

Baby Face and Mr. Freeze

Holy superentrepreneurs! Will Ellison and Grove take over the world? BY MARK WILLIAMS

The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison: Inside Oracle Corporation

By Mike Wilson
385 pages, \$25
William Morrow

Inside Intel: Andy Grove and the Rise of the World's Most Powerful Chip Company

By Tim Jackson
424 pages, \$24.95
E.P. Dutton

FOR technobiz junkies who can't get enough stories about Larry Ellison's unflagging self-love, Mike Wilson's *The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison* is a savory dish.

Unfortunately, the author's customary turf obviously isn't Silicon Valley. Given publishers' schedules, the omission of this past year's Apple maneuverings is perhaps tolerable. But it's manifestly inadequate to write, say, that Farzad Dibachi oversees Oracle's new media division, when Mr. Dibachi founded Diba in October 1995 and now works for Sun. The book also suffers from many cumbersome attempts, including an epigraph from *Citizen Kane*, to compare Mr. Ellison to historical or fictional figures. Give the man credit for being his own creation.

On the positive side, Mr. Wilson is good at telling us just how much Mr. Ellison is his own best product. He's dug through the early years. To know that our billionaire is 53 is to be impressed by Mr. Ellison's good genes, plastic surgery, and will to live out his idealized

self-vision. To learn he was born to an unwed teenager in Brooklyn, was dumped on a Chicago aunt, attended two universities without graduating, then bounced around California till he was 32 is to confront Mr. Ellison's heroic ability to re-imagine life. He's come a long way since then: one Mormon employee believed that, since Oracle's relational database served the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' efforts to posthumously baptize all humankind, Mr. Ellison was "in some way an instrument of God." Mr. Ellison, presumably, would agree.

Nevertheless, the facts contradict Mr. Wilson's chief claim that Mr. Ellison is an enigma. HERRING readers will recognize the type: a smart, energetic character who's always blowing smoke and pushing some new angle. In smaller times and places, such people either fizzle badly or finish by running the town's biggest car dealership.

Mr. Ellison, smarter and larger than most, ended up in Silicon Valley. His statements of wonder at being America's fifth-richest man ring true; he seems fascinated by his life's adventure. Really, it's pleasantly reassuring that such a guy could rise so high in the unique confluence of energies and events that the Valley has been.

Executive power

Mr. Ellison is reassuring, certainly, by comparison with Andy Grove. To single out one difference: Mr. Ellison is habitually tardy; Mr. Grove, predictably, is as precise as a chronometer. And when people make

him late, he resents it. Consider this scene, depicted in Tim Jackson's *Inside Intel*, in which Mr. Grove brandishes a piece of wood the size of a baseball bat, the end "encased in a protective glove of the kind used inside Intel's fabs, middle finger extended in an obscene gesture," and slams it on a conference-room table, "shouting at the top of his lungs, 'I don't ever, ever want to be in another meeting with this group that doesn't start and end when it's scheduled.'" On a separate occasion, Grove bawls out one of his most senior managers: "You're wasting my time. All I have in this world is

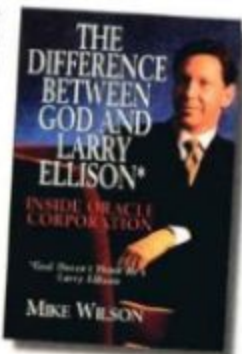
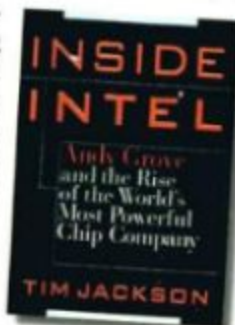
fucking time. Get out!"

But if *Inside Intel* is in part a slam job, it is also in awe of its subject. Mr. Jackson invokes the inscription on Sir Christopher Wren's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral: "If you seek his monument, look around you." In the same vein, he writes that Mr. Grove's legacy is "visible throughout the world, in hundreds of millions of computers powered by Intel processors."

Steel inside

In 1971 Intel produced the first computer on a chip. Soon after, Gordon Moore predicted that chip capacity would double every 18 months: to remain an industry leader, the company would have to outpace competitors' innovations by always developing the next generation of chips to make its current product obsolete. If the micro-processor is actually the 20th century's most important invention, and if for a quarter-century Intel has dominated its industry, then the company is in fact an entity of world-historical proportions. Intel is not only much more profitable than Microsoft, Mr. Jackson points out; it's more profitable than all of its own customers combined.

But Mr. Jackson raises some troubling questions about the company Mr. Grove has fashioned. What does Intel's supremacy necessitate? For one, it's in an industry where venerable Texas Instruments sometimes boasts about making patent litigation its greatest profit center. In 1981, Mr.



Jackson reports, Mr. Grove had already demanded that Intel's legal department initiate a minimum of two lawsuits per quarter. Using lawyers to deny competitors market share increasingly became a strategy; similarly, legal measures have been threatened against resigning employees who *might* start companies or aid competitors.

Indeed, rough treatment of employees appears to be company policy. Yes, Intel has enriched many of its workers; it extended stock options to all employees after disbursing payouts and profit sharing of \$820 million in 1997. But at the same time its Ranking and Rating guidelines direct managers to weed out the bottom-performing 10 percent. Former and current employees of Intel have a Web site (www.igc.apc.org/faceintel) containing quotes from Mr. Grove ("Nobody owes you a career"), tracking dismissal suits, and alleging ageism, racism, and stress-related suicides.


Mr. Jackson, expecting cooperation on a

straightforward business book, discovered that management was covertly instructing people not to talk. He confronted one Intel consultant named in a lawsuit against Intel as violating the law at the company's behest; this man, having first explained that Intel had threatened to terminate its dealings with him if he spoke to Mr. Jackson, then responded only through a lawyer.

Only the paranoid survive

More disturbing was Robert Westervelt, a former FBI employee who answered an Intel ad for a security officer. Mr. Westervelt claims he was assigned to tidy up a sting operation against Malaysian black market chip dealers that had backfired. After objecting that the cleanup measures were illegal, he says, he was fired. He returned to America with the story that, in retaliation, Intel tried to frame him as a drug trafficker—a hanging charge in Malaysia. It seems an incredible claim, but Mr. Westervelt had tapes of conversations

with Intel employees and enough documentation to convince a former boss at Levi Strauss. Today, having settled for an undisclosed sum, he lives in Nevada, stays armed, and believes Intel might kill him.

Is Mr. Westervelt crazy? Perhaps. But no one should underestimate Mr. Grove's toughness. In 1999 Intel introduces Merced; with this 64-bit architecture, the projected curve of the microprocessor's growth becomes almost vertical. Andy Grove—who, as András Gróf, hid from the Nazis; scavenged for food after the Soviets invaded; and, legend has it, threw Molotov cocktails at Red Army tanks in the streets of Budapest—would probably consider it weak-minded to believe edifices of Intel's scale were ever constructed without some ruthlessness. Cathedrals, after all, were built by whole communities over generations—and a few workers inevitably fell or were crushed during the effort. 

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