



## Howard Hughes: His Life and Madness

*Donald L. Barlett , James B. Steele*

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## **Howard Hughes: His Life and Madness** Donald L. Barlett , James B. Steele

Howard Hughes has always fascinated the public with his mixture of secrecy, dashing lifestyle, and reclusiveness. This is the book that breaks through the image to get at the man. Originally published under the title *Empire: The Life, Legend, and Madness of Howard Hughes*.

## **Howard Hughes: His Life and Madness Details**

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## From Reader Review Howard Hughes: His Life and Madness for online ebook

### Steven Peterson says

When I was growing up, I heard a lot about Howard Hughes, the reclusive genius businessman. A man who dated beautiful women, who was a Hollywood mogul, who was a major player in the airline industry, someone who became a player in Las Vegas gambling, and so on. Well, I was wrong.

This book's subtitle includes the term "madness." I had also heard that he was eccentric, but I was not aware how his debilities created huge problems for him as a businessman.

A few examples. He took over RKO studio, one of the major studios in Hollywood. He produced a few good movies, but he ended up producing rather few. In the process, the studio became a losing proposition. Or, when he owned and ran TWA, a then premier airline company. When jets became the norm, he was paralyzed and could not pull the trigger on purchasing enough jets to allow TWA to compete. As a result, he lost control of the company.

What about his playboy image? Surely, he dated many women. He ultimately married Jean Peters, an actress. But the circumstances were bizarre. She had to make appointments to see him--or even phone him. They seldom lived together. An indication of a difficulty with other people.

He hated paying taxes and was always on the lookout for finding ways to reduce his tax burden. His Howard Hughes Institute for medical research was an example.

Later on, his mental problems became overwhelming, as he lived with little contact with humans, letting his nails grow very long, unable to make business decisions, and so on.

He did have successes. His Spruce Goose flew. He was, in fact, a very good pilot. One of his companies was a successful defense contractor.

A fascinating portrayal of an iconic figure, who never lived up to his reputation. And who ended up an almost pathetic figure.

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### Tosh says

Howard Hughes sort of represents the American dream (nightmare). Talented yet misguided in business affairs. Sort of a dreamer who didn't have a practical bone in his body - yet had his Dad's money to do things.

He wanted to create, yet eventually destroyed everything he put his hands on. The great thing about this book is that they go into the money deals that were made and one wants to shake his shoulders and say to Hughes 'don't do it!"

One of the great things about this book is that they reprint a lot of the Hughes memos to his employees. They are both hysterical and very sad at the same time. Stuff like having his driver go to the newsstand and pick out a paper in the middle of the pile because it's unlikely it was touched by human hands.

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### **Laurie says**

Good thing I'm reading this 2 weeks until Christmas. Nothing says Merry Christmas like a 700 pg book on aviation and germaphobic warfare. I'm not complaining though. No one can pull off ocd sexier than Howard Hughes.

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### **Ashley Reid says**

I don't usually read biographies or autobiographies unless I am a fan of the person or if it is highly recommended. This was neither to me, I only started reading it because I saw it in the library's returns pile and I was in a reading slump with no idea what I wanted to read. Despite that, I'm glad I picked it up, because it was one of the most interesting biographies I've read in a while.

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### **Alison says**

I became interested in Howard Hughes after seeing 'The Aviator' (edited version)! He was definitely a womanizer and manipulator but you can't deny his courage and determination in both the field of movie production and aviation. The 'Spruce Goose' is on display at an air museum in McMinnville, Oregon which was very close to where we used to live so it had a lot more meaning for me when I got to see the plane after reading about Howard Hughes.

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### **Chinmaya Behera says**

Interesting book on the extraordinary life of Howard Hughes. Billionaire, playboy, filmmaker and an aviator - Howard Hughes dreamt big and attained success across diverse industries. This book is way too long and there are sections which delved way too much into complicated lawsuits involving Trans World Airlines and Hughes declining health conditions. One can draw striking similarities between the lives of Howard Hughes and Elon Musk with their involvement in variety of ventures spanning multiple industries.

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### **Ethan says**

Very interesting book. the the book is well-written and researched. it provides a lot of great details on the extraordinary life of Howard Hughes. overall I thought the subject matter was very interesting and made for good reading.

there are a few negatives, however. the biggest issue I have with the book is its over-emphasis on the last 10 years of Hughes life. Hughes lived 70 years in total, but more than half of the book is devoted to the last ten years of Hughes life. the author goes into incredible detail about Hughes lifestyle and lawsuits after he moved to Las Vegas in 1966, while (to the book's detriment, in my opinion) providing precious few details

on Hughes movie making exploits and life style in his 20s, 30s, and 40s.

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### **CC says**

As another reviewer pointed out, this book is incredibly detailed and painstakingly researched. The author has taken great care mapping out the entirety of the Hughes empire, including his ties to a who's who of Hollywood, politics, the mob, and beyond. If you have the patience for it, this is a fascinating read. The sheer magnitude of HRH's influence, even when he had become a virtual prisoner of his own design, is mind boggling. True, there is a staggering amount of information to digest but, such is the life of billionaire industrialists. Whatever his eccentricities, Hughes accomplished more in one life than most could ever dream. It is worth wondering, what he may have been capable of had his addictions and mental instability been kept at bay.

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### **Dakota says**

An exhaustively researched book about a very strange man I knew nothing about. Not a business genius, rather someone who built an empire from the profits of his dad's company and somehow didn't burn through ALL of it. I recommend checking out the abridged version.

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### **Luke says**

You know the *Simpsons* episode where Monty Burns runs a casino and lives in his room, afeared of Freemason-spruiking germs and wearing Kleenex boxes on his feet? Like this:

Well, that's basically the story of Howard Hughes, except Hughes isn't wearing any pyjamas. Oh, and he's jacking enough codeine and Valium to kill the average person. No biggie.

The book is exceptionally well researched - coming from a journalistic background it'd be a surprise if this *wasn't* the case, I suppose - but to the point where it can become a little bogged down in detail. Charting his decline from rich weirdo to rich OCD addict inmate, the book is its most verbose about the point where Hughes had lost control of his empire. I assume this is because a lot of the business proceedings at that point were on public record. It's illuminating but at the same time almost overwhelming to receive so much information when the book may have been able to have been snipped down a fair whack to allow it to flow in the same way as the earlier chapters - detailing Hughes' life up until the 'Spruce Goose' phase - did.

I thought I knew a lot about Hughes given my childhood background as an aviation nerd, but there's so much more in here. Central is the removal of the concept of Hughes as a genius - his mastery of PR and spin was only outpaced by the lengths to which his handlers would go to sate his OCD- and paranoia-driven desires. In the end, we're presented with the sad picture of a failed industrialist Miss Havisham, rotting away on drugs while his Mormon handlers proclaim business as usual.

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### **Angelino Desmet says**

Howard Hughes: His Life and Madness is painstakingly thorough. The saying: "It's all in the details" could've easily been instigated by this astounding piece of work. Better yet, encyclopedia. The level of meticulousness does have its downside: boringness. Although his life wasn't uneventful, it—being his post aviation years—can be rather dull due to Hughes relentless refusal to learn from his mistakes. Bound to repeat himself, he masterfully does so, until his death. There is one adage in the book which aptly compresses the 627 pages into a single line: "Same baby, different diaper." The diaper—consisting mostly of deceptive, political, and corporate diarrhea—was too much for me to handle. Although I read every line, I couldn't suppress my frustration regarding its legislative nature. Unconsciously I dozed off. I never imagined money, greed, and the legal system could be so intertwined. Yet I was wrong. My disappointment by the lack of scientific thinkers in governments has been reinforced once again.

Objectively, as previously stated, this is an impressive book. One that without a doubt many people rightfully love to read. Subjectively, it was tedious, because of my disinterest in law. A tl;dr for the second half would have sufficed.

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### **June says**

Money buy wealth one doesn't earn, fame that's an illusion, loyalty without true friendship, public admiration given no empathy; money also allow one pursue self-interest with no concern of others, cultivate human nature to evil growth, disclose the absurdity of life, and make HRH a spectacular loser!

Besides HHMI being the highest honor one can get in life science research as I was raised to admire, Marty and Leo's "Aviator" (supposedly inspired by this book) lured me to dig into HRH's real life, both HHMI in my mind and Leo's portrayal are incomplete or fictional or deviation from the reality. After 1/3 of the book, I became much less captivated by the seemingly ponderous information turning a handsome genius I respected to incompetent wacko I despise, halfway through I was exhilarated again as if reading a crime novel and suspense thriller (motion picture material!)... ended with the only feeling left for HRH is sympathy (for his mental illness and premature independence without guidance and nurturing), oh I also like his wry sense of humor: crossbred of an escaped lunatic and a child.

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### **Jason Townsend says**

I started reading this biography knowing little about its subject. As for Hughes himself, I feel conflicted. The image this book paints is one of a man who is at times both fascinating and selfish. A man who achieved much and lived life on his own terms and yet, wasn't the "genius" he was made out to be.

While Hughes certainly won't go down as one of my favorite biographical subjects, I can't help but feel sad for him seeing as how his last year's played out.

To go from being master and commander of his own world to becoming a frail wisp of a man who was apparently taken advantage of by his associates is a fate no one deserves.

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### **Maureen says**

Howard Hughes lived life large. He simply did not exist in the same universe with the rest of the world. His cousin told me about a time that Howard had his car stolen. It was a brand new convertible. Howard told his cousin that he was not upset about losing the car, but about losing the Saturday Evening Post in the back seat. It had a serial in it that he had been reading.

Bartlett and Steele are two fine investigative reporters for the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, and they are able to wrap their gifts around this very, very big story. Hughes was not a brilliant businessman, but he had a talent for finding people and putting them to work. At the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a tax shelter that was never meant to last, the remainder of Hughes' fortune is being used in a way of which he would approve. The Institute hires the most brilliant research scientists it can find, and sets them loose working on whatever they choose. Hughes did a similar thing at ToolCo, where engineers invented everything from pocket calculators to laser beams.

Hughes disintegrating personal life reflected his descent into madness. The authors go through every bit of that, along with covering his forays into aviation and the film business. If Hughes had been born into a less privileged lifestyle, I wonder if he would have had the luxury of going mad. He was capable of great things - all the way from his designs for airplane improvements that helped the U.S. win W.W.II, to the fabrication of the first push-bra. At the same time, though, very few people in his life ever told Howard Hughes "No," and the lack of boundaries, along with perhaps some genetic tendencies to mental instability, ultimately led to his downfall.

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### **Abhinav Pandey says**

The guy was so fucked up! But you take the good and leave the bad. In that sense, his eccentricity led him do things a sane person couldn't have done. He was a genius but not a pragmatic one.

You don't need to read the whole book because in the end it becomes quite painful to go through the routine logs and know the multitude of characters.

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