

Steve Faber and Bob Fisher on

Big Screen Comedy

BY KATE McCALLUM

WEDDING CRASHERS

“Oh, no ... not another wedding movie,” you may groan. I’m convinced, after meeting Steve Faber and Bob Fisher, you’ll find their film above and beyond the usual summer comedy fare. These two highly seasoned television comedy writers finally get to exercise the freedom of expressing their fully outrageous selves in *Wedding Crashers*, their debut feature film. *Crashers* stars Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson in the roles of divorce mediators as well as lifelong friends who have never met a wedding they couldn’t get themselves into. Guided by a secret set of wedding-crashing “rules,” the pair finds their way into a different wedding and a different bridesmaid’s heart every week. When they crash the social event of the season, one of them falls for the engaged daughter (played by Rachel McAdams) of an influential and eccentric politician (Christopher Walken) and decides to break the rules by pursuing her. This pursuit leads to a wild weekend at her family’s palatial estate where the ultimate crashers quickly find themselves in way over their heads.

Screenwriter Steve Faber was born into a family of magicians who emigrated from Eastern Europe a long, long time ago. Grandson of Harry Faber, renowned sleight-of-hand artist, Faber attended UCLA where he earned degrees in both literature and history. Faber went on to graduate from law school. It was a tremendous mistake. He did, however and once and for all, learn the great life





Vince Vaughn as Jeremy and **Owen Wilson** as John in New Line Cinema's upcoming *Wedding Crashers*, a fast-paced comedy of love turned upside down. PHOTOS: ©2004 Richard Cartwright/New Line Productions.



The characters of Jeremy and John are based upon screenwriters Steve Faber and Bob Fisher's real-life experiences of crashing political fundraisers for food, except Jeremy and John are in search of women instead of sustenance.

lesson that there is no money in poetry and no poetry in money. This lesson was learned at a devastating psychological cost. After a brief flirtation with magic (which failed when the bottom simultaneously fell out of both the rabbit and the hat market) and a novel (which he hopes to finally publish in 2006), Faber reestablished contact with his best friend from high school, Bob Fisher.

Fisher grew up in various mid-Atlantic suburbs (including his favorite: Middletown, New Jersey) before moving to California where he attended Chatsworth High School, played a lot of baseball and met his writing partner Steve Faber. They began their partnership writing a series of inflammatory editorials for the high school newspaper.

Fisher then attended UCLA where he was mostly interested in history, politics and literature. He spent several years in the noble trade of bartending before finally turning to sitcom writing. Writing with Faber again, the two wrote for many shows of varying

quality, including *Married With Children* and *The Bonnie Hunt Show*, before switching to film a few years ago.

After spending two years working on a movie about weddings, Fisher himself will be married this October to writer Karine Rosenthal. Faber will be his best man. And, as would only be fair, crashers are welcome.

scr(i)pt: *How was this great idea born?*

STEVE FABER: We had met with and talked to a lot of executives at various studios while making the rounds. When we met Andrew Panay at Tapestry Films, he said he had always wanted to do a movie about wedding crashing. Bob and I thought about the idea for a little while, let it cogitate and thought, "Yeah, we can maybe make a story out of this." So, we just started developing a story. We pitched it to Tapestry, and then we went out around town with it.

scr(i)pt: *Did Tapestry have a deal anywhere?*

SF: They had a first-look deal at Miramax. **BOB FISHER:** We had to pitch there first. The thing about the idea for us was that we weren't sure, right off the bat, if it was going to be able to sustain a whole movie. A story about these guys crashing weddings ... so we figured, obviously, one of the guys will fall in love and that'll be kind of his thing. It really came together for us, however, when we came up with the idea that the family the two women that Vince and Owen are interested in are very much like the Kennedys. When Steven and I were kids, we were totally into the Kennedys, and I think deep down, we both figured we'd grow up and marry one of the Kennedy daughters, and be part of the family. When we thought about that, we knew we were on the road to [the idea] becoming a cool movie, at least for us. We set up this compound situation that's inspired by the Kennedy's compound on Cape Cod.

scr(i)pt: *I've also heard a rumor that you've both had some crashing experience yourself.*

SF: Okay, here's the story. We met in high school and we wrote on the high school paper together. (FISHER GETS UP AND EXITS.) Okay, I guess Bob's going to go vomit. We've told this story a hundred times ... Then we ended up going to college together, too. Bob was the best man at my wedding, and now I'm going to be the best man at his wedding in October. We worked in Washington D.C., and we went to a lot of political functions. Since we didn't have much money, we used to crash a lot of political functions, fundraisers, so on and so forth for food.

BF: It was pathetic.

SF: It's really embarrassing. These guys crash for sex, we crashed for food. We used to come home with our pockets stuffed with cold cuts. This is no joke—it started getting embarrassing. We went to a Democratic Party fundraiser in downtown L.A. at the Biltmore. We crashed it, and it was ugly because the chairman of the L.A. Democratic Party stopped us at the door. We had known him from UCLA. He kind of looked down at our pants, and they were just bulging with cold cuts. You get the picture.

BF: We got so into it that we used to bring Saran™ Wrap, baggies and stuff to line our pockets.

SF: We'd come home and put it in the

refrigerator, then we'd go to the Republican Party. It became less about political ideals than about who had the better food. In Washington the parties were great because you could go to the shrimp boat lobbyists, and these guys would have really good spreads. There, you have our crashing experiences.

scr(i)pt: *Thanks for the tips. After you settled on the story direction, did you write a treatment? Is that what you pitched?*

BF: Well, what we did is Steve and I figured out what the movie was going to be about: the structure, what the set pieces were, who the characters were, and all that kind of stuff. Next, we worked it up as a pitch and then we went out with it to, literally, every studio in town. It was New Line who bought it. We had pitched it so much, we basically had completed the whole outline and were ready to go. So, we wrote it in a very short time.

SF: The interesting thing about it also is that, after we turned it in, New Line really didn't have very many notes. Maybe eight minutes' worth, which we satisfied, then they basically greenlit the film. From the point of time at which we sold it to them to when it wrapped was just an unusually short period of time. We still sit and look at each other and ...

BF: ... we're kind of reeling from it. We sold the pitch in April of 2003, turned in the first draft the middle of July of 2003. Owen and Vince signed on in the end of August of 2003, and we were filming by the next spring. They finished filming it last summer.

scr(i)pt: *Did you do anything unique in the pitch?*

SF: Yeah, we have this very crazed adrenaline-fueled psychotic pitch style that is really embarrassing. You just kind of feel like a dancing monkey. We pitched in various voices, accents, characters—the whole deal. It was just nonstop. We basically pitched like two crack whores.

scr(i)pt: *Were you standing up, acting, moving around the room?*

BF: Periodically, we would stand up for emphasis. Literally, by the end of each pitch we were like James Brown. We'd have to just fall on the floor and people had to fan us because we were so exhausted from the experience. We ended up compressing it into a tight period of time. When you do three pitches in a day, believe me, you're exhausted.

SF: Especially when you pitch a comedy. It's really important that, even if they don't find it funny, you get some love in the room ... or at least some fake laughter. There are a couple of places we've gone to, and it was like pitching to an oil painting; it was just death. I mean, you could hear crickets.

scr(i)pt: *Been there. And it's worse with drama. Tears help.*

BF: Generally, most places really responded well to us. I think just the fact that New Line jumped on it pretty quickly and was able to get going with it was a big help. Then, of course, obviously getting Owen and Vince attached made it all go ahead smoothly.

SF: The other unique thing I think we did is we don't have a standard sort of third act. You know, the third acts in comedies are always so short ...

BF: ... and just so disposable.

SF: We really wanted a more complicated third act, so we pitched



Claire (**Rachel McAdams**), the bridesmaid John pursues, is part of a wealthy, powerful family headed by Secretary Cleary (**Christopher Walken**). The family is based upon the screenwriters' earlier fascination with the Kennedy clan.

and wrote a more complicated third act, not sure if anybody would go for it, but they did. The movie runs a little longer, but it's worth it.

scr(i)pt: *You both have a background in television writing. What would you say is different about writing comedy for TV compared to feature work?*

BF: Well, [feature writing] doesn't suck. The big difference is that most of the work you're doing is in a room. Not that there are not good things about [being in the room], but there's also a tendency to kind of bring it down to a certain kind of level, or something that at least everybody can agree on. So, there's a homogenizing of voice, I think, that happens in a television room. We love the freedom that we have in film.

SF: Not having 15 people pitch different jokes, like, you know should the sweater be purple or green or red? It's nice to be able to just write what you want to write and then you're dealing with one set of notes, just pretty much the studio's. Then, when the actors come on, you have those notes. We just wrote TV because we thought it would be easier to break in. In a sense, there were actually better sitcoms at the time, too—*Seinfeld*, *Mad About You*.

BF: *The Wonder Years* was the show that really inspired us. Then when *Seinfeld* came out, it was like, oh man, yeah, this is great! We just never got to be on shows that we thought were of that caliber.

SF: God, we sound bitter.

BF: Probably because those f***ers never hired us on *Seinfeld* and *Mad About You*.

SF: ... so then we wrote a film about a fake family smuggling narcotics because that's the next emotional step after bitterness. You forgive, you let go and you write an R-rated drug comedy. I believe Freud spoke of this.

scr(i)pt: *What makes your comedy funny?*

BF: There's no way to answer that question without sounding like pontificating assholes.

scr(i)pt: *This magazine is just for that purpose. Go for it.*

SF: Here's a good way to explain it: In TV we would pitch jokes or

stories that they called one percenters or two percenters. That means one percent of the audience or two percent of the audience is going to get it. We write entire stories, or at least entire runs that are one or two percenters. We like worlds that are really weird, and interesting, and bizarre. I think most people do. More than one or two percent. Our next project, *We're The Millers*, deals with losers who become winners, not in any profound sense. They're just people; they retain their humanity. I guess we just don't want to write to the supposed "lowest common denominator" that they tell you are the mass of people who can relate. Those one or two percent, I think, aren't one or two percent. I think they're 70 or 80 percent.

BF: And we attempt to indulge them. I've noticed in the scripts we've written that we have a tendency to write about guys, in particular, but guys who don't necessarily buy into a meritocracy.

SF: We're kind of opt-out guys, who sort of exist on the margin of participating. Like the characters in *Wedding Crashers*.

These guys have decent jobs and everything, but they're just not living responsible lives. In a way, they feel like what the world is offering them isn't that much. Inevitably, in both this movie and in *We're The Millers*, it's about these guys finding some way to come into regular life on their own terms. Another thing that interests us is friendship. Since we've known each other for 25 years, we have a tendency to write about buddies—friends who have very specific languages and ways of talking to each other. We're also both really, really fascinated, and we have been for years and years, with anarchism and anarchists. Because we're both voracious readers about non-comedy stuff, we try to, probably even subconsciously, incorporate that into everything we do.

scr(i)pt: So, you look for the reality and tip it on its head?

BF: We try to. For example, I'm reading this book right now about boxers, and a couple of artists, and the theme of the

book is about people who are good with their hands. Steve and I are generally interested in people who are good with their minds. We like fast talkers and con men, and guys who lie ...

SF: We're interested in liars ... and people trying to pull a fast one. *Hustlers*, con men, drifters—we're interested in that arena. Taking their world and putting it into a context or a situation that people can relate to. We want to do a modern day *The Sting*.

BF: We're also interested in guys who go to elaborate means for small ends. In *Wedding Crashers*, these guys have these rules that they follow, and it's sort of ridiculous because all they're basically doing is crashing weddings. The process of doing it is really interesting to them.

SF: I think America teaches you to not take your neuroses seriously, you know what I mean? I think they teach you that in order to fit in and be a really good consumer, you have to discard your neuroses. We take our neuroses really seriously, and we take our

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characters' neuroses really seriously. They take them seriously, too, and that's fun to write.

BF: In general, people who take things seriously that shouldn't be taken seriously are funny to us.

scr(i)pt: *What do you think about when you write for your women characters?*

SF: Well, I like to think about baseball. No, we like strong women, so we always try to write really strong women. In *Wedding Crashers*, you'll see that one of the main female characters is incredibly sharp, sharper than the men, and we like that. We like to see men hoisted by their own petards, so to speak. Again, in *Crashers*, without spoiling it, I think you'll get a sense of that.

scr(i)pt: *Did you guys stay on for rewrites during production?*

SF: We did ... for the whole ride.

BF: Which was great. For a first-time feature, we understand it's very rare. We felt really thrilled and grateful.

scr(i)pt: *Were you doing rewrites during production, as needed?*

SF: As needed, yes. We would do a scene here, a scene there.

BF: The movie was pretty much set by the time that it went into production.

SF: We had ended up writing 25 drafts of the script for ourselves over and over and over again. We had put in enormous amounts of work before we turned in the draft. They didn't really get a first draft, they got, like, a 30th draft. That's what we do, I think, because we hate ourselves so much. We want to make sure that nobody else does, so we polish the script over and over again.

BF: We wanted *Wedding Crashers* to be a complete movie. So, there's a romantic component that we wanted to work. We obviously were most concerned with the set pieces and making sure that there were a lot of laughs, but we wanted the whole movie to work as a movie and not just be a comedy where you just kind of go through the motions until you get to the funny part. I think we succeeded.

SF: I think that's why people like it. The national press has been really good; and I think it's because there's an actual story there. It's not just a bunch of blackouts and gags.

scr(i)pt: *What's in your future—what are you working on?*

SF: Rehab. *We're The Millers*. We're getting that going. We're doing rewrites with the director now, with New Line. The director is Peter Cattaneo, the guy who directed *The Full Monty*. It's his first Hollywood feature.

BF: So, we're really excited about that, and we really like his ideas for the movie. We're doing his notes right now, and then we're going to go out to actors. Hopefully, they'll start filming it this summer. It was the first movie we wrote, and it's really close to us.

scr(i)pt: *It was a spec script you had written?*

SF: Yes. It was optioned four or five years ago, and then nobody wanted to make it because it deals with narcotics and it's R-rated.



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scr(i)pt: *Funny stuff.*

SF: Exactly, that's exactly it. Off the heat of *Crashers*, we were able to get this made. So, it's good for us. If we can do a mainstream film and then two or three non-mainstream films, we'd be happy.

scr(i)pt: *Do you have any advice for writers trying to break into comedy?*

BF: You've just got to write that great spec.

SF: You've got to write one great piece of material. Write what you're passionate about, don't write what you think will sell. We knew at the time that *We're The Millers* was not something we were going to sell, but it gained us entry into the film business. It was optioned for a very little amount of money, and then nothing happened with it.

scr(i)pt: *And now look, you pull it out of the drawer and off it goes.*

SF: Exactly.

BF: Yes, and in fact, there were people who told us not to even go out with it because there's no chance of selling it, so

you don't want to do that. But—we got a lot of attention and so many meetings and so much interest.

SF: Assignments.

BF: I think one of the reasons we were able to sell *Wedding Crashers* is because people liked *We're The Millers* so much. I'd definitely jump in and back what Steve said: You write something you believe in. While we were trying to think of ideas, we would take these long drives down to Mexico because for a while we were really interested in Mexico. We crossed the border and, inevitably, there was some guy with long hair being pulled over in a beat-up VW bus, having his van searched and getting arrested.

SF: We're like, "Good God, clean it up!" That's how we thought of the idea for *We're The Millers*. Hire a fake family, get a motor home and clean up your act.

BF: Our guy hires a stripper, two runaways, and rents a Winnebago—"cleans it up."

scr(i)pt: *That's funny. You mentioned you were going to crash a wedding this summer?*

SF: We're supposed to crash a wedding with a guy from *Time Magazine*. Also, we have to crash it successfully because it'll look silly in *Time Magazine* if the guys who wrote a film about crashing weddings can't successfully crash a wedding. Potentially, it's a Gordian knot. **(i)**

Visit Weddingcrashersmovie.com for more info on the film.

KATE McCALLUM is Los Angeles-based writer/producer/consultant currently working with writer/producer Michael Chernuchin in development at NBC Universal. She founded The Center For Conscious Creativity and will be co-producing a conference in October on New Story Paradigm: Writersconference.com. Contact her at Consciouscreativity.com.

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