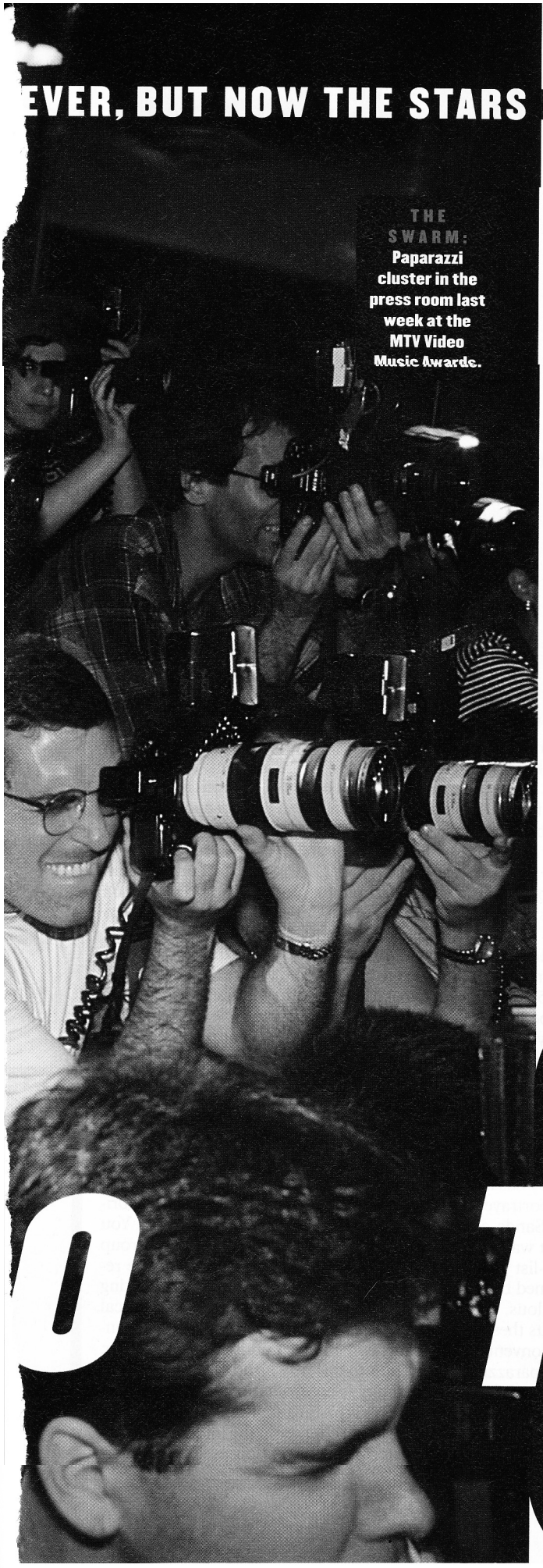
EVER, BUT NOW THE STARS HAVE LAUNCHED A COUNTER-OFFENSIVE—AND GUESS WHO'S LOSING.



THE SWARM: Paparazzi cluster in the press room last week at the MTV Video Music Awards.

We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars. OSCAR WILDE

AT THE MTV VIDEO MUSIC AWARDS, held last week at Radio City Music Hall, sixty photographers—too many to make shooting anything from a reasonable angle possible—are herded downstairs to the entrance of a draped-off area in the basement. There, they are instructed to wait for the night's winners to appear and pose before them on a raised platform (a giant MTV curtain hanging as a backdrop). Some of the paparazzi have been waiting to enter the tiny press room for four hours. When the publicists finally let them in, the scramble for seats is like a game of musical chairs, but played by worn-out, rumpled-looking men in their thirties and forties, cameras swinging around their necks.

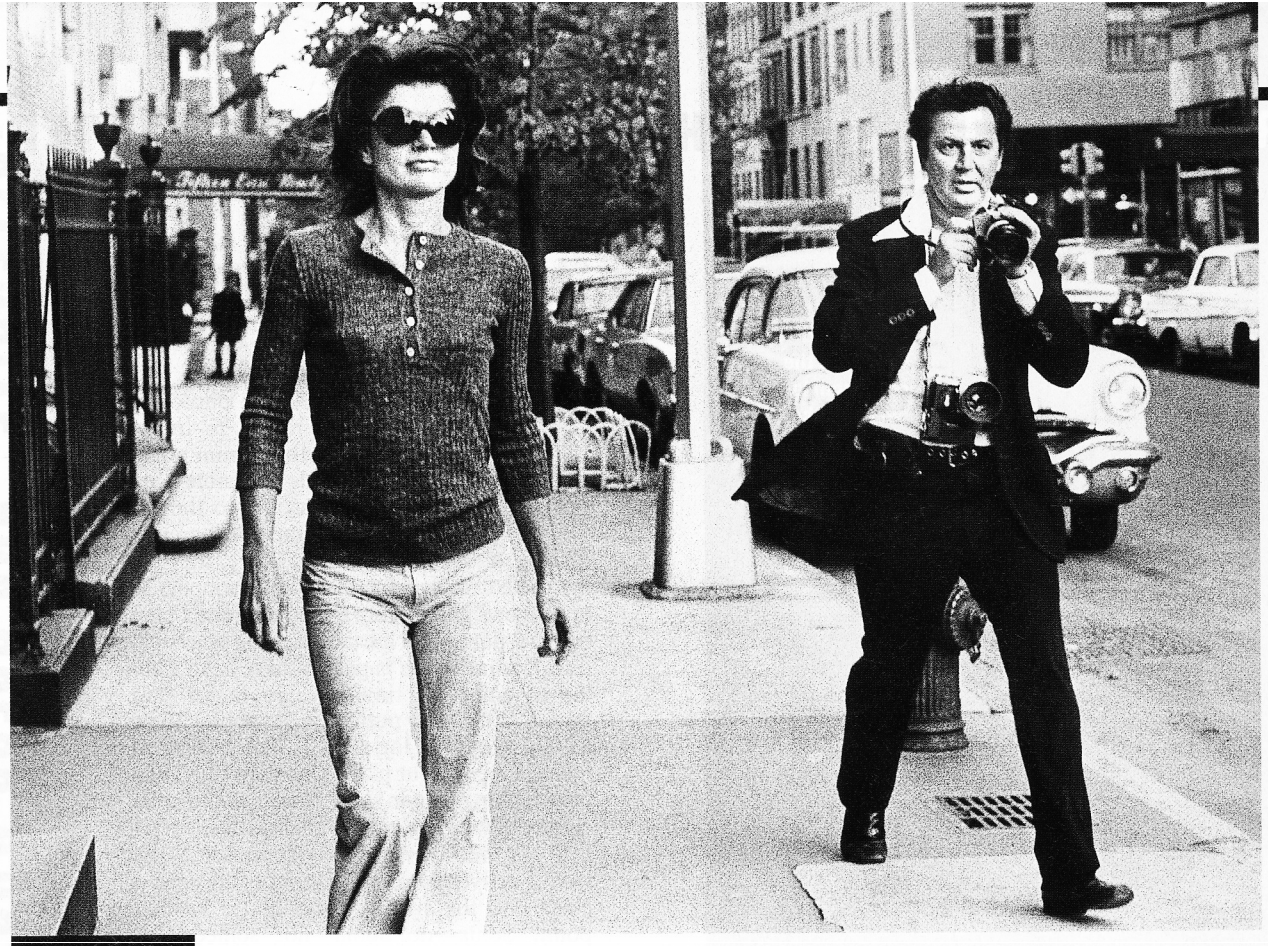
Sonia Moskowitz, a free-lancer for *Newsweek*, arrives late and attempts to drag a chair into the aisle to get a better vantage point. "Sonia—no! Sonia—no!" someone begins to chant. "These legitimate-news photographers don't give us any respect; they think they can bend the rules," sneers paparazzo Mitch Gerber. Moskowitz drags her chair back again.

The Fugees, the year's hot crossover hip-

BY NANCY JO SALES

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF MERMELSTEIN FOR *NEW YORK*

OUT



RON GALELLA was ordered to stay 25 feet away from Jackie Onassis for the rest of his life.

hop act, enter to the sound of the cameras clicking all at once.

"*This way!*" "*Over here!*" No one knows the names of Fugees singer Lauryn Hill or her two male band mates. "*Here, brother! I'm with* Vibe *magazine!*" says one white photographer, who isn't. "I'm just trying to get a shot," the white guy apologizes to an African-American paparazzo who told him to can it.

The Fugees exit, and the photogs sit down. It's an hour before any notables show up again.

"I'm not coming to this next year," says one paparazzo.

"Where the hell is Alanis Morissette?"

"She's not coming," says an MTV publicist super-sweetly. "Her publicist says she doesn't need the publicity."

Exhibitionist hoop star Dennis Rodman and crooner Toni Braxton enter. The paparazzi rise, this time with more enthusiasm.

For a moment, a brief moment, they're having fun again.

"*Dennis!*"

"*Pick her up!*"

"*Hold her over your head!*"

"*Get naked!*"

Rodman laughs and swings Braxton into the air. She lounges across his strong forearms—long enough for at least one salable picture.

"And this is the best event we've had in three months," says paparazzo Bill Davila, sighing.

IT'S A TOUGH TIME TO BE A PAPARAZZO IN NEW YORK. "IT AIN'T no *La Dolce Vita,*" says photographer Steve Sands.

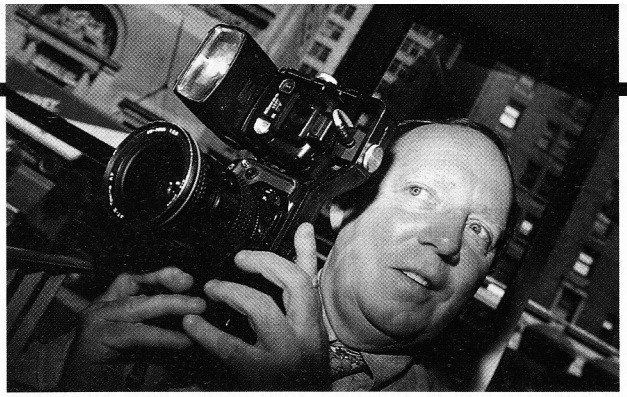
Thirty-six years ago, Federico Fellini named a relentless news photographer Paparazzo ("small bug" in Italian), coining a term for the most aggressive and irreverent journalists anyone had ever encountered. Fellini was fascinated by this new kind of eye that recognized no boundaries. In *La Dolce Vita,* the photographers are constantly in motion, jumping over fences, zooming around on Vespa motor scooters. "Italy had been under Fascism for twenty years, and the paparazzi were an uneasy symbol of freedom," says Eric Manasse, owner of the I.C.E. gallery on West 23rd Street and curator of an exhibit of classic paparazzi photography of the fifties (which has since moved to New York University). "The paparazzi were not hated yet. They, too, were glamorized."

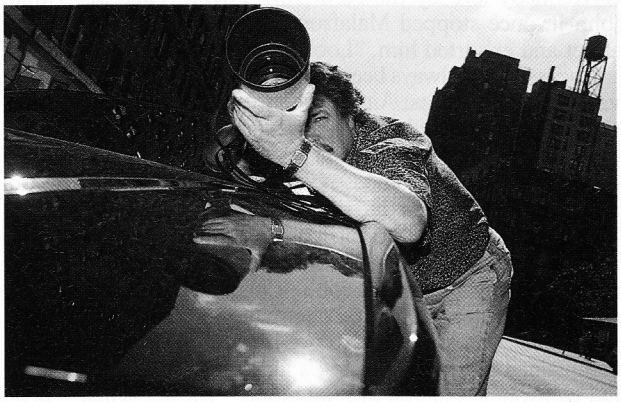
Into the seventies, in this country, paparazzi were regarded as somewhat cutting-edge figures, cool to have at parties. Studio 54 became *the* place for shooting famous fish in one strobe-lit barrel; night after night, everybody was behaving so badly that the images were pure gold. "What pictures!" says paparazzo John Barrett. Bianca Jagger boogying with her breasts escaping from her halter dress (by Felice Quinto). Maggie Trudeau without underwear. "Never been anything like it," Barrett adds. "Never will be, either."

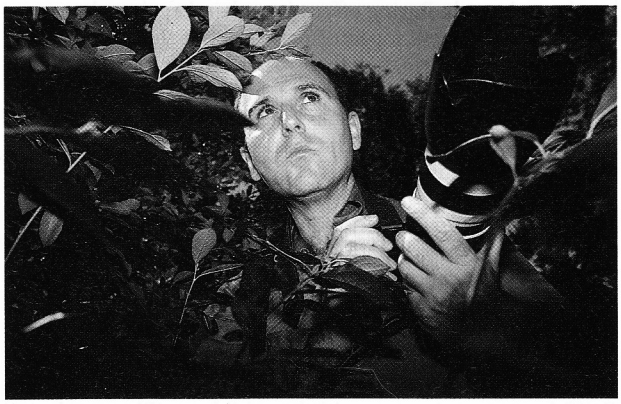
Today, paparazzi are besieged as much as they are besieging. They seek candid images at a time when the publicity industry has more power than ever to control the way its clients are portrayed in the media. "It's the Disneyfication of celebrity," Sands complains. "Everyone wants to look good. You don't want to play ball? Simple. No access." The select group of A-list paparazzi who get invited to celebrity events are restrained behind barricades as the stars breeze through looking fabulous. It seems particularly appropriate that political events these days—witness the recent star-spangled presidential conventions—are less news than carefully scripted theater.

Paparazzi just don't fit into this new airbrushed reality. The best paparazzi photography is confrontational, spontaneous, intimate: Richard Corkery's picture of Richard Nixon languishing at a Manhattan lunch counter in the middle of the afternoon (post-Watergate, pre-resurrection as Elder States-

Photograph by Ron Galella.







parazzo, you hear about it (and see plenty of paparazzo pictures of their colleagues getting socked). But when the paparazzi fight back successfully in court, it doesn't usually make the news. Alex Oliveira, for example, won an arbitration award this spring of $25,000 from Michael Jackson after Jackson's bodyguards worked him over.

CONSTANT COMPANIONS TO THE STARS:
Dick Corkery, Russell Turiak, Steve Sands, Larry Schwartzwald, Mitch Gerber.

In an era of celebrity-as-royalty, bodyguards, the paparazzi say, play the role of personal armies. "Bodyguards to me are muscular fans, because they seem to adore the people they work for or think that by having an association with them, that makes them important," says Lawrence Schwartzwald, who has had several run-ins with bodyguards himself.

The police often find themselves in the middle of the struggle between the rights of the stars and the rights of the photographers. But increasingly, the paparazzi say, the police have been choosing sides. "They like hanging out with the stars. They're starstruck," says Mitch Gerber.

Last month, a federal judge dismissed a charge against Sands—not complying with the order of a policeman—after finding that the arresting officer "was not acting as a police officer but on behalf of the movie company," says Paul Shneyer, Sands's lawyer. Sands, one of the most successful and technically adept paparazzi, has a reputation for bad behavior. But in this case, the court agreed, he was well within his rights, attempting to shoot the set of Woody Allen's *Everybody Says I Love You*. "I've just had it," Sands says wearily. "How many times do I have to get arrested in the same precinct before somebody tells those guys, 'He has a press card; he has the right to do this'?"

SOMETIMES, THE PAPARAZZI ARE GLAD THE POLICE ARE THERE—like this summer on the set of the action flick *The Devil's Own,* a set that became, Schwartzwald says, a "classic war between the movie companies and the photographers."

As movie sets go, this promised to be a good one: Brad Pitt, Harrison Ford. There was talk of an upcoming fight scene. "Photos of them doing anything together, especially a fight scene, are very, very valuable," says Schwartzwald.

"Harrison was a supreme pro throughout the filming," says Davila. "He could have cared less if we were there." It's Pitt the photographers charge with excess attitude, which means he doesn't cooperate. "Brad Pitt is the hardest person—harder than Robert De Niro, harder than Marlon Brando—to get pictures of in the history of New York," Gerber says.

"Brad Pitt has terrible skin," says Barrett.

"Bad skin," several other photographers say.

For reasons only Pitt knows (he wouldn't return calls), he doesn't like having his picture taken. "He had [production assistants] walking along beside him with umbrellas," says Gerber. "Walking down the street, he puts his coat over his head."

The usual cat-and-mouse game seemed to go a little over the freedom-of-the-press line, however, when the *Devil's Own* production crew began trying to block off the set. "They were putting up barricades, changing the press areas every five minutes," says Gerber.

"Turning capricious," Sands says.

The permit for outdoor filming that the city issues to movie companies (which, by the way, is free of charge) does not allow them to restrict press access. A press card promises all journalists greater freedom of movement than, say, a

Photographs by Jeff Mermelstein.

'THE OTHER PHOTOGRAPHERS LOOKED LIKE HUNTERS,' SAYS A NEWCOMER. DID SHE GET THE SHOT? YES.

man), or Dominick Conde's shot of a coy Soon-Yi Previn holding Woody Allen's hand at a Knicks game. "It reveals something that nobody was planning on," says Harry Benson, one of the leading session photographers in the world; he started out as a paparazzo.

Paparazzi also suffer from their own success. There is, as there has always been, an elite of about fifteen photographers, but the competition from up-and-comers, foreign paparazzi, and fans with auto-focus cameras is cutting into their action in a ferocious way. The last ten years have been a kind of paparazzi Gold Rush. When you hit a vein, that is. A single image—like Davila's shots of Jackie O.'s last walk in Central Park, or Sands's pictures of Christopher Reeve's first post-accident outing with his family—can net tens of thousands of dollars through international syndication.

The photographers don't create the demand for intrusive images—an insatiable global entertainment-and-gossip culture did that. Most legitimate news organizations run paparazzi shots, including the AP, Reuters, and the New York *Times*. "You don't like to admit that you use paparazzi, but you use them," says a photo editor at one newsmagazine. "You have to."

Not that the ever-growing demand for their pictures has done anything to raise the paparazzi's status as journalists. They have come to symbolize everything vulgar, intrusive, and obnoxious in the culture. Increasingly, they get arrested or detained while doing their jobs. "I've been locked up and held for hours when I was completely within my rights, standing on a public road taking a picture," says Russell Turiak, New York's stakeout king. "This is America, where I pay taxes and there is a First Amendment that condones what I do."

"The street in New York is open to everybody," agrees First Amendment lawyer Martin Garbus. "It's clear that these guys should be given the maximum opportunity."

To hear the paparazzi tell it, their increasing marginalization can be blamed—ironically—on the elevation of celebrities to American royalty. "It's out of control," says Victor Malafronte, the featured photographer in the 1992 documentary *Blast 'Em* (he has since retired). "The stars are out of control, their publicists are out of control, their bodyguards are out of control—and everybody's saying it's the paparazzi who are out of control." Still, the photographers get defensive. They'll tell you, "I am not a paparazzo," like Nixon saying, "I am not a crook."

IN 1975, A NEW YORK FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT DECIDED THAT Ron Galella—the self-described "godfather" of American paparazzi—had committed a crime: harassment. In his pursuit of pictures of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the court found, Galella had intruded into her children's schools; hidden in bushes and behind coat racks in restaurants; bribed hat-check girls and fisherman in Greece; and romanced employees. Galella was ordered to stay 25 feet away from Jackie for the rest of his life. "But he got the last laugh," says Davila. "His pictures were in all the [retrospectives] when she died."

Her children still endure the near-constant onslaught of men, and a few women, like Galella. We don't know how John F. Kennedy Jr. felt about paparazzo Angie Coqueran's recent video of him fighting with his girlfriend, Carolyn Bessette, in public (from which the photographer has reportedly made more than $250,000); but we do know (it was added to Kennedy lore by the New York *Post*'s "Page Six") that John Jr. once stopped Malafronte, a former nemesis, in the street and exhorted him, "Look within yourself."

The issue has always been this: Where does the right to privacy end and the First Amendment begin? "You don't get any right of intrusion by being a journalist," asks Martin London, Onassis's lawyer in the Galella case. "Just because you have a camera in your hands does not mean you are entitled to do that which any reasonable person would find harassment."

Fed-up celebrities are pushing to limit those rights. This summer, a group of stars including Robin Wright (Sean Penn's wife) announced plans to lobby Congress for a privacy bill characterizing the paparazzi's activities in pursuit of pictures as stalking. "You really have no privacy," Antonio Banderas complained to a sympathetic *Us* magazine in July. "You go to the bathroom, and you are not alone." The *Us* article—peppered, as the publication typically is, with paparazzo shots—called the photographers "dangerous" and "menacing."

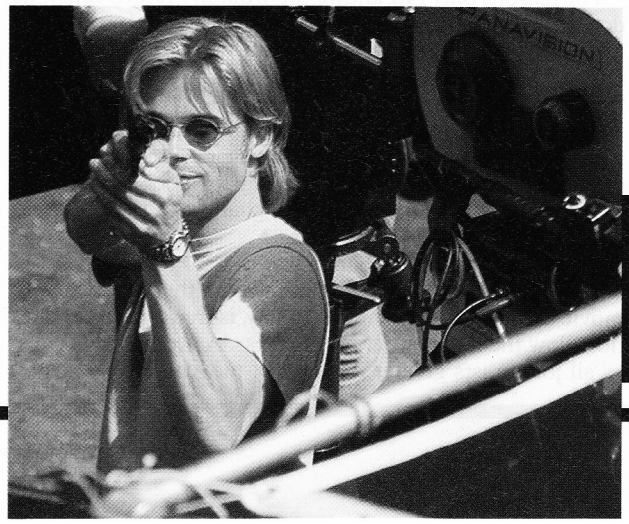
That was pretty much the assessment of the California jury that acquitted Alec Baldwin this spring of misdemeanor battery of L.A. stakeout artist Alan Zanger. Baldwin hit Zanger in the face as the photographer attempted to videotape the actor returning home from the hospital with his wife, Kim Basinger, and their new baby. Jury members said that Baldwin had acted in self-defense—even though Zanger was just pointing the camera at him.

If the job is not for the most part illegal, it certainly isn't glamorous. The days and nights of true paparazzi are filled with wandering and waiting—outside of hotels and restaurants and hot spots (the Plaza, the Four Seasons, Nobu, Spy, Wax), up and down past the shops on Madison Avenue. Going through trash. Paying off, or just plain begging, doormen, waiters, limo drivers for information about the comings and goings of the celebrities in their orbit. Sitting for hours upon hours in clandestinely parked cars, toting jars in which to urinate. Charting the love lives and marital problems and career highs and lows of people who tend to hate their guts. "What we do," says Sands, "is pathetic."

They say they do it because they have to. It's their job. "The public doesn't care that much when Christie Brinkley's coming out of a premiere," says newcomer Diane Cohen. "What they care about is seeing her with her new boyfriend, maybe her child playing on a beach."

Cohen admits, however, that often she feels "an ethical dilemma" about what she does for a living: "I was with a bunch of photographers outside a hotel once, and Melanie Griffith was coming out with her children. 'Please, please, not the kids,' she was saying. And I looked around and the other photographers looked like hunters." Did Cohen step away from the shot? "No," she says. "I couldn't go back to my editor without that picture if all the other photographers were getting it."

WHEN SEAN PENN OR ROBERT DE NIRO OR Woody Harrelson gets rough with a pa-



BRAD PITT, on the set of *The Devil's Own*, takes aim at his unwanted admirers.

Photograph by Alex Oliviera/Globe Photos.

'IT'S THE DISNEYFICATION OF CELEBRITY. YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY BALL? SIMPLE: NO ACCESS.'

regular pedestrian would have at any "news event"—these days, that includes movie sets.

The photographers are "entitled to get their shots," concedes Patricia Reed Scott, commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre, and Broadcasting. "Nobody says they can't take pictures. But they may not interfere with production in any way."

"What you have here," Reed Scott says, "are two commercial industries in conflict." And one of them—the movies—brought the city $2 billion in expenditures last year. Nonetheless, she says, "the production and the photographers have to find a reasonable coexistence on each set."

That was not what happened one morning in June, when Schwartzwald, Davila, and Oliveira arrived at the *Devil's Own* set, downtown next to the courthouses. They tried to take pictures; the production crew put up "gobos," large black screens. The photographers moved. More gobos went up, until the set was hidden from sight.

"So we went up to the second floor of this building, and some people in an office let us shoot from there. It was a law firm," says Davila.

"Brad comes out of hiding and sees us leaning out the windows. It's the day of the fight scene," Schwartzwald says. "He's holding a gun. And he points the gun at me. He had a big smile on his face—he was getting a kick out of it, showing us what he thought of us. He pointed the gun at Alex too.

"So I snapped him." The shot wound up in the *Post,* and in publications around the world.

"That gun was loaded with blanks, which is still considered a deadly weapon," says Schwartzwald.

"Just ask Brandon Lee," says Sands, referring to the actor who was accidentally shot to death three years ago on a movie set. "Frankly, I think Brad Pitt should have been brought up on charges for pointing a gun—that's menacing."

Lieutenant Joseph Byrne, the head of the NYPD Movie and TV Unit, agrees that it was unfortunate behavior on Pitt's part. "I don't like that myself," says Byrne.

"He made them take the gobos down," says Sands approvingly.

"I felt I was being part of some sort of censorship if I didn't do that," Byrne says. "And it didn't seem correct. Now, the lawyers at [the mayor's office] tell me it's more complicated than that. . . .

"I liked working in narcotics better," the lieutenant adds. "If somebody's selling drugs, you arrest them. It's easier."

The photographers got their pictures—Harrison knocking Brad for a loop: *pow!* The photos appeared in *Time, Newsweek, People,* the *Post,* the *Daily News, Star,* the *National Enquirer,* and sundry other publications.

"Some of these stars don't want their picture taken because they're having a bad hair day," Byrne adds. "Gimme a break."

A TALL GUY WITH ROPY DREADLOCKS WALKS INTO the upstairs lobby of the Ziegfeld theater and starts swinging his head around, exuberant.

"Who the hell is he?" asks Sands.

"Soap-opera star," says Davila.

"He thinks he's Lenny Kravitz, but he ain't Lenny Kravitz."

Some of the paparazzi only pretend to take Keith Hamilton Cobb's picture—he's "Noah" on *All My Children*—holding up cameras and popping flashes. We're at the premiere of the Schwarzenegger vehicle *Eraser,* and the money shot will be Arnie, so they don't want to waste the film.

Booing is heard from the 3,000 fans flanking 54th Street: They're razzing the mayor of New York. Rudolph Giuliani enters the theater alone.

"Mr. Mayor, right here!"

"Rudy, this way, please!"

Giuliani stands in front of the bullpen, trying to look natural. It's a strain. The paparazzi watch the mayor return to the entrance of the theater and perch himself against the wall.

"What the hell is he doing?" All the rest of tonight's "arrivals," as they say in publicity-speak, are continuing down the escalator and taking their seats in the theater.

"Oh, God. He's waiting for Arnie."

"Get him out of here!"

"This will kill our pictures—"

People, Us, Time, Newsweek, and the rest are apparently uninterested in running a shot of Arnold Schwarzenegger with Rudolph Giuliani.

"—unless Arnie holds him over his head," says one photographer.

"Here comes a dress," says Nick Elgar. He's shooting for *InStyle.*

Vanessa Williams is climbing out of her limousine in a low-cut white gown. The paparazzi assume the position. They raise their cameras, which click and rustle like chain mail before battle. They lean forward, heads and shoulders touching, elbows rubbing.

"Vanessa!"

Williams glides in and puts a hand on her hip. Ten seconds.

"One more!"

"Vanessa, please!"

She floats downstairs on the escalator.

The paparazzi are keeping an irritable eye on the mayor, who's maintaining his watch patiently.

"He's standing there like Mia Farrow in the *Purple Fucking Rose of Cairo,"* Elgar groans.

Steve Guttenberg, who hasn't had a hit recently, strikes a good long pose with a bombshell blonde on his arm.

"Dawn Kuser," Guttenberg tells the photographers dutifully. "Kuser. K-U-S-E-R."

"Yeah, thanks, Steve."

The fans let out a primal scream.

"Here we go—"

Schwarzenegger, mallet-jawed and summer-bronzed, alights from his limo and gives the fans a wave, arm straight up in the air; it's unsettlingly martial. Arnie's finally coming. The photographers lean forward as far as they can across their red velvet barricade. The mayor springs off the wall and greets Schwarzenegger with, yes, a boyish smile.

"Arnold!"

"Arnold!"

"Over here!"

Schwarzenegger and the mayor stand before the bullpen with their thumbs up like Siskel and Ebert.

"One by yourself, Arnold?"

"Why are you standing in front of Arnold?" Sands finally yells at the mayor.

Still smiling, Arnie and Rudy break formation. Arnie's done; he's moving toward the escalator. Rudy's following close behind him.

The photographers keep straining forward. The red velvet rope stretches; the metal poles it hangs on begin to tip over.

"Arnold!"

"One more!"

"Please—"

Davila hangs back a moment, looking over the scene. "There's nothing to be proud of anymore," he says. ■