



## Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer

By Scott Eyman

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### **Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer** By Scott Eyman

*Lion of Hollywood* is the definitive biography of Louis B. Mayer, the chief of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer -- MGM -- the biggest and most successful film studio of Hollywood's Golden Age.

An immigrant from tsarist Russia, Mayer began in the film business as an exhibitor but soon migrated to where the action and the power were -- Hollywood. Through sheer force of energy and foresight, he turned his own modest studio into MGM, where he became the most powerful man in Hollywood, bending the film business to his will. He made great films, including the fabulous MGM musicals, and he made great stars: Garbo, Gable, Garland, and dozens of others. Through the enormously successful Andy Hardy series, Mayer purveyed family values to America. At the same time, he used his influence to place a federal judge on the bench, pay off local officials, cover up his stars' indiscretions, and, on occasion, arrange marriages for gay stars. Mayer rose from his impoverished childhood to become at one time the highest-paid executive in America.

Despite his power and money, Mayer suffered some significant losses. He had two daughters: Irene, who married David O. Selznick, and Edie, who married producer William Goetz. He would eventually fall out with Edie and divorce his wife, Margaret, ending his life alienated from most of his family. His chief assistant, Irving Thalberg, was his closest business partner, but they quarreled frequently, and Thalberg's early death left Mayer without his most trusted associate. As Mayer grew older, his politics became increasingly reactionary, and he found himself politically isolated within Hollywood's small conservative community.

*Lion of Hollywood* is a three-dimensional biography of a figure often caricatured and vilified as the paragon of the studio system. Mayer could be arrogant and tyrannical, but under his leadership MGM made such unforgettable films as *The Big Parade*, *Ninotchka*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and *An American in Paris*.

Film historian Scott Eyman interviewed more than 150 people and researched some previously unavailable archives to write this major new biography of a man

who defined an industry and an era.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Anyone who's heard one of the legions of tales about obstinate Hollywood founding father Mayer's tyranny over his stars (and the entire studio system) won't be surprised to learn Mayer grew up selling scrap machinery in the eastern Canadian port town of Saint John: "Junk dealing itself made [Mayer] endlessly resourceful and opportunistic," Eyman (*Print the Legend: The Life and Times of John Ford*) writes in this meticulous and engaging biography. But because Mayer (1885–1957) was a Russian Jew selling scrap metal and was looked down upon by many, he developed his "almost feral belligerence" early on. That ruthlessness may explain his unprecedented consolidation of power once he arrived in Los Angeles in 1918, but not his genius for packaging and selling the nascent and suspicious medium of film to audiences. Mayer's maudlin sentimentality about American values and the virtues of family life (despite major womanizing) surfaced in most of the films he oversaw at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—and in what he did to get them made. Mayer's "mania for quality" drove MGM to the top of Hollywood's studio system, while his melodramatic fainting spells and crying jags would frequently induce fellow executives or stars to relent. Eyman's extensive knowledge of old Hollywood, his scrupulous research and his refusal to indict the often-pilloried Mayer make this biography an often revelatory delight. *Agent, Fran Collin. (May)*

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### Review

"*Lion of Hollywood* is compulsive reading as well as thoroughly enjoyable. There is so much that is new, so much that surprised me."

-- Kevin Brownlow, author of *The Parade's Gone By...*

"Scott Eyman has accomplished the near impossible -- he's taken Louis B. Mayer, the comic goblin of so many Hollywood histories, and restored him to his rightful place as one of the great business executives of the twentieth century. Laughable no more, Mayer is a fascinating amalgam of vision, chutzpa, cunning, and sheer genius."

-- James Curtis, author of *W. C. Fields and James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters*

### About the Author

**Scott Eyman** is books editor of *The Palm Beach Post* and author of seven previous books about film, including *Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer* and *Print the Legend: The Life and Times of John Ford*.

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