefer says

A new subgenre of book has emerged in recent years, one I would call "the inside story of the making of..." In place of the ellipsis, I would place a movie title, a good example of what I am talking about is Glen Frankel's excellent book about John Ford's THE SEARCHERS, which came out a few years back, Frankel has followed this up with a book on HIGH NOON; similar treatments have recently been given to 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, GIANT, and just this month, the publication of Chris Nashawaty's recounting of how CADDYSHACK came to be. These books are not necessarily a treatise on the greatness of a particular movie, but often an argument that the story of what went on behind the cameras, and what occurred before and after said movie was made is just as interesting, if not more so, than anything an audience paid to see in the theater. They are not necessarily about the movie stars we remember, but often center on the gifted and

creative person, usually a writer or a director, who became enamored with a story, or simply with an idea or truth that they just had to tell, and were willing to do the very hard work to get the movie made and before the public.

Dave Itzkoff's MAD AS HELL, tells the inside story of the making of the 1976 film NETWORK, and the creative man who made it happen, that man being Paddy Chayefsky, a writer who had earned considerable fame in the early 1950's by writing dramas for live television, an industry then in its infancy. Chayefsky was short, but powerfully built, a proud Jew with a short fuse who channeled his anger into his writing. He was a veteran of World War II and a political liberal at a time when liberals were proud to be tough guys; Chayefsky had a knack for writing dialogue, giving his characters, often common men and women, a special eloquence; this was on full display in his first big network hit, MARTY, the story of a lonely Bronx butcher, the movie version of which won Chayefsky his first Oscar for screen writing in 1955. It was a Golden Age and it did not last, soon Chayefsky was working in Hollywood putting his talents to use in the movie business, and television was no longer putting dramas with the quality of MARTY on the air, but were now serving up the likes of THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES every week. As the 60's gave way to the 70's, Chayefsky observed these changes, and it stoked his anger.

Itzkoff's book is story of how this anger became an idea, the idea became a story, the story became a screenplay, and the screenplay a movie. The finished product would be a profane look at the inner workings of a fictional TV network's news division, where corporate interests and the desire for higher ratings (which meant higher add revenues) have forced the scraping of old standards, causing the vaunted profession of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite to be turned into just another entertainment show to attract the attention of an America shell shocked by assassinations, an unwinnable war, riots in the streets, epic corruption in government, and an energy crisis. At the center of the movie is Howard Beale, a venerable TV anchorman who has a break down on air, starts telling it like it is, and becomes a ratings sensation, one the suits at the network, and their ruthless female programming executive, are more than happy to exploit. Scene by scene the movie is both a condemnation of what TV had become, and a warning at what yet could be. What I enjoyed most about Itzkoff's book is the recounting of the creative process that brought all this about; especially the pages discussing Chayefsky's writing process, how he had to have an office to go to everyday and sit alone and write for at least four hours, and how the finished product bore little resemblance to the first draft. Chayefsky was extremely protective of his words, and on the set, had the clout to resist actors and director's attempts to rewrite or dumb down his work, a position many script writers would surely envy.

Itzkoff also introduces us to the other talents who made NETWORK such a success, starting with director Sidney Lumet, who had a knack for this kind of material, coupled with the ability to handle prickly talent, both in front of and behind the camera. The book makes the case for Lumet being the indispensable man behind NETWORK; the time it went from a screenplay to finished movie was remarkable, and a lot of that credit is given to producer Howard Gottfried, a friend and partner of Chayefsky, who knew how to get things done. The principle photography took place in January and February of 1976, on location in New York and Toronto, with the movie opening in November. Itzkoff gives us a day to day breakdown of which scenes were shot and in which order, which should be of great interest to anyone interested in getting into the movie business, we also get some great behind the scenes info on how the editing went, including some obvious mistakes were deliberately left in the picture.

Of course we get some background on the casting, and the actors who were ultimately hired. One gets a good understanding of why Faye Dunaway has a reputation for being difficult; then there was Ned Beatty, who bluffed his way into the role of Arthur Jenson, after Roberts Blossom, who had been hired to play the part of the corporate big wig, was let go early in production. We learn why George C. Scott passed on the part of Howard Beale, a role that he would have been a natural for, and that Henry Fonda, Gregory Peck and even James Stewart were considered for the role that Peter Finch ultimately made his own. One of the best things about the book is Finch's story; he was a British born, Australian raised actor who had made a career out of being in movies in which his leading ladies – Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn, Julie Christie – were bigger

stars than him. Like his fellow Brits, Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton, Finch had a fondness for alcohol, but unlike the other two, he often brought that certain masculine charm distinct to actors from the Land Down Under to many of his roles. By the mid 70's, Finch was pushing 60 and thought that the best years of his career were behind him, and was settling into semi retirement in Jamaica with his second wife and young children. Through his agent, he got a chance to read for the part of Beale for Lumet and Chayefsky, and the role of a lifetime was his. The iconic "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore," was only shot once because Finch was too exhausted and had to quit half way through a second take. Nevertheless, he knew his career had been given a new lease on life even before NETWORK opened; he became the front runner for the Best Actor Oscar, and began practicing his acceptance speech in front of a mirror. He also moved his family back to Los Angeles as the phone began ringing with offers of other roles. But a cruel fate intervened.

Even crueler was the fate of William Holden, who played Max Shumacher, the head of the news division who is still trying hang on to his integrity, while having an affair with Faye Dunaway's Diana Christenson, the soulless programmer. By 1976, Holden was no longer the handsome leading man of the 1950's as years of heavy drinking and a history of depression had taken their toll, but like Finch, NETWORK gave him a great part that played to his middle aged strengths and the air of weariness he could project like no one else; and as Itzkoff tells it, Holden had to use much of his talent to be believable in a love making scene with Dunaway, who proved to be every bit the diva, then and later. Holden would get a late career Best Actor nomination for his performance, but ultimately, and so sad for his many fans, his demons would get the best of him. Dunaway would win the Best Actress Oscar, and it proved to be the high point of her career; NETWORK would net Chayefsky his third Oscar for screen writing, it would prove to be his greatest success, and his final triumph. In fact, NETWORK makes a good case for the Oscar jinx.

Itzkoff's book is only 243 pages long, but it packs a lot of information; as expected, the final section attempts to put NETWORK in perspective. Though he did not live to see the proliferation of cable channels and the 24 hour news cycle, much of what Chayefsky foretold has come to pass. At the time of its release, NETWORK was frequently called a satire by critics, while others referred to it as a "black comedy," while many others took Chayefsky to task, calling him a has-been, bitter at the industry where he'd done his best work and then dispensed with his talents. Nobody used the word "prophet," but now in the age of FNC, MSNBC, and CNN, and fractured world of information delivery, much less the vast number of news and opinion websites online, nobody cannot look at NETWORK now and feel that Chayefsky was not looking into the future.

Yet, MAD AS HELL left me wanting more, if for no other reason than because it came out four years ago and missed the tumultuous 2016 Presidential election where we saw a man elected who could fairly say he'd taken a page out of Howard Beale's play book in articulating the public's rage and anger. But where Beale was just plain crazy, Donald Trump was crazy like a fox, at least when it came to his manipulation of the voters and the media. It was not for nothing that during that year, many people referenced Elia Kazan's A FACE IN THE CROWD, and NETWORK, as the two movies that perceptively saw the future decades before it arrived.

In the end, Itzkoff calls Paddy Chayefsky the "angriest man in movies," but as he makes clear in his book, it was not a resentful anger directed at scapegoats, the kind we often see on the public airwaves today; for Chayefsky believed that an angry American was a good American, that silence was truly unpatriotic and to do nothing but sit on the couch in front of the television made him the angriest. He pointed his finger at his fellow Americans and said that if you think the country is going to hell, it's your fault for keeping silent about it. Many speculate that if Chayefsky could come back today, he would say "I tried to warn you." That he might, but the man in Dave Itzkoff's book would then immediately get busy writing, for he would have a lot to say.

## Justin says

Paddy as hell. Perfectly solid series of “and this happened” with some nice anecdotes, and then he gives a page at the end for Bill O’Reilly and Glenn Beck (who cites Beale as an inspiration) to hang themselves. 3.5

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## Richard Kramer says

Scrupulous, perceptive, impeccably reported and presented with just the right amount of appreciative distance.

Paddy Chayefsky comes to wild, crazy, tragic life on the page, and Itzkoff brilliantly shows how everything in his life led

to NETWORK and how nothing else that followed could ever match it, not for success (although he died not long after) but

as a vehicle in which he could capture all the tensions and wild anger that made him -- and television -- what they are.

He went too far, he talked too much, he couldn't hold back, and the result is a movie that for all its wildness of tone

is as vital today as it was when I (and many others) first saw it in the early 70's. And there are great stories of how

nightmarish Faye Dunaway was to work with, poor thing. This is up there with Mark Harris's PICTURES FROM A REVOLUTION,

John Gregory Dunne's THE STUDIO, Lillian Ross's PICTURE, Julie Salamon's book on the film of THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES

whose title I'm too fucking lazy to look up or, to NOT end a sentence with a preposition, Im too fucking lazy up to look.

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## Lee Anne says

A decent exploration of the making of the movie "Network." If you've never seen it, do so.

I liked this book enough that I had weird dreams related to the movie (more than one, even), and although it took me a little bit to adapt to Itzkoff's writing style, it flowed well and told me a great deal that I didn't know about Paddy Chayefsky. It also led me to look up new things and revisit old favorite things related to the movie (Faye Dunaway's post-Oscar photo, for example).

My only complaint, and it's a small one, is the about the final chapter, which delves into how the satire of "Network" has become reality today. This could have been better summed up in a shorter afterword, but it's clear Itzkoff interviewed a lot of people, and wanted to cram their various perspectives in somewhere.

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## Rebecca McNutt says

*Network*, made in the late Seventies at a time when the news industry was taking a big shift towards exploitative news and "fluff" news, took the world by storm when it first came out, especially the depressed, mentally unbalanced anchorman who decides to stir things up on television before he is fired. This intriguing book analyzes the film in depth, connects it to cases in reality such as the infamous Christine Chubbuck suicide-on-live-TV in 1974, and it also discusses how *Network* became such a highly-rated and influential film in pop culture and society.

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### **David says**

If you like the movie this is a must read. Absolutely fascinating and great fun.

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### **Richard says**

This book only added to my admiration of what is my favorite movie.

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### **John says**

Fascinating detailed look at the development and making of one of the most important films of the 1970's. At the time, much of what the film had predicted seemed far too out, but unfortunately with the advent of reality TV and so-called Action News has come true. No longer a satire but the real thing. I do wish the author spent more time on director Sidney Lumet, but that is a minor complaint.

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### **Brad Hodges says**

There are movie lines that live forever, and their creation is usually some kind of alchemy. For instance, the line "I'm as made as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!" came to writer Paddy Chayefsky, but he never thought it would stick in pop culture. Fortunately, for those who have seen it and loved it, as I have, there is more to his film *Network* than just that line.

Dave Itzkoff tells the story of *Network*, soup to nuts, in his book, titled of course, *Mad As Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies*. It is a straightforward account of how Chayefsky came up with the idea, how the film was cast and shot, and how it was received and remembered.

"*Network* was a bundle of contradictions, the last gasp of an era of populist Hollywood filmmaking as expressed by a man who never subscribed to the movement; it used the resources of one mass medium to indict another and, beyond it, the degradation and emptiness of contemporary American life," Itzkoff writes. He starts with a biography of Chayefsky, who began in the Golden Age of television, and then transitioned to movies when his teleplay, *Marty*, was made into a film and he and it won Oscars. He had various successes and failures, including another Oscar for *The Hospital* in 1971, when he came upon the idea of writing about television.

Itzkoff covers this area well, getting his hands on Chayefsky's notes and early drafts so we can see the

evolution of the story. Chayefsky teamed with producer Howard Gottfried and the movie was shopped. Chayefsky suffered no fools and was not about to make changes, but the film landed at MGM, Sidney Lumet was hired, and the casting process began. There were three main characters: Howard Beale, the "mad prophet of the airwaves," Max Schumacher, the old-school TV producer who bemoans the changing world, and Diane Christensen, representing the new wave, where anything on TV can be sold like beer.

"For Beale, his mad prophet of the airwaves, he envisioned Jimmy Stewart, Henry Fonda, Gene Hackman, Sterling Hayden, or Robert Montgomery; Max Schumacher could be played by Fonda or Hackman, or by William Holden; and Diana Christensen seemed ideal for Candice Bergen, Faye Dunaway, Ellen Burstyn, or Natalie Wood." Holden and Dunaway would get the parts, but Beale went to the unlikely Peter Finch, an Australian by way of England and Jamaica who had to convince all involved he could do an American accent.

Itzkoff covers the filming on almost a daily basis, and notes such struggles as Dunaway's recalcitrance, particularly about a sex scene with Holden. How much nudity there was had to be negotiated, and when Dunaway went back on it, she was almost fired. Another actor, Roberts Blossom (who would later play the old man in Home Alone) was axed as Arthur Jensen, the head of the corporation that owns the Network. He was replaced by Ned Beatty, who would utter perhaps the film's second-best known line: "Because you're on television, dummy."

Then we see the surreal events surrounding the death of Finch, who died in January of 1977, just two months after the film's release. He left behind a Jamaican wife, and there was much discussion of who would be allowed to accept a potential Oscar. Peter Bogdanovich, who was producing the telecast, did not want a repeat of dark moments like Marlon Brando sending up a woman in Indian garb to refuse an Oscar.

The book then covers the reception of the film. It was hailed by some critics, such as Vincent Canby, and panned by others, such as Pauline Kael. The reception by the TV news industry was alarming to Chayefsky--he never intended it be an insult. He had received full cooperation of the networks before the film--he shadowed a network producer while writing--but almost the whole industry came down on him, even Walter Cronkite, whose daughter had a role in the film.

Network would be nominated for ten Oscars, including five of the film's actors, tying a record. It also tied a record by winning three acting statuettes (the other was *A Streetcar Named Desire*), with Dunaway winning Best Actress; Beatrice Straight a surprise winner for Best Supporting Actress (her speech was almost as long as the length of her part), and Finch winning his posthumous award. Chayefsky accepted, but waved up Finch's widow, to hell with everyone. Chayefsky also won for Screenplay, his third Oscar. The film lost Best Picture to *Rocky*, a much more feel-good enterprise.

Itzkoff devotes his last chapter to the prescience of *Network*. Almost everything that Chayefsky envisioned came true: television news is now completely entertainment. "Where nationally televised news had been a once-nightly ritual, it has since grown into a twenty-four-hour-a-day habit, available on channels devoted entirely and ceaselessly to its dissemination. The people who dispense these versions of the news seem to take their direction straight from the playbook of Howard Beale: they emote, they inveigh, and they instruct their audiences how to act and how to feel; some of them even cry on camera."

What Itzkoff doesn't touch on is that Chayefsky foresaw reality television, with the Ecumenical Liberation Army getting a weekly show in which they commit a new crime every week, cameras rolling. We haven't gotten quite that far yet, but we've come close.

The film has made me want to see *Network* again, for the fourth or fifth time; it's number one on my Netflix queue. It's part of what we old-timers call the greatness of the 1970s, the best decade for American film, when good films actually were at the top of the box office: *Network* was one of the most profitable films of

the year, while it probably couldn't get made today.

And one fun fact to close: Finch did his "Mad as Hell" monologue in one take. They started a second, but he stopped midway and told Lumet that he didn't have any gas left in the tank.

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## **Paul Lyons says**

Sometimes interesting, yet fairly disappointing look at the making of the classic 1976 film NETWORK. Considering the amount of research and access to material author David Itzkoff had, I was expecting "Mad as Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies" to be a riveting, page-turner of a non-fiction book...chronicling the making of one of my favorite films. Perhaps my expectations were too high, as instead of being riveted, I was occasionally engaged, and often frustrated. Instead of being a page-turner, I was counting the time before the book ended.

Paddy Chayefsky was a wonderful writer, and dramatist, yet the author spends way too many pages covering every aspect of Chayefsky's life, including the years after NETWORK was completed, and had won several awards. It's not that I didn't enjoy reading about the life of Paddy Chayefsky, it's just that I didn't need to read about his 1978 Oscar ceremony rebuttal to the PLO-supporting Vanessa Redgrave and her controversial Supporting Actress acceptance speech, nor did I care to read about the details of Paddy Chayefsky's involvement in the 1980 film ALTERED STATES. What did any of this have to do with NETWORK? I thought the book was supposed to be about the making of NETWORK, at least the title said so.

Yes, Dave Itzkoff DOES (thankfully) discuss the making of NETWORK in detail, yet the discussion is too brief, and the chronicle from production to release goes by too fast, in too few pages. I got the sense that the author didn't have enough material to fill an entire book, so instead, he filled the remaining pages with post-release details, and commentary, followed by a long, and dull analysis on how NETWORK predicted the state of news media today, featuring various quotes from Keith Olbermann, Aaron Sorkin, Bill O'Reilly, and Ben Affleck.

As much as I appreciated the attempt at ANY insight into the making of NETWORK, "Mad as Hell: The Making of Network and the Fateful Vision of the Angriest Man in Movies" was a real letdown,

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## **Raphael says**

Some solid research. Skip the last third, apparently his editor told him to pad it out with a dull essay on how Network predicted O'Reilly, Lady Gaga, and of course, the Higgs Boson particle.

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## **Anthony McGill says**

GREAT FILM GETS SPECIALIZED TREATMENT.

Dave Itzkoff has written a thorough and engaging history of the making of the great 1976 film "NETWORK". A very detailed analysis from the roots of Paddy Chayefsky's first idea to the exacting process of writing the Academy Award winning screenplay, to overseeing all aspects of the film making process.

The genius of Chayefsky looms all over this film and the book for that matter as you would expect.

This thought provoking film, superbly directed by Sidney Lumet and starring an incredible cast (with three acting Oscar wins) is still a riveting viewing experience 40 years later and seems even more relevant today with the choice of so much television news available: the good, the bad and the ugly. The author successfully examines all these issues in this intelligent, thoughtful examination; an excellent addition to your library of worthwhile film studies.

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