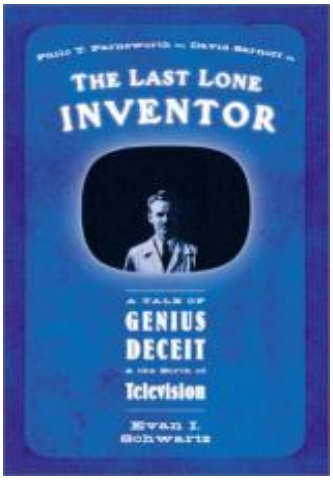
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The Last Lone Inventor: A Tale of Genius, Deceit, and the Birth of Television

by Evan I. Schwartz



About the Book

In a story that is both of its time and timeless, Evan I. Schwartz tells a tale of genius and greed, innocence and deceit, and corporate arrogance versus independent brilliance. In other words, the very qualities that have made this country--for better or for worse--what it is.

Many men have laid claim to the title "The Father of Television," but Philo T. Farnsworth is the true genius behind what may be the most influential invention of our time. Farnsworth ended up a footnote in history yet he was the first to demonstrate an electronic process for scanning, transmitting and receiving moving images, a discovery that changed the way we live.

Growing up on a small farm in Idaho, Farnsworth was fascinated by anything scientific, especially the newest thing on the market -- radio. Wouldn't it be even more miraculous to project images along with the sound? Driven by his obsession, Farnsworth found a local philanthropist willing to fund his dream. By the age of twenty, in 1926, Farnsworth was operating his own laboratory above a garage in San Francisco and filing his first patent applications. The resulting publicity brought him to the attention of David Sarnoff, the celebrated founder of the NBC radio network, whose own RCA laboratories soon began investigating -- without much initial success -- a way to transmit a moving image. Determined to control television the way he monopolized radio -- by owning all the royalty producing patents -- Sarnoff, from the lofty heights of his office in a New York skyscraper, devised a plan to steal credit for Farnsworth's designs and the two sides ended up in patent court.

Vividly written, and based on original research, including interviews with surviving Farnsworth family members, **The Last Lone Inventor** tells the story of the epic struggle between two equally passionate adversaries and how their clash symbolized a turning point in the culture of creativity.

Discussion Guide

1. How do you think Philo Farnsworth felt as a teenage farm boy in Idaho when he brainstormed the principle for electronic television? How do you think he felt when he confided to his father and his father said to keep the idea quiet because "everyone already thinks you're a little odd." What drove this kid to pursue his idea so passionately? Have you ever had a new idea that no one around you would understand? What did you do about it?

2. Why did David Sarnoff feel so compelled to fabricate some of the early events of his life and make them more dramatic? Was he truly a visionary who foresaw the future possibilities of broadcasting before anyone else? What do you think of his tactics for rising through the ranks at RCA and for advancing the interests of RCA in the communications industry? Were his actions simply typical of what goes on in many corporations today?

3. Was Farnsworth lucky or unlucky? Was he fortunate to meet the people and raise the money he did? Or should he have been able to raise more money to fund such a revolutionary invention? Could he have achieved all he did without the efforts and loyalty of his wife Pem?

4. Was Farnsworth foolish? Was it unrealistic of him to try and go it alone and try to become the Thomas Edison of television? Should he have allowed television scientist Vladimir Zworykin to visit his laboratory for three days, knowing Zworykin could be a potential rival? Should Farnsworth have accepted the buyout offer from RCA's David Sarnoff and simply have gone to work at RCA Laboratories as a staff engineer like Zworykin?

5. Was Sarnoff foolish? Should he have offered more money to buy out Farnsworth and his patents? Would Sarnoff have been better off licensing Farnsworth's patents at the outset instead of fighting the inventor in patent court for years? Why did Sarnoff choose this more difficult route?

6. Why do you think Farnsworth disassociated himself from television just as television was sweeping the country? Why did he put all his efforts into his fusion research? Was it a mistake for him to switch to a new field of invention?

7. What are the parallels in the story that you see in our current time? Does RCA's antitrust troubles remind you of the plight of a certain modern day company? Are today's dominant corporations more or less arrogant than they were back then? What are the parallels between the early days of radio in the 1920s, the early days of television in the post-War era, and the early days of the Internet in the 1990s?

8. What is the significance of the Albert Einstein quote at the beginning of the book: "Anything that is truly great or inspiring is created in the mind of one individual laboring in freedom?" How does Farnsworth view Einstein, and what role does Einstein play in the story?

9. Do you think we will see a resurgence of lone inventors, in the mold of Bell, Edison, the Wright Brothers, and Farnsworth, or are famous independent inventors a thing of the past? How do new ideas come about in your company or in your industry? What kind of individuals come up with the best new ideas? How do you or others react to new ideas when you first learn of them?

10. What do you think was the most influential invention of the 20th century: the automobile, the airplane, the television, the computer, or something else? How do you justify your choice?

Author Bio

To write **The Last Lone Inventor**, Evan I. Schwartz spent two years researching the life stories of Philo T. Farnsworth and David Sarnoff. He interviewed surviving Farnsworth family members, including Farnsworth's 93-year-old widow, and he visited document archives in six states.

As a journalist, Evan has been covering information technology for 15 years. He is a former editor at BusinessWeek, where he covered software and digital media and was part of teams that produced 12 cover stories and won a National Magazine Award and a Computer Press Award. In recent years, he has written for *The New York Times*, *WIRED*, and MIT's Technology Review.

Evan's first book, titled **Webonomics**, published by Broadway Books, a division of Random House, has ranked as Amazon.com's #1 bestselling business book and was chosen as a finalist for two major awards: The Global Business Book Award as well as the Computer Press Award. International editions have been published in eight countries.

Evan's second book, **Digital Darwinism**, from the same publisher, also hit #1 on Amazon's business list shortly after its release, in June 1999. Now in its twelfth hardcover and first paperback printing in the U.S., it is available in the U.K., from Penguin, and has been translated into eight other languages. It too was named a finalist for the Computer Press Award for Non-Fiction Book of the Year.

Evan holds a B.S. in computer science from Union College in Schenectady, New York, and lives with his family in Brookline, Mass.

Critical Praise

"?Fascinating? A riveting American classic of independent brilliance versus corporate arrogance. I found it more fun than fiction."

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