

DisneyWar

By James B. Stewart

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The dramatic inside story of the downfall of Michael Eisner—Disney Chairman and CEO—and the scandals that drove America’s best-known entertainment company to civil war.

“When You Wish Upon a Star,” “Whistle While You Work,” “The Happiest Place on Earth”—these are lyrics indelibly linked to Disney, one of the most admired and best-known companies in the world. So when Roy Disney, chairman of Walt Disney Animation and nephew of founder Walt Disney, abruptly resigned in November 2003 and declared war on chairman and chief executive Michael Eisner, he sent shock waves through the entertainment industry, corporate boardrooms, theme parks, and living rooms around the world—everywhere Disney does business and its products are cherished.

Drawing on unprecedented access to both Eisner and Roy Disney, current and former Disney executives and board members, as well as thousands of pages of never-before-seen letters, memos, transcripts, and other documents, James B. Stewart gets to the bottom of mysteries that have enveloped Disney for years: What really caused the rupture with studio chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg, a man who once regarded Eisner as a father but who became his fiercest rival? How could Eisner have so misjudged Michael Ovitz, a man who was not only “the most powerful man in Hollywood” but also his friend, whom he appointed as Disney president and immediately wanted to fire? What caused the break between Eisner and Pixar chairman Steve Jobs, and why did Pixar abruptly abandon its partnership with Disney? Why did Eisner so mistrust Roy Disney that he assigned Disney company executives to spy on him? How did Eisner control the Disney board for so long, and what really happened in the fateful board meeting in September 2004, when Eisner played his last cards?

DisneyWar is an enthralling tale of one of America’s most powerful media and entertainment companies, the people who control it, and those trying to overthrow them. It tells a story that—in its sudden twists, vivid, larger-than-life characters, and thrilling climax—might itself have been the subject of a Disney classic—except that it’s all true.

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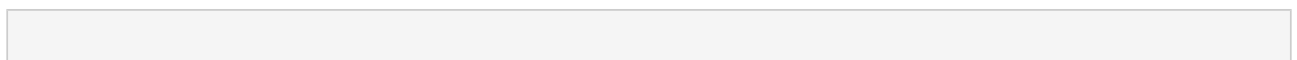
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

James Stewart has done it again. The author of the mega-bestselling *Den of Thieves*, about the 1980s insider-trading scandals on Wall Street, and *Bloodsport*, the 1990s tale of the Clintons' Whitewater affair, now gives us another epic story, this one culminating in late 2004. With *DisneyWar*, Stewart turns his investigative and storytelling lens on Michael Eisner and the corporate intrigue which has overtaken the Walt Disney Company in the last decade. He explains how this once-proud institution, long one of America's most admired and well-known businesses, has stumbled in recent years amid a disastrous swirl of egos, personalities, and bad business decisions.

Like one of the roller coasters at Disneyland, Stewart's epic book takes readers through a wild up-and-down ride as it describes Eisner's regime as CEO. The tale begins with Eisner's early successes rejuvenating Disney's live-action movie franchise and theme parks, the kickoff of the modern animation era with blockbuster hits like *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*, and the cultivation of a highly talented cadre of lieutenants, which reads like a Who's Who of executive talent now dispersed across the Fortune 500: Stephen Bollenbach (Hilton Hotels), Steve Burke (Comcast), Geraldine Laybourne (Oxygen Media), Richard Nanula (Amgen), Joe Roth (Revolution Studios), and so on. Stewart makes clear that Eisner has had a major eye for strong creative content himself, both as a young executive in his pre-Disney years at ABC and at Paramount Pictures and more recently in building partnerships like Disney's extremely lucrative one with Pixar.

Just as he credits Eisner for various Disney successes, though, Stewart assigns blame for the failures, too. The thoroughly researched 534 pages of *DisneyWar* make clear that his overall verdict on the CEO is negative. Much of the book describes detailed and specific interactions between Eisner and his rivals. Readers interested in the entertainment industry or in the personalities which drive it will not be disappointed. The blow-by-blow accounts of Eisner's feuds with Dreamworks SKG founder Jeffrey Katzenberg, who was his chief aide for nearly two decades, and Michael Ovitz, the superagent from CAA who had been friends with Eisner for even longer than that, are amazingly detailed. They show Eisner to be creative, funny, and charming when he wants to be--and devious, dishonest, and horribly Machiavellian when he doesn't.

Though dispassionate in his writing, Stewart assembles a withering portrait of Eisner as a grasping, self-centered, manipulative, and ultimately self-destructive executive. He shows how the Disney CEO has consistently undercut his potential successors within the company, in many cases drawing on Eisner's own writings and conversations with board members. He shows how Eisner's erratic attitude towards paying severance to former employees--in some cases being overly stubborn (as with Katzenberg, to whom he had a chance to close out for \$90 million, but whom Disney ended up paying \$280 million) and in others being shockingly lenient (as with Ovitz, who received a \$140 million golden parachute after one relatively ineffective year at the company). He shows the overreach of grandiose projects like Euro Disney, and the missed opportunities like *Lord of the Rings*, *Sopranos*, and *Survivor*, on all of which Disney passed.

In the end, Stewart has returned with *DisneyWar* to what he does best: drilling into a murky and complex subject, capturing an enormous amount of detail through personal interviews, emails, memos, court records, and other data sources, and then weaving together a rich tapestry of people and events to bring others to the same conclusions he has clearly reached himself. Though some readers might tire of the reams of detail Stewart offers--at certain points, the book reads like a gossip rag, with intricate he-said, she-said accounts of

individual meetings--most will enjoy it. Beyond the entertainment value, this book also has serious value to students of corporate governance, as it presents a scathing portrait of Disney's captive board of directors and shows what happens with the lack of proper CEO oversight. --*Peter Han*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The most explosive chapter of this exceptional, much-anticipated book may be its last, wherein Stewart (*Den of Thieves*, etc.) indicts Disney chief Michael Eisner on multiple charges: "Eisner squandered Disney's assets" [and] "committed personnel and judgment errors which... in the vitriol and publicity they generated, are without parallel in American business history." Eisner, Stewart finds, is a "Shakespearean tragic character" whose fatal flaw is "dishonesty," which in the author's view led directly to the ruptures with Steve Jobs (Pixar) and the Weinstein brothers (Miramax), the Disney Company's most important partners, and to former animation head Jeffrey Katzenberg's successful \$280 million suit against Disney for moneys owed upon his firing. Stewart's DisneyWorld is a land riven by naked ambition and its necessary consequence, hubris, as during his reign (1984–present) Eisner left behind "a trail of deeply embittered former employees." One of Eisner's many achievements—Stewart tosses his subject petals as well as thorns—was the construction of the Team Disney headquarters in Burbank, buttressed by towering models of the Seven Dwarves; but there's no real place for Happy in the Disney world that the author portrays with unflagging precision. Stewart smartly frames his book with personal experience, opening with a description of his difficult training and inept performance in a Goofy suit at DisneyWorld, and closing with several encounters with Eisner (who, amazingly, cooperated with the book in part); at one, Eisner explained to Stewart that "Disney" is a French name, and that a Frenchman would pronounce the name D'Eisner as "Disney." Stewart understands the medieval nature of corporate life and presents business as a clash not only of ideas but of personalities. With a dream cast that includes Katzenberg and fallen überagent Michael Ovitz—both of whom come off no worse than Eisner, which is faint praise—plus heir apparent Robert Iger and ultimate Eisner nemesis Roy Disney (the book's hero, if there is one), Stewart has an astonishing story to tell. His notable accomplishment is that he tells it so well. The book is hypnotically absorbing—nearly 600 dense pages drawing on an impressive array of sources to build what reads like an airtight case against Eisner's leadership. There's much more craft than art here—Stewart's prose and approach are meticulous but lack the empathy and deep insight that can make a character truly Shakespearean; this is journalism told not with a novelist's eye but with a master journalist's—yet that craft is expert throughout and will help thrust this book toward the top of national bestseller lists. (Feb.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Pulitzer Prize-winning Stewart, author of *Den of Thieves* (1991) about Wall Street insider-trading scandals, and *Blood Sport* (1996) about the Clintons' Whitewater caper, offers an "often brilliant" business history and character study with *DisneyWar* (*Washington Post*). Stewart, who couldn't have timed his investigative reporting any better, had inside access to Eisner, who cooperated somewhat. Balanced, informative, and exceptionally well-researched, Stewart provides a compelling tale of Disney's creative successes under Eisner's early reign, then his painful missteps (like Euro Disney) and missed opportunities (*Lord of the Rings*, *CSI*). Sadly, the details that make *DisneyWar* so juicy can also make it long, gossipy, and tedious.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jodi Saldana:

The book DisneyWar has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you check out this book you can get a lot of benefit. The book was published by the very famous author. Tom makes some research ahead of write this book. This specific book very easy to read you can get the point easily after reading this article book.

Annie Hendricks:

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