

# INSIDE MOVES

A BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT HOLLYWOOD'S GAME OF FAME



Danny Aiello as Ruby



Jack Ruby, 1966

## STONEWALLING 'RUBY'?

THE CONTROVERSY OVER OLIVER STONE'S 'JFK' CONTINUES

THE MAN WHO SHOT THE MAN WHO SHOT John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, was Jack "Sparky" Ruby — mob bagman, two-bit strip-joint majordomo and subject of the upcoming film *Ruby*, which stars Danny Aiello and Sherilyn Fenn. And the man who shot *Ruby* — director John Mackenzie — claims that his film was almost shot down by another celebrated marauder, director Oliver Stone.

The story begins in the fall of 1990. Three unrelated films about the Kennedy assassination were then being rushed into production. One was *Ruby*, a bare-bones drama backed by Propaganda Films, upstart producers of the Madonna tour documentary, *Truth or Dare*. Another, *Libra*, was an adaptation of Don DeLillo's stunning novel reimagining the life of Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. The third: Oliver Stone's massive, secrecy-shrouded docudrama, released last December as *JFK* but then known only as *Project X*.

Long obsessed with the assassination, Stone reportedly locked up copies of his

script and swept his production offices for bugs. Then he is said to have set his high-powered gun-sights on the possible competition — starting with *Libra*, which appeared to be ready to roll and which might well have beaten his film into theaters. Stone denies any charges of stonewalling other J.F.K. films. "It's absolute nonsense," says the director.

Others disagree. "Maybe Stone's entitled to defend his commercial interests," argues *Ruby*'s screenwriter, Stephen Davis. "But I liked the idea that these movies represented three very distinct routes into the material that three very different artists chose to take. Stone should have been more graceful. He had \$40 million and Kevin Costner."

Before shooting had even begun on *Ruby*, Mackenzie's scouts in Dallas reported that Stone was negotiating with the Dallas City Council to grant *JFK* a three-year guarantee that no other film about Kennedy's assassination could be made using the Texas School Book Depository building. "This is common practice in the

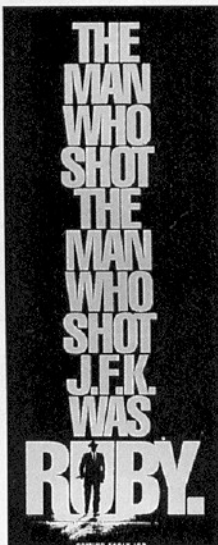
film business," says Stone, "as it protects the commercial viability of the product." Such a guarantee would effectively halt filming on the subject, since the book depository is the building from which Oswald supposedly fired the fatal rounds.

On hearing about this development, a livid Mackenzie barked down the horn at Stone. "I said, 'I can't believe you, a fellow director, are involved with this. But this is what your guys are doing,'" recalls Mackenzie. "I must say, I think I was being charitable — he was the leader. But at the time he was affable. He said he would call them off."

By early 1991, Mackenzie had been able to convince the Dallas City Council to let him use the book depository. However, the building next door wasn't under the city council's jurisdiction. According to Mackenzie, Stone's people had tracked down its owner and negoti-

ated for him *not* to take down the signs and canopies — all added after 1963 — that decorated his building. "We did not block in any way Mr. Mackenzie from shooting," says Stone. "Mr. Mackenzie is engaging in cheap publicity for his movie by making charges that are unsubstantiated." Mackenzie, however, feels he was left with an anachronistic nightmare that threatened to sink his whole reenactment. He dealt with it by redirecting the cameras and placing obscuring objects in the foreground. How did it come out? "It was a pain in the ass. But it didn't stop us."

As screenwriter Davis points out, it's important for those who would become Hollywood conspiracy theorists not to lose perspective. "I was never afraid of the CIA," he says. "So I don't see any reason to be afraid of Oliver Stone." *Martin Kihn*



One film too many