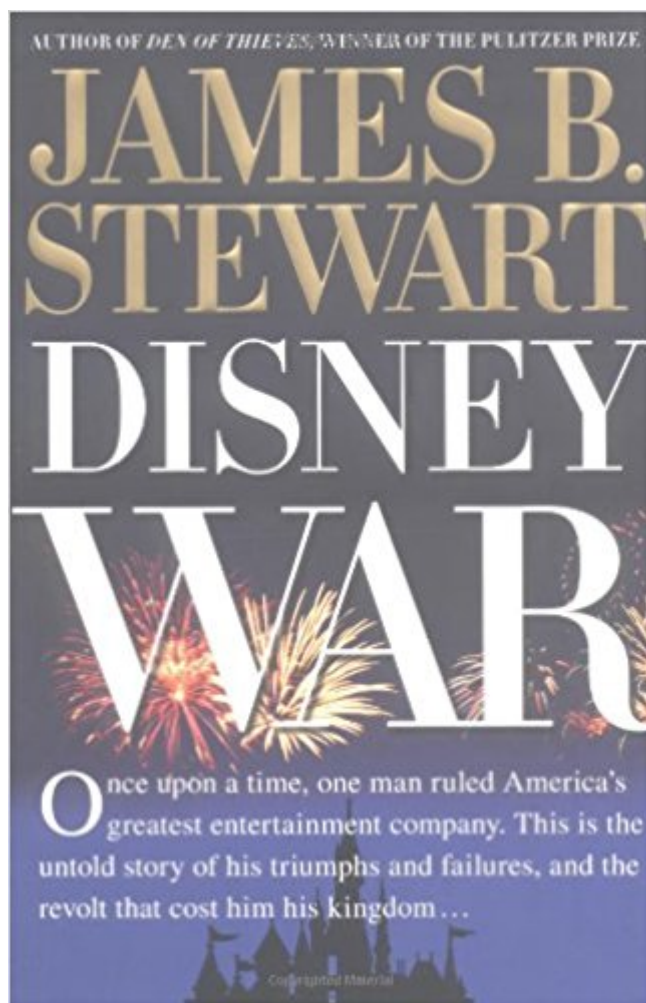




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Disney War



Synopsis

"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. *DisneyWar* is the breathtaking, dramatic inside story of what drove America's best-known entertainment company to civil war, told by one of our most acclaimed writers and reporters. 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? Here, too, is the creative process that lies at the heart of Disney—from the making of *The Lion King* to *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Even as the executive suite has been engulfed in turmoil, Disney has worked—and sometimes clashed—with a glittering array of stars, directors, designers, artists, and producers, many of whom tell their stories here for the first time. Stewart describes how Eisner lost his chairmanship and why he felt obliged to resign as CEO, effective 2006. No other book so thoroughly penetrates the secretive world of the corporate boardroom. *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. *DisneyWar* is an epic achievement. 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 animated classic—except that it's all true.

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Customer Reviews

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

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 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 agent 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.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Mr Stewart does a brilliant job in telling the story of the Eisner years at Disney, the writing and journalism are top notch. The only thing is, you come away not really liking anyone involved. They all seem greedy and self-absorbed. Eisner himself comes off as a megalomaniac. After reading this book, I wouldn't cross the road to meet him. If there is a hero of this book it is poor Frank Wells, who died tragically in the middle of the story trying to make everyone happy.

Great book but it was so detailed that it was a very slow read. I got about halfway through and decided to do the free 30 day audible trial to listen to the second half as an audio book. It was a great choice, I wish I had just listened to the entire book.

Interesting and eye opening read. Disneyland may be the happiest place on earth but Disney corporate seemed far from it. I found myself laughing at some of Michael Eisner's antics, although I am sure his former colleagues failed to see the humor. I would have loved to read more about the development of The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast and the Lion King. At 620 pp, I wouldn't have minded 20 more pages covering these movies.

This is a very thorough history. My only regret is that it didn't continue through the end of the Eisner era and tell the story of Iger's ascension. This is a case for a 'live book' that the author could update (at least a Kindle edition)!

A good read, and certainly one I couldn't put down (my backlog of daily blog reading suffered over the 3 days to finish it). Lots of details, leading to quite a few changed impressions (and, after only really knowing Ovitz's history as a bit of a jerk in negotiations as an agent, particularly from the Leno-Letterman era, found him to be a much more sympathetic character in this part of his life). About my only complaint is the moment it stopped, right in the middle of Spring, 2005 - I was hoping for a little more of an epilogue on Iger's successful transition and the subsequent recovery of Pixar (and ultimate loss of Miramax), as well as a bit of a conclusion to the building story of ABC's turnaround and Iger's focus on the parks. While the book talks about Iger's roles up to that point, it does little to connect the dots between his past support for Eisner in all things and his subsequent tremendous success as a leader once out of that shadow, since that hadn't happened at the time of publication.

The book is very engagingly informative. The quality, however, of the individual paperback book I received, published by Simon & Schuster Paperbacks and shipped and sold by , should be an embarrassment to both companies - at the very least in the area of quality control. I cannot read a few pages without a four-or-five page section of the book coming loose and falling in my lap or on the floor - purely through the act of gently turning pages while reading.. Apparently, the binding glue used, or the application of it, is at fault. While I understand there is some dispute over publisher royalties, or whatever, from "Kindle" versions of publisher output, and I have no doubt that everyone on the selling side would much prefer readers to switch to ordering electronic, rather than printed, versions of their product - both for obvious economic reasons - I can only hope that unloading inferior copies of printed books on innocent customers is not a deliberate part of an overall strategy

to "help convince" those of us who prefer printed books to become screen scrollers and flickers if we happen to enjoy reading. I would hope such is not the case, because I otherwise love and the conveniences and comparisons and customer ratings it provides. At least on the surface, for me, so far, it is a company that actually appears to care what its customers think, which unfortunately seems more and more unusual as time passes. So, I will give a rating based on the book's content. As to the crappy quality of the binding of the book itself, I won't give it a rating, because there is no such available rating as "If it weren't such a pain to do, I'd ask for my money back or a replacement".

James B. Stewart does a great job telling the story of Michael Eisner's fall at the Walt Disney Company. As a huge Disney fan, I found the book immensely entertaining. Mr. Stewart must have excellent sources because the stories that he tells about this tumultuous time in the Disney company are outstanding. When he said that Michael Eisner had a chance to read the book before it was published.....I was quite shocked. The book does not paint Mr. Eisner in a very favorable light at all. I read the entire book on my flight to and then back from Asia. Just couldn't put the book down on the flight. A great way to spend the 12 hours (each way) in the air.

Stewart does a thorough job of covering the rise and fall of Michael Eisner. His telling of the progress of the Disney empire from 1984 to 2004 is interesting and thought provoking. If you are a fan of the Disney brand and are interested in Eisner's abilities to revitalize the company and build the empire, this is worth the time. I found Stewart to be an interesting storyteller and his ability to keep my interest in the business side was exceptional. The last ten years of Eisner's reign is reminiscent of Macbeth, maybe because I happen to be in the middle of teaching the play to my students; but, the parallels are similar and intriguing. The book was written in 2005, so you will be left wanting. I would be interested to see Stewart's take on the rise of Bob Iger and just how he was able to come into a fractured executive environment and be successful.

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