Dealers of Lightning: Xerox PARC and the Dawn of the Computer Age

Michael A. Hiltzik

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Dealers of Lightning: Xerox PARC and the Dawn of the Computer Age Michael A. Hiltzik *Dealers of Lightning* is the riveting story of the legendary Xerox PARC--a collection of eccentric young inventors brought together by Xerox Corporation at a facility in Palo Alto, California, during the mind-blowing intellectual ferment of the seventies and eighties. Here for the first time Michael Hiltzik, a correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times,* reveals in piercing detail the true story of the extraordinary group that aimed to bring about a technological dawn that would change the world--and succeeded.

Based on extensive interviews with the scientists, engineers, administrators, and corporate executives who lived the story, *Dealers of Lightning* takes the read on a journey from PARC's beginnings in a dusty, abandoned building at the edge of the Stanford University campus to its triumph as a hothouse of ideas that spawned not only the first personal computer, but the windows-style graphical user interface, the laser printer, much of the indispensable technology of the Internet, and a great deal more. It shows how and why Xerox, despite its willingness to grant PARC unlimited funding and the responsibility for developing breakthroughs to keep the corporation on the cutting edge of office technology, remained forever unable to grasp (and, consequently, exploit) the innovations that PARC delivered--and it details the increasing frustration of the original PARC scientists, many of whom would go on to build their fortunes upon the very ideas Xerox so rashly discarded.

More than just a riveting historical narrative, *Dealers of Lightning* brings to life an unforgettable cast of characters. Among them:

Bob Taylor--the preacher's son from rural Texas who would be considered a prophet by some and a cantankerous egomaniac by others, whose fearless (and feared) leadership of a team of computer renegades made them the heroes of the embryonic Silicon Valley;

Jack Goldman--the Xerox chief scientist who convinced the stolid corporation to stake tens of millions of dollars on PARC while warning that the investment might not pay off for years--if it paid off at all;

Alan Kay--PARC's creative and philosophical soul, who suffered years of ridicule for envisioning a computer that could be tucked under the arm yet would contain the power to store books, symphonies, letters, poems, and drawings--until he arrived at Palo Alto and met the people who would build it; and

Steve Jobs--who, aided by Xerox's indifference to PARC's most momentous inventions, staged a daring raid to obtain the technology that would end up at the heart of the Macintosh: the machine that for a time helped Apple dominate an explosive new market.

Dealers of Lightning is an unprecedented look at the ideas, the inventions, and the individuals that propelled Xerox PARC to the frontier of technohistory--and the corporate machinations that almost prevented it from achieving greatness.

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