

IN CONVERSATION WITH

# Antonio Banderas

Words: **Nev Pierce**  
Portrait: **Paola Kudacki**

**A**NTONIO BANDERAS IS A MASKED OUTLAW, AVENGING ASSASSIN AND SWASHBUCKLING FELINE: ICONIC AS ZORRO, EL

*Mariachi and Puss In Boots. He's superb at playing slyly funny action heroes, their macho nature nicely undercut by half-smiles and a fine sense of the absurd. It's also worth looking behind the mask. Because before Banderas became Hollywood's go-to guy for Smoldering Latinos, he was a stage-trained performer at the avant-garde of Spanish cinema. In 1982, he teamed with the masterful Pedro Almodóvar on Labyrinth Of Passion, before raising temperatures and headlines as a lip-locking gay killer in Law Of Desire. His fifth collaboration with Almodóvar, Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!, looked for a while to be their last, but after a 20-year gap they are back together for their sixth picture.*

*Adapted from Thierry Jonquet's novel Tarrantula, it is a peculiar, haunting, uniquely Almodóvarian concoction. Part thriller, part horror and part melodrama, musing on gender, revenge, love and desire, The Skin I Live In certainly gets under your own. And Banderas gives his most exposed performance, as Robert Ledgard, a plastic surgeon trying to engineer a skin that is impervious to any attack — and experimenting on a prisoner... He is startling and deserves, at the least, the Oscar nomination which has so far eluded him.*

*He has four other films due for release, some decidedly more family friendly. Puss In Boots is a spin-off for the best-loved character from the Shrek series, a voice-only role for an actor who could barely speak a word of English when he first came to America. Spy Kids 4: All The Time In The World is his seventh pairing with Robert Rodriguez, who directed him as the simmering, bullet-spraying Mariachi in Desperado. Then there's the dramatic Black Gold, a Lawrence Of Arabia-style epic in which he plays an Arabian sheikh alongside A Prophet's Tahar Rahim. Finally, Haywire: a high-octane actioner sure to be distinct, as it comes from Steven Soderbergh.*

*Málaga-born, but now largely US-based, Banderas still makes regular trips back to Spain, where Empire sent Editor-At-Large Nev Pierce to interview the star, at Almodóvar's Madrid offices. "Banderas walked in rocking a flowery shirt, white jeans and tan suede boots... A bold choice," says Pierce. "He also mumbled about jet lag... then proceeded to be bright, thoughtful and articulate. You can't quite convey the cadence of his speech — it's completely engaging. The bloke talks in italics. He is, yes, a pretty animated cat."*

**EMPIRE:** So, you've been all over the place and it's getting a bit much?

**BANDERAS:** Yeah. You feel like you are not totally yourself. You have, like, a percentage of you that is active and... everything is kind of blurry! I have to make an effort to really think. Maybe it's just because I'm getting older!

**EMPIRE:** Where do you spend most of your time?

**BANDERAS:** Los Angeles, because my little baby is still going to school there, our home is there. She's 14.

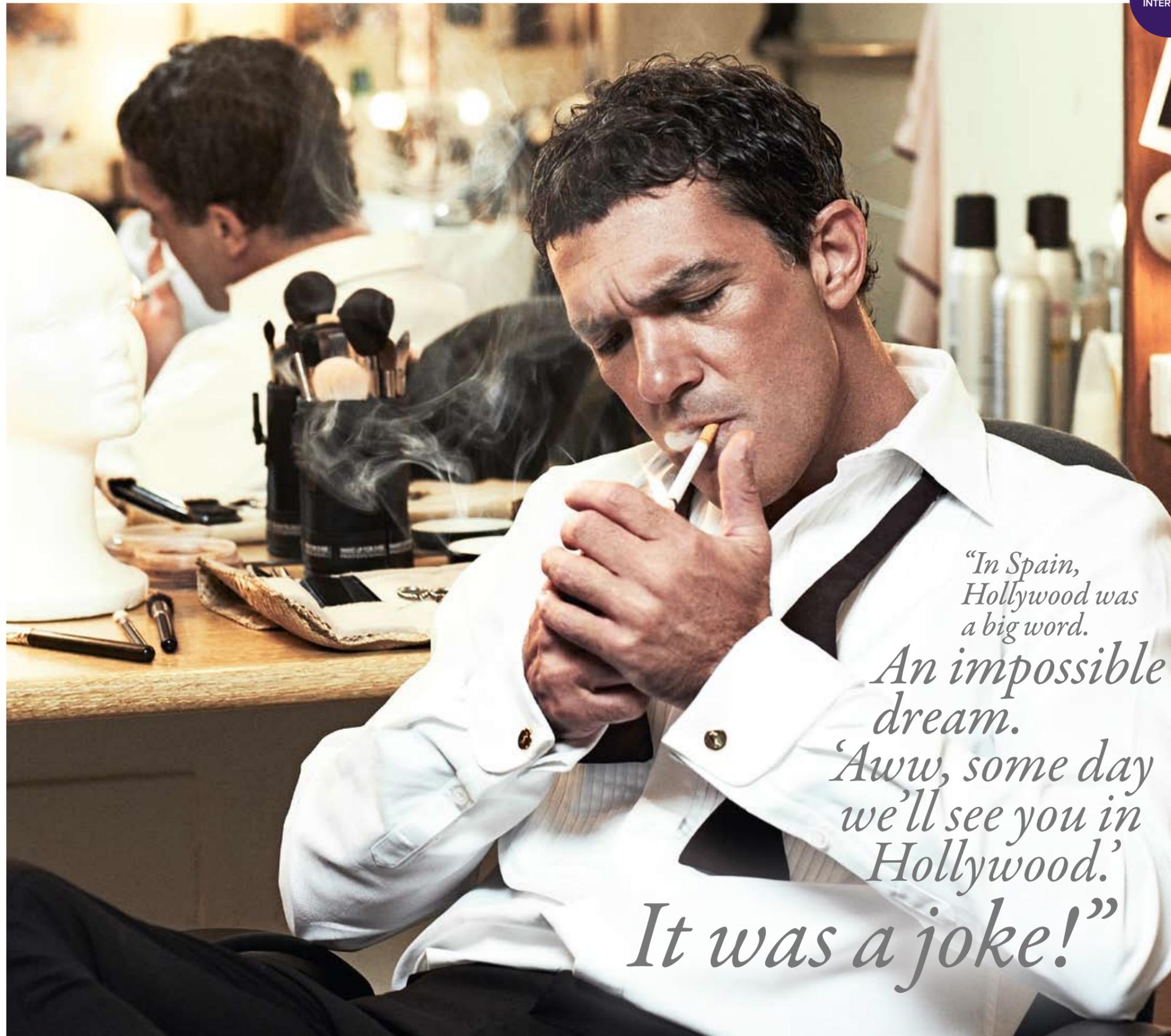
**EMPIRE:** It's interesting how family changes you: it's not all about you anymore...

**BANDERAS:** Yeah, it's true. And sometimes they teach you lessons. Though I never learn! But they teach you. Fortunately my three kids — two of them are not, you know, my blood, but I embrace them anyway — teach good lessons. They are very mature. Especially the little one: it surprises me sometimes, her level of conversation.

I suppose we always have a tendency to think that new generations are better than we were. At least, that happens to me. Not only with my kids: with actors, too. I see young Spanish actors now, in their twenties, and my tendency is to think they are way better than we were. And they don't have the kind of complexes that we had — that kind of weight on your shoulders that you were not better than British actors or French actors. These kids now: they have no complexes, they confront life in a very open way, without the backpack that we used to have in those years — I'm talking about the '80s, the end of the '70s. But that's the way it is, I guess.

**EMPIRE:** With those actors, on an international scale, part of that is because of the work done by the likes of yourself...

**BANDERAS:** You know, we probably talk too



*"In Spain, Hollywood was a big word. An impossible dream. 'Aww, some day we'll see you in Hollywood.' It was a joke!"*

much about the years of the dictatorship, but it's true — you have to recover from those things and it takes years and generations. Because I do remember that kind of thinking... It was very common to hear people saying things like, "Oh, well — they are French!" or, "They're coming from England — come on!" Almost like we were lesser, in a way, you know? And it takes a while to break those barriers, to consider yourself an equal. There was a time in which the Spanish figures in any level, in sport or painting, poets, whatever, they were like *bursts*... There was no structure, parameters of what we should be. It was just like a burst of ingenious people that ended up working in different countries and getting out of here. You know, like Picasso, Rafael Alberti<sup>1</sup> — people like that. Then it started getting different and these new generations are coming stronger and different. They don't have that. They just look at us like, "Weird guys". (*Laughs*) It's good. That's the way it is.

**EMPIRE:** When you first started acting, weren't you arrested a couple of times?

**BANDERAS:** Yeah, that's true! That was 1977, 1978... At that time, it was the years of what we call the transition, the time between Franco<sup>2</sup> and the beginning of democracy.

**EMPIRE:** Because he died in '75, yes?

**BANDERAS:** He died in '75, but we didn't have really a constitution approved until 1978, so there was this transition where the country was still finding itself. I remember people looking for the word democracy in the dictionary! (*Laughs*) And

trying to scare people who may be threatening for them at the time. But it was very clear that there was no way back — it was just a matter of time. And they even knew it.

**EMPIRE:** It's funny: there are certain moments when things become inevitable. Like now in the Middle East and North Africa...

**BANDERAS:** I was there! I was in Tunisia. I was doing a movie with Jean-Jacques Annaud<sup>3</sup> when everything exploded. And so we lived the revolution very close.

**EMPIRE:** It all kicked off in January, didn't it?

**BANDERAS:** That's right. The thing that ignited the whole entire thing — this kid burned himself — happened right before Christmas<sup>4</sup>. But the revolution itself didn't start until after Christmas. I went back to Tunisia and we saw that the environment on the set was different. You know, in a way, when you are in a set in a foreign country, or in a different city, it's almost like a magnifying glass of the society. We had almost 500 guys from Tunisia working in our movie. And you have from the blue collar workers — carpenters, painters, stuff like that — to the producer and everybody in the middle: a spectrum of what Tunisian society was. So you get a very clear picture of how everybody was positioning themselves. But we started living that thing and it started getting emotional, because obviously you are living every day with these people. You start establishing relationships, you start having friends, and then you start feeling for them. It's very interesting because when I arrived there, two months before, the feeling,

OUT, EVERYBODY OUT! We have 20 minutes to leave this place! The military has power! Ben Ali is out of the country!" It was very emotional. I never felt fear. It was more feeling for them, because you go to your comfortable life and you leave them behind. When you live that kind of situation, it's different from when you see it on television. It gets very exhilarating and very... I don't know how to describe it. I lived that before, in Somalia, in the war, when I went there with UNICEF. It's kind of a rush.

**EMPIRE:** When were you in Somalia?

**BANDERAS:** I went there in 1994, just when the American troops left. I was there for nine days, with a programme UNICEF had at the time. Just because the Americans left, people forgot about what was happening there. The country was out of control completely, they didn't have a government, it was clans and a lot of war and it was a mess, it really was a mess, but the main problem was food, you know? We were just moving around to these different places and seeing these orphanages they had: just a wall in the middle of the desert... All they did was take a thousand kids and when the sun came to the top of the wall, change them to the other side. That was it. And for me it was the first real experience that I had that was shocking. Because you see those things on television, you know that is happening, but when you are there... Five or six kids died daily. I continued that collaboration with UNICEF. Last year, I didn't do enough. I feel kind of guilty.

**EMPIRE:** There's a chance to use your attention in a positive way...

**BANDERAS:** You can do. You can do that. And I know that some people may think, "Ah, well, who knows why he is doing that or she is doing that — they just want to gain a great image in front of an audience..." And it may be truth! But it doesn't matter. And you learn that immediately. The kids are receiving the help: the medicine, the food. They don't ask you why you are doing it. They don't care if you are a religious guy, if you do it because you are an altruist or if you just do it because you want to make your name wonderful. It doesn't matter. I wish every corporation in the world wanted a clean image, dedicating programmes to that, because in the end it comes to that — it comes to something that is just unbelievably specific, it's just bringing attention, food and medicine to those people. Which is not the solution — let's just face it — it's just putting a patch there, but is more than nothing.

**EMPIRE:** A life is a life...

**BANDERAS:** I mean, you can do that or you can play golf the rest of your life. That's possible, too. And probably you have less criticism. But it's intoxicating, actually — you get hooked. Especially when you are in the battlefields.

## The Top 5 Antonio Banderas Performances

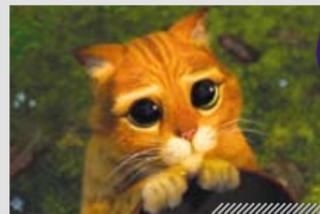
Selected by  
Kim Newman

5

### Armand

*Interview With The Vampire (1994)*

Pitt and Cruise flash fangs and emote about existential ennui, but the coolest vampire in Neil Jordan's *Annerceverse* is Banderas' simmering Marius, who runs the theatre in Paris where creatures of the night snack on volunteers from the audience. Features Antonio's best hair.



4

### Puss In Boots

*Shrek 2 (2004)*

As the voice of Puss In Boots, a swashbuckling rogue who pauses to cough up a hairball and whose greatest weapon is the big appealing kitty-eyes look, Banderas swings into the second instalment of the franchise and virtually steals it from the leads. It takes a lot to upstage Eddie Murphy. Puss has that lot.

3

### Ángel

*Matador (1986)*

In his most bizarre role for Almodóvar, Banderas is a sexually confused, mother-dominated apprentice bullfighter so guilt-ridden over a failed rape that he confesses to the murders committed by an impotent matador. Everyone in the film is a monster of sorts, but he is the only one who recognises his crimes.



2

### Alejandro Murrieta/Zorro

*The Mask Of Zorro (1998)*

Banderas was too handsome, too dashing, too charismatic not to 'go Hollywood', and this is the one great vehicle crafted for him, directed by Martin Campbell. Banderas plays a peasant bandit-rebel who is tutored by the ageing Zorro (Anthony Hopkins) to become the new man behind the mask. Note the sexy flamenco swordfights.

1

### Robert Ledgard

*The Skin I Live In (2011)*

Reuniting with Almodóvar, Banderas delivers his best screen work to date as a very different sort of mad scientist, obsessing over his female creation the way Jimmy Stewart obsesses over Kim Novak in *Vertigo*, but burning with his own tragedies and righteous neuroses.



I understand those people that get caught in wars. I've seen a lot of them. Kind of guys who were in Vietnam. For example, the guy who was piloting the helicopter in Somalia, he said, "I went to Vietnam and I got hooked. I just cannot live in a city... It's like they take the salt out of life."

**EMPIRE:** It's interesting about how we seek to

live in tension in at least some part of our lives, whether at work or at home...

**BANDERAS:** I know what you mean. It's something to make you feel alive, somehow, and it's very strange and psychologically difficult to say, "Theoretically, I have a good life. Everything is in place. *Why am I doing this?* Why am I putting myself in this risk?" or, "Why am I walking

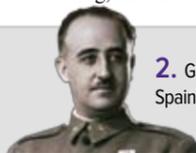
## "I WAS ARRESTED DRESSED LIKE A MIME. THEY TOOK OUR PRINTS AND PICTURES. IT WAS KIND OF FUNNY."

there was a group in Barcelona, a great group of actors and directors, who were arrested. And all around Spain, we did protest campaigns against that and the best way to do it was just to do theatre. And in Málaga, I remember doing one of those sketches and seeing the helmets of cops. "Oh, shit!" When the curtain came down, they came on stage: "You have to come with us." We were all painted, you know? In white, with tears and stuff — like a mime. So they handcuffed us and put us in a car and took our prints and pictures. It was kind of funny. But we lived that kind of situation sometimes. Not really life-threatening, but it was a time when everybody was just trying to position themselves. It was still the government of the conservative people just

the sensation, was that the country was in a state of anaesthesia. Like the Spain of Franco in the 1960s. I was a kid then but I remember that kind of, "Nothing happened, everything is fine..." [attitude]. Not in an eerie way, but almost like... [everyone is] on pills! And you see pictures of Ben Ali, the President, everywhere — in little posts on streets, in bars and banks, on every official building. Like, this guy was loved by his people. "Okay. That's the way it is." And then, this guy was *out*. I was shooting that day with 200 guys, some of them extras, but four or five actors — at the same time they were intellectuals, they were coming from the theatre, some of them wrote, you know: interesting people. We were there with our cellphones, just getting news from the capital. Then, it was like 4.30pm, one of the producers storms onto the set screaming, "EVERYBODY

## Footnotes

1. Rafael Alberti (1901-1999) was a member of the influential group of Spanish poets known as the Generation Of '27; Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) was a famed Spanish painter and sculptor. Anthony Hopkins played him in a movie.



2. General Francisco Franco, Spain's fascist dictator for 35 years. (No relation to James.)

3. Black Gold, a tale of oil and familial conflict, from the director of *The Name Of The Rose* and *Enemy At The Gates*.

4. On December 17, 2010, after being abused by a police officer, 26 year-old Mohamed Bouazizi set fire to himself in protest. It triggered demonstrations, leading to the Tunisian revolution.



5. The stage musical, based on Federico Fellini's film *8½*, about the romantic and life crises of film director Guido Contini (played by Daniel Day-Lewis in Rob Marshall's big-screen adaptation).

since you worked with Pedro Almodóvar: what brought you back to him?

**BANDERAS:** It had to happen. I knew that it had to happen at a certain point. He's a big sun and I was a planet going around and suddenly I was caught by the gravity of this sun! (*Laughs*) And I ended up here. It actually started at the Cannes Film Festival in 2002. He approached me and I loved the idea and thought it was crazy enough for him to direct. Probably nobody in his right mind would jump into a story like that but him. I knew he could pull it off. Then it kind of disappeared and years later, I was coming out of a workshop in New York, for *Zorba*<sup>6</sup>, and it was snowing outside and I got in the car and the telephone rang. It was Pedro. "It's about time." That's what he said. And I said, "Yes. It is."

**EMPIRE:** So then he sent you the script...

**BANDERAS:** And I loved it! The narrative was not what I was expecting, he surprised me there. It was non-linear, told pretty much in flashback. And it produced an interesting game of moralities. All the first part of the movie is questions, with no answer. "What is that woman doing there, locked in a room? What type of relationship do they have? Why is this older woman telling him to kill her?!" He is abusing her... that's what it is. He is some strange kind of motherfucking guy. So you establish a morality point of view, there. Then you see the flashback and you realise, "Oh!" So you start rotating around this morality. When you are watching it, it's like, "Hold on, what am I now?" That was great. And difficult. It was difficult to do.

## "MELANIE WAS ADDICTED TO PILLS, BUT SHE RECOVERED. WE HAD TO DEAL WITH IT. IN HOLLYWOOD IT'S ANATHEMA."

**EMPIRE:** With a role like that, it would have been quite easy to twirl your moustache, and instead you play it very bare... Does that make sense?

**BANDERAS:** Yes, it makes sense. In fact, that was my natural instinct. My natural tendency was, when I saw the character: "Oh, what a rare opportunity to get histrionic! Oh, what a great opportunity to show, actually, skills and acting muscles! It's an open field, you can do anything, you can change registers, tones, *this*, *that*, you can be very nice, you can be very bad, you can be *Caligula!* And Almodóvar said, "No way." In the rehearsals, it was like this (*Banderas grinds his fists together*). Not exactly, but in a very subtle way...

**EMPIRE:** Passive-aggression!

**BANDERAS:** Yeah! I was just trying to impose my thing and Pedro was saying, "No. The story is *told*, Antonio, you don't have to retell the story, or wink an eye to the *fucking* audience the whole entire time! Just: you're a family doctor. Psychopaths are nice people. They find out, when they interview the people who live around them, they always say, "Oh, he went to church every Sunday, used to say good morning in the church and was wonderful with kids... But he got 17 people cut in pieces in his fridge! So, you think about that, Antonio. You have to be natural!" And it's true. And when I saw the movie for the first time... Actually, no: the first time I was, "I would have loved take two instead of four..." "Oh, that wonderful scene is not there!" So you are fighting, still. But the second time I saw it, in Cannes, I realised, "Ah, you fucker... He has made me play a note that I didn't know I really had." He's a genius. And I love him for that. There was a moment in the applause when I looked at him and it was like slow-motion, you know: you saw the guy with a red briefcase — the first time I met him, he came like that — and the stories in the '80s and the craziness, the partying, everything... There was a moment when we looked at each other and there was a little smile... and it was beautiful.

**EMPIRE:** His films are their own genre, really: that's a reason they stay with you and why they could only exist here. I couldn't see him going to the States...

**BANDERAS:** No, me neither. They try to bring him there. I think he very, very smartly realised

that he was going to have a bolt in his neck. And he needs total freedom — *total*. Not even opinions. No producers saying, "Why don't we try to make this a little..." He will get out of there in three minutes, he will abandon the movie. He's the leader of every department: he decides the colours, the clothing, how the actors have to play, everything. Can that bother many people? Yes, it does. Even me, sometimes — in the '80s and now — but in the end, it's what Pedro Almodóvar is. You take it or you leave it. That's what it is. And it's interesting because, what you said before, he is a style: that very strong personality is fantastically made of eclecticism, of many patches of many things. Sometimes I have the feeling with him that I am just working in a Shakespeare play and sometimes I have the feeling that I'm doing a Mexican soap opera — all together.

Unbelievable! He pulled it off. I think his style is that type of reconstruction of many other styles, in a way. Many people, when I was doing interviews in Paris, talk to me about Hitchcock, about this movie. I don't know. I don't have the objectivity yet. Maybe it's because of the detail, the love for objects, this kind of care that he had with every detail. He said to me, "Economy, economy, economy. Subtleness, minimalism, Antonio — back, back down, don't move your hands, don't do that with your face." And sometimes you can get upset, "It's *natural*, Pedro! I'm doing this because it is *natural!* Because people *do* this in their life." [And he'd reply], "Not Robert Ledgard!" (*Laughs*)

**EMPIRE:** There's Vertigo in there and Hitchcock is amazing, but Almodóvar films often have more humanity...

**BANDERAS:** And even to points that are dangerous, from a narrative and emotional point of view. You can cross lines that may have no return: like with the end of the movie. Very little people have the balls to do that thing, in our age. Especially now that we are living in a world of Coca-Colas and fast food and hamburgers. It's very difficult to find this type of food. There are six, seven directors in the world who can do that, maybe, who can really impose their personality against all the odds.

**EMPIRE:** Is it a case of just having to put yourself in his hands and saying, "I'm the flesh. You're the surgeon"?

**BANDERAS:** You have to trust, and sometimes he can see things that you have that you don't know. Also, we actors, we travel with a suitcase filled with tricks — some of them are *wonderful* tricks. Some of them are not. Pedro takes that suitcase, opens the window and throws it out. It leaves you completely naked — from day one. And that is territory really in which creation happens — when you are insecure, when you are not hanging on things that you know are going to work, when he says, "No. I've seen that. I don't like that, Antonio: it's not true, it's not true, it's not true!" And that hurts sometimes, because you don't know that is a trick, you think it's real, or you sell it like real and then he opens your eyes and it *hurts*. You know what I'm telling you?

**EMPIRE:** That acting is a somewhat frightening thing, in terms of having to expose yourself? That your "tool" is just yourself?

**BANDERAS:** That's right: you don't play the trumpet, you don't paint — it's you. It happens to you, to everybody, when they say, "I want to take a picture." You think, "I want to be better." That's the thought, immediately, no? Imagine that, multiplied by 10,000. That's what happens. That's why it's so difficult sometimes to be so fresh and so natural in front of a camera.

**EMPIRE:** There are pros and cons to being

married to someone in the same profession — is how you are perceived, and your work, something you discuss with your wife?

**BANDERAS:** No, because Melanie (*Griffith*), believe it or not, she doesn't have that type of thing. She's the most detached person I have ever met in this professional world about how the people will perceive her. She's very authentic. She's way better than me — as an actress. She has something that is very difficult to obtain — you just get born with it, or not, and it's a pity, actually, that for years... Now she is doing a movie again<sup>7</sup> and she's *so* happy she's in front of the camera. But we had problems and she had problems which she had to put together. She did and she's working again, and I am so happy. And now there is totally acceptance in her, you know, that she is 53 and that she is not going to be the "girl", "very sexy", anymore, and she loves that, too.

**EMPIRE:** What problems?

**BANDERAS:** She was addicted to pills — that was her problem, but she totally recovered in the last three years and has been totally sober and great. We had to deal with that — professionally. I am telling you now about our personal life, but professionally that is why she just disappeared. Because in Hollywood that is anathema.

**EMPIRE:** The film you directed her in, *Crazy In Alabama*, goes from comedy to thriller to civil rights drama — was that part of the appeal?

**BANDERAS:** Yeah, it had to do with freedom, in different layers, you know, from social freedom to personal freedom and unbelievable acts that we may do in life in order to obtain it. And at the same time expressed in a very kind of simple way, but in contradicting stories: we have a black comedy of a woman travelling with the head of her husband in a Tupperware container, and we have this kind of social movie going on. It was quite difficult. It was there in drawers in Hollywood for a long time and nobody put attention to it and nobody, I suppose, dared to direct it, but I saw the potential and I loved it. I loved to direct it and directing my wife was great. It was like somebody gave me a Ferrari.

**EMPIRE:** One of the things David Morse's character says is, "It's not right, it's just the way things are..."

**BANDERAS:** Exactly, it's said in the car to his nephew when they are crossing the square. Because he is complaining, "Why can't the negroes vote, Uncle Dove?" And he says that, "It's just the way things are."

**EMPIRE:** Is that desire to challenge — in a marriage, in society — an appeal from when you were growing up?

**BANDERAS:** Yes, definitely.

**EMPIRE:** When you made *Law Of Desire*, what was the reaction from your friends and family?

That's a pretty balls-out performance. Almost literally balls-out...

**BANDERAS:** It was. My mother, she just didn't like it *at all*. She said, "Why you have to do that? You have to think about my friends!" It opened in me a big reflection about morality. Because, if you remember, the character kills somebody... I bite him in the mouth and I throw him off a cliff. And that was okay! You kill somebody in a movie, that's fine — from my mother's point of view! But to kiss another man on the mouth or just to get in bed with him, (*growls*), *that's not right!* And so I said, "Fuck that!" Literally, you know?

"I got to get out of this shit. I'm an actor. I'm not supposed to be judging the characters from a morality point of view — I do them. That's it." And, so, in a way it opened my mind to that kind of reflection. It was funny because when we went to the United States with *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, people were complaining, "How is it possible you kidnap a girl and the girl falls in love with you? That is outrageously wrong!" And it's very funny, because right at the same time, there was *Beauty And The Beast* — a movie for kids — and that is exactly what happens! And nobody was putting any kind of attention to that fact, but that's the way it was. So, morality is a very interesting, flexible thing. There is a very interesting anecdote that a Spanish philosopher called Fernando Savater always tells and it is a funny story: There is this old lady who has a balcony that goes to a river, right? And in the river, there are three guys swimming naked. And so she calls the police, says, "There are three guys swimming naked right in front of my balcony!" So the police come and say to the guys, "Could you move 50 metres up? Because you are bothering this woman." So the guys move and then she calls the police again: "I can still see them!" So they go again, "Can you move 100 metres?" They move 100 metres. They go like that, up the river, and when they are a mile away she calls again and the police say, "How is it possible? They are a mile away!" And she says, "Yeah, but I can see them by my binoculars!" (*Laughs*) That is morality. Sometimes it is what you want to see: it is you imposing your criterion. And to me it was very important for my life, for the way I could actually understand life, in terms of moralities and the openness to gayness or to any other thing that that is punished by society. We are made by patterns... And Pedro, for me, broke all those patterns. Just shattered my mind. It happened in the '80s and is one of the legacies I have from him.

**EMPIRE:** When you left Spain for the States, what actually took you there?

**BANDERAS:** A coincidence. An accident. I went there and some of the agencies wanted to meet us. I didn't know English at all and I sat at a table filled with agents and I didn't understand shit.

And suddenly, at the end of the meeting, I met with a guy who was literally taking coffees to the agents, but he spoke Spanish. His name was Manny Nuñez, now one of the biggest agents in Hollywood<sup>8</sup>, and he said to me, "Do you want me to represent you in America?" I said, "Yeah, sure." And I went away. And when I came back to Spain he said, "You have to meet a guy who is going to direct *Mambo Kings*." I said, "I don't speak English..." But I went and I learned one line only, which at the end of dinner I say: "I can do that!" So I went to the United States, learned the lines phonetically, and they picked me to do the movie. I said, "This is something I can tell my grandson some day!" Then they call me again, Jonathan Demme: "Come to New York. I would like you to test with Tom Hanks"<sup>9</sup> Then they call me for *The House Of The Spirits*. And little by little they start giving me more responsibility: *Desperado*, *Assassins*, *Interview With The Vampire*. And then I met my wife, about the sixth, seventh movie I did (*Two Much*). And she's got two kids, with two American men, and I didn't have kids in my first marriage, so I moved, and that changed my life, I guess.

**EMPIRE:** Life made the decision for you.

**BANDERAS:** In a way. To tell you the truth, it was very appealing. In Spain, Hollywood was a big word. Even bigger at that time than now — because it was an impossible dream. It was something that we never expected. Hollywood was a joke among us. "Aww, some day we'll see you in Hollywood!" It was a joke.

**EMPIRE:** And how have you felt about your choices over the last ten years?

**BANDERAS:** Some of them were bad. And some of them were good! I did theatre, on Broadway — that was one of my dreams and it was very successful. Probably the happiest time that I have spent in the United States was not in front of a camera, but on the stages of Broadway. Um, a cat came and stole my heart! (*Laughs*) And I have done good work mixed with bad — that's the truth. But three years ago I changed my agency and started taking characters with people that I really love: Woody Allen, Steven Soderbergh, back to Almodóvar, Jean-Jacques Annaud, and I start putting together a little bit the whole thing again.

**EMPIRE:** You're not doing bad... Thanks for your time.

**BANDERAS:** You, too. And we will mature... We will be men someday! Maybe. Just the day before we die!

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**The Skin I Live In is out on August 26 and is reviewed on page 56.**

## Footnotes

**6.** The revival of the musical, based on the novel *Zorba The Greek*, by Nikos Kazantzakis (who also wrote *The Last Temptation Of Christ*). The 1964 film adaptation starred Anthony Quinn.



**7.** *Yellow*, directed by Nick Cassavetes (*The Notebook*), co-stars Griffith, Gena Rowlands, Sienna Miller and David Morse. "It's a cool, interesting, weird movie," says Banderas.

**8.** Emmanuel 'Manny' Nuñez is a Cuban-born agent who has proved a key figure in Hollywood financing, involved in deals with everyone from Steven Spielberg to Will Smith.



**9.** For Philadelphia. Banderas was cast as the lover of Hanks' AIDS-afflicted lawyer, in a film that was credited with both raising awareness of the disease and challenging homophobia.