



The New New Thing : A Silicon Valley Story

By Michael Lewis

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The New New Thing : A Silicon Valley Story By Michael Lewis

In the weird glow of the dying millennium, Michael Lewis sets out on a safari through Silicon Valley to find the world's most important technology entrepreneur, the man who embodies the spirit of the coming age. He finds him in Jim Clark, who is about to create his third, separate, billion-dollar company: first Silicon Graphics, then Netscape-which launched the Information Age-and now Healtheon, a startup that may turn the \$1 trillion healthcare industry on its head.

Despite the variety of his achievements, Clark thinks of himself mainly as the creator of Hyperion, which happens to be a sailboat . . . not just an ordinary yacht, but the world's largest single-mast vessel, a machine more complex than a 747. Clark claims he will be able to sail it via computer from his desk in San Francisco, and the new code may contain the seeds of his next billion-dollar coup.

On the wings of Lewis's celebrated storytelling, the reader takes the ride of a lifetime through this strange landscape of geeks and billionaires. We get the inside story of the battle between Netscape and Microsoft; we sit in the room as Clark tries to persuade the investment bankers that Healtheon is the next Microsoft; we get queasy as Clark pits his boat against the rage of the North Atlantic in winter. And in every brilliant anecdote and character sketch, Lewis is drawing us a map of markets and free enterprise in the twenty-first century.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Michael Lewis was supposed to be writing about how Jim Clark, the founder of Silicon Graphics and Netscape, was going to turn health care on its ear by launching Healtheon, which would bring the vast majority of the industry's transactions online. So why was he spending so much time on a computerized yacht, each feature installed because, as one technician put it, "someone saw it on *Star Trek* and wanted one just like it?"

Much of *The New New Thing*, to be fair, *is* devoted to the Healtheon story. It's just that Jim Clark doesn't do startups the way most people do. "He had ceased to be a businessman," as Lewis puts it, "and become a conceptual artist." After coming up with the basic idea for Healtheon, securing the initial seed money, and hiring the people to make it happen, Clark concentrated on the building of *Hyperion*, a sailboat with a 197-foot mast, whose functions are controlled by 25 SGI workstations (a boat that, if he wanted to, Clark could log onto and steer--from anywhere in the world). Keeping up with Clark proves a monumental challenge--"you didn't interact with him," Lewis notes, "so much as hitch a ride on the back of his life"--but one that the author rises to meet with the same frenetic energy and humor of his previous books, *Liar's Poker* and *Trail Fever*.

Like those two books, *The New New Thing* shows how the pursuit of power at its highest levels can lead to the very edges of the surreal, as when Clark tries to fill out an investment profile for a Swiss bank, where he intends to deposit less than .05 percent of his financial assets. When asked to assess his attitude toward financial risk, Clark searches in vain for the category of "people who sought to turn ten million dollars into one billion in a few months" and finally tells the banker, "I think this is for a different ... person." There have been a lot of profiles of Silicon Valley *companies* and the way they've revamped the economy in the 1990s--*The New New Thing* is one of the first books fully to depict the sort of man that has made such companies possible. --Ron Hogan

From Publishers Weekly

While it purports to look at the business world of Silicon Valley through the lens of one man, that one man, Jim Clark, is so domineering that the book is essentially about Clark. No matter: Clark is as successful and interesting an example of Homo siliconus as any writer is likely to find. Lewis (*Liar's Poker*) has created an absorbing and extremely literate profile of one of America's most successful entrepreneurs. Clark has created three companies: Silicon Graphics, Netscape (now part of America Online) and Healtheon. Each valued at more than \$1 billion by Wall Street. Lewis was apparently given unlimited access to Clark, a man motivated in equal parts by a love of the technology he helps to create and a desire to prove something to a long list of people whom he believes have done him wrong throughout his life (especially his former colleagues at Silicon Graphics). As Lewis looks at the various roles of venture capitalists, entrepreneurs and programmers and at how these very different mindsets fit together in the anatomy of big deals, he gives readers a sense of how the Valley works. But the heart of the book remains Clark, who simultaneously does everything from supervise the creation of what may be the world's largest sloop to creating his fourth company (currently in the works). Lewis does a good job of putting Clark's accomplishments in context, and if he is too respectful of Clark's privacy (several marriages and children are mentioned but not elaborated on), he provides a detailed look at the professional life of one of the men who have changed the world as we know it. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Acclaimed journalist Lewis does for Silicon Valley in the Nineties what his previous best seller, *Liar's Poker*, did for Wall Street in the Eighties. The book is threefold in scope. First, it offers an insightful look at the life and career of Dr. Jim Clark, the eccentric but brilliant visionary who thus far has created three multi-billion-dollar ground-breaking enterprises--Silicon Graphics, Netscape, and Healtheon. Second, it gives an insider's look at how the concept of the "new new thing" has been translated into an actionable product by key players in the game. Finally, it presents a social history of Silicon Valley, which has become the primary driver for worldwide social, economic, and political change. Although a little slow at times, this book is a great read and tells a compelling story. Highly recommended for both academic and public libraries.

---Norman B. Hutcherson, *Beale Memorial Lib., Bakersfield, CA*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daisy Richardson:

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