The Devil's Candy

The Bonfire of the Vanities Goes to Hollywood

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To Bill and Roxie

THE PLAYERS

THE CREW

Brian De Palma	*Director and Producer*
Eric Schwab	*Second Unit Director*
Fred Caruso	*Co-Producer*
Richard Sylbert	*Production Designer*
Ann Roth	*Costume Designer*
Vilmos Zsigmond	*Cinematographer*
Monica Goldstein	*Associate Producer*
Aimee Morris	*Production Assistant*
Karl Slovin	*Production Assistant*
Doug Rushkoff	*AFI Intern*
David Ray	*Editor*
Bill Pankow	*Editor*
Lynn Stalmaster	*Casting Director*
Nancy Hopton	*Script Supervisor*
Doug Ryan	*Camera Operator*
Larry McConkey	*Steadicam Operator*
Chris Soldo	*First Assistant Director*
Peter Runfolo	*Unit Production Manager, New York*
Dave Grusin	*Composer*
Else Blangsted	*Editorial Music Consultant*
Elisha Birnbaum	*Foley Artist*
Maurice Schell	*Supervising Sound Editor*
Gary Jones	*Assistant Costume Designer*
Cara Silverman	*First Assistant Film Editor*
Ray Hubley	*First Assistant Film Editor*
Bruce Frye	*Location Scout*
Darren Wiseman	*Location Scout*
Brett Botula	*Location Manager*

Randy Bowers	*Bruce Willis's Stand-in*
Eddie Iacobelli	*Transportation Coordinator*
Rob Harris	*Unit Publicist*

THE CAST

Tom Hanks	*Sherman McCoy*
Bruce Willis	*Peter Fallow*
Melanie Griffith	*Maria Ruskin*
Morgan Freeman	*Judge Leonard White*
Beth Broderick	*Caroline Heftshank*
Kim Cattrall	*Judy McCoy*
Alan King	*Arthur Ruskin*
Rita Wilson	*P.R. Lady*
Andre Gregory	*Aubrey Buffing*

THE STUDIO

Lucy Fisher	*Executive Vice President, Production*
Mark Canton	*Executive Vice President, Worldwide Motion Picture Production*
Rob Friedman	*President, Worldwide Theatrical Advertising and Publicity*
Terry Semel	*President and Chief Operating Officer, Warner Bros., Inc.*
Robert A. Daly	*Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Warner Bros., Inc.*
Bill Young	*Vice President, Production*
Ron Smith	*"Bonfire" Production Executive*

THE EXTRAS

Peter Guber	*Executive Producer*
Tom Wolfe	*Author*
Judge Burton Roberts	*Model for Judge Kovitsky, the Model for Judge White*
Michael Cristofer	*Screenwriter*
Marty Bauer	*Agent*
Steven Spielberg	*Brian De Palma's Best Friend*
Dawn Steel	*Former Head of Columbia Pictures*

PROLOGUE

A genteel murmur presided in the dining room of the Carlyle Hotel, at Seventy-sixth and Madison Avenue, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. There was, naturally, a certain bustle at breakfast as the well-groomed patrons of this refined enclave made their way to the buffet table. But there was none of the purposeful table-hopping that was so noticeable at Park Avenue's Regency Hotel, known for the "power breakfasts" of its Wall Street and entertainment industry clientele. Discretion ruled the Carlyle, where the bellhops wore white gloves and the opulence was obvious yet understated, and the mood cheery yet subdued.

Dominating the center of the room was a huge Japanese iron vase filled with a luxurious spray of bright flowers. The walls were covered with subtle brown linen velvet and nineteenth-century English hunting prints. For more intimate conversation, one could move into one of the smaller offshoots of the main room — into the smoking room, with its fussy, fabric-lined walls and eighteenth-century French *redouté* floral prints, or into the "Chinese room," named for its decorative Oriental silk screens. Everything was just so. The china was Villeroy and Boch, the silver was Chambly. The Louis XV furniture completed the sensation that manners as well as money still mattered here.

This stronghold of luxe Victoriana was one of the few places in New York City circa 1990 where Tom Wolfe didn't look like an anachronism. Dressed, distinctively as always, in a three-piece gray-plaid suit, a cream-colored shirt with an old-fashioned high-necked cut, and shoes designed to look as though they sported

spats, he spoke in a mild voice, touched slightly by a Virginia accent. With his soft, pale face and fine, graying hair, the author appeared delicate, slightly otherworldly.

It was difficult to connect this frail, courtly gentleman with the glinting satirical wit that had made him one of the most famous writers in America. Could this meticulous dandy really be the same man who composed the sixth spoken line in the best-selling novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*: "*Heh-heggggggggggggggggghhhhh-hhhhhhhhhh!*" That was it. The entire thought. "*Heh-heggggggg-gggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!*" And *Bonfire* was only the latest example of Wolfe's singular style. For twenty-five years as a journalist he'd gleefully jabbed at the pretensions of the American middle and upper classes — especially the New York intelligentsia. He'd merrily debunked *The New Yorker*, the Bauhaus movement, liberal chic, and Freud with uniquely rambunctious prose and enthusiastic punctuation.

That morning the slender, contradictory man was eating grain cereal with stewed fruit and speaking in a thoughtful, slightly formal fashion about how the people from Hollywood were progressing with the movie version of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. He mentioned diplomatically that they were being attentive to details.

"I must confess I get my shoes made at New & Lingwood," Wolfe said, dropping the name of the London fabricator of two-thousand-dollar-a-pair men's shoes with his cultivated mixture of snobbery and modesty. "And the salesman was here in New York, and he said that Tom Hanks had arrived and wanted two pairs of shoes for the movie — Tom Hanks or whoever was buying shoes for him — and asked the salesman what kind should we get? And the salesman says, 'Well, in the book it says half-brogues,' and the movie person says, 'Okay, give us those.' I was rather impressed by that because, unless they make a point of it in the script to have the camera focus on the shoes, who's going to know? You have to have a very picky eye like myself to sit around and figure out where the shoes are from. They seem to be concerned with accuracy — in certain respects."

He wasn't willing to criticize the moviemakers — just yet. "I think it's bad manners in the Southern sense to be sharp and critical of it," he said. "I did cash the check." However, with his good Southern manners the author had made it clear to the Hollywood

people right after he accepted the $750,000 they paid him for the rights to his book that he didn't want to have anything to do with the making of their movie.

"To tell the truth, I've never wanted to write any script based on something I've done," he said. "From my standpoint it's too bad that movies don't run nine or ten hours. The way I constructed the book, almost every chapter was meant to be a vignette of something else in New York as well as something that might advance the story, and to me one was as important as the other."

The author paused briefly. "It's a fairly simple story. It's not a complicated story. But I wanted there to be all these slices, one after another. Not that I gave very much thought to how the movie could be made, but I never could see how you could do that."

Tom Wolfe found the title for his novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* in the story of Girolamo Savonarola, the fifteenth-century Florentine monk whose crusade against secular temptation won him a huge cult following. The zealous Savonarola convinced his followers that, in return for the privilege of living in Florence, God's chosen city, they had a moral duty to cleanse themselves of earthly distractions. Conducting a house-to-house search, Savonarola's most devoted followers, mostly adolescent boys, would collect the earthly manifestations of spiritual decline — jewels, gold, pictures, sculptures, playing cards, musical instruments, perfumes, powders, wigs, and books — and then burn these forbidden items, known as the "vanities," in a bonfire in the town square.

Before long, though, this pious undertaking took on a carnival atmosphere. Savonarola's young minions, wearing white robes and olive wreaths and carrying red crosses, would lead the faithful through the streets toward the square, whipping their collective urge for purity to a feverish pitch. As the bonfire billowed, the crowd sang hymns and danced wildly. The Bonfire of the Vanities had become a form of entertainment.

For a time a great many people were caught up in this orgy of asceticism. Then, as monkish rivals began denouncing Savonarola as a heretic and a barbarian, the Florentines tired of the repetitive purification rites. Inevitably Savonarola's teachings fell out of favor and he himself was publicly burned.

* * *

The story of Savonarola had always intrigued Tom Wolfe, who had taken it upon himself at a relatively early age to become *the* mocker of vanity as practiced in America in the second half of the twentieth century. Wolfe didn't explain the roots of his provocative title anywhere in his book, however. He'd considered including an epilogue explaining the title's origins but finally decided against it. Even Tom Wolfe hesitated to identify himself with the man who was burned at the stake for his convictions.

But Wolfe was never immolated for his cautionary tale. On the contrary, his first novel, published when he was fifty-six years old, achieved legendary success. Pundits hailed Wolfe as a prophetic writer, and his satiric story of the fallen mighty was taken as an apocalyptic warning in the guise of amusing popular fiction. There were naysayers, to be sure, but their voices were buried by the avalanche of praise.

As it turned out, the wrath of public opinion was reserved for those who dared to tamper with Wolfe's novel. In the end it was the heretics from Hollywood who went up in flames.

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PART I

Pre-production

Chapter 1

THE DEVIL'S CANDY

On January 12, 1990, a cold Friday afternoon, Tom Hanks met with Brian De Palma in the comfortable old apartment on Lower Fifth Avenue the director used as an office. The room where they sat was small and sunny with a number of books and a curved Formica desk that held De Palma's computer and telephone.

Tom Hanks was seated next to a plaster Madonna that had been a prop in De Palma's film "Wise Guys." The actor was dressed in black jeans, a black shirt buttoned to the neck, and a black jacket. He had just met with the costume designer for "The Bonfire of the Vanities" and was reporting in. He touched his dark, wavy hair. "She talked about lightening my hair up a little bit, which I've done before," he said matter-of-factly. "I had lighter hair in 'Dragnet.' "

De Palma was also dressed in black — a black cashmere sweater and black slacks, with New Balance sneakers. He was a large, imposing man with a bald spot and a short, graying beard. He nodded slightly and waited. Though Hanks was the star of the film and his salary was twice as much as De Palma's, he seemed eager to please. "We talked about some process that won't alter my scalp permanently," Hanks continued, and then added earnestly, "I will do it if you think we must for the picture."

But De Palma hadn't called Hanks downtown to discuss his hair. Warner Bros. had plans to release "The Bonfire of the Vanities" by Christmas and as of January 12 the movie didn't have a starting date for production and many crucial parts hadn't been cast. Perhaps the most critical of these parts was that of Maria Ruskin, the

mistress of bond trader Sherman McCoy, who would be played by Tom Hanks. Maria is the young Southern wife of a rich, elderly man and the catalyst to Sherman's downfall. Tom Wolfe had described her as "something from another galaxy," a seductive composite of clothes, shoes, a style of walking, all "calculated to provoke maximum envy and resentment." Tom Hanks would have to make a convincing show of making love to the actress chosen to play Maria.

Warner Bros. and De Palma had wanted Michelle Pfeiffer to play the part, but she'd turned it down. At De Palma's suggestion, the studio then began negotiating with Melanie Griffith. De Palma had directed Griffith before and thought she had the potential to make Maria a sparkly bad girl. The thirty-three-year-old actress had been a semianonymous starlet seven years earlier when De Palma cast her as a saucy porn star called Holly Body in his suspense picture "Body Double." De Palma liked the work she'd done on that film, but he didn't like what it took to get it out of her. Griffith had been a whine and a nag and she liked to get high. Since then she'd gotten off the drugs and alcohol and become an established star, which meant working with her could be easier — or more difficult. He told Warner Bros. not to close a deal with Griffith until he was sure she was the best Maria they could get.

So, while Warner Bros. stalled on Griffith's contract, Brian De Palma looked for Maria in New York. When he met Uma Thurman, the nineteen-year-old actress who had made her sensational debut in the film "Dangerous Liaisons," he thought he might have found her. He asked Tom Hanks what he thought. Hanks said Thurman was too young for the part, that the obvious choice was Griffith. But De Palma kept saying to him, "Uma's so beautiful. Like Veronica Lake." Hanks agreed to read at her audition.

The movie's original producer, Peter Guber, had his own vision of Maria. As he sat in his office and talked about her, Guber would smack his hands together and keep them clutched, as though he were holding the very idea of Maria between his palms.

"This woman, Maria, she's the devil's candy," he said. "This woman's the devil's candy. You know, the apple . . . in . . . in . . . 'Little Red Riding Hood'! When the guys see her in the audience,

the guys have gotta go, 'Unnnnnnh!' " He made a gesture that approximated the yanking of a gear shift. " 'I think I might risk my career, my business *to get into that*!' "

As he considered who might play Maria, he said, "The girl, whoever she is, she's a good actress, that's all important, great, great, great. But if it's gotta be . . . just . . . it's just gotta operate on a visceral sexual level. This is the Eve's apple. If you don't see that, you don't see the picture."

Tom Wolfe had introduced Maria by showing her effect on Sherman McCoy: on the pretext of taking the family dachshund for a walk, Sherman leaves his Park Avenue apartment and ventures into a drenching rainstorm just so he can call his mistress from a pay phone. Trying to imagine what kind of woman could make a man like Sherman act in such an obviously irrational way set Guber off again. "The second he's out the door he's got an erection, just thinking about that girl! You know what I mean? We could have gone with an unknown girl if she had that quality. I wouldn't have gone with, for example, Meryl Streep. No way! She's attractive, she's attractive . . ." He didn't want to insult Meryl Streep by articulating exactly what it was he thought she lacked. "She's attractive, but would you want to —" He interrupted himself and then answered his own unspoken question. "No way! You wouldn't! You wouldn't want to! She doesn't have that Rita Hayworth thing —" He interrupted himself once more. "It's gotta be, she's gotta be the devil's candy!"

Monica Goldstein, De Palma's assistant, tapped on the door to the director's office and ushered in Uma Thurman. Thurman was very tall and very slender. She was wearing a tiny, snug brown skirt, black tights, and a short jacket, all of which only emphasized her endlessly long legs. Her face had the startling ageless beauty of a classical statue.

The nineteen-year-old actress tossed her long, straight brown hair self-consciously and avoided looking anyone in the eye, like an awkward teenager.

"Uma, Tom. Tom, Uma," said De Palma. They nodded at each other, and Hanks mumbled something glibly polite. De Palma then