

Secrets of the Godfather

Exclusive, never-seen pictures from the hottest (\$700) book of the holidays

by **STEPHEN LYNCH**

Skip the horse heads in our beds — for “Godfather” fans (that is, pretty much every man in America), there’s no way to refuse the offer of “The Godfather Family Album” (Taschen).

The \$700 coffee table book, out this week, features many never-before-seen pictures from behind the scenes of the “Godfather” films, shot by photographer Steve Schapiro. On assignment for Life magazine during the first movie, Schapiro captured candid moments such as Marlon Brando being made over to look like chipmunk-cheeked Don Vito Corleone, Al Pacino and Diane Keaton joking around on set, and James Caan nervously awaiting his explosive death scene. Schapiro’s relationship with Francis Ford Coppola continued through all three films, with the photographer shooting many of the film’s iconic advertising images.

Even those who have seen the movies dozens of times — or dozens and dozens of times — will find fascinating details. Schapiro runs photos from scenes that didn’t make it into the final cut, like Don Vito visiting his dying consigliere, Genco Abbandando (the predecessor of Robert Duvall’s Tom Hagen). Or Pacino’s Michael Corleone brandishing a shotgun, taking revenge for the death of his Sicilian wife.

The text of “Family Album” is made up of interviews and some little-seen excerpts, like Mario Puzo writing in 1972 about how the film got made and his fight with the studio for Marlon Brando over actors such as

Robert Redford and Danny Thomas. Deep in debt, Puzo sold the film rights for only \$12,500, and had to battle producers who wanted the script to open with a love scene between Michael and Kay.

But Puzo’s most uncomfortable moments come when he is introduced to Frank Sinatra at Chasen’s in L.A. Sinatra, steamed at being fic-

See GODFATHER, Page 30

tionalized as Johnny Fontane, chases Puzo out of the restaurant with a string of expletives, ending with, “Choke. Go ahead and choke.”

Though Coppola famously had to fight the studio on the original movie’s length and its dark cinematography, “Family Album” paints a surprisingly fun set, with pictures of the actors laughing and goofing off between takes. The Corleone boys bonded, including Brando, who had a reputation for being difficult but took to the role, according to Caan.

“Brando was so concentrated and available to everything around him that if a train came through the room in the middle of a f - - - in’ scene, he wouldn’t break,” Caan recalls. “There was this one scene where Duvall comes back from cutting the horse’s head off; it’s between him, Brando, and myself, and we’re discussing something to do with Sollozzo. The dialogue was predominantly with Bobby and Marlon. There was a bowl of walnuts on the table, so while they’re talking, I reached for one of the nuts, like most f - - - in’ idiot actors.

“Now I cracked it, right, and Brando looked up at me, right

in the middle of the scene, his eyes kind of flashed up at me, and I could see, like, there was disgust, right? Now I had the f - - - in’ nut in my hand and it was right in the take, and I couldn’t just put it down, and at one point, he goes, ‘Pay attention. That’s why you’re not gonna be a good don.’ What’s going through my mind is, ‘Oh my God, Marlon Brando’s thinking that I’m doing some scene stealing s - - - with this nut.’

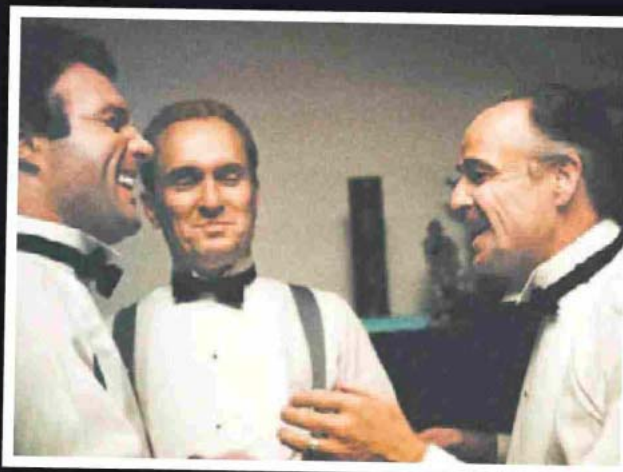
“And I’m f - - - in’ humiliated and embarrassed, which all seemed to work for me anyway. And when it was over, he hugged me. ‘That’s the greatest!’ He thought it was brilliant. He just loved the idea that Sonny would be eating f - - - in’ nuts when he’s discussing serious business, you know. It was great.”

If there’s any downside, it’s that you might not be able to watch the “Godfather” films the same way after reading the book. Think Tom Hagen is the rock of composure and intellect? The running joke through the making of the original was mooning, which turned out to be a contest between Duvall and Brando, recounts actor Richard Bright, who played the gangster Al Neri.

“They’re standing at the wedding ceremony when they posed for that picture, and there are 500 extras, old ladies, old men, kids, everybody. Bobby Duvall sees the ultimate moon. He and Brando had a race to drop their pants, and Bobby’s got hitched, and Brando beat him, bent over and spread his cheeks and mooned everybody. We had this belt made, MOON CHAMPION, hand-tooled leather. Brando got it.”

You come to me on the day of my daughter’s wedding, you don’t even think to call me Moon Champion . . .

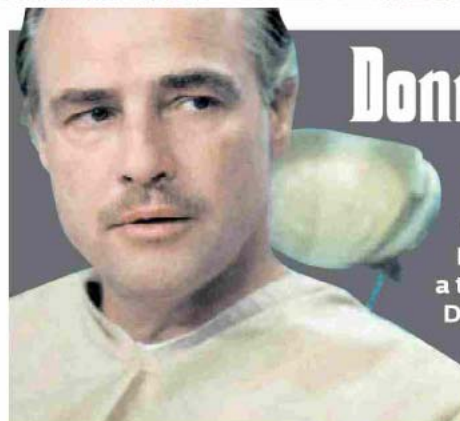
Marlon Brando played with a cat between takes, so the cat was incorporated into the film.



Caan, Robert Duvall and Brando clown around. Duvall and Brando had an ongoing mooning contest.



James Caan was wired with more than 100 "squibs," packets of blood that exploded when the wires were pulled, for the tollbooth assassination scene. In the book he recalls, "I was scared to death. The squibs were inch-long brass casings with a V in the middle of them, and in that V would be gunpowder, and then over the gunpowder would be a little sack of fake blood. All the Vs had to point outward, because they would blow a hole in you otherwise, which would really be fun. So I had, like, a 10-inches-in-diameter f---in' ball of wires coming out of my leg. And then they have these boards with nails on 'em, and when you make the contact, each one goes off, tac-tac-tac! All I remember was A.D. Flowers, the effects guy, going, 'You know, I've done I don't know how many pictures, and I've never put this many squibs on anybody before.' I was really happy to hear that."



Donning the makeup

Marlon Brando, who was 46 at the time, goes through the transformation into aged Don Vito Corleone. Makeup artist Dick Smith had sculpted a tiny wax bust of how he envisioned the Don. During the transformation, which included stuffing in Brando's cheeks, Coppola liked to run through scenes with him and Al Pacino.