

## Road To Perdition Production Notes

The first step toward making the movie "Road to Perdition" was taken by producer Dean Zanuck when he received the graphic novel of the same name, written by Max Allan Collins, as part of a pitch. Having never even seen a graphic novel, let alone read one, he began flipping through it and was hooked. "I just loved it", he recalls.

The younger Zanuck immediately sent the book to his father, producer Richard D. Zanuck, who picks up the story. "I read it and was instantly attracted to it. It had wonderful action and colourful characters and just had all the elements of being a very entertaining, provocative picture. But it was the relationship between the father



and son that develops through the course of the story that really got me. I called Dean and asked him to send a copy over to Steven Spielberg at DREAMWORKS. To my amazement, two days later the phone rang and it was Steven. He said, 'I love this. Let's do it', and that's how it happened."

Another one of those who responded positively was Director Sam Mendes, who chose "Road To Perdition" as the follow-up to his Oscar-winning film directorial debut, "American Beauty".

The central character of "Road To Perdition" is Michael Sullivan, played by two-time Academy Award winner Tom Hanks. While Michael Sullivan is something of an enigma to the audience, Hanks' insight into his character began before he ever stepped into the role. "While I was reading this, I actually thought of the verse from the Bible that says, '*He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind*'. That's what happens to Sullivan; he's married, the father of two and has one of the bigger houses in town... And it's been paid for with fear, intimidation, violence and blood. Now he's in the midst of something he should have known was coming, but somehow was able to block out the reality of his world and believe it would have no consequences and, of course, finally it does. At the moment we're dropped into the story, it is literally the last day of that false perspective".

The father and son aspect of the story was compelling to the man who portrays Mr. John Rooney, Oscar-Winning screen legend Paul

Newman. However, as the patriarch of the family, Newman's perspective was that of a father whose loyalties are tested by his surrogate son,

Michael Sullivan, and his real son, Connor Rooney.

"Rooney's son Connor is a bad guy, and his 'adopted' son Michael is kind of a good bad guy," he offers.

"Rooney is forced to protect one at the expense of the other, so it's an intriguing conflict."



While Michael Sullivan's father figure is played by the iconic Paul Newman, his son Michael Sullivan, Jr. is played by newcomer Tyler Hoechlin. Hoechlin won the plum role over a field of more than 2,000 young actors, who were screened by casting director Debra Zane in open calls held in cities across the United States.

**"Road To Perdition" is set in 1931 when the country was in the grip of the Great Depression, Prohibition was still the law of the land and gangsters like Al Capone were at the height of their power. Long before the cameras rolled, research was the order of the day for everyone involved in the production.**

Research was especially important for the movie's design teams. Costume designer Albert Wolsky soon learned that recreating the wardrobe of the times was made all the more challenging by the fact that its main distinction was its lack of distinction. "It's not the Hotsy Totsy of the roaring '20s and it's not the very slinky style of the mid-to-late '30s," he says. "It's a very difficult period; it slips away from you in seconds."



As part of his research, Wolsky set out to find real clothing of the period, which was in itself problematic. He and his team researched throughout the United States and Europe, but found that very little remained of the actual clothing. "It was the Depression, nobody kept those clothes," Wolsky explains.

The scarcity of authentic clothing and the demand for so many multiples meant that the costumes would have to be manufactured from scratch, which led to another problem - modern fabrics are much more lightweight, so today's suits fall differently on the body than those of the early '30s. "Without the right fabric, you lose the period," Wolsky contends. "We tested the current fabrics and there was just no way to fake it. The weight dramatically affects the way the clothes move."

The only choice was to have the fabric specially woven in the correct weight for the period costumes. After some trial and error, Wolsky tracked down a weaver in upstate New York named Rabbit Goody, owner of Thistle Hill Weavers, who weaved the enormous amount of fabric needed for the production. The new fabric then had to be aged and dyed to complete the effect.

"Road To Perdition" was filmed entirely on location in Chicago, Illinois and the surrounding towns. "I wanted to shoot on location and, in Chicago. What you see on screen is what's actually there. It still exists," Mendes says. The fact that it has



existed for the better part of a century meant that the production design team had to go in and turn the clock back 70 years. One area that needed little redressing was the Pullman area on the outskirts of Chicago, which is named for Henry Pullman who built the town for those building his trains. Among the shooting sites found in the Pullman area was the historic Florence Hotel, which was used for both interiors and exteriors.

The Illinois State Film Commission provided the filmmakers with another location mainstay when they helped the production team convert the armoury in Chicago into a soundstage, where the interiors of the Sullivan house and Rooney mansion were constructed. The exterior of the Sullivan home was found in the town of Barrington, Illinois while the small community of West Dundee doubled for Rock Island, the town where the Sullivans lived and Rooneys live and where Michael Sullivan and his son begin their journey.

Rising in sharp contrast to those rural communities is the city of Chicago, which Mendes intended to be "A kind of Oz in the middle of the movie," at least to young Michael Sullivan, who had never before ventured out of his hometown. Filming took place on La Salle Street in Downtown Chicago, where the buildings of the period are juxtaposed with a few modern-day structures that would later be removed digitally. **Dozens of vintage cars were obtained** by the production team to fill the street,

along with hundreds of extras in period costumes that Albert Wolsky had designed to be decidedly more upscale than the small-town wardrobe seen earlier.

The journey of Michael Sullivan and his son takes place mainly during the winter and, likewise, so did filming on "Road To Perdition." The Midwest winter cold - which dropped to as low as minus 30 degrees - tested the endurance of the entire production team. "Winter in the Midwest is a pretty bleak time," Tom Hanks attests.

Though the air was freezing, the weather didn't always cooperate



in providing the blanket of snow needed for some scenes. **Special Effects Coordinator Allen Hall and his crew took over where Mother Nature left off, fabricating several football fields' worth of fake snow to create the wintry landscape.**

The effects team was also responsible for generating the drenching "rain" that was all-too-real for the cast and crew.

"There was an enormous amount of manufactured weather. We had snow, rain, ice, sleet, you name it," Mendes recalls with a laugh. "And let me tell you, they don't always mix, they become a kind of awful mush. There were times I cursed the day I ever decided that the first 20 minutes of the movie should take place in a snowscape."

Taken from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox edition of *Road to Perdition*

