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## **Book review by the Association of Strategic Planning USA / May 2016**



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### **Book Review: Big Boys, Big Egos**

**Reviewed by: John McGonagle**

**Joseph H.A.M. Rodenberg and Antoinette Rijsenbilt,  
Big Boys, Big Egos and Strategic Intelligence.  
Eburon Academic Publishers, Delft, the  
Netherlands, 2015, 243 pages/paper \$29.95**

Big Boys, Big Egos is a fascinating and important book for several reasons. First, it is one of the kind of collaborations that contribute to management studies. In this case, it is an experienced expert in strategic intelligence paired with an academic researcher that generates a thoughtful, yet practical investigation and analysis of strategic management.

The premise of the book is a deceptively simple one. It is that many of the most successful businesses need a narcissistic CEO to succeed. OK. But, there is a corollary, which came out of the academic research. That is that a CEO who is too narcissistic will usually take his or her firm down in flames. And the authors have both academic research and many case studies making their point. Of particular interest is their catalog of the characteristics of the CEO whose narcissism is "over the top". (Chapter 1.4)

If that were all, Big Boys, Big Egos would be well worth reading. But there is more. Rodenberg and Rijsenbilt point to European and US cases, naming names, to explore when and how boards of directors fail to control the excessive, dangerous narcissism – and why. However, they offer an ingenious and proven way to prevent or at least manage it. From my point of view, I would venture to say that if I saw an enterprise without the board approach and intelligence operations they advocate, I would wait for it to implode. It would probably not be a long wait.

This is a fascinating, detailed, and valuable work, adding to our working knowledge of strategic management, executive behavior, and strategic competitive intelligence.

John McGonagle is the Managing Partner of The Helicon Group, a competitive intelligence research, analysis and training firm, and the co-author or contributor to 16 books on competitive intelligence. A Meritorious award winner from Strategic & Competitive Intelligence Professionals, he served as chair or a member of ASP's Richard Goodman Strategic Planning Award committee from 2008 through 2016.

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