



The Accidental Zillionaire: Demystifying Paul Allen

By Laura Rich



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The first in-depth look at one of the world's richest-and most secretive-businessmen

Though his wealth is certainly no secret, the world's fourth richest man remains an enigma. Paul Allen made his fortune as Bill Gates's partner in Microsoft, supplemented it with questionable, though often profitable, venture capital schemes, and has since invested his wealth in a widely divergent list of interests. He owns the NBA's Portland Trailblazers and the NFL's Seattle Seahawks. Among hundreds of smaller ventures, he is a primary stakeholder in the film production company DreamWorks SKG and formerly held a large piece of the widely despised Ticketmaster monopoly. Dubbed the "Accidental Zillionaire" by Wired magazine, Allen has often appeared to be a bumbler who succeeded primarily through luck and by coopting the visionary ideas of others. In *The Accidental Zillionaire*, Laura Rich, one of the foremost chroniclers of the Internet economy, unravels the secret Paul Allen, his inner motivations, his vision, and his personality. She tells Allen's story from his days as a fledgling computer geek in suburban Washington state, to his role in founding the world's largest software company, to his battle with cancer, to his sycophantic flirtation with Hollywood and its brightest stars. Paul Allen is a man of various interests and passions, but few if any know him well. *The Accidental Zillionaire* for the first time reveals the inner workings of a towering figure in the worlds of technology, business, sports, and entertainment.

Laura Rich (Los Angeles, CA) is a former writer for *The Industry Standard*, *Adweek*, and *Inside Media*. She currently covers the world of digital entertainment for *Entertainment Weekly*, *Fortune*, and *The Hollywood Reporter*. She penned *The Standard*'s popular "Rich List" report and has reported on Paul Allen for years.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Everyone knows about Bill Gates, the boy-wonder founder of Microsoft and the planet's richest citizen. Although less well known, Paul Allen helped make Gates's good fortunes possible, and he's certainly worth study for his mistakes just as much as his many successes.

Enter former *Industry Standard* reporter Laura Rich, who does little to demystify Allen the man, but paints a useful portrait all the same. Rich takes readers through Allen's career as an early Gates ally, a technically savvy man who first saw the possibilities of DOS, the operating system that drove a big chunk of the personal computer market, and launched several other software enterprises. Although he left Microsoft owing to illness in 1983 (according to Rich, Gates has behaved badly toward him ever since), Allen is still a major shareholder and has amassed a personal fortune that dwarfs the GNPs of whole nations. As Rich observes, Allen has put this money to good use as "technology's archangel," but has also managed to lose staggering sums in misguided ventures--some too far ahead of their time, some just plain wacky.

Those missteps have earned Allen the sobriquet used in Rich's title. Though carelessly written and full of unhelpful asides ("Software is a language, hardware is more technical"), her book provides ample evidence for both why the name fits and why Allen, a visionary and man of action, merits respect. --*Gregory McNamee*

Review

&for the first time reveals the inner workings of a towering figure in the worlds of technology, sports, and entertainment& -- *Computer Consultant, April/May 2003*

&questions Allen's patchy business track record since leaving Microsoft and details his billionaire lifestyle& -- *Business Eye (Northern Ireland), April 2003*

"a cutting new biography" (*Newsweek*, February 3, 2003)

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"...questions Allen's patchy business track record since leaving Microsoft -- and details his billionaire lifestyle..."(*Business Eye (Northern Ireland), April 2003*)

"...Rich has finally presented a balanced view of Allen's achievements..." (M2 Best Books, 3 February 2003)

"a cutting new biography" -- *Newsweek, February 3, 2003*

...for the first time reveals the inner workings of a towering figure in the worlds of technology, sports, and entertainment... -- *Computer Consultant, April/May 2003*

...questions Allen's patchy business track record since leaving Microsoft and details his billionaire lifestyle... -- *Business Eye (Northern Ireland), April 2003*

From the Inside Flap

From humble beginnings as the son of a working-class family in suburban Washington state to one of the world's richest men, Paul Allen's life story reads like the American dream come true. But if Allen's story is as familiar to us as any rags-to-riches tale, Allen himself has remained a curious enigma.

As cofounder of Microsoft, Allen banked billions while still a young man. Since then, he's invested in a massive array of both high-tech and more traditional interests—he owns the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers and the NFL's Seattle Seahawks and is a primary stakeholder in the film production company DreamWorks SKG, among other investments. Dubbed the "Accidental Zillionaire" by Wired magazine, he's often seen as a quixotic figure who succeeds primarily through luck and by investing in the visionary ideas of others. But even his harshest critics would find it hard to bet against him. Today, Allen's money—if not his personality—casts a long shadow over the intertwined worlds of technology, business, sports, and entertainment.

In *The Accidental Zillionaire*, Laura Rich, one of the foremost chroniclers of the Internet economy, unravels the secret Paul Allen, his inner motivations, his vision, and his personality. She follows Allen from his days as a teen computer geek, to his role in founding the world's largest software company, to his battle with Hodgkin's disease, to his odd flirtation with Hollywood. Paul Allen is a man of varied interests and passions, but few, if any, know him well. This book, for the first time, reveals the inner workings of a figure whose significance is often overlooked.

The collaboration between Gates and Allen has been well documented. But for all of Microsoft's success—and as big a part as Allen played in that success—his contribution to the software behemoth has often been downplayed. Allen remains a shadowy figure while Gates hogs the limelight. Though their relationship has been examined in detail, Allen himself has received scant attention.

Cutting through the mythological tenor of much of what passes for the history of Microsoft and its founders, *The Accidental Zillionaire* reveals Allen as more than merely "Bill Gates's partner," but as a man whose brilliance and subterranean influence has had a profound and far-reaching impact on modern America.

Users Review

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