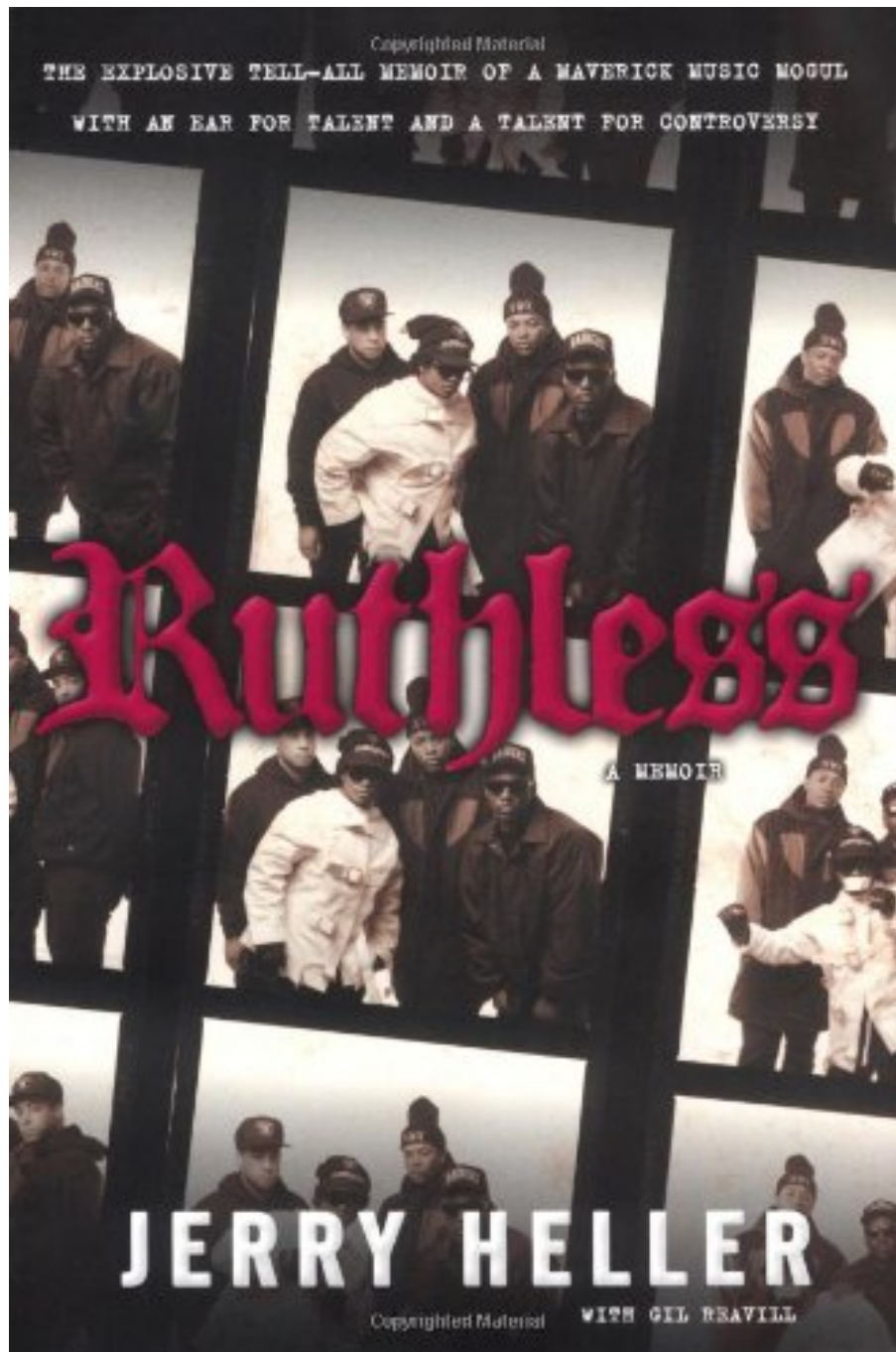


RUTHLESS: A MEMOIR BY JERRY HELLER



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From Publishers Weekly

"People had me thinking that I was coming to meet the devil," Dallas rapper J.R. Ewing once said to Jerry Heller, long-time artist representative and a co-founder of Ruthless Records, home to N.W.A., Bone Thugs-N-Harmony and Eazy-E, aka Eric Wright, Heller's partner and label co-founder. Heller's book is in part a response to the anti-Semitic rhetoric thrown his way (especially by O'Shea Jackson, aka Ice Cube) and in part a tribute to Eazy-E. Opening in 1991 with Eazy-E's betrayal by Dr. Dre-rap mogul Andre Young-the bulk of the book covers Heller's work with rap artists, leaping back to Associated Booking in 1963, where he cut his teeth. Heller's volume is a meandering but fascinating personal tour through the sordid underworld of the music business, with its guns and grudges, drugs and bodyguards. Those familiar with Heller only as a rap impresario may be surprised by the extent of his pop culture pedigree; he crossed paths with the likes of Bill Graham and David Geffen, as well as Berry Gordy and Marvin Gaye. Written in an informal style, including gritty conversations transcribed with scatological color intact, the book tracks the collision between street-smart and business-savvy, presenting the prototypes for the rapper/entrepreneur figure that currently dominates the scene-think Diddy or Jay-Z. This should appeal to anyone interested in the history of the hip hop business. A brief discography is included.

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RUTHLESS: A MEMOIR BY JERRY HELLER PDF

"PAYBACK'S A BITCH, JERRY."

The words scrawled crudely across Jerry Heller's bedroom mirror that afternoon meant the rap wars had suddenly escalated. In the battle of his life over the ragingly successful music label he had helped found, Ruthless Records, Heller had seen death threats, strong-arming, and beatings. Now the violence had come home when his enemies burglarized his house, jacked his Corvette, and left behind this sneering piece of graffiti.

Heller didn't get mad; he got even. Ruthless tells the explosive story of Jerry Heller's alliance with Eric Wright, aka Eazy-E, one of the legends of rap music and a founding member of N.W.A., "the world's most dangerous band." As a longtime music industry superagent, Heller had the skill and insight necessary to guide N.W.A.'s cometlike rise to the top of the charts. Along the way there were raucous nationwide tours, out-of-control MTV pool parties, and X-rated business meetings. Heller held on through the brutal shocks and reversals of the Ruthless Records era, which saw the label being targeted by the FBI, and its principal artists locked in bitter conflict, until a final turnaround placed Ruthless at the top of the heap once more. Always in the middle of the whirlwind were Jerry and Eazy, an odd-couple pairing that represents one of the deepest and most appealing stories in American music.

You don't have to be an N.W.A. fan to love Ruthless. Heller turns the music industry inside out, exposing its strange logic and larger-than-life personalities. Ruthless provides keen insight into the popular music scene, with an unforgettable portrait of its rollicking excesses, life-churning drama, and multimillion-dollar highs.

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A Very Compelling Read

By Ghost in the Matrix

I have to admit, that when I first heard that Jerry Heller was writing a book about the Ruthless Records History, I was a little suspicious that the book would have something of a tabloid-esque, payback tonality to it. After all, any of us who followed the Ruthless chronicles in its entirety, knows well the verbal beating that Jerry Heller took after the break-up of NWA. His flogging seemed inevitable since most of Urban America, if not the world, was deeply disappointed when Ice Cube left the group. So it was easy to jump on the "Jerk Jerry" band wagon when Cube pointed the finger at him. Then Dre pointed the finger. I even remember hearing the word "Draconian" being used in regards to the contracts the group shared.

Finally, and after a decade, Jerry Heller stands up to tell his side of things. Despite my suspicion, I was impressed to discover that book isn't nearly as bitter as I had anticipated. "Memoir" is an accurate term used in the book's sub-title, as there's an obvious emotional undercurrent about the friendship that existed between Eazy-E and Heller. This friendship, severed by Eazy's death, takes on a documentary voice as Heller takes it all the way to the beginning. First, he gives us a brief account of his own life before he met Eazy. His pre-Eazy story helps underscore just how improbable their "dynamic duo" alliance really was. It also gives you a glimpse of just how much Jerry Heller evolved from having been in Eazy's company for years. Every good story involves change and evolution from experience and introspection, and that's something of how Heller as a "character" in this Memoir presents himself.

But perhaps what is even more urgent than appreciating the bond between Heller and Eazy is someone FINALLY bringing to the immediate foreground the indisputable importance that was NWA and "Straight Outta Compton." Somewhere in the beginning of the book, Heller mentions how Chris Rock noted "Straight Outta Compton" as the single most important album of all time. I vividly remember when I encountered this same article in Rolling Stones, because I felt a sudden relief that finally someone of significant celebrity had

finally taken the Torch that everybody has given "The Chronic" and handed it to the rightful pioneer project: Straight Outta Compton. Anybody who witnessed the advent of NWA and how it changed the entire social and political climate of America knows what I'm talking about.

After NWA controversy became fashionable. Everybody, including Tupac & The Geto Boys, sought out controversy either through more explicitly told ghetto stories, or just plain explicitness and then defended it with the "I'm just kicking reality" - a signature mantra of NWA. "The Chronic" was a great album, but it was really just a smoother sequel to what Dre had already started with "Straight Outta Compton," and "Eazy Duz it."

This book finally offers people like me 300+ pages of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW descriptions of NWA.

Not to be missed are pages 98-100, where Heller gives a tell-all account of Eazy, Dre, Yella and Heller being harrassed by the police while hanging in front of THEIR recording studio during a break. Actually, let me correct myself. Heller stood on the sidelines and protested in awe as the police completely excused him from the routine pat-down administered to the other three. As a black man who has many white friends, I will be the first to say that whites often dismiss and refuse to believe that the police are that selective in singling out young black men. That's what made "F--- tha Police" such a potent and prophetic song. Heller's story serves to validate it.

The book does have a somewhat sour beginning, specifically when Jerry attempts to brand himself with the "N" word. A move that wasn't so much offensive as it was pretentious. Even if he is as anti-establishment as he claims, turning the "N" Word into a self-given fashion emblem is a temptation (and embarrassment) he should have avoided.

Another unfortunate part of this book, and I'm not sure if this is a reflection on the book or just the reported history of the author, is that you can't help but feel suspicious of how much of the story has been slightly twisted to simply un-do all that has been said in the past about Heller and Eazy. At times, you can sense the indulgence to over-romanticize an obvious "Father and Son" story, but hey, maybe it really was that way. And if not, I suppose all that matters is that it geuninely seemed that way to Heller.

Eitherway, if there is truly two-sides to every story, then here we have at last a little light shed on the alleged "darker side" that was the backbone of Ruthless Records. If nothing else, Heller is probably one of a small few who make up the short list entitled to tell Eazy's and the Ruthless story.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Heller missed a good opportunity to tell all

By scriptkeeper

No major revelations here that wasn't already known to the public. Only 70% of book is dedicated to his time with NWA.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Three Stars

By Ronnie D

Fairly entertaining

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