KIRK KERKORIAN WAS MADE AN OFFER HE COULDN'T REFUSE

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Category: Opinions

By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 15 June 2026

After months of high-pressure deal making, *Paramount was all set to shoot The Godfather to be* directed by Francis Ford Coppola. All the principles had been hired, except for the actor who would play Godfather Marlon Brando's son and heir. Al Pacino was dying to get the role, but the studio honchos were not impressed by him after three screen tests. They also called him "the dwarf" because of his height.

Left in the wilderness, a rejected Pacino had meanwhile signed to appear in MGM's *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*. The film was to shoot the same time as *The Godfather*. Paramount offered the role to Jack Nicholson. But Nicholson said: "pass," and advised the director that an Italian-American actor should play the role.

With time running out, Paramount was forced to offer the role to Pacino. The actor then asked MGM to release him from *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight* so that he could appear in *The Godfather*. The studio refused. *The Godfather* production was stuck.

Robert Evans, one of the Paramount bigwigs involved closely with the production of *The Godfather,* called his lawyer Sidney Korshak for help. The lawyer had high-power Mafia contacts. Korshak called Kirk Kerkorian, the multimillionaire owner of MGM. Less than thirty minutes later, the producer of *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight,* got a phone call from Pacino's agent.

"The iffy deal we had for Pacino" wasn't binding said Pacino's agent to the producer of *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*. The agent added that Pacino would leave immediately. The producer didn't object.

The next time Evans saw Korshak, he asked how Korshak had managed to get Pacino's release. Korshak shrugged and reminded Evans that Kerkorian was building a huge casino in Las Vegas—the MGM Grand. The mob ran Vegas.

Korshak said he had simply asked Kerkorian "if he wanted to finish building his hotel."

It was an offer which Kerkorian couldn't refuse.

The incident is narrated in *The Last Kings of Hollywood* by Paul Fischer.

There are no comments yet.