

UO graduate tries to expose truth through television

Screenplay writing is the new vehicle of truth for a former journalism student and TV anchor

By Laura Cadiz
Higher Education Editor

When Bryce Zabel sat in his journalism classes at the University 20 years ago, he was young, idealistic and wanted to change the world.

The 1976 University graduate wanted to expose the truth to society through journalism, but he eventually found that television entertainment was the easiest way to conquer that goal.

"Sometimes there's more truth in fiction than in nonfiction," Zabel said. "TV is nonfiction, but think about trying to capture an hour speech in a 15-second sound bite. A lot of people get into journalism to be seekers of truth, but a 15-second sound bite — it's not a

lie — but it's not the full truth."

Since he came to that revelation, Zabel has taken to writing screenplays in Hollywood. He is the creator of "Dark Skies" and "M.A.N.T.I.S." and has written scripts for other TV shows, including "Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman," "Life Goes On" and "L.A. Law."

During his first season working on "Lois and Clark," Zabel was the one responsible for Lois Lane first locking lips with Superman, and in "Dark Skies," he wrote a radical reinterpretation of history.

"I'm the crazy guy who said Kennedy was killed by aliens," Zabel said.



ZABEL

"Dark Skies," which NBC carried for the 1996 season, is what Zabel said he is most proud of. The show enabled him to inform and entertain the public concerning something he felt deeply passionate about.

"I believed in the underlying reality that Roswell was a true event, so I had something to say," he said. And Zabel even got to live vicariously through the main character of the show, John Loengard.

"He was a sincere guy, out to do good in the world. Then he got set adrift after he realized how the world was," Zabel said.

None of the shows that Zabel worked on are currently on the air; however, he is now writing four pilots for next season — one each for ABC, FOX, HBO and the Sci-Fi channel. He also wrote the script for "Mortal Kombat II," which will be in theaters Nov. 21.

"I'm one of the most employed pilot writers in Hollywood,"

Zabel said.

Locally, Zabel's claim to fame is being the "TV Romeo." He secured this title in 1979 when, as the 11 p.m. anchor on KVAL, he became engaged to the 11 p.m. anchor on KEZI. When the engagement became public knowledge, Zabel was fired because of a "potential breach of security."

This lover shakeup of the Eugene TV media hit the national headlines. Although Zabel never did marry the KEZI anchor, Zabel's 15 minutes of fame eventually led him to leave his safety net in Eugene and pursue a reporting job for CNN.

"All of a sudden [the attention] stopped," he said. "I didn't have a job, and nobody cared."

Zabel is nationally famous for being the first CNN correspondent in Los Angeles. But back then, CNN wasn't as highly regarded as it is now and was known as the "Chicken Noodle Network," he said.

But Zabel believed that it could change the world, so he stayed with the network.

After his job with CNN ended, Zabel started his career as a screenwriter. He decided to tell his stories based on his journalism background.

"I think there's no better preparation than journalism [for screen writing]," Zabel said. "You need to see the world through somebody else's eyes."

"You have to be aware of the world you live in. If you're going to create entertainment, you have to consume journalism."

Although he is no longer in the journalism field, Zabel still tries to affect society through his own version of truth depicted on the shows he creates.

And, just as he did 20 years ago, Zabel still clings to his idealism.

"I'm still trying to change the world," he said. "I'm just choosing different weapons."

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