

THE UNLIKELY

WORDS MATT MUELLER

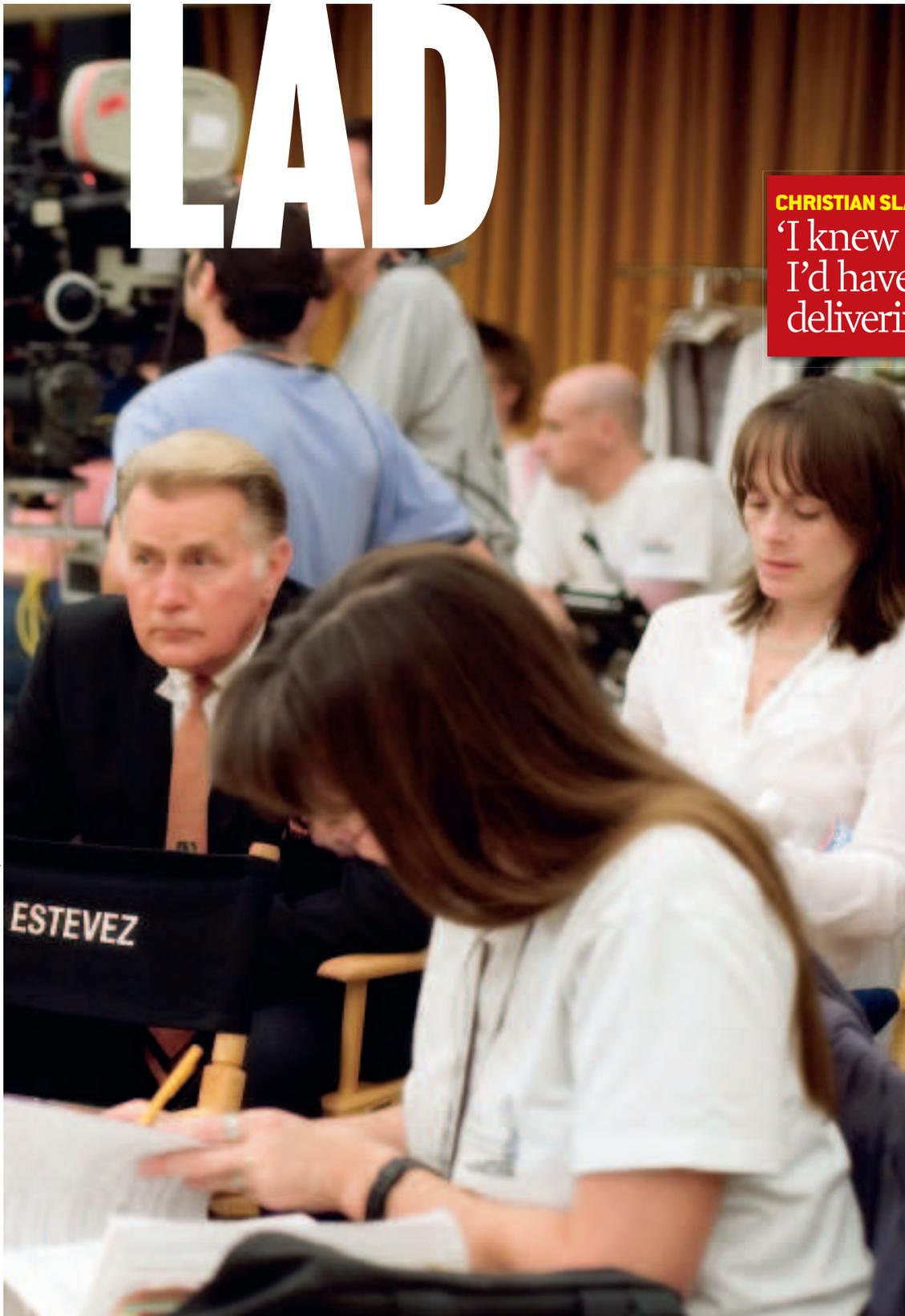


AFTER 10 YEARS IN THE MOVIE WILDERNESS, EMILIO ESTEVEZ IS BACK AS THE WRITER/DIRECTOR/STAR OF BOBBY, AN OSCAR-TIPPED, ALTMAN-ESQUE POLITICAL DRAMA THAT SWIRLS AROUND THE ASSASSINATION OF RFK...

Emilio Estevez is seriously choked up. His throat's catching, his mouth's quivering, his left hand's wiping at liquid-filled eyes... Demi Moore and Sharon Stone stroke his back in support. What's sparked this emotional outpouring from the former Brat Packer? No, not an announcement that his agent has committed him to a three-picture deal for *Mighty Ducks 4, 5 and 6*. It's his formerly wayward younger brother Carlos (aka Charlie Sheen), who's since straightened his life out and now stars in his own successful sitcom (*Two And A Half Men*)...

Back in 2000, it was Estevez who'd tumbled into a trough: with his acting career in deep-freeze, he'd been attempting to write a screenplay about the 1968 assassination of Robert F Kennedy. But he

LAD



optimistic and unapologetically earnest," he admits), and hearing his starry cast slug it out for who can say the nicest things about him (see pull-quotes), it seems churlish to nitpick. And the talk is that Estevez's gauzy dream to reclaim a time when the

CHRISTIAN SLATER Racist manager Timmons

'I knew Emilio already. I'd have been happy delivering coffee on Bobby'



Kennedy name evoked hope, justice and moral courage, rather than death, scandal and tragedy might just propel him to the Oscar podium. A bit of a sea change for a man whose previous directorial stabs were 1985's *Wisdom*, a modern-day *Bonnie & Clyde* starring then-fiancée Demi Moore, and 1996's Vietnam vet drama *The War At Home*. Both were slain by vicious reviews, but Estevez insists he learned his lesson.

"When I started directing I was young and arrogant," he admits. "I wanted to be the youngest writer/director/actor in Hollywood. And I believe I was at the time, but nobody told me that the scripts were terrible. Nobody had the courage to say it because I was trafficking in my celebrity. I've now learned that it always starts with the script."

As much as his brother's counsel inspired him, it would be years before Estevez could get *Bobby's* script not only right, but rolling. After his sibling heart-to-heart, he holed up in a northern California motel to finish it and met a woman at the checkout desk who'd been at the Ambassador on that fateful night. She ended up inspiring Lindsay Lohan's character (a young girl marrying a draft-age boy to save him from Vietnam) and Estevez's ambition shifted to seek out a galaxy of star faces to portray the fictional, kinda boring characters who find themselves in the Ambassador on the day of RFK's death. "I wanted to take 22 very well-known people and make them 22 very ordinary people," he says.

When 9/11 happened, Estevez was forced to shelve *Bobby*. Last year, though, he finally got a fragile financing package in place. And, crucially, convinced Anthony Hopkins to come aboard as the grand old hotel's grand old retired (but lingering) doorman.

"Actors have a tendency to like something more when it's greenlit as opposed to when you're going to them hat in hand," laughs Estevez. "So we didn't go back to them until 2005. It began with Anthony Hopkins, who's an actor magnet. When Hopkins says yes, other actors don't even want to know who else is in the cast, they just agree to be in it."

Joining Hopkins were many of Estevez's own friends: Moore as a booze-soaked chanteuse; Laurence Fishburne as the Ambassador's dignified sous chef; his *Mighty Ducks* co-star Joshua Jackson as a dedicated campaign aide. There's also William H Macy as the hotel's philandering manager; Sharon Stone as his hairdresser wife; and Ashton Kutcher as a hippy acid dealer. According to Estevez, it's *Grand Hotel* cross-pollinated with an Irwin Allen disaster movie. "These people are emblematic of the times. We put them inside the hotel and turn it upside-down," he muses, relishing his theme. "This is a disaster movie of the heart."

The shoot was a run-and-gun affair, with actors showing up on set 24 hours after they'd been cast and Estevez often not seeing his sets until he >>

couldn't crack it — a paralyzing case of writer's block stalling him at 30 pages — and his worried parents had dispatched Charlie to check up on him.

"He said, 'Can I see those 30 pages, brother?'" gasps Estevez, still trembling. "He took them in the garden to read, then came back inside and said, 'You have to do this. This is potentially your life's work. It will change your life.'" At this, *Total Film* joins Estevez in shedding a tear...

Well, not really. We're at the Toronto Film Festival, where *Bobby* has just been unveiled. Reaction is mixed to Estevez's ensemble political drama about the day Kennedy was gunned down in LA's Ambassador Hotel, straight after a victory speech for California's Democratic primary and well on the path to being the next US

President — until everyone witnesses Estevez's heartfelt devotion to his career-rescuing passion project. "I believe Bobby's death was in many ways the death of decency in

DEMI MOORE Boozy chanteuse Virginia Fallon

'It was so much fun to see Emilio have this chance. He deserves it'



America," Estevez declares. "It was the death of poetry, the death of manners and the death of hope."

Listening to these grand sentiments ("I'm unapologetically idealistic, unapologetically

SHARON STONE Beauty salon manager Miriam Ebbers

'I'm so proud of Emilio for having the courage to make the movie'



began shooting on them. "At night, we didn't know what was going to happen the next day," says Stone. "A trailer would pull up and we'd say, 'Who's this?' 'It's Bill Macy: 'Who's he playing?' 'Your husband!'" Added to the mêlée was a five-day shoot at the real Ambassador, while it was being torn down to make way for a new school. "If I'd pulled the camera back, you'd have seen the bulldozers," sighs Estevez.

Kennedy himself only appears in newsreel footage and over-the-shoulder, stand-in shots. With Estevez wanting to portray Bobby as a heal-the-world saint, he was never going to find a suitable actor. "He was Mick Jagger and Tom Cruise rolled into one," the 44-year-old gushes. "He was just so charismatic. People loved him."

"Fear not the path of truth for the lack of people walking on it," Kennedy said in his final speech, but Estevez avoids any mention of RFK's less appealing facets – such as his ferocious persecution of Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa. Nor does he grant more than momentary screen time to the assassin, Sirhan Sirhan. But this isn't a biopic, and Estevez wants us to come out feeling that RFK's death not only left a gaping hole in US politics, but it possibly

snatched a global saviour from our collective bosom.

"Sadly, the film has become more and more relevant," says Estevez. "And it's not by my design. The movie forces us to look at our inhumanity to one another. Bobby Kennedy believed that we are all connected, we are all brothers and sisters, we all share the same short moment of life and we can either touch and inspire people or we can go in another direction. This movie comes when we need Bobby Kennedy's voice more than ever."

Bobby successfully ticks all the boxes adored by sentimental Oscar voters (modern-day parallels; an actor's movie, à la *Crash*; a bona-fide Hollywood comeback). Whatever comes next, Estevez is just grateful for a

ELIJAH WOOD Vietnam War draftee William Avary

'I got the sense it was Emilio's life's passion to get this movie made'



second chance. "I've been in movie jail for the last 10 years," he chuckles. "It's been an interesting decade. But I believed in this project. I was surrounded by an extraordinary group of people and was supported and encouraged. It feels good to be back..."

Bobby opens on 26 January and will be reviewed in the next issue.



In charge: Estevez directs a member of the crew. But who let Liam Gallagher on set?



Old guard: Estevez chats with veteran 'actor magnet' Anthony Hopkins.



Shock treatment: Jacob Vargas and Freddy Rodriguez in the shooting's bloody aftermath.

GREATEST HITS

The assassinations that shook history – and one gender-crazed attempt...

VICTIM ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND OF AUSTRIA (1863–1914)

Runtish Gavrilo Princip of the imaginatively titled Young Bosnia society capped FF and his wife in their car. Having tried and failed earlier in the day, Princip was later amazed to see his quarry reversing slowly past the cafe he was eating in. Bang!

CONSEQUENCES A bunch of wan, self-consciously 'arty' Scots popsters. Oh, and the First World War.



VICTIM DR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

(1929–1968) James Earl Ray initially confessed to offing King when captured with fraudulent papers at Heathrow airport following the long-distance shooting. He changed his mind three days afterwards. Bit late, fella – see you in 99 years.

CONSEQUENCES One really good speech becomes immortal. Numerous conspiracy theories cite Ray's rank stupidity, not to mention utter lack of motive. Or, um, evidence.



VICTIM US PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(1809–1865) Assassin's handbook, tip one: being a famous actor hinders your escape. Tip two: so does doing the deed in a theatre you work at – on an opening night.

Tip three: breaking your leg on the way out won't be much help, either. Disgruntled, anti-Abe Confederate John Wilkes Booth clearly hadn't done his homework. **CONSEQUENCES** The collapse of the Unionist government, allowing the South to regroup and unlose the Civil War! Oh no, wait – not that... In fact, nothing. By Booth's own dying admission as he lay shot on a porch, his efforts had proved 'useless'.



VICTIM ABU MUSAB AL-ZARQAWI (1966–2006)

US Forces dropped two 500lb guided bombs – one laser, and, for good measure, one GPS (wonder who provides the "Turn left!" voice for that) – on a safe-house north-east of Baghdad. Shortly after, the meeting there attended by Iraqi Al-Qaeda leader al-Zarqawi was adjourned. **CONSEQUENCES** Surprisingly, not a rethink of the definition of 'safe-house'. Rather, martyrdom for the deceased, the usual queasy Bush rhetoric and a slight al-Qaeda reshuffle.



VICTIM ANDY WARHOL

(1928–1987) Valerie Solanas, a radical feminist writer, had managed to attract the interest of mucky '60s art-mentalist Warhol by calling her play *Up Your Ass*. Apparently, even Warhol found her script so repellently obscene, he confiscated it. Then lost it. So, in 1968, she shot him. Lots. **CONSEQUENCES** Warhol was forced to wear a corset for the rest of his life, to prevent his wounds from starting to bleed again. Mary Harron's 1996 account of Solanas' life, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, is very good. The *Up Your Ass* script was eventually found and is still staged today. It isn't very good.



BOX: ANDY LOWE AND MARK POWELL; ALL STAR, EMPICS