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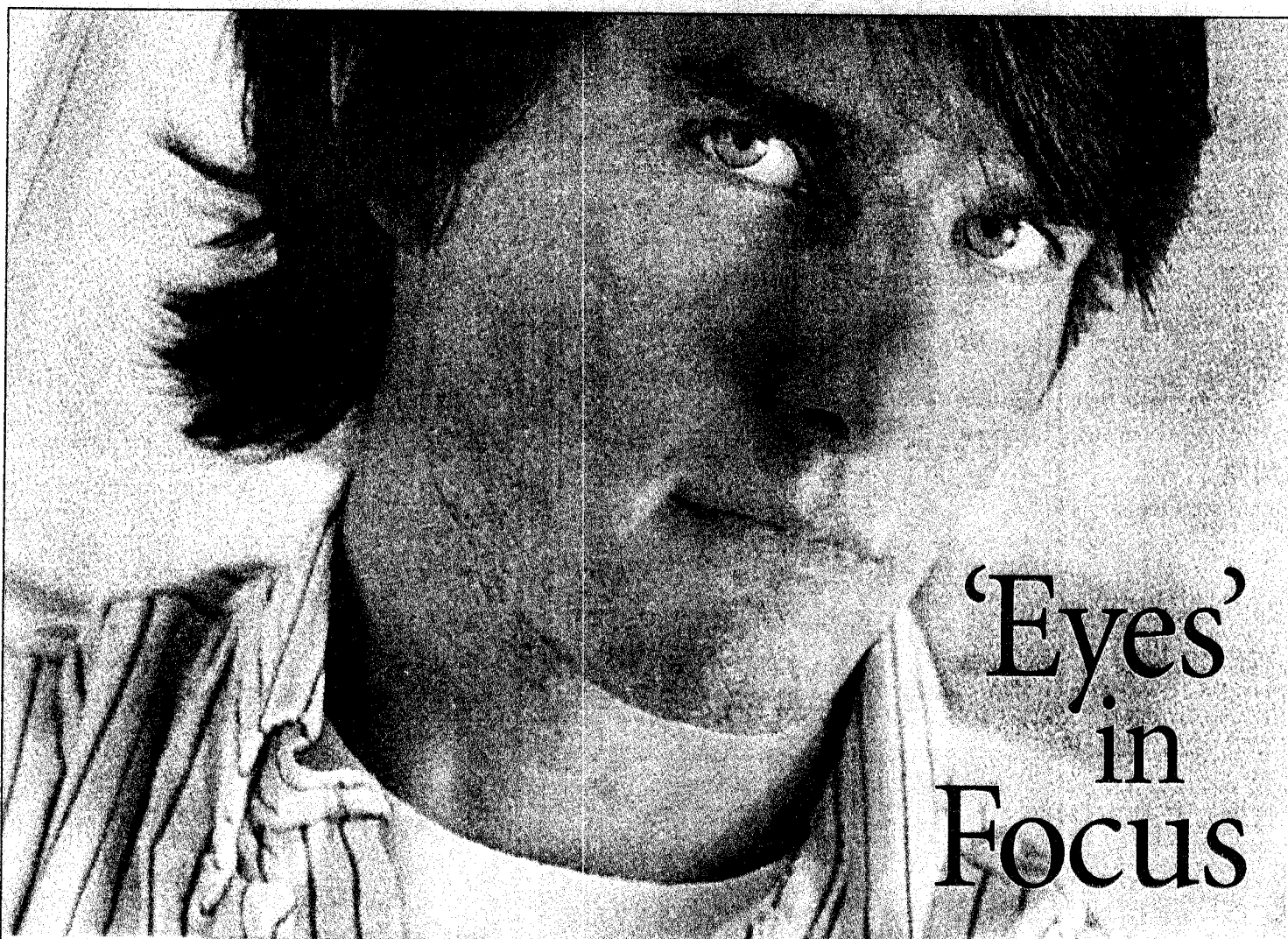
WEDNESDAY
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ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



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'Eyes' in Focus

KIRK MCKOY / Los Angeles Times

Kubrick wasn't secretive, "he was private," says Tom Cruise, in a scene with wife Nicole Kidman, at right.



WARNER BROS.

Q&A • Tom Cruise, co-star of Stanley Kubrick's final opus, talks about challenges and rewards of working with the director he says was wrongly labeled as an eccentric.

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F10

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 1999

LOS ANGELES TIMES

By PATRICK GOLDSTEIN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

When Stanley Kubrick was first wooing Tom Cruise about starring in "Eyes Wide Shut," the director learned that Cruise was a pilot, as Kubrick himself had been before he crash-landed one day and never flew again. So the most all-controlling cinema master of our time decided that if Cruise was going to zoom around the sky, then surely he should fly the correct way—the Stanley Kubrick way.

"One of the first things he sent me was an entire manual on the proper landing configuration for different aircraft," Cruise recalled in an interview this week. "All of it was 100% accurate. Even though Stanley didn't fly anymore himself, he loved talking about flying. He could tell you everything you wanted to know about a P-51 or just about any plane. That was the great thing about Stanley, he could have a conversation with you about anything from philosophy to the beauty of a great curveball."

Cruise and his wife, Nicole Kidman, who co-stars in the movie with him, saw "Eyes Wide Shut" for the first time in early March. The couple didn't have much time to enjoy the moment; days later Kubrick died of a heart attack at his country home north of London. Cruise was devastated; he says his wife—he calls her Nic—hasn't been able to watch the film since.

The film, which opens Friday, represents the final chapter in Kubrick's legendary career and the end of an unprecedented three-decade-long relationship with Warner Bros., which has bankrolled every Kubrick project, largely sight unseen, since "A Clockwork Orange."

Like most Kubrick projects, "Eyes Wide Shut" was shrouded in secrecy. Based on "Dream Story," a 1926 novel by Arthur Schnitzler set in turn-of-the-century Vienna, it focuses on a doctor and his wife whose domestic bliss is shattered when the wife admits to having sexual fantasies about another man after she and the doctor are propositioned at a masquerade ball.

In 1994, Kubrick hired veteran screenwriter Frederic Raphael to update the book, setting the story in modern-day New York. Once

Please see **Cruise**, F10

Cruise

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Kubrick had a satisfactory script, and Cruise and Kidman were on board, filming began outside London in the fall of 1996. Kubrick didn't finish until early 1998, although Cruise and Kidman had six weeks off during the summer and six weeks at Christmas. Kubrick filmed the intimate scenes between Cruise and Kidman himself on an empty set. There were no dailies—Cruise and Kidman watched their performances on a video monitor after each take.

Though "Eyes Wide Shut" is a probing meditation on jealousy and temptation, Warners has marketed it as a daring erotic thriller, even going to the unusual length of showing an NC-17 version of the movie (slated for release in Europe) at press junkets last weekend; the press was then shown how characters were digitally inserted to block the view of graphically sexual material in an orgy scene.

Cruise, who's only given a handful of interviews for the film, sat down Sunday with *Calendar* for an hourlong chat at the Four Seasons Hotel. Bleary from jet lag, having just flown in from Australia where he's shooting "Mission Impossible 2," the actor was eager to counter the perception of Kubrick as an eccentric recluse. At 37, he's lost little of his boyish good looks. Intense and enthusiastic, he has the charm of a well-briefed diplomat. He gives a model movie star interview, looking you straight in the eye and artfully dodging difficult questions by giving an interesting answer about an entirely different subject.

Q: So how did Stanley Kubrick woo you to do this movie?

A: He approached me through [director] Sydney Pollack, a mutual friend. (Pollack ended up with a role in the film.) Stanley sent a fax asking if I would be interested in doing a movie with him. A couple of months later, he sent another fax, wondering if Nic and I would be interested in doing it together. He didn't even tell me what the movie was about. And I didn't ask—I was just hoping it wouldn't go away.

Finally about a year later, he sent us a script and we went to dinner at his house. We had a brief discussion of the script and then Stanley said, "Good, we'll start shooting." It was an incredible night. We spent six hours there, relaxing, drinking wine. When we finally left, at 1:30 in the morning, I remember saying to Nic, "Gee, I hope we didn't overstay our welcome."

Q: Kubrick apparently checked you out with Pollack, asking him if you were a spoiled superstar. Did you check him out to see if he was really a reclusive weirdo?

A: It's really an unfair misconception. Stanley did a lot of things—he'd go to art fairs, to plays, out to dinner. Maybe he didn't travel to Paris for the weekend, but he had lots of friends he communicated with—Sydney, Terry Semel, John Calley.

Even I believed what I'd read. When we first moved into our house in England, Stanley said he was coming to see us. And I was such an idiot, because I said, "How are you getting here?" And he said, "I'm going to drive." And I said, "Yourself?" And he laughed and said, "I know how to drive. I even have a license."

Q: Some people who've seen the

film said they felt like voyeurs, watching actors who are together in real life acting like lovers. When you're necking with your wife, but it's on camera, are you acting? Or are you acting natural?

A: It was difficult, but Nic and I grew together making the movie. It's very wrenching to play out feelings of jealousy with your own wife. When you play that scene with someone you know so well, you can't get away with anything—you can't back off an inch from the truth of the scene. It was hard, because you couldn't help but bring home the stuff from the movie. I'm just glad we made the movie now. It would've been a lot to ask to do it in the first year of our relationship.

Q: Was it hard working with someone who's really the star of his own films?

A: Listen, all film is a director's medium. I was nervous because you look at the man's body of work and you think of the mind behind all that. But he was a worker. He didn't throw his scarf over his shoulder. He didn't walk around saying [booming voice] "I am the great Kubrick!" He was Stanley. He wasn't pretentious in any way. When my parents came to visit the set, he wasn't just nice to them in an obligatory way, he was really interested in them. He liked people.

Q: But he was incredibly secretive. No one could see his script, no one could see the movie.

A: Stanley wasn't secretive, he was private. He's the author of the film. If he didn't feel the studio could contribute anything, why should he show the studio the film? Just because it's the accepted practice? He was too unconventional to worry about what was accepted.

Q: He had a reputation of being very demanding with his actors. After "The Shining," Jack Nicholson said of Kubrick, "Just because you're a perfectionist doesn't mean you're perfect."

A: I never talked to Jack about

his experience, but it was intense working with Stanley. It was very demanding. Was it hard? Yes. But did I mind? No. Was Stanley ever angry or did he abuse our relationship? Not once. If I didn't want to do something, I was never pushed. He was the very voice of sanity. We'd talk, relax and bring things back into focus.

Q: Last night, after seeing the NC-17 version of the film and the digitally edited version of the orgy scene, Roger Ebert got up and said: Why did Warners go through the charade of putting in these digitally created figures to obscure the sex acts at the orgy? Why not have the courage to embrace the NC-17 rating since this film is unsuitable for a 15-year-old kid? If Kubrick was an uncompromising filmmaker, why would he agree to that?

A: Stanley knew he had to deliver an R-rated film. It was his decision to alter the scenes. He knew in the editing room what kind of digital work needed to be done. He was flexible; he'd even change things for the censors in Japan. He didn't think this hurt the integrity of the film. If I was 15, I'd like to have the opportunity to see the movie, even if I didn't comprehend everything. I don't think it's offensive to see people having sex, but that's just me.

Q: You've talked about wanting to direct someday. Did working with Kubrick encourage you or intimidate you?

A: Both! [laughs] It definitely made me think that I'll have to find my own voice, because the great filmmakers, like Stanley, all have their own voice. I respected that he was so tenacious. He never gave up, never took anything for granted. Film is about capturing moments that will never happen again. You can't say, "Give me that moment." It has to happen by itself. But Stanley had a genius for creating an atmosphere where you could find those moments without thinking about them.