



Accidental Empires

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Robert X. Cringely details how the major fortunes were made in Silicon Valley by such hardware and software companies as Apple, Microsoft, Lotus, and Compaq. His subtitle, while not accurately describing the book's contents (there is little concerning foreign competition or dating habits), offers a clue about the nature of the book, which is not a business manual but rather a lively, irreverent look at the personal computer (PC) industry by the "gossip columnist" for INFOWORLD magazine.

Cringely calls the PC industry one of America's greatest success stories, even though it succeeded more or less by accident. Most of the people who founded the most successful companies were amateurs, he says, and most of them still are. Lack of business experience is not necessarily a flaw in this industry. Cringely describes how those who took risks, let their egos run rampant, and operated under rules that are not taught in business school (or no rules at all) often succeeded where the professional managers at IBM and elsewhere failed.

ACCIDENTAL EMPIRES is full of anecdotes about the major personalities in the PC industry. Cringely perhaps carries his personal analysis too far, explaining much of Steve Jobs' business behavior at Apple and NeXT, for example, by the fact that he was adopted. Technical developments receive just enough attention to keep them interesting and to support Cringely's conclusions and predictions for the future. Perhaps the most surprising prediction is that the mainframe computer industry will slump at the millennium as a result of the fact that changing the software to reflect the date change will be more expensive than buying new minicomputers and networks of PCs.

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