A *LOS ANGELES TIMES* BESTSELLER

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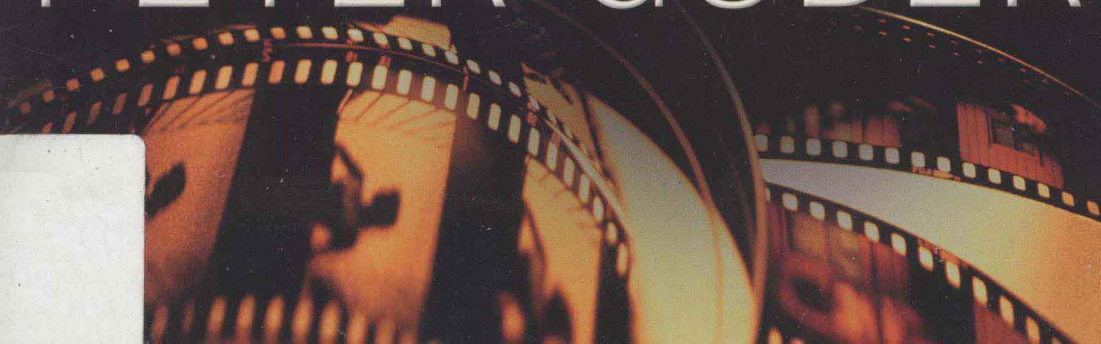
—*Entertainment Weekly*

SHOOT OUT

Surviving Fame and (Mis)Fortune in Hollywood

PETER BART &
PETER GUBER



SHOOT OUT

SURVIVING FAME AND (MIS)FORTUNE IN HOLLYWOOD

Peter Bart and Peter Guber

A PERIGEE BOOK

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"Nothing even comes close to *Shoot Out* in laying out both how the business really, *really* works and why it is a machine broken beyond repair. For one thing, it's written by two men with industry battle scars, sometimes self-inflicted . . . What makes *Shoot Out* more than a jeremiad, though, is the way Bart and Guber explain in detail *how* each dysfunction functions. A–."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Elegantly written and passionately argued, *Shoot Out* is a labor of love by two articulate, insightful, and seasoned insiders—an indispensable guide to anyone who aspires to navigate the challenging and often treacherous waters of contemporary Hollywood."

—Robert Rose, dean,
UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television

"Bart and Guber are clearly committed to the value of a good script, and they write with real respect about directors who had the courage of their convictions when their careers were on the line. Plus, they are sincere in wanting to share what they know with aspiring filmmakers."

—*Premiere*

"Bart and Guber opine on every part of the filmmaking process and share insights, for example, on how best to deal with egomaniacal auteurs. They have plenty of juicy tidbits to share." —*Movieline*

"*Shoot Out* spares no bullets in taking on Hollywood's favorite targets."

—Gil Cates, producer/director, and founding dean,
UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television

"Writing in a direct, refreshing, and honest style, Bart and Guber offer an intimate view of the film industry and its unending economic, political, and artistic clashes. Fascinating illustrative anecdotes that range from the scary . . . to the charming . . . an informal, highly entertaining step-by-step survey of how all the parts of filmmaking fit together."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"What Bart and Guber clearly do enjoy is the art of the deal, the intrigue that permeates the corridors of power in Hollywood and the mechanics of how films are successfully put together and sold. Their enthusiasm, expertise and experience in these areas are what makes *Shoot Out* live up to its promise. [An] irresistible combination of juicy stories about the foibles of Hollywood moguls and stars spun out in Bart's silky smooth, compulsively readable style." —*Newark Star-Ledger*

continued . . .

"*Shoot Out* is like the story of a film in Hollywood with villains and heroes, all behind the camera." —Terry Semel, chairman and CEO, Yahoo!

"Fascinating . . . The real inside look into Hollywood and how films get made." —Irwin Winkler, Winkler Films

"A must-read book for anyone interested in the movie business. Guber and Bart are the real deal, with great personal anecdotes that lead you through all aspects of moviemaking." —Scott Sassa

"I've never had a shoot-out with either Peter Bart or Peter Guber. I'm too smart. Learn and laugh with them."

—Bernie Brillstein,
founding partner, Brillstein-Grey Entertainment,
and author of *Where Did I Go Right?*

"Their years in the industry give [Bart and Guber] the wherewithal to relate all kinds of interesting anecdotes about famous directors, screenwriters, studios, and other members of Hollywood film production society past and present. In some entertaining asides, Bart and Guber trade off giving short sidebars on famous personalities in the film industry. The result is an insider's view of how some of the most popular films in history were made and subsequently consumed by the public." —*Library Journal*

"Tantalizing behind-the-scenes tidbits . . . Brisk, lively, and detailed, *Shoot Out* proves once again that there really is no business like show business." —*BookPage*

"In *Shoot Out,* [Peter Bart and Peter Guber] have distilled the essence of movie magic to a single moment during a film's production—the shoot-out—when creative forces clash; a star walks off the set, a studio fires the director, the financial backers tighten the purse strings . . . [they've] packaged their best tales of Hollywood shoot-outs into an entertaining tutorial on how movies are made today . . . If you wonder why they don't make 'em like they used to (and whether they will again), you'll find the answer in *Shoot Out.*" —*The News-Press* (Ft. Myers, FL)

"Candid insight into why some movies become monster hits while others languish in developmental purgatory . . . the unflagging enthusiasm with which the authors share personal anecdotes and infamous Hollywood tales results in a surprisingly optimistic guide to surviving the perilous journey from the first draft to the final cut." —*Contents Magazine*

"A skillful explanation of a high-stakes, high-pressure industry." —*Book Magazine*

Acknowledgments

In his introduction to *The Years with Ross,* James Thurber expressed surprise that "everyone I turned to for opinion and guidance without exception dropped everything and came running to my assistance." It turned out that Harold Ross, his longtime editor at *The New Yorker,* was revered as well as feared. Well, we cannot lay claim to a similar experience in this book. In fact, some people went running in the opposite direction when they learned of plans for this volume. The state of Hollywood at this moment is such that some industry leaders are less than eager to voice their true opinions. By contrast, other talented show business practitioners willingly stepped forward, not only for our course at UCLA but also in private conversation, both on and off the record. We wish to thank all those executives and filmmakers who gave of their time and wisdom.

PETER BART AND PETER GUBER

Special thanks also to those friends and mentors whose encouragement meant a lot to me in this period. They include William Goldman, Robert Evans, Art Cooper, Peter Gethers, John Duff, Kathy Robbins and, of course, my wife, Blackie, whose love, encouragement—and excellent insights—have always gotten me through the difficult times. If this were a movie, she'd deserve top billing. I also owe a debt to the editors and reporting staff of *Variety* who contributed so much to my knowledge, especially its principal editors Elizabeth Guider, Steven Gaydos, Timothy Gray and Todd Cunningham, and to my stalwart assistant, Bashirah Muttalib.

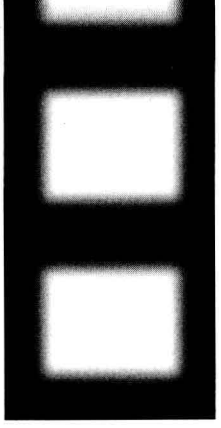
PETER BART

Virtually every event that shaped this book is the result of the inspiration, support and often leadership of many partners, colleagues and employees who have collaborated in this experience I call my life's work. My views stem from the combined energies and talent of authors, coaches and mentors far too numerous to mention. But if my career has been a lightning rod for opportunities, then the beacon is Lynda, my wife, who has supported me at my lowest and banged on me to keep me humble when I became full of myself. It's courageous to participate in supporting another's dream. To her I dedicate this effort.

PETER GUBER

SHOOT OUT

Contents



Roll Credits

The stakes have never been higher, nor the obstacles greater. Anyone setting out to create film, music, TV or any other product of our popular culture faces not only the intense competition of the marketplace, but also an intimidating landscape dominated by multinational corporate leviathans. The process of navigating these minefields requires both passion and strategic know-how, not only creative fervor but also consummate cool. The purpose of this book is to analyze this landscape and set forth these strategies.

The term "vision keeper" will crop up frequently in these pages. It is intended to describe those filmmakers, writers, musicians and random innovators whose imaginations galvanize those around them. What they see and think rallies others to their side and mobilizes the resources needed to bring that vision to reality. This book is

not intended to present a stratagem on "how to" make movies, but "how come" movies get made and sometimes, frighteningly, why.

At any given time in human history, the vision keepers seemed as rare as an endangered species. Yet through the ages they've reappeared alternatively as shaman or storyteller, driven for whatever reason to plant their mark on the experience of the moment.

Only a generation ago, archeologists marveled over a special find, deep within a network of caves in a forest of oaks, three hundred miles south of Paris. On the wall of one cave there sprawled an elaborate depiction of what appeared to be a bison hunt. It consisted of a series of blurry images, as though its artist suffered from double vision, which was all the more intriguing since natural light could never have penetrated the depths of that cave. The vision keeper seemed to have designed his work as a sort of dynamic experience; as viewers carried the torch from one end of the painting to the other, passing it on to others, they sensed the bison running, the hunters pursuing, the blurred lines reinforcing the sense of movement.

What led this ancestral artist to create these images in the subterranean darkness? There was certainly no paycheck, no opportunity for residuals. On the other hand, there probably were no tribal naysayers either, no corporate arbiters to mandate a different approach, no demands to raise additional financial resources.

The shaman/storyteller survives today in many different and more sophisticated forms. Cyberspace has supplanted the walls of a cave as a means of conveying his vision, the cosmos becoming the ultimate repository of mankind's errant imaginings.

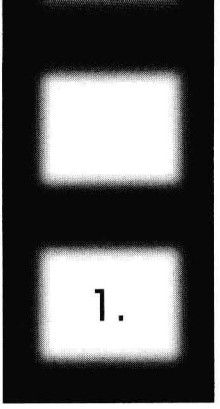
Bran Ferren, the former head of the Walt Disney Company's Imagineering think tank, observes that "[storytelling] comprises the core competency, not just of entertainment but also of education and commerce." The human brain, he goes on to suggest, is wired to observe and collate experience through story. We naturally convert everything into story, even information.

That indeed is one key reason why mankind has related with such intensity to literature, theater or movies. "Movies are the closest external representation of the prevailing storytelling that goes on inside our minds," writes Antonio Damasio, the prominent neurologist. "The brain naturally weaves wordless stories of what happens to an organism immersed in an environment."

To be sure, the fundamental alchemy of storytelling was forever changed by technology at the turn of this millennium. The new storyteller reemerged as a digital shaman, at once poet and engineer.

All this has inevitably created a new set of rules. Our mission in this book is to delineate and demystify those rules and, in doing so, we shall focus particularly on the art and craft of moviemaking. One reason is that the role of the vision keeper in film has undergone the most dramatic change, epitomizing the forces affecting every tributary of our pop culture. Further, our depth of experience is principally in filmmaking, and hence is our point of reference.

Throughout the book we shall frequently hark back to our collective odysseys spanning a period of three decades—cellular fragments of celluloid experience. We shall also summon up the "war stories" of others who've been immersed as creative and commercial participants in the process. Most of these other voices derive from guest appearances over the years at our courses, which were conducted at the School of Theater, Film and Television of the University of California in Los Angeles, and represent a unique broadband of key players in the Hollywood spectrum. On one level, therefore, the book provides an ongoing journal of their creative journeys. We thank all of them for their contributions to our understanding, and hence to this book.



1.

Eye of the Storm

Fellini once told me, "Robertino, remember always tell the truth." Now I understand he was lying to me.

ROBERTO BENIGNI

Peter Bart: Initiation

What have I got myself into?

I kept obsessing over that question throughout my first moments, indeed my first weeks, on my new studio job as vice-president of production at Paramount. Sure, there were obvious perks to gloat over. I drove to the studio in a new Mercedes, leased for me by my employer. It beat the sullen Chevy that the *New York Times* had supplied, a vehicle decorated with three bullet holes—a by-product of my coverage of race riots in Los Angeles and San Francisco. I had a sharp new office and a secretary, both milestones to a journalist whose accoutrements prior to this consisted of a gray metal desk and an insistently ringing phone. I also was the envy of my friends, many of whom were stunned to learn I'd become a studio executive. In

their minds, I would now dine with stars, and women would throw themselves at me thanks to my exalted station. Several of my journalist friends were less congratulatory, to be sure. They told me I was selling out to Hollywood. They could not believe that I—that anyone—would voluntarily depart the hallowed halls of the *Times*, which was, to them, more a cathedral than a newspaper.

I had tried to explain myself to some of these friends but knew it was fruitless. I said I'd grown weary of writing about people who were doing things and that I wanted to try doing something myself. I explained that this would probably be a temporary gig. I would take copious notes for a book that would provide the ultimate insider's view on how a studio really functioned. I told friends that it was not about meeting girls (no one believed this) but rather that this, the year 1967, seemed a fascinating moment of transition in Hollywood history. Boldly innovative films were being made that could never have gotten through the old studio system, I told whoever would listen, and I wanted to be part of that process. The town seemed awash with bright young filmmakers—maybe I could actually lend a hand to some worthy ones.

Of course, no one really believed *any* of this—not my friends, not even my parents. To them, I was straying into dangerous territory, taking on a position for which I was ill prepared, also getting involved with people who "were not like me" and who ultimately would betray me.

They didn't put all that into so many words, but I could tell it from the wary glances, the nuances of our conversation. And frankly, during my initial days and weeks at the studio, I had come to the conclusion that they were probably right.

My new car and office notwithstanding, the reception accorded my immediate boss, Robert Evans, and me was not exactly sunny. To the established studio bureaucracy, we were intrusive outsiders whose tenure would be brief at best. We could be counted upon to

make fools of ourselves and quickly fade into the night. As though to emphasize this attitude, Frank Caffey, an austere, silver-haired man who was operational head of the physical studio, casually informed me that the furniture in my office and in Evans' was all rented. There was no point in bringing in the "real stuff," he observed.

This made me curious where the "real stuff" resided. Since Caffey was not interested in responding to that question, I conned a studio art director into taking me to the remote building where sets were stored. One section of that building, I learned, housed office furniture to be allocated to filmmakers or new executives who'd moved onto the lot. The area was filled with mahogany desks, leather chairs, antique lamps, etc. This was the "real stuff," none of it destined for Evans or me. Why bother, since we were going to be gone in sixty seconds?

Caffey's hospitality was matched by that of other Paramount lifers. The head of business affairs was appropriately disdainful. The head of casting remained distanced. She kept a small dog in her office, which tried to pee on my shoe when I paid a courtesy call. At lunch I ate with the "commoners" in the commissary, rather than trying to penetrate the so-called executive dining room that adjoined it. Special tables in that room were reserved for the likes of John Wayne and Otto Preminger, the ferocious Teutonic director, and I had no desire to insinuate myself into that exclusive domain.

The frosty reception was to be expected, I learned. Working for a studio was like joining an elite club. Once your membership was assured, you could glide from one studio job to the next as the regimes changed. You still played golf at Hillcrest, ate dinner at Ma Maison and screened movies in your private theater at home.

Neither Evans nor I was a member of this circle. Evans was an actor who went on to found a clothing business with his brother, Charles, called Evan-Picone. He had then proceeded to use his winnings from the *schmatteh* trade to buy rights to a few novels and

wedge his way into producing. He was Hollywood handsome and coveted a flashy lifestyle, but he had two traits that served him well in his new job. Endearingly modest by nature, he made no pretense to being the next Irving Thalberg, even though he once played Thalberg in one of his early acting gigs. Further, he was utterly lacking in vindictiveness, which set him apart from the rulers of other studios. Filmmakers and agents doing business with him realized that you couldn't get him mad nor could you get him mean.

The specifics of how Evans got his job are still the subject of speculation. But it appeared that Charles Bluhdorn, the erratic Austrian-born chief of Gulf + Western who had acquired Paramount when it was on the threshold of bankruptcy, had met Evans through a friend and taken an instant liking to him. A coarse, ill-mannered man who lived in a state of permanent belligerence, Bluhdorn admired Evans' style—and access to women. Had he hired an old-guard studio chief to run Paramount, that individual would surely have been scornful of Bluhdorn and unwilling to put up with his tyrannical ways. In Bluhdorn's mind, it would be far more satisfying to "discover" a new Thalberg—someone who would be at once aggressive, yet subservient. His fondness of Evans took on a father-son aspect; Bluhdorn made no bones about his disappointment in his own son, who was neither jaunty nor attractive. Evans, with all his panache, was the glamorous heir Bluhdorn had always wanted.

Evans and I had met through Abby Mann, a mutual friend who had won an Academy Award for his brilliant screenplay *Judgment at Nuremberg,* and the three of us frequently dined together. Though obviously quite different in attitudes and interests, we were all fascinated by the sweeping changes overtaking the entertainment industry, especially as they reflected the social unrest of the late 1960s. Each of us was witness to these transformations, but in unique ways.

After I survived a three-week stint covering the Watts riots and the subsequent racial upheaval in San Francisco, Evans sent me a