

# The Man Who Shot

# "JFK"

*Director Oliver Stone turns his obsession with all that is shameful and unresolved in American history to the mysteries of the Kennedy assassination*  
*By Jennet Conant*

When Pauline Kael, the legendary critic for *The New Yorker*, announced her retirement last year, she listed as one of her reasons for leaving that she couldn't bear to watch another Oliver Stone film.

She hadn't even seen *The Doors* yet.

Ending a twenty-three-year career rates as a mild reaction compared to the effect two or three hours alone in a dark room with an Oliver Stone film has had on some folks: The Turks reviled him for what they perceived to be the negative stereotypes in *Midnight Express*. Chinese-Americans organized nationwide protests and boycotts over the racism in *Year of the Dragon*. And the Cubans put out the unwelcome mat in Miami due to the sadism in *Scarface*. And those were just his screenplays. His early directorial efforts were no more popular—1981's *The Hand* was a low-budget horror pic about a severed mitt with murderous tendencies that one critic found so offensive, he immediately hailed Stone as the Antichrist of moviemaking.

Ten years, six movies and three Oscars later, Oliver

*Stone with Costner, whose casting as Jim Garrison has fueled skepticism about JFK.*



Stone is still the auteur everyone loves to hate. No matter that *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* made Vietnam vets cry and put the country on the couch for some collective-guilt therapy. To his critics, Stone is dangerous to the public health—a gonzo crusader with a talent for tapping big, messy emotions. He keeps poking into the Pentagon's past, getting the national psyche all hot and bothered about things best left to the shredder. Now, with *JFK*, his dramatic three-hour-long, \$40 million reexamination of the Kennedy assassination that stars Kevin Costner and a cast of hundreds, Stone has historians, pundits and pols from the Left and the Right foaming at the mouth, accusing him of being "morally repugnant" (*Chicago Tribune*) and seeing "conspirators hiding under every bed" (*Time*).

These days, everybody hates a liberal, but a righteous reformer from LaLa Land—especially one who's been caught with powder up his nose and his trousers down—now that they really can't stand. Stone, with his party-hearty past and Hollywood hubris, is a big target. The prevailing disdain for Stone's restaging of the Kennedy killing was probably best expressed by former *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, who turned to Frank Mankiewicz, a former press secretary for Robert Kennedy who has been recruited to do damage control on *JFK*, at a recent Washington function and demanded "Who the hell does this young punk think he is, anyway?"

"I don't know why, really, they get so hysterical," says Stone softly, sounding almost hurt. "I suppose I do provoke very strong reactions in people."

It may be the first and only time Oliver Stone could ever be accused of understatement.

## For several weeks now, Stone has locked himself in a suite of sleek offices,

in the same building as Skywalker Sound, in Santa Monica, California, where he and four editors are working around the clock to cut *JFK* in time for Christmas. Standing in a narrow hallway, Stone seems to loom larger than his six-foot frame. The man, like his movies, comes on way too strong. "He's very big, like a giant grizzly bear," says actor Terence Stamp, who was in *Wall Street*. "He's gentle, but from a base of power. He exudes charisma, a kind of really positive masculine energy."

"Like the old Brando image," says Stone's pal Chuck

Pfeifer, "Ollie's very much the sensitive brute."

It's almost spooky how much Stone recalls Brando's beefy, brooding longshoreman in *On the Waterfront*, all raw animalism and barely contained contradictions. He has broad shoulders and no neck, the thick hands and stubby fingers of a boxer, and a gap between his front teeth that seems to confirm a pugilistic personality. Stone can be roguishly handsome, with a great bulldog smile, but his good looks are offset by the naturally sulky cast of his features. With his coal-black hair, heavy brows and inky eyes, he seems to be in mourning for mankind's lost innocence.

The reason for today's tragic mood, of course, is his Kennedy movie, which is being assailed on all sides months before its release. Several publications, most notably *Time* and *The Washington Post*, went so far as to obtain copies of the unfinished script for their unfavorable advance reviews—something Stone finds grossly unfair. "It's premature, it's precensorship, it's precriticism," he rails. "In my opinion, it's just immoral."

Kevin Costner, who plays the controversial New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison, loyally defends Stone. "To grab his script and leak it borders on being a kind of criminal act," says Costner. "It's so out of bounds. And it's mean. It's been hard for Oliver to work when he's under attack and being turned into a cartoon."

Back in the trenches, Stone sounds embattled, embittered and, as far as that goes, pretty much in his element. His voice drops to a low whisper, presumably exhausted from the constant effort expended in defense of his craft. "It's taken a lot of time and energy not only to make the movie but to defend my right to make it while I was shooting it," he says.

When it comes to moral indignation, Stone is a champ. There are so many people on his list of Public Enemies that he can't possibly mention them all by name. "I don't have that much faith in the Older Generation, having been raked over the coals by them," he starts ranting again. "I don't have faith in Ben Bradlee. No faith. I have no faith in the Establishment, the more I get to know them. . . ."

When was the last time anyone you know used terms like "the Establishment" and "the Older Generation" in serious conversation? College? Stone has about him the impenetrable melancholia of sophomore year. And the same us-kids-against-them mentality. But he's hip enough to love it when critics accuse him of still working through some post-adolescent rebellion. "I like that, yeah, that's a compliment," he says, grinning. "To be called an adolescent at the age of 45. . . to be a man-child. . . ." He gets a faraway

# "I suppose I do provoke very strong reactions in people," says Stone.

look, as if he's savoring some blanket-and-flashlight fantasy, when suddenly his eyes snap back and he adds with great solemnity, "But it's a compliment only if I believe I have something to be truly rebellious about, and I believe I do."

Such intensity is hard to resist. Back in college, guys like Stone were called *deep*. They'd walk around quoting Blake, Nietzsche and the Old Testament, mumbling "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" before they went home for the holidays. Pfeifer, an advertising executive turned actor who has appeared in three of Stone's movies and is the godfather of his 7-year-old son, Sean, says, "Ollie is out there. His politics can be ludicrous at times. And he makes these outrageous fucking statements. But 'brilliance' is a word I don't throw around in a foolhardy manner, and I think he's a true genius."

"He's a very volatile, passionate guy," explains actor Willem Dafoe, who appeared in *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*. "One of his talents is instilling in everyone a certain excitement and a sense of mission. He's very ambitious, very driven. He wants to make things happen. He's always upping the ante. With Oliver, the stakes are always very high."

Stone's films are the sort of tortured, symbol-laden, autobiographical works psychiatrists like to call "a cry for help." He is the first to admit that he identifies wholeheartedly with his macho heroes—usually outwardly asshole but intrinsically good fellows—who are at war with pretty much everything: themselves, their fathers, authority, the system and, not infrequently, the Vietnamese. They suffer through rites of passage that end up being more painful than profound. The cynical Boyle (James Woods) in *Salvador* and the wet-behind-the-ears recruit Chris (Charlie Sheen) in *Platoon* are so dim that they're half-dead before the bulb finally lights up in their head: *War is hell*.

It's virtually impossible to miss the point of Oliver Stone's pictures, which are rooted in the tradition of cinematic overkill handed down from Cecil B. De Mille to Brian De Palma. At the heart of every film is the same showdown at the O.K. Corral: good versus evil, truth versus corruption, the individual versus society, the PTA versus the CIA, etc. Stone is preoccupied with the idea that the bad guys are the ones wearing badges. The biggest villains commit crimes in the name of God and country.

"There are no gray areas with Oliver," says New York actor Michael Wincott, a buddy of Stone's who has been in three of his movies. "He is never hesitant to grab people by the throat. He has a healthy amount of disgust for the way things are, and unlike most people in his field, he doesn't think we are at a time in this nation or this world when we can afford the luxury of pandering and trivializing."

It's Stone's best defense: He's either courageous or a crackpot—or both—but at least he's not making *Home Alone 2*.

"As my dad always used to say, 'Don't tell the truth; it will get you into trouble,'" Stone says, laughing caustically. He shakes his head, letting out a long, heavy sigh. "That's the idealism in me. My God, you've got to tell the truth. The little boy in me: *You've got to tell the truth.*"

He's in character again, Oliver the Outraged, a Don Quixote off to slay the biggest hypocrites in the land.

"The guy is struggling with demons," says Dafoe. "He's conflicted. It gives everything he does a certain kind of drama, a certain passion. He's not at peace."

## When Stone first headed down to New Orleans, in the late summer

of 1990, to meet Jim Garrison, he wasn't absolutely sure the big, brash Louisiana lawyer was his kind of hero.

After all, Garrison has gone down in history as a cheap, headline-hunting demagogue of the Huey Long variety. In



*Costner with Tommy Lee Jones (Clay Shaw) and Michael Rooker (Garrison's assistant Bill Broussard); with movie wife Sissy Spacek; with Joe Pesci (David Ferrie).*

1969, Garrison, then New Orleans's district attorney, put a local businessman named Clay L. Shaw on trial for conspiring to kill President John F. Kennedy and wound up creating a national scandal that embarrassed himself and the whole city when the jury acquitted Shaw in an hour. At the time, there were dark suggestions about Garrison's being connected to the Mob—including an indictment for allowing payoffs on pinball gambling (he was later acquitted) and allegations that he was a stooge for a notorious gangland figure named Carlos Marcello.

Stone became intrigued by Garrison's bizarre saga in

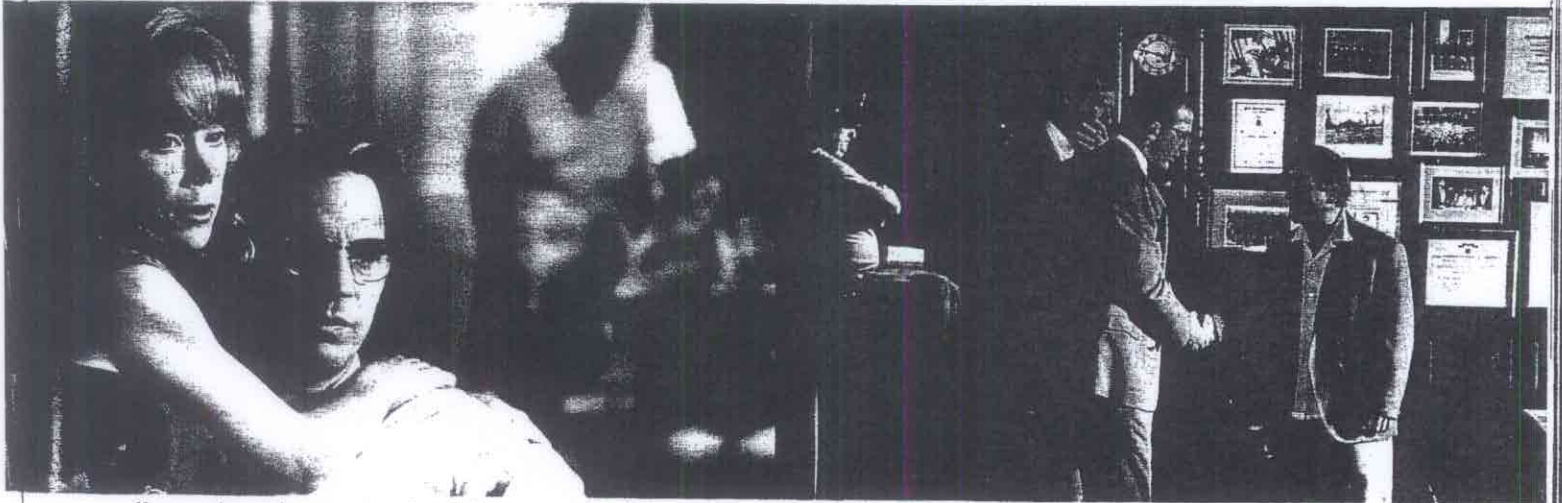
# The best defense of Stone as a or a crackpot—or both—but at least he's

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1988, after reading his newly published memoir, *On the Trail of the Assassins*. The intervening years had done nothing to dull the prosecutor's zeal for his investigation, and he laid out a compelling—if self-serving—Dashiell Hammett-style account of his efforts to build a case against several men he suspected to be conspirators, and of how he was thwarted at every turn by the local and national media, government officials, the CIA and the FBI. Garrison, recently retired from the Louisiana court of appeal, detailed not only the existence of an elaborate conspiracy to eliminate the president but also a massive cover-up, an organized

book-lined chambers, Stone threw everything at the judge—all the old accusations that he was nothing but a self-aggrandizer, a corrupt prosecutor, a front man for the Mob. Garrison, a once physically imposing man worn down by illness, calmly listened. (He later told a friend that the encounter had mightily taxed his patience.)

Finally, after some three hours of questions, Garrison looked at the director and inquired "Are you finished?" When Stone nodded, Garrison continued, "Good. Now, young man, why don't you take your people up north, where Carlos Marcello is in jail, and go ahead and make



effort to discredit anyone who did not corroborate the "official story": that a disaffected ex-marine named Lee Harvey Oswald did it with his mail-order rifle and World War II-issue ammo. Garrison's chilling conclusion: Kennedy's killing was tantamount to a coup d'état in our own country, a political murder carried out by anticommunist foes.

It's heady stuff. Stone read the book three times and optioned the story for \$250,000. For him, the tale of one man's battle against the Establishment had immediate resonance: Here was another Capraesque underdog, like *Born on the Fourth of July's* Ron Kovic. Garrison had pursued his beliefs down a dangerous, disastrous course, was publicly ridiculed and lived to write about it twenty years later. In Stone's tough-guy vernacular, "Jim stood by his guns."

But before he committed to a movie glorifying Garrison, Stone needed to confront the 71-year-old crusader mano a mano. In their first long session together, in Garrison's

your movie about Carlos Marcello."

"Do you mean that?" an incredulous Stone asked.

"I certainly do," the old man said and got up and walked out.

It was love at first sight. According to one member of the JFK crew, Stone called Garrison the next day to set up a second meeting, but the interrogation phase was over: "Garrison had told him to go to hell. He's a no-bullshit, macho guy. From then on, Oliver was convinced he was for real."

Slumped in a black swivel chair, a small white notepad in the palm of one hand, Stone is taking copious notes on our conversation in his blunt, stabbing scrawl. A leather-cased tape recorder is also documenting the interview for his "protection" (all that precensorship, precriticism business has made him a little nervous).

filmmaker is that he's either courageous  
not making *Home Alone 2*.

Despite Garrison's god-awful reputation, Stone stands by his man. "Jim never pandered to me," he says respectfully. "He never wanted to get the movie made." Stone even went so far as to give him a cameo role, rich in irony: Garrison gets to play his old foe, Chief Justice Earl Warren.

"Jim was twenty-three years in the military, he was second in command of his region for the National Guard, he was a pilot in World War II, three times district attorney, an ex-FBI agent, appellate judge, and he's written books," Stone recites. "He's not the loony tune that I had pictured as a kid."

Since the conventional wisdom on Garrison is that he represents the "far-out fringe" of conspiracy theorists, Stone prepared for the onslaught of criticism from recognized Kennedy scholars and the so-called "assassination community": every historian, journalist and conspiracy buff who has made a living out of trying to resolve the Kennedy murder mystery. "We use Garrison, in a sense, as a metaphoric protagonist," explains Stone. "He stands in for about a dozen researchers, and in that sense we take liberties and make his work larger, and make him more of a hero. I know I'm going to get nailed for that."

Stone has already been nailed for casting America's favorite nice guy as Garrison (Sissy Spacek plays his long-suffering wife), but he insists that using Costner doesn't mean he's glossing over Garrison's shortcomings. "Garrison, I admit, made many mistakes, trusted a lot of weirdos and followed a lot of fake leads," concedes Stone. "But he went way out on a limb, way out. And he kept going, even when he knew he was facing long odds." And if there's one quality Stone admires in a man, it's stubbornness.

"This is a man without fear," agrees Costner, who says he read up on the period but felt "at a certain point, you've got to go with the script." Costner met with Garrison several times and studied his mannerisms and accent. "He was a very commanding presence, a man who was made to look foolish by history and given ulterior motives," says Costner, who tries, in the film, to obscure his handsomeness behind nerd glasses and Brylcreem'd hair. "In the end, it's very difficult to know the truth. What I believe is the emotional truth of the movie, the aspects above and beyond Garrison."

Both the star and the director maintain that Garrison comes across as the deeply flawed man he really is. Costner cites a speech (since deleted from the finished film) that sums up Stone's view of the infamous prosecutor. Garrison compares himself to the old fisherman in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*: "The old fisherman manages to catch this great fish, a fish so huge, he has to tie it to the side of the boat to get it back in. But by the time he reached shore, the fish had long since been picked apart by sharks, and nothing was left but the skeleton." "It's all about his obsession," says Costner. "Here's a man who was willing to take everybody down, and at great risk to himself."

That speech, of course, could also apply to Stone. On the set of *JFK*, "Oliver

was possessed," says Gary Oldman, who plays Lee Harvey Oswald. "He brought a sense of urgency and aggression to it. I likened it to being in the army. When we were rehearsing, it was like 'Let's synchronize our watches.'"

*JFK* took Dallas by storm. The front line featured a staggering array of big names: Walter Matthau, Jack Lemmon, Donald Sutherland, John Candy, Kevin Bacon, Joe Pesci, Ed Asner and Tommy Lee Jones. Oliver's army descended and, with its cinematic imperative for historical accuracy, spent \$4 million and employed nearly 800 locals to turn back the clock at the old Texas School Book Depository, in Dealey Plaza. The director donated \$50,000 to the Dallas County Historical Foundation for permission to use the sixth floor of the depository so the sight angles on the rifles would be just right. He had billboards removed. Storefronts repainted. Traffic rerouted.

Then, as Stone gave the signal, that familiar motorcade of open-air Lincoln limousines started slowly down the roadway. There was Jackie in her pink pillbox hat. Then came the shots: one, two, three, four? five?

With everyone busy dodging all manner of bullets, things were bound to be a bit dicey on the set. "Everybody could feel the tension," recalls Costner. "We came very close to disaster."

Stone was shooting a scene in Dealey Plaza with about a hundred extras assembled right below the fateful sixth-floor window of the depository when a big sheet-glass window came loose and hurtled to the ground. "It was coming straight down like a guillotine," says Costner. "It would have cut some people right in two. But at the last minute, the wind caught it, and it fell in the middle of nothing. It was remarkable. We were all shaken. As the shattered glass was swept up, I just projected that it was the blemish on American history and those who didn't want the movie to go forward."

Many in Hollywood believe that *JFK* will be Stone's *Apocalypse Now*, a monster of a movie that will be debated and dissected, loved and hated. (In a preemptive move, Stone has commissioned a documentary about the research behind the movie, produced by filmmaker Danny Schechter and scheduled to air on HBO this month. An annotated version of the complete *JFK* script will be published by Warner Books.) Stone's detractors, however, dismiss the movie as another *Mississippi Burning*—a supposedly fact-based film that turns out to be rotten fiction, where the "good guys" are, in reality, the bad guys.

In truth, the Kennedy assassination remains one of the murkier chapters of American history. Almost all the cru-

"I'm more concerned with why Kennedy was killed than who or how."

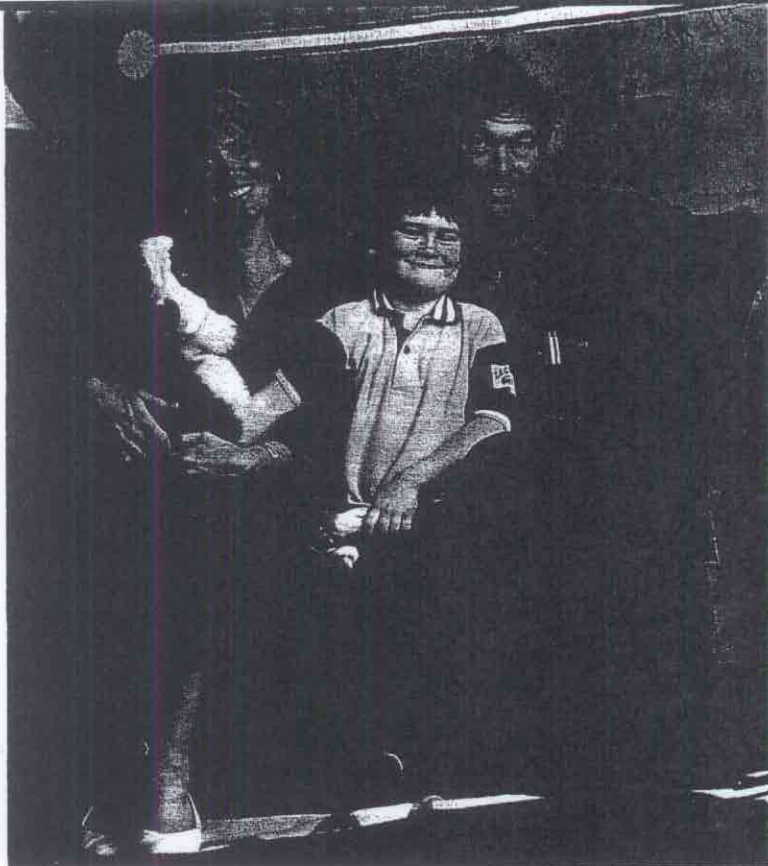
cial "facts" are open to dispute, with everyone from coroners who were on the scene to forensic specialists from across the country arguing over the veracity of the autopsy photos and the correct interpretation of Abraham Zapruder's horrifying 5.6-second film of the mortal wounding of Kennedy. Much of what passes for evidence—such as the "magic bullet" that struck Kennedy, changed directions twice and then hit Governor John Connally Jr., who'd been sitting in front of Kennedy—defies logic.

Depending on whose "expert testimony" you care to listen to, Kennedy was killed by three, or as many as seven, shots fired by one or more gunmen positioned at the Book Depository and/or across the street, on the now-historic grassy knoll. If there was more than one shooter, there was a conspiracy of some kind, and consequently also a cover-up. The whos and whys are awfully iffy. But Stone isn't the only one persevering in this tangled terrain: A recent five-part documentary on the A&E Cable Network, *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*, and several forthcoming books claim to shed new light on who assassinated Kennedy and why.

It would seem that just about the only Americans with any faith in the Warren Commission's 1964 report concluding that Oswald had acted alone were the seven members of the commission, and even that's questionable. A poll of the Clay Shaw jury in 1969 found that the majority believed that there had been a conspiracy but just didn't think Garrison had the goods. In 1979, a House investigation committee concluded that Kennedy was "probably assassinated as the result of a conspiracy" and that further inquiry was merited, but its recommendation was never followed up. Harrison Livingstone, coauthor of two recent books about the Kennedy assassination, has summed up the situation this way: "Both Stone and Garrison are well-meaning men bringing charges without the evidence. They're trying to tell the truth, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

"Some people will say we're fiction," grumbles Stone. "I would have avoided all this bullshit if I'd said this is fiction from the get-go." It makes critics queasy when Stone says his composite characters and condensed chronology are "faithful to the spirit of events." But as Zachary Sklar, the editor of Garrison's book and the coauthor, with Stone, of the JFK screenplay, argues, "Since nobody agrees on anything, nobody is distorting history. The only official history is the Warren Commission report, and that nobody believes."

Stone, an expression of exquisite pain on his face, patiently defends his methods. No, he is not going to stamp all over the Kennedy legacy in his combat boots. In fact, he is going Zen, using an open-ended technique called Rashomon, after the Japanese film classic that juxtaposed different scenarios of the same event. It's a subtle, suggestive approach, with the speculative sequences set off in sepia tones, theoretically leaving the audience to arrive at its own conclusions. But then again, subtlety is not this guy's strong suit. Stone drops some heavy hints about who Kennedy's murderers might have been: high-ranking members of the CIA, the military-industrial complex and the Pentagon. In



*The man's man at rest: Stone with his wife, Elizabeth, and their son, Sean.*

the final scenes, he chases his government-conspiracy theory all the way to the Pentagon, suggesting that Kennedy had been assassinated so that war could be waged in Vietnam.

"I believe the Warren Commission [finding] is a great myth, and in order to fight a myth, maybe you have to create another one," says Stone. "The Warren Commission [report] was accepted at the time of its release for its soothing Olympian conclusion that a lone nut committed this murder. I suppose our movie is a countermyth: that the man was killed by larger political forces, with more-nefarious and sinister objectives."

He stops short of naming names. "I don't know who did it," he says in a half-whisper. "I have a feeling about what happened. I have a *feeling*. I'm more concerned in a way with why Kennedy was killed than who or how." He pauses before adding "The 'why,' though, is key."

Oliver Stone was 17 when John Kennedy was assassinated, and it affected him profoundly. "The Kennedy murder was one of the signal events of the postwar generation, my generation," he says, lapsing into his pulpit voice. "Vietnam followed, then the bombing of Cambodia, the Pentagon Papers, the Chile affair, Watergate, going up to Iran-Contra in the Eighties. We've had a series of major shocks. And I think the American public smells a rat that's been chewing on the innards of the government for years."

Something much more personal than politics is eating at Stone. "I'm a child of distortions," he says. "I grew up reading fake history. I'm still groping my way, trying to figure it out, to see the truth, to (continued on page 137)

## THE BIG SLEAZY

paid me back, and in this case, it just was a matter of this kid was really trying to put his life together, and I helped him out."

"Did he pay you back?"

"He's attempting to. I have to tell you, I don't personally care whether he does or he doesn't. It's only money."

"Hey, goombah! How ya doin'?" Pellicano held the phone in his ear. Men he barely knew were "buddy" or "pal" or "partner" or "ace." But not all men.

"How ya doin', honey?" Pellicano said to the next caller. He listened. "Yeah," he said, smiling bigger than he had all day, and hung up.

"Who was that?" I asked, figuring it was Kat, Mrs. Pellicano.

"Guess." He was still smiling.

I didn't.

"Okay, I'll give you a hint: Marlon Brando."

"That was Brando?"

He looked at me the way a toll collector looks at an out-of-town driver who pays with a twenty and wants directions.

"Robert Shapiro," Pellicano said. Brando's lawyer.

"What about the 'honey'?"

Calling men "honey," Pellicano said, throws off the eavesdroppers.

I thought about Brando. And about the fact that, without guys like Brando, with problems like Brando's, people like Anthony Pellicano would have problems, and the worst of them wouldn't be eavesdropping. But people like Brando would always have Brando-sized problems.

"If you want, I will let you read a story idea that I've just put together," he said. "Would you like that?"

I said I would.

"Stacey girl!" he called, bringing in a blonde who didn't hurt the eyes and send-

ing her to fetch the document.

"I've got several semi-deals going," he told me while we waited for Stacey to come back. "I'll have a pilot on the air or a series in the works by this time next year." (The project with Michael Mann stalled when Mann went off to North Carolina to shoot *The Last of the Mohicans*.)

Seeing the question coming, he again recited the Pellicano Principle. "For only one reason," he said. "Money. There is nothing else, besides being a drug dealer, that will bring you the amount of money that you can make in the movie business."

Stacey returned. "Let me know when you're done," he said, handing me nine typewritten pages and leaving the room. "Take your time."

It was quite a saga. The story of two boys from the same Chicago neighborhood. They were as close as brothers. One grows up to be an FBI agent, discarding "as much of his ethnicity as possible," including his Italian name. The other becomes a private eye, working for the Outfit. The agent ends up investigating the shamus, old friend versus old friend. Shots are fired amid a Greek tragedy subplot about confused parentage. Gritty, Michael Mann sort of stuff. Aaron Spelling had already read the treatment and liked it. I thought of what Sly had told me, that Pellicano's life "was the kind of a script that can only get better as his experiences grow." One of the characters in this piece had to be Anthony Pellicano, probably the gumshoe, on the right side of the law. I figured the dick was his chum Paul DeLucia or one of the unclean types he'd tracked down.

Pellicano said I was wrong. He said he was both.

*Peter Wilkinson wrote about Patsy Kensit in the October 1991 GQ.*

## OLIVER STONE

(continued from page 67) understand what really happened."

A year before the Kennedy assassination sent the country reeling, Stone's parents' abrupt divorce shattered his world. The only child of a colorful French Catholic mother and a conservative Jewish father, a well-known Wall Street stockbroker, Stone was raised in the same affluent WASP style as his prep-school mates on the Upper East Side of New York. He went to Trinity School and then to the posh Hill School, shared his father's anti-Roosevelt politics and thought he had, in his words, "a happy life."

Then Hill's headmaster called Stone and broke the news that neither of his parents had the courage to tell him. "It was a very sudden twist—my parents had not loved each other and were committing adulteries

on both sides," says Stone. "Later, my father said he was deep in debt from my mother's spending and the divorce. . . . I think I got a sense that everything had been stripped away. That there was a mask on everything, and underneath there was a harder truth, a deeper and more negative truth. And I felt very alone in the world at that point."

Though Stone graduated high school and entered Yale, he once said that during those years he felt as if he'd gone from "the golden boy to the ugly duckling." He dropped out of college and went to Vietnam for six months, to teach English. He drifted into the merchant marines, then in one rage-filled, self-destructive act, enlisted in the army, in 1967. Looking back, he says his parents' betrayal, of each other and of him, "was the beginning for me of the

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## OLIVER STONE

road that led to Vietnam early. I had to get out of America. I reassessed everything. It really darkened my whole world."

By the time Stone returned to the United States, in 1968, he was one of the walking wounded. His reentry into society began with a bust for marijuana possession; his father had to fork over \$2,500 in payoffs to pry him out of a San Diego jail. Stone freely admits he tried to lose himself in a mountain of cocaine.

By 1969, Stone was churning out blood-splattered screenplays and studying with Martin Scorsese at New York University's film school. He was supported by his first wife, Najwa Sarkis, a Lebanese national seven years his senior. His first movie, *Seizure*, which he wrote and directed, died at the box office. What followed was a disappointing, drugged-out decade of scratching together a living as a cabdriver and a messenger. This period was punctuated by the occasional lucrative project, such as *Conan the Barbarian*, which he coauthored. "I was trying to borrow money here and there, hustling, trying to make it as a screenwriter," recalls Stone. His career didn't really take off until *Salvador*, a film he cowrote and directed, in 1986.

He had already begun work on *Platoon*, which would soon establish him as the era's quintessential macho filmmaker. While much has been written about Stone's obsession with war, his rage against authority figures seems more to the point. For Stone, his parents' divorce and the Kennedy assassination were double tragedies. Had neither of them occurred, Stone wouldn't have found himself at war with the world. It is easy to understand his romanticized view of the fallen president. "I don't think Kennedy ever would have gotten into the mess we did in '64," he says passionately. "Not even close. There would have been no Vietnam as we know it."

If Stone is working out the past in his pictures, his body of work is a pretty frightening commentary on his opinion of women. "What would I do with an Anne Tyler novel?" he asks. When pressed about why the years haven't taken the edge off his attitude, he beats a hasty retreat to the door and says with obvious glee "I have to take a piss now." On his return, he explains that he is "still working on" his relationship with his mother, a flamboyant woman who took several lovers after her marriage ended. Stone recalls her as being "a big white-liar; she was white-lying all the time."

Stone says he is attracted to "the opposite type." His second wife, Elizabeth Cox, 42, operates as his de facto manager and is known to hover protectively around him on the set. Stone calls her "a saint," and it's no wonder. Tales about his unbecoming conduct while auditioning starlets for

*The Doors* are collected by certain Hollywood actresses as casting-couch classics.

Stone's friends all stare at the ceiling when the subject of women comes up. "Oliver works hard and he plays hard," says Oldman, a rowdy sort himself. "He's a man's man, really," another actor ventures. "Oliver is like one of those warrior chieftains who feels he has to sleep with all of the women in the tribe, not just the pretty ones."

Stone's habit of clashing with the actresses in his films has gotten him into tabloid trouble. There was the day that, on the set of *Wall Street*, Charlie Sheen stuck a sign on costar Sean Young's back that read "I AM THE BIGGEST CUNT IN THE WORLD." Young was outraged that Stone and the crew colluded with Sheen by not telling her about the sign, and the prank ended with the fuming actress taking off in a car packed with her pricey costumes. When a crew member apprehended her at the pass, she threw the garments at him, stripped the dress off her back and hopped back into the car, buck naked.

"Sean fucking Young," mutters Stone. "She was unbearable, totally unprofessional. I was proved right by the fact that nobody has been able to work with her. She is a monster of major proportions, or else chemically unbalanced."

Young, reached at her Arizona retreat, insists that Stone isn't a misogynist but that he just doesn't deal well with women. "When Charlie put that note on my back and the boys started playing jokes at my expense, it hurt my feelings," she says with uncharacteristic restraint. "Oliver should have stuck up for me, but he didn't. He let me be the butt of the joke. It's what guys do. He had to be one of the bros. They're all part of an old boys' club—[Michael] Ovitz, Kevin Costner, those CAA people. In the old boys' network, women are expendable."

Few of the actresses who have worked with Stone have anything good to say about him. "Yeah, they blacklisted me, those girls, Sean and Daryl [Hannah, who was in *Wall Street*]. They were attacking me in the press, and that set off all this," he says, unchastened. "Madonna, too. She was rapping me because I wouldn't give her the *Evita* role, because I wanted to work with Meryl Streep."

While *Evita* has been scratched, Stone says that he is currently working on a movie with a female protagonist, though he can't talk about it. Stone insists he has a very high opinion of the opposite sex: "I think women are totally equal to men in every way, except maybe upper-body strength."

Just when you think success and fatherhood might have had a calming effect on him, Stone says something sufficiently out-



## OLIVER STONE

rageous to reassure one that he is still the same raging adolescent. While he's no longer calling the big studios "cocksucker vampires"—he has only kind words for Warner Bros., which is financing *JFK*—it might be because he's too busy hurling invective at the press, dubbing the media "Doberman pinschers" for tearing apart his movie and pitting the public against him before it even gets into the theaters. "Everything I've done, I've done feeling good and clear in my conscience," he says piously. "*JFK* is the most important thing I've ever tried. No matter if the press drives me out of the country and I wind up making movies in England or France, it was damn worth it.

"Jim Garrison had a great line to Johnny Carson when Carson was tearing him up," says Stone, shifting back into rant mode. "He said 'Johnny, you can either make the issue me or John Kennedy, but by making the issue Jim Garrison, you're obviously trivializing it.' Well, if you make the issue Oliver Stone and his filmmaking, then basically you're doing the same work that the apologists for the Warren Commission are doing, which is continuing the lie."

Either way, count on Stone to charge at his attackers. He courts controversy. All this righteous indignation about the evil press is a little disingenuous, considering the media blitz—and the dozen or so magazine covers—he has orchestrated for *JFK*. His future projects will all draw the same kind of fire, given their subjects—from the assassination of gay political leader Harvey Milk to the incarceration of Indian-rights

activist Leonard Peltier, who was allegedly framed for the murder of two FBI agents. Doing daily battle with the powers that he feeds his passion. "The scrapper in him needs it," says Dafoe. "The truth is, he's a major player now in Hollywood. So he can't be the outsider anymore. One of the things he's dealing with is his identity."

It's getting late, and Stone looks bleary-eyed from hours in the editing room. He stands up heavily and starts to gather his things. Reaching into an innocuous-looking cardboard box on the table, he says offhandedly "I bought this today," pulling out a shiny silver-barreled .357 Magnum. Aiming it at the opposite wall, squinting as he lines up the sights, Stone explains that a religious cult near his house in Santa Barbara has been giving him some trouble. "I bought the gun for protection," he says, grinning perversely, "but they're going to say it's because I'm becoming paranoid."

It's Stone's favorite head game. He's throwing down the gauntlet, begging the media to distort his words and portray him as a pistol-packing kook. He's looking for an excuse, any excuse, to lead the next charge against a cruel and corrupt world. With *JFK*, he's pointing his popgun at the Pentagon, challenging it to bring on the heavy artillery. After one last flourish, Stone slips the pistol back into the box, and the last angry man in Hollywood heads into the sunset.

*Jennet Conant last wrote about Warren Littlefield, in the September 1991 GQ.*

## A BEAU'S ART

(continued from page 101) of the French Republic.

One afternoon, Antonio found himself standing next to the Baron de Rothschild, holding a silver tray filled with the pins that Monsieur Damien was using in the process of reducing the size of the dinner jacket the baron was wearing. Antonio heard the baron boast to Monsieur Damien that he now had 7,000 sheep on his country estate. Just then, one of the Russian princes arrived and said "On my country estate, I have 7,000 *shepherds*."

The most challenging client for Monsieur Damien to fit properly was France's flying hero, Louis Blériot, who had often been injured in plane accidents and had a disproportionate figure. His hips were conspicuously off-center, and one of his legs was a few inches shorter than the other, requiring that one of his shoes be constructed with an elevated heel. Still, he was a fastidious dresser; favoring pin-striped suits, he ordered several at a time—all of which Monsieur Damien designed and tailored in slightly tilted ways that al-

lowed the material to hang flatteringly on the slanted body of the aviator, achieving an illusion of sartorial symmetry.

At times Antonio accompanied Monsieur Damien in his carriage to private fittings in the Paris homes or apartments of these leading clients, and early one evening, in a grand suite of the Hôtel de Crillon, where an archduke from Hungary was being fitted, Antonio could hear someone playing the piano magnificently in an adjoining room. "The music consisted almost entirely of Southern Italian love songs and the arias that we have grown up listening to," Antonio wrote to Joseph. "The door was slightly open, and as I stood helping Monsieur Damien with the archduke, I felt carried away by the sadness and beauty of the music. Then it stopped, and a lovely woman with blonde hair appeared in the doorway, wearing a long gown and a sparkling necklace. She apologized to the archduke because she did not realize we were there. The archduke introduced her as his wife to Monsieur Damien, who complimented her on her playing. She thanked

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