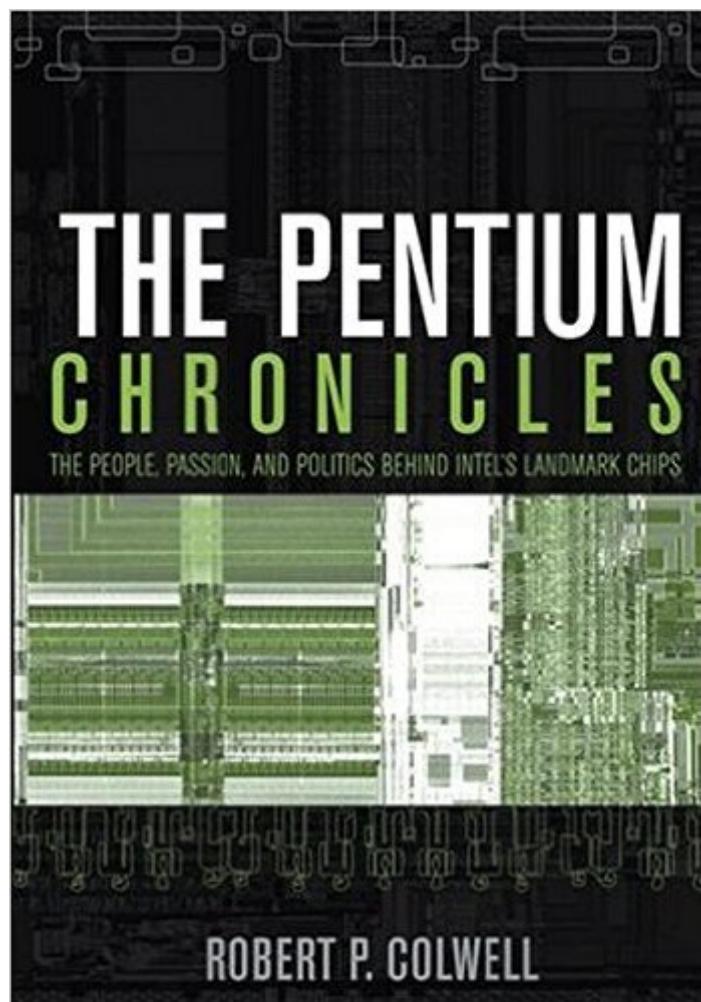


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The Pentium Chronicles: The People, Passion, And Politics Behind Intel's Landmark Chips



Synopsis

The Pentium Chronicles describes the architecture and key decisions that shaped the P6, Intel's most successful chip to date. As author Robert Colwell recognizes, success is about learning from others, and Chronicles is filled with stories of ordinary, exceptional people as well as frank assessments of "oops" moments, leaving you with a better understanding of what it takes to create and grow a winning product.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I rated this book as three stars because the title promised more than it delivered. Nevertheless, it is a very good book, especially for people who have to manage huge projects in complex technical areas. Colwell clearly is skilled in technology, and has tremendous insight and experience to convey. My expectations were different. Tracy Kidder's *Soul of a New Machine* created excitement and tension into the development of computers, at least as of the early 1980s. The machine was successful for Data General to some extent, but faded as a blip in history that few remember. Intel's P6, Colwell's baby, is totally the opposite, selling hundreds of millions of copies in multiple forms since its inception. Kidder spins magic about the development process. Colwell tells how to make it happen--no magic, just cleverness and grunt work. What I found most valuable were Colwell's methods for taking on this huge project. Quantify your goals, quantify the merits of each idea, and quantify your progress toward the goal. Without these measurements, you have no idea when you will finish and whether you will succeed when you get there. In a field where technology moves very quickly, the

difference between success and failure is not so much if you complete the job, but when you complete the job. Colwell pulls some punches because of corporate and personal sensitivities. He does not tell us very much about the P6 processor, but what is revealed is done skillfully in layman terms so that the nontechnical reader can follow the development.

If you are involved in the world of integrated circuits, or considering becoming involved, then you'd be crazy to pass up this book. It's no less than a first-hand account of how the golden age of Intel came to be, as well as how it came to a close. In the early 90's, the common wisdom in the CPU industry was that a buzzword-complete (out-of-order, superscalar, superpipelined, speculative execution) x86 was simply impossible to successfully execute, hence the smorgasboard of then-new competing RISC architectures. The book's author led the architecture development of the project that proved otherwise. What's truly astonishing about a project of this scale is the vast array of things that have to go right in order to prevent a catastrophe (or, as a colleague says, it's not the rocket science, it's the rock science). Even more amazing is how many things the P6 team fundamentally got right (at least according to my own 15 years of IC experience). I was also delighted to find simple and yet brilliant ideas that were new to me, such as assigning cubicles by overlaying the building floorplan with the chip floorplan. The parts of the book that I found most entertaining (from the outside looking in, that is) were descriptions of the naive attempts to replicate and exceed the success of the P6 project, largely by deprecating the very mechanisms that led to that success. A word of warning: If you don't already have a lot of experience with large projects, you'll probably have to resist the urge to disbelieve many of the anecdotes. Obstructing Pentium 4 engineers from knowing their own plan seems ridiculous, but I can assure you that in my years in the IC business, I've seen worse.

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