



High Concept: Don Simpson and the Hollywood Culture of Excess

By Charles Fleming



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Using the life and career of Don Simpson as a point of departure, "High Concept" takes readers on a riveting journey inside the Hollywood of the 1980s and 90s. For over two decades, Simpson was Hollywood's reigning bad boy, yet through the same period he and his partner, Jerry Bruckheimer were the most successful independent producers in the Hollywood history. The revelations in "High Concept" are astounding! Through intensive research Fleming has created a dramatic tale of the rise of the key players and how the Don Simpson way became the Hollywood way. Through an interwoven narrative of the decadence and greed, hypocrisy and hysteria, profligacy and moral emptiness of the key power brokers, Fleming returns to the core concept of excess and how it continues to drive Hollywood.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Veteran show-biz news hound Charles Fleming argues that the short, insanely foolish life of producer Don Simpson (*Flashdance*, *Top Gun*, *Bad Boys*) stands as a larger indictment of Hollywood, and it's hard to argue with him. For one thing, Simpson helped create Tom Cruise, Richard Gere, Will Smith, and Eddie Murphy, and his loud, high-concept, low-IQ school of filmmaking helped launch Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, and Bruce Willis to new heights (or depths). Others may have been responsible for 14 Top Ten pop tunes and 10 Oscar nominations, but nobody had thought to combine pop music and movies in a synergistic way.

While Fleming concentrates on Simpson's own antics--car wrecks, career crackups, whacked-out drug and sex orgies, whimsical overspending on brain-dead blockbusters--he does make an excellent case that the entertainment industry as a whole is nutty and slutty. Even the more levelheaded stars who turn up in *High Concept* turn out to be appalling: Fleming documents the behavior that earned Demi Moore the Hollywood nickname "Gimme More."

Despite his \$60,000-a-month drug habit, Simpson actually did come up with smart ideas, according to many witnesses, and he was sharp enough to know how dumb so many of his colleagues were. Sylvester Stallone, for instance, almost starred in *Beverly Hills Cop*, and had he not left the project in favor of his notorious stink bomb *Rhinestone*, viewers would have been stuck with Stallone's rewrite of *Cop*, from which the star had removed every trace of humor--the very concept that made an ordinary action film, in Murphy's talented hands, a smash hit. In his detailed account of Simpson's bizarre life, Fleming demonstrates why modern movies are the way they are.

He also proves what a strangely tiny town Hollywood is. Simpson was mixed up with Heidi Fleiss, whose indicted dad was Madonna's pediatrician; his doctors had treated Kurt Cobain and Margaux Hemingway (and one had helped design Miss Piggy); Don Simpson's drug dealer claims he sold drugs to O.J. Simpson the day Nicole Brown Simpson died. The most shocking thing about the book is the *Pulp Fiction*-like combination of decadent horror and slapstick comedy that constituted everyday life for Don Simpson's cronies. The high life, as described in Fleming's addictively readable book, exemplifies Carrie Fisher's Hollywood mantra: "Good anecdote--bad reality." --Tim Appelo

From Library Journal

Contemporary Hollywood takes it on the chin in these two books, written from widely different perspectives. Fleming, who has written extensively on Hollywood for *Variety*, *Newsweek*, and *Entertainment Weekly*, tells the sordid story of producer Don Simpson, who helped create a string of blockbusters (*Flashdance*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Top Gun*) and whose box office figures gave new meaning to the phrase "gross receipts." Simpson died in January 1996 at the age of 52; his heart gave out after years of crash dieting, drugs, alcohol, and disfiguring plastic surgery. Fleming spares few of the gory details of Simpson's decline, and he's quick to tie his lifestyle up with that of other Hollywood miscreants like Robert Downey Jr. and Chris Farley. The book needs a better sense of Simpson's longtime relationship with partner Jerry Bruckheimer, as well as some perspective; Fleming barely acknowledges that the film business has always harbored and even encouraged hard-living dynamos like Simpson, as long as they were successful. Grey, described by his publisher as "once a Hollywood insider," offers a collection of brief essays and interviews about the state of films. Grey's chats with directors John Waters (*Hairspray*) and Wes Craven (*Scream*) highlight what's best

about the book; the author's essays range from the provocative to the puerile. A discretionary purchase for most collections. [Fleming's book was previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 12/97.]A Thomas J. Wiener, Editor, "Satellite DIRECT."

-A Thomas J. Wiener, Editor, "Satellite DIRECT"

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From Kirkus Reviews

Lots of sex, lots of drugs, and even a little rock 'n' roll there's something for every scandal lover in this rollicking, dirt-dishing account of the life and times of Hollywood producer Don Simpson. Movie insiders credit Simpson with inventing high-concept movies the action-packed, loud, flashy, simplistic, but tightly structured films, that crowd the multiplexes every summer. With his producing partner, Jerry Bruckheimer, he certainly hauled in great gusts of money with films such as Flashdance, Top Gun, and Crimson Tide. Simpson's life was as big and in-your-face as his creations. He hit Hollywood as a junior studio executive and quickly climbed the corporate ladder. But his increasingly public drug habit eventually got him fired. Financially, this was the best thing that ever happened to him. He and Bruckheimer teamed up as independent producers and began to crank out the movies that would make them feared and loathed and celebrated. If anything, success upped the ante of Simpson's misbehavior from even more drugs to a constant stream of hookers to epic mistreatment of subordinates. But the powerful absolution of success kept him working until his heart gave out when he was 52. In his first book, Fleming, a former staff writer for Variety and Newsweek, is not so much interested in Simpson the man (in fact, in strictly biographical terms, this book is a failure), but Simpson the poster boy for '80s excess. This leads to long, tell-tale digressions on Hollywood seaminess. This oft-told tale features the usual suspects (Heidi Fleiss, Charlie Sheen, Jack Nicholson), but Fleming does manage to dig up enough juicy, original tidbits to slake all but the most jaded prurient appetites. A tale full of sound and fury but signifying little beyond gossip. (Author tour; radio satellite tour) -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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