Clarion Review ★★★★★   **TECHNOLOGY**

The Limits of Strategy: Pioneers of the Computer Industry: Second Edition

Ernest von Simson
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Written by an industry insider, The Limits of Strategy *is an intriguing history of the evolution of computer technology.*

Ernest von Simson's *The Limits of Strategy* is a dense insider's history of the business, marketing, and strategic timeline of computer technology's evolution.

Von Simson takes a granular view of the computer industry as a whole, covering its most ardent and doomed purveyors. His book is philosophical in addressing how computer power morphed its way into people's everyday lives. As it goes through a series of engaging, detailed business pursuits and market pulse taking—and by documenting a number of prescient hunches, regrettable strategic follies, and several instances of the shortcomings of myriad CEOs—it comes to represent a thorough recounting of over seven decades' worth of the birth of the computer industry, leading toward its ubiquitous stranglehold on contemporary culture.

The text is hyperfocused when it comes to sharing details. It also benefits from the personal insights of von Simson and and his wife, researcher Naomi Seligman, who had front-row views in the industry's early days. And its second edition augments many of the conclusions of its first, complementing them with additional recollections about the foresight (or lack thereof) of the ballyhooed high-ranking executives who came and went from some of the industry's biggest companies. Indeed, it leaves few stones unturned, diving deep into the stories of industry titans, including executives from IBM, Microsoft, and Apple, as well as from companies that fizzled out, like Digital Equipment Corporation and Wang Laboratories. Some references are quite obscure, as with the book's coverage of National Cash Register.

Culled from copious notes taken during interviews with CEOs, visionary soon-to-be CEOs, and a smorgasbord of the major players of the computer industry's storied echelon, the text highlights what worked, what didn't, and why. It displays a keen eye for strategic missteps and ill-fated market considerations. It also evinces razor-sharp intuition about the personalities who seemed to be destined to lead the technology race into the future.

Humorous descriptions enliven the book's prose, which is elsewhere duly critical and teeming with intriguing tidbits. Indeed, its "byte"-sized factoids are ready-made for trivia nights. Homing in on the personalities behind the job titles, it also humanizes its subjects via intimate anecdotes that, considering the cutthroat nature of the fledgling computer business era whence they arrive, aren't always warm and fuzzy.

An intriguing insider's guide to the evolution of computer technology, *The Limits of Strategy* has smart insights and a story that, though you know the end as it exists today, still commands attention.

RYAN PRADO (December 28, 2023)

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