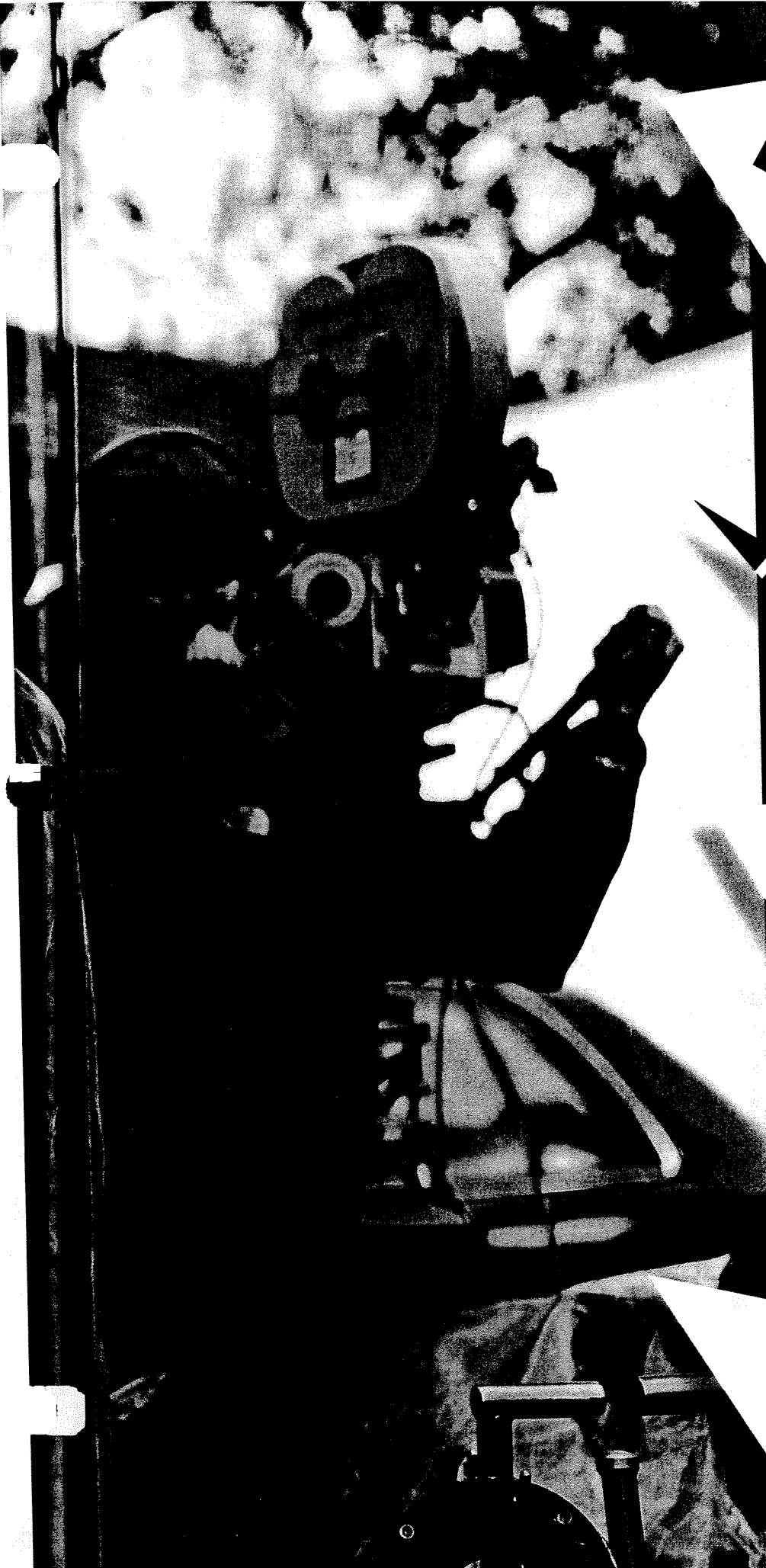




**FROM 'TOP GUN' TO 'PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN,' JERRY BRUCKHEIMER HAS LEFT A MAGNIFICENT (AND LUCRATIVE) TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION. IS HE THE MAN WHO RUINED MOVIES OR JUST THE ONE WHO FIGURED OUT HOW TO MAKE US HAPPY? BY KEVIN CONLEY PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF RIEDEL**



# BLAST OFF

BLOWING UP

PARIS IS THE

EASY PART

EQ 167

**CONSIDER JERRY BRUCKHEIMER**, a producer with \$5.8 billion in worldwide box office; responsible, at press time, for a quarter of the nation's top twenty television shows; whose next movie (the latest installment in his *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise) is, as it has so often been, the most anticipated release of the summer. His style—fast-paced, expensive, explosive, dynamic, set to soundtracks that spin off number one hits, and invariably peopled with a constellation of rising and established stars—is carefully scrutinized and imitated by filmmakers, video directors, and creators of video games, but until recently, it has been reflexively condemned by critics who seem to believe that one Bergman movie dies with every high-speed car chase, supersonic fly-by, or multiracial team sing-along. The reason for the critical petulance is obvious: For thirty-four years now, movie reviews have stopped exactly no one from going to Bruckheimer's movies. "There are lots of people that come along for a moment, a short period of time—six, ten years," fellow producer Jeffrey Katzenberg says. "He's done it now for three or four lifetimes. He's like an 80-year-old basketball player who can still charge right down the middle and jump over Shaquille O'Neal."

Bruckheimer is widely regarded as the best judge of talent in Hollywood; his assessment of his own talent—"I'd like to be Tom Cruise, but I don't have that ability"—is coldly accurate. He stays behind the camera: shy, slim, with baleful blue eyes, a chin that has spent much of its adult life behind a beard, and an uncomfortable quick-draw smile that could easily be mistaken for a grimace. But nobody is better at producing movies than he is. Roughly speaking, he has made twice as many films as the handful of producers whose films have done better than his at the box office (George Lucas, Katzenberg, Avi Arad). And his films, compared with those of producers with similarly prodigious outputs (Brian Grazer, Scott Rudin, Gale Anne Hurd), earn roughly twice as much.

In person, however, he can seem more likely to vanish. His silences in meetings have become almost as much of an industry legend as the talking sprees of his former partner, Don Simpson, back in the '80s. As Bruckheimer tells it, Simpson (who died in 1996 after a flagrantly failed battle with drug addiction) once went into a meeting with the studio heads at Paramount and made up the story line for *Top Gun* on the spot, elaborating the eventual shape of the movie out of the title of a magazine article about a navy flight school. The pitch meeting was Simpson's natural habitat: He could get things started. Bruckheimer haunted the editing room: He was the one who got things done.

Chad Oman, the president of production at Jerry Bruckheimer Films, remembers the first time he experienced the boss's "weird genius" for editing. The director Boaz Yakin had just screened his cut of *Remember the Titans* for the first time. After a five-minute

break, Bruckheimer started talking. "He's giving notes like 'In this seventh scene, if you restructured it so you took the third shot and made it the first shot and put the second shot at the end, and had Denzel walking in *after* the action...—very complex editorial notes and changes, all off the top of his head, throughout the entire movie," Oman says. "He was restructuring things within the editing of the scenes and also restructuring whole acts by moving the scenes around, without any note-taking whatsoever, just in his head."

The house editing philosophy is one of

impatience and aggression. "I don't like to sit there and wait for somebody to talk, wait for them to walk across a room or into a building," Bruckheimer says. "Let's get on with the story. Let's go! Get into the building. The audience doesn't want to sit there—then they start thinking about their lives. Don't let them get out of the movie." By contrast, Bruckheimer's working manner, according to those who have put in the hours with him, is invariably soft-spoken, at least on the surface. When he does speak, his voice is arresting: deep, unhurried but unhesitating, with a resonance that he holds in reserve.



He speaks quietly, sparingly, and he uses the conversational mildness of his remarks as a gentlemanly disguise for their finality.

"In the old days, I'd sit there going, 'Terrible cut!'" says Bruckheimer. "But now I'll wait till the director cuts it to a certain shape that he's happy with, and then we start working with it. I spent weeks with Ridley [Scott, who directed *Black Hawk Down*] and the editor, trying to make the story and the characters in that movie as clear as possible, because you have all that noise and a lot of those characters looked alike. They all had helmets on. And we had all these different stories going on. You had the two guys that were lost, you had one Humvee that was taking a dead guy—all these different stories, so you had to crosscut, intercut, and not confuse the audience. It was fun. I really love it."

Bruckheimer has earned the unusual reputation as a final-cut producer. That doesn't pose a problem when he works with a first-time director, like James Gartner, the veteran of commercials who shot *Glory Road*, the story of the 1966 Texas Western Miners, the first basketball team to start five black players and win the NCAA Championship. But when he hires a big name like Ridley Scott or Joel Schumacher to direct, the producer is put in a more delicate position, roughly equivalent to the one Dick Cheney occupies in the White House. "He'll give you 'the line,'" says Michael Bay, who has shot five movies for Bruckheimer. "And it's a great line: 'You can do what you want. It's your movie.'" Bay squirmed and laughed and launched into another imitation of Bruckheimer: "'Physically, I don't believe it—but you can do what you want.'" Bay likened the experience to water torture.

Bruckheimer's method of making movies combines organizational habits of the old studio system—the relay of writers, the top-notch production crew, the all-seeing producer who eyeballs everything from casting calls to the final cut—with the more improvisational elements of the auteur era. Bruckheimer has updated the model, but more than any other production company today, more than the omnivorous Weinsteins or the triumvirate at DreamWorks, Bruckheimer does what the studios used to: take a broad but recognizable range of stories, film them at a variety of budget levels, and deliver a consistent product to a big audience—filming *Remember the Titans* for \$30 million, then *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* for \$200 million.

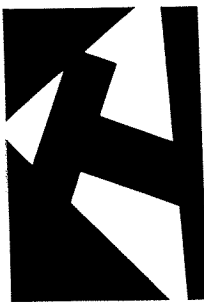
"He pays for the best people in town to form the project as you go," says Nicolas Cage, who has starred in four Bruckheimer films. "At times, it's unnerving. There've

been days where I go to work not knowing what I'm going to say. But what you get from that is a very terrifying but very electric and spontaneous experience that often lends itself to fresh performances."

Three years ago, when test audiences, or at least that portion of them older than 14, hated Bruckheimer's buddy movie *Down and Under*, he simply added more scenes with a talking, dancing kangaroo and released it as the children's comedy *Kangaroo Jack*. In 1998, six weeks before the release of *Armageddon*, he detected a restlessness in the test audience halfway through the film and so added the destruction, by meteor, of Paris—a twenty-second, million-dollar effect that also worked nicely in the trailer.

In the past few years, Bruckheimer has extended his brand to television, where he now has ten prime-time shows in production, including seven hour-long hits on CBS. It's not unusual to find his shows ranked one, two, and three in the weekly Nielsen ratings. "His success is so extraordinary in television that it's hard to think Jerry has time to do everything else," says Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS. "I was saying to somebody the other day: 'Do you know that this guy also does motion pictures?'" Multiple hits have forced him to delegate tasks that he would normally do himself. Ann Donahue, the executive producer of Bruckheimer's *CSI: Miami*—often, depending on the week, the number one show on the planet—looks to his body of work for guidance. "Keep in mind, the awkward girl in *Pearl Harbor* is Jennifer Garner. So that's the Bruckheimer vision of an awkward girl: one of the most beautiful girls in the world," Donahue says. "When I'm producing, if I'm doing casting, if I'm looking at a location or talking to a production

designer about building a set, I literally say in my head, 'What would Jerry do?'"



**TO START**, Jerry would use a lot of writers. Two of his latest favorites—Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio, the screenwriters who delivered the original *Pirates of the Caribbean* and its two sequels, including *Dead Man's Chest*, which opens July 7—work together in adjoining offices at the Disney studios in Burbank. The writing pair share a background (Orange County) and dress like employees of the same used-record store. They don't so much finish each other's sentences as begin the rewriting process halfway through. Discussing the appearance of writerly elements in Bruckheimer's recent films, Rossio begins, "I'm going to be really pretentious and say that—"

"*Pirates* had a subtextual element," Elliott continues.

"Is *pretentious* the right word or *self-serving*?" Rossio counters.

"*Painfully self-conscious*?"

When Elliott and Rossio came into the Disney-Bruckheimer project, the dauntingly absurd premise—a movie based on a theme-park ride about pirates—was well established, but at that point nobody had suggested anything except standard swash-bucklers. According to Elliott, the two of them went into the pitch meeting with Bruckheimer et al. and said, "Look, we want to do this movie, and we have an approach. And although we will not guarantee that this approach will result in a huge box-office success, we will guarantee that it's the only approach that has a chance."

"Or conversely," Rossio says, "any other approach will be a failure, definitely."

"And then we said, 'Cursed pirates who become skeletal in moonlight.' Jerry heard that and said, 'That's a movie that I want to go see.' Is that how you remember it, Terry?"

Rossio offers the most collegial of demurrals: "When the legend contradicts the truth, print the legend?"

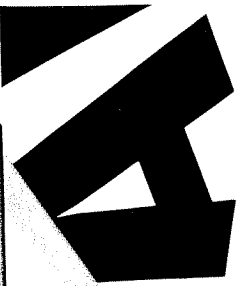
Working on *Pirates* convinced them that what Bruckheimer ultimately wanted was enough footage so that he could go into the editing room and assemble a movie that would be a series of good things you want to see up on a movie screen. Elliott says, "Yes, tell the story, but also tell it in such a way that each moment in the story will, in and of itself, be something we all want to see on-screen."

He hesitates. "I'd always liked most of Jerry's movies for what was there. My criticisms were about what *wasn't* there. What was there were movies I like. What wasn't there were these story elements—'Where is the unified theme?' If you're going to have a scene where characters talk, then get good dialogue. So part of what we decided to do on *Pirates* was: We're going to make sure that everything Jerry needs to have in a movie is there, and then we're going to work like hell to make sure that those things that usually aren't in his movies are also there."

Rossio interrupts his partner. "A non sequitur Jerry story: We're on the deck of the *Black Pearl*, and a scene was being shot, and Jerry was there. One of those things where all of a sudden you realize you're standing next to Jerry Bruckheimer. So I said, 'Oh, hi, Jerry.' And we're looking at the scene, and we're watching it, and there's stuff going on, and out of nowhere he shakes his head a little bit and says, 'People don't understand. Power is not taken. Power is granted.' And I'm like, Wow, Jerry Bruckheimer just said something about power and it sounded really profound and I really ought to pay attention to that. And when I turned back to ask him what he meant, somebody called him and he walked away. And ever since then, I've said to myself, Damn, I've got to track him down and say, 'What the heck did you mean by that?'"

> OPENING PAGES AND LEFT, JERRY BRUCKHEIMER, PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE SET OF 'DEJA VU,' NEW ORLEANS, FEBRUARY 6, 2006.

**"JERRY'S TASTE IS UNMISTAKABLE. GET IN THE SCENES LATE; GET OUT EARLY. HE LIKES A FAST PACE: MOVE THE CAMERA, USE LONG LENSES, CONDENSE ACTION. GIVE A MOVIE-STAR QUALITY TO THE ACTORS: LIGHT THEM WELL, RESPECT THEM WITH THE CAMERA, GIVE THEM POWER."**



**ACT 3** in a Bruckheimer film often contains a call to courage, a point where the hero or heroine must rise above circumstance and dream to be something that seems impos-

sible, say, a welder turning into a ballerina; an inspired, if undisciplined, fighter pilot finally harnessing his maverick urges; a right-thinking, if mutinous, nuclear-sub commander reestablishing radio contact in the next three minutes to save the entire planet. The scenes are hokey and stirring, but all of them contain a seed of believability, a Bruckheimer version of the American Dream.

Jerry Bruckheimer was born five weeks after V-J Day, in Detroit, the only child of Jewish immigrants with thick German accents they never lost. His father was a chatty salesperson at a women's-clothing store; his mother, a disciplinarian who judged people by how they cleaned, gave her husband an allowance and scrimped all the way to her forties until she felt they could afford a child. The first inkling of what Bruckheimer would become was at age 8, when he organized a baseball team for the neighborhood kids. ("I'm not a good athlete," he says, "so the only way I could play is if I controlled the team.") At 9, Bruckheimer started working with his father, first as a stock boy, then, by the time he was 12, out front with the customers. His father once told him, "Don't ever take a job where you look forward to a vacation, like I do. Love what you do." Now, despite earning an estimated \$66 million a year in up-front fees, back-end participation, DVD sales, soundtrack royalties, and syndication deals, he rarely takes a vacation. "What we do isn't work," he says.

Bruckheimer's old partner, Don Simpson, a former publicist, was notorious for inventing stuff, whimsically adding items to his own bad-boy myth from one interview to the next: teenage promiscuity, baseball prowess, stunts in prison for grand-theft auto, an encounter with a policeman who beat him up and scared him straight. But Bruckheimer, on autobiographical matters, heeds the advice he gives to his writers: "Get to the heart of it. If it's a character-driven scene, it better have some plot in it or it won't make the final edit." He jump-cuts from his high school photography awards to the 1968 *Bonnie and Clyde*-style Pontiac GTO commercial that brought him to Madison Avenue, and then on to the \$70,000 vice president job



> WITH FORMER PARTNER DON SIMPSON (LEFT) AND EDDIE MURPHY DURING THE FILMING OF 'BEVERLY HILLS COP'; THE TWO WITH CRUISE ON THE SET OF 'DAYS OF THUNDER.'

he turned down at BBDO in order to "come to California and work on a movie for ten grand." The movie was a bomb, but during postproduction he got to sit in the editing room every weekend with Elmo Williams, the editor who took some Gary Cooper reels off the shelf at United Artists, recut them, and made a success out of *High Noon*.

His rise to prominence is straightforward—tidy, tightly constructed acts 1 and 2. The sustained success of the Simpson-Bruckheimer partnership is harder to untangle. Starting with *Flashdance* in 1983, they managed a string of surprise popcorn hits. One common ingredient was casting. Bruckheimer has turned actors like Tom Cruise, Will Smith, and Nicolas Cage into box-office stars, which is another way of saying that he was the last one to get them to work cheap; still, he has consistently caught young actors and directors early in their careers. Sit down for a Bruckheimer festival and you'll see Sylvester Stallone, Meg Ryan, Tim Robbins, Eric Bana, and Orlando Bloom pop up in small, even bit, parts (the 1975 *Farewell, My Lovely* is the last time Stallone looks short). Michael Mann (*Thief*, 1981) and Michael Bay (*Bad Boys*, 1995) both directed their first feature film for him. I asked Bruckheimer about his habit of hiring unknowns, and he said, "Right now I could hire very expensive directors. But I want to get it done. And I don't like to wait. So I'll take the best that I can get who I feel is talented when I need to make the movie. You go down the list and see that all the Spielbergs, all the well-established, enormously talented directors are gone, and you say, 'Who could we break?' You've got the middle, but I don't like the middle, because there's a lot of mediocrity there. I'd rather go down to the bottom and try to bring somebody who I think is talented, who I've seen their work and believe in their ability, and give them the opportunity."

Bruckheimer's partnership with Don Simpson was also marked by Me Generation gestures of personal excess—posing in



> WITH DIRECTOR MICHAEL BAY (LEFT) AND NICOLAS CAGE ON THE SET OF 'THE ROCK.'

Armanis beside matching Ferraris, hiring twins as secretaries, and retaining publicists who could plan parties in Aspen and make sure they got the credit for their hits. On *Days of Thunder*, Simpson—who introduced women he brought to industry shindigs (hookers in jumpsuits) as neurosurgeons or astrophysicists—kept production closets full of Donna Karan dresses to hand out. He had a reputation for sleeping much of the day, then quitting at six thirty to go work out or watch *Magnum, P.I.*, leaving Bruckheimer to do all the work. Few were surprised by Simpson's Icarus-like fall. In 1996 he was found dead of an overdose of cocaine mixed with the prescription drugs Unisom, Atarax, Vistaril, Librium, Valium, Compazine, Xanax, Desyrel, and Tigan. What they didn't expect was Bruckheimer's success in the years that followed—his first three solo efforts (*Con Air*, *Armageddon*, and *Enemy of the State*) made more than a billion dollars worldwide. Near a storage room in the Bruckheimer offices is a stark black-and-white photo of Don Simpson that says **JERRY, IT TOOK THE BEST PRODUCER IN THE BIZ, YOU, TO MAKE ME RICH... ETERNAL GRATITUDE, DON.**

When Bruckheimer was looking for someone to film the pilot of *CSI*, he chose Danny Cannon, a stylish British director with a short track record—a debut film, *Young Americans*, followed by, well, *Judge Dredd* with Stallone. "I thought this kid

should be a star, and then he made some bad choices, which every director does," Bruckheimer says.

Cannon directed the pilots for all three *CSI* shows and is responsible for their essential Bruckheimerishness. "If you watch many of his films, Jerry's taste is unmistakable," he says. "So he has the luxury of saying, 'You know what I like.'" Bruckheimer still reads every script and watches the director's cut of all his shows, but for the most part he leaves day-to-day operations in the hands of what TV people call the "show runners."

Cannon put the Bruckheimer imperative into practice by, as he says, "lensing it, covering it, scoring it, cutting it" like a Bruckheimer film. "No shoe leather: Get in the scenes late; get out early. He likes a fast pace and dynamics on top of the pace: Move the

into the world of forensics. Be authentic. I take people into a world. The talk may be technical, but it's the experience. Don't ever shortchange the research."

Bruckheimer doesn't often win the admiration of critics. His one great critical success, *Black Hawk Down*, got reviews that were grudgingly glowing. "I'll be damned if the producer Jerry Bruckheimer and the director Ridley Scott haven't renounced their sins and knocked boldly on the door of virtue," David Denby wrote in *The New Yorker*. And Kenneth Turan, of the *Los Angeles Times*, said, "This film is also an unlikely triumph for producer Jerry Bruckheimer, whose usual M.O. is so different that *Black Hawk* for the most part seems an anti-Bruckheimer film." But *Black Hawk* was, in fact, almost pure Bruckheimer, offering distilled versions of two basic elements of his films: process and the dramatic capital of characters in danger, a combination that helps explain Bruckheimer's attraction to military themes.

The connection began with *Top Gun*, a film that spurred a sizable increase in navy recruits in the months following its release. Officially, the Department of Defense withheld cooperation on *Crimson Tide*—"The navy's position was, there's never been a mutiny on a naval ship," Phil Strub, the special assistant for entertainment media at the Department of Defense, told me. But unofficially, and according to Bruckheimer, a naval commander took a team of writers and producers on a Trident sub out into the Puget Sound and performed a series of maneuvers whose commands and procedures you see reproduced on-screen, often word for word. One of Bruckheimer's early ventures in reality television, *Profiles from the Front Line*, sent Bertram Van Munster, the creator of *Cops*, to follow Special Forces on missions in Afghanistan. The show, which aired on Thursday nights opposite *Friends*, ran for only six episodes, but the arrangement, which Strub said required sign-offs at the most senior level, served as the model for embedding journalists. "We got criticized

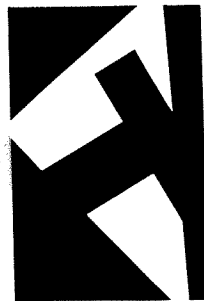
in the press, because we were these entertainment guys trying to do news," Van Munster told me. "We weren't trying to do news. It's the news guys who are trying to do entertainment!"

**THERE'S NOT** a lot in Jerry Bruckheimer's routine that would work in a Jerry Bruckheimer movie. In one of those, a hushed and wide-open office like his could mean only one

thing: a Ferrari is about to crash through the window. Otherwise, it's hard to picture anything on his schedule making the final cut—the pile of scripts stacked on the sixteen-foot-long combination desk-and-office-theater system; the (continued on page 196)

camera, use long lenses, condense action. Give a movie-star quality to the actors: Light them well, respect them with the camera, give them power. That's his taste, of course." Cannon (with help from the 1999 movie *Three Kings*) figured out the signature shot of the series—the snap zoom that follows a bullet through a body—by shooting with snorkel lenses and lipstick cameras inside animal organs and oversize dummy organs, and then stitching the shots together with minimal computer-generated transitions.

The three *CSI* shows and the company's other procedurals, such as *Cold Case* and *Without a Trace*, import one of the signatures of the Bruckheimer film canon, which is, basically, guys doing tricky stuff that looks pretty cool. In the films, they fly Tomcats below the hard deck; they use plasma cutters to open safes; they drill 800 feet beneath the surface of an asteroid; they blow up an actual mansion. And they do all this in a fashion that seems both technically plausible and comprehensible, in the presence of booming musical accompaniment. Carol Mendelsohn, the longtime producer of *CSI*, now producing the pilot episode for a new Bruckheimer series, *Justice*, remembers that early on Bruckheimer told her, "Take the audience



> WITH JOHNNY DEPP ON THE SET OF 'PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL.'

# THE BRUCKHEIMER INDEX

Like it or not, Jerry Bruckheimer has made a meteor-sized impact on the visual culture of America. And faced with the daunting numbers, even a die-hard Jarmusch disciple would have to be impressed. Below, the staggering math behind the man who tried to make animal crackers look sexy and forensic science seem cool. —BRYAN THOMAS

Number of Bruckheimer-produced TV series currently airing on prime time .....	9
Number of Bruckheimer-produced TV series ranked in the top twenty as of May 14, 2006 .....	5
Number of combined viewers for those five shows during the same period .....	90.3 million
Number of people living in the three most populous states—Texas, New York, and California .....	77.6 million
Number of theatrically released movies produced by Bruckheimer .....	36
Number of Bruckheimer-produced movies in which a mismatched pair (e.g., womanizing cop and his neurotic family-man partner, wild New York bartenders and quiet singer-songwriter, black ticket scalper and white CIA agent) overcome their obvious differences to triumph against overwhelming odds .....	19
Total worldwide gross of Bruckheimer's movies, beginning with 1984's <i>Beverly Hills Cop</i> * .....	\$5.8 billion
Gross domestic product of Zimbabwe .....	\$4.5 billion
Average worldwide gross of all Bruckheimer-produced movies since <i>Beverly Hills Cop</i> * .....	\$231 million
Total worldwide gross of Academy Award winner <i>Crash</i> * .....	\$94 million
Number of Olympic-sized pools that could be filled with the difference in pennies .....	2.5
Approximate length of the car-chase finale in 1974's <i>Gone in Sixty Seconds</i> .....	40 minutes
Approximate length of the car-chase finale in 2000's <i>Gone in Sixty Seconds</i> .....	5 minutes
Worldwide box-office gross of the 1974 version .....	\$40 million
Worldwide box-office gross of the 2000 version* .....	\$237 million
Square footage of actual beachfront mansion destroyed in filming of action sequence in <i>Bad Boys II</i> .....	38,000
Number of soundtrack albums for Bruckheimer movies on the top 100 best-selling albums of all time .....	2
(FLASHDANCE AND TOP GUN)	
Number of gold and platinum soundtracks spun from Bruckheimer movies .....	13
Of those 13 titles, approximate combined number of units sold .....	32 million
Total combined sales of all Britney Spears records .....	31 million

\* according to [Boxoffice Mojo.com](http://Boxoffice Mojo.com)

remembered the monastery—as he would have passed it coming in. So he began walking.

Later, they found him dead by the river, near the good climbing tree. In the darkness, he'd walked right past the chapel and the adobe home of the monks and had lain down where he thought someone might find him. He went to sleep in silence.

#### XIV.

MY LAST AFTERNOON, I left the monastery grounds and started down the dirt road, the one I'd driven in on. About an eighth of a mile up was a dry arroyo, and I veered off into it, having no idea where it led but following it through the brush and over rocky inclines into a little box canyon. The sun was hot, and I broke an easy sweat. Up here, there was no wind, though you could hear it blowing out in the canyon proper. Everything was hot and still.

I could only follow the pale silt path to a spot near the high cliff walls, as vast boulders had dropped over the millennia and blocked the way. Still, as I looked up, the walls seemed to be tilting, on the verge of full topple. There

was one boulder in particular, enormous, the size of a house, with a flat top perfect for resting. I found little holds and climbed aboard.

The evidence was clear here: Boulders fell. And yet, up on the rock, I lay down and closed my eyes. I could smell piñon and chamomile, saw the occasional shadow of a bird overhead. I just lay there for a very long time, in the sun, thinking of nothing, really, because that's what my mind wanted.

Time flew.

#### XV.

BEFORE LEAVING Christ in the Desert, I had one other encounter worth mentioning. It wasn't with God or Pamela Anderson. It came out of silence, in the chapel one afternoon as I sat there alone after None. I was staring at the crucifix for a long while, to see if I could feel anything. Soon, I let my eyes close, not to force a prayer or ask any miracles for myself. I just followed my breath down and was startled to meet halfway the image of a hooded man.

He was a bit hunched as he made his way along a harrowing trail that revolved upward

around a great yawning abyss, the one that must be the vast hollowness in all of us, into which we pour all of our Noise. Above him loomed high, seemingly endless cliffs, tottering with boulders. On the trail were thousands upon thousands of glittering, pebble-sized stones, no two the same. They were purple and white and rust and green, like words themselves, silent until struck.

The hooded man bore a candle, and I could see him, at a great distance inside of me, making slow progress upward. This journey would take him decades. If I were to guess, he seemed to be rising to some sort of epiphany that I'd never had in my days at the monastery, nor maybe ever will.

Except this: It was only his progress that seemed to matter. I watched him in both awe and concern. He was so vulnerable down there—so hunched and small below all that violent rock—and he was coming from so far away, against such odds.

But he kept walking.

The miracle was that I saw him at all. ❧

MICHAEL PATERNITI is a GQ correspondent.

## >JERRY BRUCKHEIMER



CD cases filled with dailies and rough cuts ready to be watched during a stint on the Exericycle; the meetings and phone calls over quibbles and crises, both monetary and non-, that don't stop except in that three-and-a-half-hour period when his private jet is in the air from California to Kentucky, where his wife is restoring an 1820 three-bedroom Greek Revival house and filling it with Americana.

The surviving partner is now a solid citizen in Hollywood. He has a small list of quirks: He plays hockey a few times a week, in a game he organizes; he works out at dawn with a trainer named Jorgen; for dinner, more often than not, he eats takeout at his desk. He can talk for hours about his movies, but on the subject of his life outside of them—the sort of quiet life that includes dinner at Nobu with the Cages and Derby weekends with the Moonveses—he is politely nonresponsive. When asked about his wife, with whom he has lived for the past twenty-nine years and whom he married in 1993, at Blaine and Robert Trump's estate in Millbrook, New York, he says, "We met at a

party." Later, on the possibility of his optioning either of her novels, *Dreaming Southern* or *The Southern Belles of Honeysuckle Way*, he says, "No, I want to stay married."

The lengthy corner office where he works in his Santa Monica headquarters is done in Masculine Spare, with a sitting area at one end and at the other, below a shelf built to house his MTV awards and Emmys, a suit of armor from *King Arthur*. In between, primarily, are his flight deck of a desk and, off to the side, a whiskey trolley stocked with a set of CIA glasses and a daunting array of liquors of the world (Shochu Zipang, Pimm's, Ultimat, Woodford Reserve). He takes me on a tour of the photos on his desk, lingering over snapshots of him and his hockey buddies, including Wayne Gretzky, Chris Chelios, and Sidney Crosby at the Jerry Bruckheimer Bad Boys Hockey tournament in Las Vegas.

An assistant appears with several notebooks filled with photos Bruckheimer has taken. In the past few years, he has revived his boyhood hobby, which he practices now on location. The pursuit is both relaxing and practical: He likes to stay in the background for long stretches on the set, and taking photos allows him to stay focused on the day's business and disappear at the same time. Despite the long layoff, his photos are, not surprisingly, quite professional (faces of local extras in Morocco, a Caribbean sunset as seen from the deck of the *Black Pearl*). Several, such as the ones from the Dublin set of *Veronica Guerin*, look like better versions of studio stills. But others, especially those he took on the *Black Hawk Down* shoot, are startlingly good, straight-faced and unscuttling.

A little while later, another assistant appears with a notebook, this one filled with

costume drawings for *Pirates 2* and *3*. Bruckheimer's manner softens, and his voice takes on a protective shading. "This is Davy Jones," he says, looking down fondly at a creature in a captain's hat. It's a mug anyone would love: an octopus face seething with slimy sea-bottom tentacles, including one holding a long, London-style clay pipe. He keeps flipping: a sketch of Johnny Depp's dramatic entrance; Keira Knightley crying in a mermaidlike wedding gown; a ship teetering at the end of the world, the ocean pouring around it like water off a cube. "Here's the island with headhunters and cannibals," he says, flipping again. "Johnny becomes the king of the cannibals." He laughs. "What he doesn't know is they eat their king."

Can Bruckheimer get any bigger? About ten years ago, he considered starting a record label. His movies had generated a slew of number one hits, from Blondie's "Call Me" and Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise" to Aerosmith's "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing." But he didn't like the look of the business and decided to try his hand at television instead. The next step may be producing video games.

"We're thinking about it," he says. "It'll happen. We're just looking for the right fit with the right company, where it's a good deal for me and a good deal for them." His face grows pained: Good as he is at deal-making, it's the part of his job he calls work. Unfortunately, it's work he must do practically every day. He was two and a half years into his five-year contract at Disney before the two sides agreed to a basic outline (\$5 million and 7.5 percent of the studio take on every picture, \$10 million a year for development, plus the rent and upkeep on his office). And he still has to renegotiate the deal with every picture. "Jerry always bets on himself," says

**"Jerry is not wondering, Gee, what do people want to see?" Nina Jacobson says. "He knows what people want to see. They want to see what he wants to see."**

Dick Cook, the chairman of Walt Disney Studios, by which he means that the producer usually defers his fee in favor of a larger share of the profits. Many expensive stars are willing to take that bet with him. "It's more common than ever," says the director Gore Verbinski, who deferred on all three *Pirates* films. "You put not just your sweat and blood on the screen but also a portion of your paycheck to ensure that we're all in it together."

Bruckheimer first contacted Verbinski in the '90s, back when he was known primarily for directing the Budweiser frogs. Initially, Verbinski was wary. "Jerry protects you from the studio," he said, "but who protects you from Jerry?"

Dick Cook says he's learned a lot from watching Bruckheimer. "Like don't complicate things. He really doesn't question his instincts. He doesn't think about them all that much." This self-confidence has given Bruckheimer an air of serenity at this stage in life, but every once in a while his big-budget-Buddha quality disappears, and he'll flash a touch of the maverick brashness you invariably see in the heroes in his films. When I ask him about the long-term health of the

business—many industry watchers see the shrinking box office, fractionalized viewer attention, and competing technologies, and predict meltdown—he gives me a *High Noon* stare. "You know what? Take yourself as an example: Open the newspaper from this past weekend and tell me what you really wanted to go see. Is there anything?"

Deep, long silence. *Capote? The Constant Gardener?* "Actually, no."

"Okay. There you go."

I hesitate: "A couple of things—"

"—that maybe you'd go see."

"Leftovers from the Academy Awards."

"But other than that, there's nothing you wanted to see."

"It's this time of year, though."

"Hey," he says, "a good movie can come out anytime and capture you—if it's interesting enough."

"So you're saying good moviemaking—"

"—will find an audience."

He cuts me off when I start listing the dire economic indicators.

"We heard the same arguments when the DVD came out, when VHS came out, when television came out. It's all what you put on

the screen. Filmmakers who can deliver the quality entertainment that people can line up for become more and more valuable."

He is right. Maybe it's the room and the screen-saver candids of Captain Jack Sparrow and Caribbean shipwrecks flashing on his office computer, but at that moment the only movie I really want to see is the next *Pirates*.

"Jerry is not wondering, Gee, what do people want to see?" Nina Jacobson, president of the Walt Disney Motion Picture Group, tells me a few days later. "He knows what people want to see. They want to see what he wants to see." Jacobson is responsible for the development and production of Disney's slate of films, and her basic rule of thumb with Bruckheimer, she says, is to trust him. "Jerry's populism has not always played well with the critics. But it plays great with the audience. As studio executives, we'd rather count the dollars than count the Oscars. We'd love to have both, but if we have to have one or the other, we'll go with the pop appeal any day of the week. The Bank of America Award, we like to call it."

KEVIN CONLEY is a GQ correspondent.

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like it."

"Then there's something wrong with *her!*" says Vellesha. "Mmm-mmm."

Okay, but wait a minute. About those dental dams: Do the guys they pick up really go for that?

"Ma'am," says Danielle, "one thing my mother always told me growing up... I am waiting for a weighty, profound piece of wisdom, and in fact that is what I get. 'My mama always told me one thing: 'When a man's penis is hard, he will do *anything*.'"

Almost on cue, Greg the waiter arrives at the table with some breaking news.

"Dale Davis. Oh, my God," says Greg.

The girls look at him. Who?

"Dale Davis just came in!" gushes Greg. "He's the third backup center for the Pistons! He just walked in."

"I didn't get my baked potato," says Vellesha.

"And last night Russell Simmons was here," says Greg.

"Russell Simmons was here?! *Here?* Right

here? Oh, my God," says Renee.

"Russell was *here?*" says Vellesha.

"Yeah," says Greg. "This giant Bentley pulled up—"

"Oh, my God!" says Renee. "Was that Russell's Bentley?"

Actually, says Greg, it was 50 Cent's—

"*Oh, dear God!*" says Renee. "50 was *here?* Last night? God."

### The Rules, Part Three

**9. Follow the bad boys.** The players Groupies want most are not necessarily the most talented—or even the best looking. They're the guys who have attitude on the court. "Allen Iverson is the number one hottie," says Brenda. "He has the cutest little lips!" But Groupies also like guys who can fight, like Rasheed Wallace. "He don't have to be pretty. We like a guy who's hard on the court. I never hear women oohing and aahing over Kobe, because he's a punk. He's soft." They like Ben Wallace "because of the way he's built." Dwyane Wade? "A cutie, but not all women are turned on by the Christian thing."

**10. Don't think you're special.** "Mostly, the players look at these girls like, 'They *crazy!* They'll do *anything!*' When you get to the pro level, Groupies are just part of the package. It's like, 'Fuck, I can get my dick sucked whenever I want, wherever I want.'"

**11. Don't go picking out china patterns.** "Players will never marry the Fly Girl who's been with him at all the clubs and bars. She's seen too much. They don't want to come home to that." They're certainly not going to marry the Gutter Girls. And the white-girl thing? "That's old-school," says Brenda. "The new guys aren't going to bring some white girl home to their mama who raised them alone. It's disrespectful." So who do they marry? "The girls from the neighborhood, who put up with all their shit for years and will continue to, because the end goal is to be

Mrs. So-and-So. People always say, 'Why does Kobe's wife put up with it?' Where she goin'?"

### The Morning After

THERE'S NOTHING like packing nine suitcases when you're hungover. The girls, on their last night in Houston, stayed out until dawn, but Vellesha was so wrecked she went back to the Doubletree and slept through the fire that emptied out part of the hotel. It will take them a multi-city tour to get home to New York City.

In Renee's first week back at work, an 11-year-old will pull a gun on a 6-year-old over a Game Boy and a dollar bill in Far Rockaway, Queens, and Renee will be called to the grade school to deal with the arrest. Vellesha will deal with the same old bullshit on the bus ("People rude, people crazy, people stink"). Chermaine will have to deal with the usual 911 calls, like from the guy who claimed his baby was choking (but in fact was already dead, because he'd choked her to death). Danielle will deal with the standard crap on the F train ("You really never know who's going to throw themselves on the tracks, so you have to be extra nice to people"). All-Star weekend was more than just a fond memory.

"I didn't exactly score," says Danielle, "but I don't think I ever had a better time in my life."

I ask the girls what they plan to do next. They look at me like I'm a crazy white girl. Vegas, of course! The next All-Star game is in the City of Sin, and they're already booking their trip.

LISA DEPAULO is a GQ correspondent.

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