

Inside the Industry

News, Notes and Quotes From the Computer Entertainment Industry

Infocom's West Coast Move Stirs Controversy

The dismantling of **Infocom** as an east coast subsidiary of **Mediagenic** offers mixed signals regarding the future of the storytelling division. To many industry observers, moving **Infocom** to the Menlo Park headquarters of **Mediagenic** was inevitable. The failure of *Cornerstone*, the database produced by **Infocom**, necessitated an infusion of capital. The acquisition of the company which was once synonymous with interactive fiction became inevitable. **Infocom's** corporate functions were assimilated by **Mediagenic** in a gradual evolution designed to reduce overhead and streamline operations. In addition, **Infocom's** inability to get new products out in 1988, tremendous research and development costs in upgrading the development system, and technical snafus with regard to releasing MS-DOS SKUs during the initial roll-out of new products in 1989 took its toll on the viability of the Massachusetts subsidiary.

Herein lies the dispute. Sources inside **Infocom** believe that **Mediagenic** pulled the plug just when the money invested in graphics development (admittedly, more difficult and expensive to implement than the original projections) had started to pay off. Background sources suggest that the entire Mac II development system is paid for, but except for Marc Blank, there

is no real indication that it will be used. In addition, there are leaks about a completely new parser that may never be used. ZIL (Zork Implementation Language), the current development system, is functionally dead.

However, Rob Sears (General Manager for **Infocom**), insisted that it would have taken more than two years for the east coast subsidiary to recoup its losses. He noted the MS-DOS problems and suggested that the consolidation *might* not have been necessary if the IBM SKUs could have been released initially. Nevertheless, he has noted that Duncan Blanchard, a wizard Macintosh programmer, moved to the west coast to join **Mediagenic's** Technology Group. Duncan is allegedly working on a hybrid technology between ZIL and future storytelling projects.

Of the 24 people who were employed at the time of the east coast shutdown, twelve were asked to make the move to the west coast and five accepted. Of the five, Donald and Elizabeth Langosey are working on a hypercard story. Donald is a computer artist who has worked on some of the latest **Infocom** products and Elizabeth wrote two stories for the *Infocomics* series. Joe Ybarra, VP of Entertainment at **Mediagenic**, expressed great hope in the hypercard product, suggesting that it would be more of an adventure and less of a simple exploratory toy (like *Manhole* and *Cosmic Osmo*). The new direction in the company's approach to storytelling products was made clear when Ybarra suggested, "We cannot continue, in the marketplace,

living off products that take eight hours to learn to play well and up to 200 hours to complete."

Broderbund to Publish "Distinctive Software"

Gary Carlston (**Broderbund Software** Chairman) and Bill McDonagh (Executive Publisher of the Entertainment and Education Publishing Group) have announced a renewed commitment to entertainment publishing. Carlston noted, "We enjoy the game business. Our getting out temporarily was a result of some entertainment products that didn't fly, while we had products in other areas, like *Print Shop*, *Carmen Sandiego*, etc. that were doing extremely well."

The two executives announced that they have signed a long term agreement with **Distinctive Software, Inc.**, to jointly develop entertainment products. **Distinctive Software** is the British Columbia-based firm who developed *Test Drive*, *Grand Prix*, and others for **Accolade**.

Microprose Acquires British Telecomsoft

In May of 1989, **Microprose** acquired **British Telecomsoft**. In the past, **British Telecomsoft**

has marketed games like *Starglider*, *Carrier Command*, and *Guild of Thieves* under the **Rainbird** label. **Microprose** plans to market between six to twelve **Telecomsoft** products per year through their **Medalist International** division. The products will now carry a **MicroPlay** label. At least, six **Telecomsoft** products are expected to appear under the **MicroPlay** label prior to the end of 1989.

Electronic Arts Inks Lucasfilm and New World Pacts

Microprose is not the only major publisher to make major waves in distribution of late. **Electronic Arts Distribution** has added **New World Computing**, publishers of *Might and Magic* and *Might and Magic II*, and **Lucasfilm Games**, publishers of *Maniac Mansion*, *Battlehawks 1942*, and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* games to its lineup of Affiliated Labels.

Sierra Responds to Virus Report

The Financial Times of London and *The Daily Telegraph* of London have each reported that **International Data Security**, a London-based security consultant, has received several distressed calls from traders in the financial district. Each caller had been playing a pirated version of the first *Leisure Suit Larry* during lulls in their work schedules. Apparently, the pirate version contains a virus program that will destroy all the programs and data files on a user's hard disk. According to the story in *The Financial Times*, the virus had already struck computers in Switzer-

land and West Germany. **Sierra**, publisher of the game in the U.S., and **Activision U.K.** distributor of the game in Europe, both note that the original game did not contain the virus. The problem only exists on illegal copies of the game.

Origin Graduates from Broderbund

Broderbund Software and **Origin, Inc.** have announced an end to their affiliated label agreement. Terming the departure of the publisher of the *Ultima* series as a "graduation," both companies underscore the fact that the distribution/marketing agreement has worked well in the past and **Origin, Inc.** is moving onward toward a new identity as publisher of a full line

of titles. Robert Garriott, president of **Origin**, notes that since his brother Richard, a.k.a. Lord British, and Charles Beuche originally worked as developers for, then, **Sierra**, and moved on to an affiliate relationship with **Electronic Arts**, and finally, **Broderbund**, the company has learned from the best. Gary Carlston, chairman of **Broderbund**, reiterated best wishes during a brief light-hearted ceremony at the recent Consumer Electronics Show and indicated positive feelings about **Origin's** foray into full-service software publishing.

On-Line Games Are Proliferating

With the success of their new network game, *Sniper!*, based on the **TSR** board game of the same name, **Compuserve** now offers a

four player version of the game. Now, two players can team up against their favorite two foes for a true multi-player version of the game. Also, the service now provides a directory of modem game players which can be accessed by typing "Go Challenge." Opponents who play **Microsoft's** *Flight Simulator III*, **Interstel's** *Empire*, **Electronic Arts'** *Modem Wars*, and **Spectrum Holobyte's** *Falcon* may currently be located on-line and a directory for **EA's** *688 Attack Sub* is due to be added in the near future.

Meanwhile, on **GENie**, *Air Warrior*, the popular Macintosh, Amiga, and ST game designed by the **Kesmai Corporation**, has made the transition to the IBM world. The aerial combat simulation allows, at least, 25 players to engage in high-resolution graphic dogfights.

The game allows players to choose from vintage World War I and World War II aircraft running from Fokker Triplanes to B-17G Flying Fortresses.

Meanwhile, **Prodigy** (the joint-venture backed by IBM and Sears) has joined with **Broderbund** to feature an on-line version of *Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?* Each week, a mystery is placed on-line and readers who solve the case have their names listed on-line. Those with the very best scores are posted in the Acme Detective Agency Hall of Fame.

CGW On-line magazines or news stories can be found on **Compuserve** in the GameSig; on **PCLink**, **QuantumLink**, and **AppleLink** as *CGW Magazine*, on **Prodigy** with three news stories per week, and soon, with special features on **GENie**.

THE NEXT EMPIRE

...the *only* game that sends you fabulously detailed maps like this one, showing your fleet's sensor views *every turn* ...along with clear, complete stats on each starship you design, build, and maneuver *individually* using up to 21 different onboard systems ...plus status reports on starbases, probes and asteroids you control!

The Next Empire is a completely computer-moderated game, over 6 years in the making. Each universe is a *unique, complex* gaming environment populated with 21 alien players itching to blow the hulls off anyone who gets in their way!

- \$20.00 for set-up, manual, universe map and first two turns
- \$7.50 per turn; *no hidden fees or double turns*
- \$5.00 for manual only (credited against set-up fee if you play)
- *fast* game (two weeks per turn) or *slow* game (three weeks per turn)
- clear, concise rules; our complexity comes from *your gaming freedom*
- MasterCard or VISA also accepted

PLAY BY MAIL
PRINTOUTS
LIKE THIS
EVERY
TURN!

CYBORG
gamesSM



Recently voted #1 PBM
game in a nationwide
player magazine
survey!

Cyborg Games, Inc.

Department E2
P.O. Box 71019
Milwaukee, WI 53211
(414) 332-1966