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The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison : *God Doesn't Think He's Larry Ellison

By Mike Wilson



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Larry Ellison started the high-flying tech company Oracle with \$1,200 in 1977 and turned it into a billion-dollar Silicon Valley giant. If Bill Gates is the tech world's nerd king, Ellison is its Warren Beatty: racing yachts, buying jets, and romancing beautiful women. His rise to fame and fortune is a tale of entrepreneurial brilliance, ruthless tactics, and a constant stream of half-truths and outright fabrications for which the man and his company are notorious.

Investigative reporter Mike Wilson, with access to Ellison himself and more than 125 of his friends, enemies, and former Oracle employees, has created an eye-opening, utterly fascinating portrayal of a Silicon Valley success story ... filled with the stuff that dreams and cultural icons are made of.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

It seems like all of the biggest names in the computer industry are getting the celebrity bio treatment these days. But no corporate CEO deserves it more than Larry Ellison, the charismatic head of Oracle Corp. This isn't your standard, dry, "learn-from-his-example" type of life. It's not that Ellison's life doesn't offer the same lessons in hard-won business success as some of his colleague's, because it certainly does. It's just vastly more entertaining.

In *The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison*, author Mike Wilson delivers a fascinating and genuinely interesting portrayal of Silicon Valley's most notorious bad boy, constructed from hundreds of interviews with friends, colleagues, and those unfortunate enough to stand in Ellison's way. There are plenty of behind-the-scenes stories of the growth and worldwide success of Oracle, which Ellison founded in 1977. Plus, there's plenty of the good stuff: tales of Ellison's truly fast-lane lifestyle, filled with big boats, beautiful women, and celebrity friends. While this book probably won't transform you into a fan of Ellison's, you will be grateful for a chance to observe him--from a safe distance.

The punchline is "God doesn't think he's Larry Ellison," of course.

From Kirkus Reviews

An authorized biography of Oracle's founder and brash billionaire leader. Ellison, the adopted son of a Jewish couple from Chicago, seems to specialize in reinventing himself. By all accounts, he grew up on middle-class South Shore Drive, but he has told reporters that he lived in the South Side ghetto. He was an uninspired student who never received a college degree but would maintain something of an obsession with the University of Chicago and imply he had an advanced degree in physics. Ellison is also an indifferent student of language but has arranged his home with all the trappings of a Japanese lord, and a few boats and helicopters to boot. These grand inconsistencies--delightful to some, horribly irritating to others, including many former employees--go a long way to explaining Ellison's unbelievable success at marketing his Oracle database software, used by thousands of companies. One employee, a devout Mormon named Rick Bennett, even considered his ubiquitous software akin to "an instrument of God" and believed Ellison pivotal to modern-day Mormonism. Wilson, an investigative reporter for the St. Petersburg Times, wisely focuses much of the attention on Ellison's one-sided feud with Bill Gates (who views Ellison as something of a gadfly but doesn't mention his name at all in his book, *The Road Ahead*) and documents his obsession nicely. He also does a fair job of explaining Ellison's vision for the NC, an inexpensive computer that provides quick access to the Internet and stores all of its software on a network server, rather than on a hard drive. While some in the computer business see the NC as the future computer for schools, many others see it as a \$500 empty box and a poor attempt to topple Microsoft. While the title is the funniest line of the book, this is an engaging, humanizing look at a Silicon Valley megalomaniac. (8 pages b&w photos) -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

Mike Wilson, an investigative reporter and feature writer for *The St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*, has done his craft proud in *The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison*. Through interviews with more than 100 of Ellison's friends and enemies, as well as Ellison himself, Wilson has unearthed a fascinating amount of detail about the personal and corporate life of the Oracle founder. The author paints a portrait of someone entranced with himself, yet insecure; with the drive and ambition to build a company like Oracle, yet so

deeply flawed that he almost destroyed his creation through carelessness and arrogance.

However, the treatment of Oracle technology is rather simplistic, obviously meant to appeal to a general audience. There is also little insight into the culture of Silicon Valley and how it contributed to Oracle's initial rise. Though Wilson has collected a mound of information about Ellison, his relationships and Oracle's ascent, he leaves the reader to sort it all out. The author often presents two or more differing versions of an incident--one from an acquaintance, one from Ellison--the implication being that Ellison is the one who is stretching the truth. But most of the time the conclusion is left to the reader. -- *Upside, Karen Southwick*

Wilson paints Ellison as a randy sexist, an egomaniacal prevaricator as calculating in his personal relationships as he is in his business dealings. But Ellison is no cartoon character, and Wilson is careful to portray his more likeable side, too. -- *The New York Times Book Review, Katie Hafner*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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