



# Ruthless: A Memoir

By Jerry Heller

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**Ruthless: A Memoir** By Jerry Heller

## "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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### Editorial Review

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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### About the Author

Across five tumultuous decades, **Jerry Heller** has helped shape American popular music, breaking new talent, developing new trends, and forging an industry-wide reputation as "the guy who gets there first." He rose to prominence in the 1960s as a "superagent," importing Elton John and Pink Floyd for their first major American tours, and representing Journey, Marvin Gaye, Joan Armatrading, Van Morrison, War, Average White Band, ELO, Eric Burdon, and Crosby-Nash, among many others.

In the mid-1980s, Heller was the moving force and marketing genius behind the worldwide emergence of West Coast rap music. He not only cofounded Ruthless Records with Eazy-E, but discovered, signed, or managed the likes of N.W.A., The Black Eyed Peas, Above the Law, The D.O.C., and Bone Thugs-N-Harmony. Jerry Heller lives in Calabasas, California, with his wife, Gayle, a Realtor for Sotheby's; his sister-in-law, Vicki, an attorney; and their menagerie of animals.

**Gil Reavill** is a journalist, author, and screenwriter who lives in Westchester County, New York.

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**Patricia Coulter:**

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