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## **Stone, Par return to 9/11 trenches**

### **Helmer to follow up 'WTC' with Afghanistan pic**

By [MICHAEL FLEMING](#)

After steering clear of political controversy with 9/11 heroism tale "World Trade Center," Oliver Stone and Paramount Pictures are venturing into edgier territory with "Jawbreaker." Pic will focus on America's response to the terrorist attacks with the invasion of Afghanistan and hunt for 9/11 mastermind Osama Bin Laden.

Cyrus Nowrasteh, whose most recent credit was the controversial ABC miniseries "The Path to 9/11," is set to write a second draft of "Jawbreaker." Script is based in part on a memoir of the same name by Gary Berntsen, the CIA's pointman during the invasion, who coordinated the efforts of the CIA and Special Operations Forces to end Taliban rule.

Stone and Par bought the book months ago and kept it hush-hush so that "World Trade Center" could open unencumbered in the U.S. and overseas. A first draft was written by Ralph Pezzullo, who co-wrote "Jawbreaker" with Bernsten.

With "World Trade Center" on track to gross upward of \$125 million worldwide, Par was eager to take the subject to its next logical step.

Stone, however, cautioned that "Jawbreaker" is one of several projects he has percolating and he hasn't locked his next film.

"This will be partly about the ground war in Afghanistan, among other things," Stone said. "We've been discreet because we didn't want 'World Trade Center' to be affected unnecessarily by political bullshit about Afghanistan."

"World Trade Center" was marketed as a heroic rescue tale, but Stone recognizes it will be harder to avoid political discussions on "Jawbreaker." In a memoir heavily vetted by the CIA (there are pages of blacked-out lines), Bernsten details feeling stymied by bureaucrats in President Bill Clinton's administration who prevented operatives from engaging a growingly malicious Al Qaeda and Bin Laden presence. While Bernsten describes how he and his cohorts were stunningly told to stand down when they had Bin Laden cornered in Tora Bora, he writes approvingly of President George W. Bush's handling of the invasion.

But Stone, an outspoken critic of Bush's decision to invade Iraq, said Bernstein's tome does look skeptically at the situation, too. "Gary might be a defender of the administration, but he certainly had very clear criticisms of bureaucratic snafus in Afghanistan," said Stone.

Also compelling is Stone's choice of Nowrasteh, whose "Path to 9/11" script met a volley of critical salvos for injecting fictional scenes. The mini, which was nearly pulled by ABC in September, was pointedly criticized by

Clinton for unfairly painting his administration as indifferent to Bin Laden. Nowrasteh wrote and directed 2001 telepic "The Day Reagan Was Shot," which Stone exec produced.

Stone just returned from a whirlwind nine-country, 22-day tour to launch "World Trade Center" and said he felt high levels of skepticism and scrutiny on a film he felt was devoid of political context.

"They were watching every nuance of the film, trying to decide if I was being pro-Bush, anti-Bush, too patriotic," Stone said. "It's the least political film I've made, and looking at it politically blinds one to the heart of the movie."

Stone said the intention in "Jawbreaker" will be to create compelling drama, not a polemic.

"It has the potential to be very exciting. There's a lot of action and a thriller element that we're still trying to bring out," Stone said. "I'm not looking to make a political movie, but it always seems to come down to that with me."

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