

NEW YORK

The Boy Who Wouldn't Be King

A son who craves his father's love. A father who believes in his own immortality. The intimacy that rocked the Murdoch dynasty.

By **Steve Fishman** Published Sep 11, 2005



Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch in 1999.
(Photo: Photo-illustrations by Scott Darrow;
Andrew Murray/Rex USA)

In late July, Lachlan Murdoch, who is 34, took a flight to Australia. He did this in his capacity as deputy chairman and chief officer of News Corp., the media empire assembled by his father, Rupert, who is 74. In addition to his important title as chairman of the company everyone knew, the person Rupert had designated

to run the company from Sydney, Lachlan put in a call to his dad. Lachlan refers to him, even in business settings, as "Dad." Lachlan kept in touch with his vast kingdom via frequent phone calls. For most of Lachlan's adult life, few workdays passed without Lachlan calling his dad about some business matter. Mostly, Lachlan looked forward to these calls. Working closely with his dad was one of the job's pleasures. Lately, though, the calls had shifted, an unhappy one. Something unarticulated had been building between father and son, creating a strain. Lachlan felt it keenly.

On the phone, the two at first chatted genially about the company's Australian papers, of which Lachlan was now chairman. Australia was one of the places Rupert was born there, and Lachlan called it his spiritual home. The newspaper business that Rupert grew News Corp., now worth some \$55 billion, out of a single Australian paper; Lachlan's assignment had been to help manage the Australian papers.

Then, unexpectedly, Rupert changed subjects. He brought up the company's 35 TV stations in those as well, along with the New York *Post* and HarperCollins. As Lachlan learned, Rupert had just met with the CEO of Rupert's beloved Fox News, had grabbed a minute with the boss. Lachlan knew that Rupert adored Ailes, with whom he shared an affinity for hard-right politics. Also, Ailes was Rupert's genius, the guy who had CNN on the run. Ailes liked to hatch programming ideas for Lachlan's group. The latest brainstorm was a news-based police series tentatively called *Crime Line*. Lachlan resisted. He ran the stations, and he'd decided to hold off on *Crime Line* for a few months. It was a percent right decision if you want to save tens of millions of dollars," Lachlan told his staff.

But Ailes had made a little fuss. "It's a whinge," Lachlan called it, using the Australian term for a complaint. "The show?" Ailes asked Rupert.