

INSIDE GAMES & ENTERTAINMENT UPDATE

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From the Publishers:

Authors and other word-ripe folk are a commodity in short supply for Inside Games & Entertainment Update. If you enjoy computer and/or video games, know how to write complete sentences, understand and know how to meet editorial deadlines, then this is your opportunity to grow with our publication. We would definitely enjoy hearing from you if you would like to write for IG&EU. Please forward your name, email address OR contact phone number, and your background. Let us the systems you have available for your review use and the genre of the digital entertainments you enjoy. Thanks!--Hartley & Pattie Lesser

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[DISTILLATIONS: news and new products](#)

* COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT NEWS *

EARNINGS FOR ACCLAIM

For their Q1, which closed 11/30/95, Acclaim is reporting revenues of \$134 million. Net income was \$0.6 million, with earnings per share at \$0.01. In the previous year for the same

time period, earnings were \$164 million and net income \$15.9 million. Company officers state these nominal profits certainly did not meet company expectations. Lackluster performance is partially blamed on the change to new hardware platforms, slow retail sales during a bleak holiday season, price competition from more competitors, and retail product return policies.

FROM NY TO LA

The entire Activision licensing division is moving from New York to Los Angeles. This is seen as a move by the company to bring their properties more closely to other media centers. Now directing all licensing activities will be Eric Dandridge, just named as licensing director for the company. Before he joined his new company, Dandridge was the director of strategic planning and new business development at Motown Record Company, L.P.

SWEEPS FOR TICKETS

If you're interested in winning a grand prize of two season tickets to the pro or college football team of your choice in 1996, you might be interested in the Compton's NewMedia Sweepstakes. This promo is raise the level of awareness of this company's top CD-ROM titles. These include offerings like Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, Compton's Encyclopedia of American History and Compton's Reference Collection. All you have to do is fill out an entry form and make certain it arrives at Comptons on or before March 30, 1996. You don't have to buy anything. However, if you do purchase one of the 14 Compton's titles covered by this promo, a coupon inside that package will not only enter you into this sweeps, but also award you a free hat.

STARTUP TO OFFER MORPHING TITLES

Harber Brothers Productions just started operation and two children's CD-ROM series will debut this year. Featuring 3D rendering and morphing technology, they are KinderActive Musicals and KinderActive Minds. Targeted for children ages 3 to 8, the first title in the KinderActive Minds series will be Grandma's Morphabet Soup designed to teach early reading and learning skills. Children will find a complete 3D kitchen within which they can move and use objects and completely explore the environment. There's a 3D spelling wheel that, once the child selects the correct letter, morphs into an object or animal that begins with that letter. There's plenty of music as well as character development. Also on the agenda by Harber Brothers is the release of CDs and music tapes that will coincide with the software releases.

SOME CES UNVEILINGS

Digital entertainments have taken advantage of 3D technology for some time. Edutainment titles are now doing likewise. At the Winter CES last week in Las Vegas, several entertainment AND edutainment companies showed off their new 3D edutainment wares.

Bill Gates' Corbis company demo'd three new titles that include Critical Mass: America's Race to Build the Atomic Bomb; Paul Cezanne: Portrait of My World; and Volcanoes: Life on the Edge.

PowerHouse Entertainment, which is also doing some title work for IBM Multimedia Studio, is going to release Collision which is actually an arcade game with some cool live-action video inclusions this month. This is a racing destruction sim that has players smashing all sorts of opponent cars to win their way to a final battle with Spine. PowerHouse is also going to be

releasing The Jungle Book, a title for IBM, that'll reach retailer shelves soon which has players in search of the Monkey King's crown. The flow of action in PowerHouse titles, thanks to their proprietary technology, really makes the flow of the game unpredictable, all depending upon the player's actions and some cool, video instant-branching.

The Learning Company is offering a 3D medieval adventure for children ages 8 to 14 called Logic Quest, plus Interactive Math Journey which is the first in the company's Math Explorer Series of products. The latter title is for kids ages 6 to 9.

Sanctuary Woods presented Orion Burger. This is a humorous adventure game that involves aliens who are searching the universe for unintelligent life. When located, these parties are harvested for the aliens' food chain outlets. There are some strange and wacky characters in this offering.

For example, there's WizardWorks--this company is going to assemble three, hot 360-degree action games as a bundle for an SRP of \$19.95: Rise of the Triad: The Hunt Begins, Terminal Velocity and WarCraft.

* VIDEO GAME NEWS *

HIT TITLE IN SHORT SUPPLY

As you've probably already heard, times are tough for consumers who wish to purchase Nintendo's Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest. Many retailers are taking advance orders for this action game for the SNES. The shortages are serious, with only about one million copies available for distribution via an allocation process. Toys R Us, for example, will offer a free, 128-page player's guide for the game when DKC2 is pre-ordered through their store. Delivery is guaranteed by February 1st.

SEGA SOLIDIFYING SIGHTS

Still suffering a retailer backlash from the early release of their Saturn video console last year, Sega is doing all they can to mend fences as well as make viable their new Sega Soft joint venture and solidify product distribution. The Sega Soft products will see the first light of day sometime during Q3 and Q4 of this year--expect multiplayer capabilities to be strong components of these titles--with the PC and Saturn the primary systems and Internet hooks included. Overall, Sega expects a solid 30 internal titles to be developed during 1996, with another 25 Japanese internal titles becoming available for marketing in the U.S. Add in the third-party developments, and there could be nearly 180 titles for the Saturn this year in total.

\$25K WON BY 12-YEAR OLD

Sega recently held a Play To Win promo for their VectorMan, a video game for the company's Sega Genesis video console. The grand prize winner was to receive \$25,000 plus a trip to Sega HQ in the San Francisco Bay Area for a VIP tour, an award ceremony, the ability to create a home page for Sega Online, plus act in a TV commercial for Sega. All of these wonderful opportunities came true for Keolamanaokalahuinui "Keola" Kaula, a 12 year old who has been playing with his Sega Genesis for three years. He received a VectorMan cart for Christmas and the "You Win!" flashed on his TV screen when he succeeded in winning the game without using cheat codes. He then called the special phone number that appeared to register as a winner. Yet, for those interested in some of the other \$50,000 in prizes that remain, you don't have to buy anything to enter the contest. All you have to do is handwrite

your name, address, age and phone number on a postcard. Then, mail the postcard to Sega Play To Win Contest, P.O. Box 7531, Melville, N.Y. -- 11775-7531. Additional info can be obtained at the Sega WWW site at <http://www.segaoa.com> or at the VectorMan WWW site at <http://www.vectorman.com>.

** DIGITAL DELIGHTS **

3D GRAPHICS COSTS ASSAULTED

One of the problems with 3D graphics applications is the cost involved in acquiring and using software for geometry processing. Plus, many programs are just too darn slow to be of constant use. Mips Technologies has now developed a new 64-bit RISC chip that can accelerate this performance as well as reduce the cost. Called the R-5000, this chip is designed for Unix and Windows NT desktop systems and servers and comes in 272-pin PGA or BGA configuration. The company hopes this new design will result in volume availability in a price range that will be less than \$300 per chip. The chip was designed with OpenGL and VRML apps in mind. The R-5000 will offer high FPU performance plus the execution of two instructions per clock cycle in FP ops. Operating at 200 MHz, the R-5000 is capable of drawing 990,000 3D primitives per second. The first manufacturers of this 0.35-micron geometry chip will be Integrated Device Technology, NEC Electronics and NKK Corporation, all of whom are Mips licensees.

DVD COMPETITION HEATS UP

As manufacturer after manufacturer climbs aboard the Digital Video Disc (DVD) bandwagon, many are searching for a way to offset each other's initial marketing drives. Sony Corporation will coordinate their US activities with Sony Electronics, Inc., and plan their first DVD players release for Q3 and Q4 of this year. They hope to have as many as 50 software titles available with the players' release. Test manufacturing of DVD media is already underway in Japan and there will be a full MPEG2 encoding system set up for the company in California this year. Projections for DVD sell-through this year is about 500,000 units. By the third year, 2 million units are expected to be installed in the U.S.

DOLBY TECHNOLOGY LICENSED

Dolby Laboratories' AC-3(R) surround sound audio decoding technology has now been licensed by VLSI Technology for inclusion within their Digital Video Disc (DVD)-related product line. This technology enables the highest multichannel digital sound quality and enables VLSI to support this sound in silicon products for this marketplace. VLSI ICs for the digital video market will include AC-3 decoding for their customers who will be building cable TV set-top boxes, digital satellite systems, and DVD players.

FLOPPIES FOR INSTRUMENT STORES

On-demand digitized melodies will be something new from Yamaha Group. Recorded onto floppies, this music can be played on PCs equipped with a MIDI board as well as electric pianos and organs with automatic playing functions. Recording will take place at instrument stores throughout Japan where customers may select from some 6,000 popular and classical arrangements. The arrangement database will be expanded each month. Yamaha expects sales to reach 300 million yen for the first year this service is in operation.

* ONLINE STUFF *

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS FORMAT

For those using CompuServe's Enterprise Information Link(SM) information service, now available is Ziff-Davis Wire. Because EIL is Lotus Notes(R)-based, this format makes the collection of info on current technology trends easy to use. There will be two ZD Wire databases. Snapshots will offer summaries of articles that appear in MacWeek, Interactive Week and PC Week. Highlights will present the full content of around 10 articles each day.

Of additional good news for European CompuServe subscribers is the fact that the on-line service is totally negating their additional location surcharges. Perhaps this is in response to the launch of America Online in the United Kingdom with full 28.8 support, for that service does not charge subscribers a surcharge for non-metro access. CompuServe is also upgrading their access points to 28.8 bps where such is possible.

SITES START FOR SOFTWARE SLAMMIN'

Take 2,000 square feet of floor space, network 20 computers together, and you've got a digital world just ripe for head-to-head, real-time gaming. Called slam.site, gamers will pay \$12.50 for each mission and become involved in digital adventures for as many as 90 minutes. There will also be a virtual reality area that includes a virtual shopping mall, a retail store and Internet services. Yet-to-be released CD-ROM titles will also be previewable at these locations.

The founder and CEO of this attraction is Frank Westall and he indicates that three test slam.sites will be built for Los Angeles and Orange counties, to debut in April of this year. Sites will be networked to one another and when this plan reaches its final stages, more than 100 computers will be WANing together. Once this test is completed, as many as 50 more sites will be built across the United States.

** DEVELOPER DUMP **

HI-RES IMAGE BUSTER

Another new tool has been announced by Macromedia. This is Macromedia xRes 2.0, a tool for editing, painting and compositing high resolution images. This is a cross-platform application that also offers support for saving files in formats critical to Web authoring, such as PNG, GIF89 and progressive JPEG. Seen as a companion product to PhotoShop, files that range in size from 20 to more than 100 MB can be easily edited. In xRes mode, you can manipulate hi-res images in near real-time without large RAM requirements. Pixels are processed in real-time for smaller files, plus there's an entire set of color correction and artistic effect filters. Included are a wide range of artistic brushes, textures, as well as an integrated gradient designer. The product also includes Kai's Power Tools 3.0 Special Edition which itself includes the Spheroid Designer, the Texture Explorer, and the Gradient Designer. xRes customers will also receive the Smudge Tool and more than 200 graphics presets. Plus, there is over 250MB of hi- and lo-res images from third-party suppliers. The Macintosh version is expected in February, with the Windows version shipping in March. The SRP will be \$699, with a street price of around \$489. Users of PhotoShop, Live Picture or Fractal Painter will be offered a special price of \$199. As this program was developed by Fauve Software, which was acquired by Macromedia last August, users of Fauve Matisse can upgrade to Macromedia xRes 2.0 for \$99.

SHOCKWAVE FOR FREEHAND

Additional functionality is being provided to ShockWave by Macromedia, who has now announced Shockwave for FreeHand(SFF), the company's illustration program. SFF will enable the display of native FreeHand graphics files within Web pages displayed in the Netscape Navigator 2.0 browser. Web authors can use a special Xtra, created for FreeHand, to create interactive hot spots of any size or shape to provide links to different URLs. Vector images and designs can now be incorporated into Web pages with the look they had when they were created on their home systems. As you already know, ShockWave for Director provides sound, animations and motion (known as interactive multimedia content) to exist on the Web. Shockwave for FreeHand provides the capability to incorporate compact, scaleable vector graphics in WWW pages. The key advantage of vector graphic designs is scalability. You can zoom in or out very closely, all without compromising the integrity of the image. With FreeHand's Zoom feature up to 25,600 percent, Web'ers could zoom in very close to crisp details in, say, a geographic map, illustration or tech drawing. Current file formats, like GIF and JPEG, do not offer zooming functionality. Plus, graphics can include text on a path, text wrapped around graphics, text in columns, and so on. Plus, one of the most compelling features is the fact that vector files are usually much smaller than their bitmap equivalents, allowing download and display far more quickly. For more info, check out Macromedia's WWW site at: <http://www.macromedia.com>.

Mudgeon: On Games(TM)

Buyer, Beware!

How many times have you heard that purchasing additional insurance for your computer, television, CD player, is not worth your investment? How many experts have you seen pop-up on your TV screen to explain why these insurance purchase plans are only a boon to the retailer and not to you? That these plans are simply a rip-off?

Although I cannot speak to every single equipment insurance purchase plan that abounds throughout this marvelous country of ours, I can relate to you one experience that proved the general consensus to be wrong! That's absolutely correct, my friends. And the reason the added insurance plan proved viable is because the retailer has an absolutely despicable policy regarding equipment purchased without insurance.

Not so long ago, Tandy Corporation developed an idea to help boost company profits through the development of a retail superstore for electronics products. The name of the store is The Incredible Universe--mammoth stores packed to the rafters with every electronic device imaginable, from washing machines to cell phones, video consoles to computers, big screen TVs to satellite systems. The employees of The Incredible Universe are "cast members," homage to the Disney-approach of customer service.

I purchased a new Acer-built, Pentium-based machine at The Incredible Universe last November. I needed the 100 MHz speed and the 16MB of RAM to run Windows 95. Unfortunately, I knew more about the equipment than the "alleged" expert in the computer section of the local Incredible Universe and managed to negate her up-sell to a more expensive system because I knew what Windows 95 required--nothing more, nothing less.

In my haste to leave the store with my purchase, I agreed to purchase an additional insurance package for the computer. I have never believed much of what I'm told in a superstore, as volume is a way of life, and with volume sales comes specialists who manage verbiage better than product knowledge. I decided that, should anything untoward occur to my new computer, the extra, hard-copied, affirmed, definite protection would be worth the \$45.00. Had I more trust in the retailer, I doubt I would have bought the coverage.

Approximately one month after the purchase, there began a series of strange happenings with the computer. Windows 95 would not load correctly--my MIDI board decided to cease operation--the internal speakers of the Acer SVGA monitor decided to imitate the screechings of a harpooned whale. Messages began to pop-up during startup that indicated the computer's main memory was failing, apparently in the high register range.

I did what I could--I completely reformatted the hard drive twice, hoping the memory messages were in error. I reinstalled Windows 95 four times and finally I did what all consumers end up doing--I unplugged all of the peripherals from the computer and took the entire unit back to The Incredible Universe for an exchange. I also managed to tuck away my original sales receipt that indicated not only the purchase of the computer itself, but the insurance policy as well.

While standing in the Customer Service area for 25 minutes awaiting my turn, I noted with some concern the lack of zeal and happiness upon the faces of those folk ahead of me attempting to return items. Whether they were justifiable returns that were accompanied with appropriate sales receipts, or folk attempting to scam the store, I have no idea. Some of the cast members became rather animated when talking to the customers, but most held their composure well. Score one for Incredible Universe employees.

My turn arrived and I was told I would have to take my computer to the Upgrade Area for examination. The Upgrade Area rested behind a closed and locked door that required a secret knock to enter. A young man named Corey, polite and experienced, read the documentation I had made regarding the memory corruption. He stated that the RAM was definitely the problem and that RAM with problems usually starts to go between one and two months after the purchase of the computer. He stated I should get a new computer and he authorized the exchange. I beamed with joy. What a pleasant experience!

But NOOOOOOO! I returned to the Customer Service area and was politely told that there would be NO exchange. As I had purchased the additional warranty on the machine, they would repair the unit. I was somewhat amazed and asked what would have happened had I not bought the insurance policy. I was informed that such was just the consumer's bad luck--there would be no exchange--and I incredulously asked if that meant the consumer would be out the \$3,000 they had paid for their machine. The reply was that, after 30 days and NO insurance policy, that was indeed the case. They would lose their investment--The Incredible Universe would do nothing for them. I muttered under my breath that certainly legal action would be one result of such a policy.

There you have it, folks. Make certain you know EXACTLY what the standard warranty is on your computer before you purchase it. If you hear 30 days, I highly recommend you purchase the additional insurance. After all, any retailer that will only guarantee their systems for 30 days--any retailer that also knows RAM can go nutso within 30 to 60 days--is not a retailer I would care to revisit in the future. If you have to, buy from a store that gives you a decent warranty--at least 90 days in length. If you have no choice but to purchase from the 30-day warranty retailer, then buy that insurance policy. Otherwise, you're getting sold a bill of goods.--Mudgeon

PS - As an aside, The Incredible Universe add-on warranty indicates that if you have to leave your computer for more than two days, and you require your computer for business, they will "loan" a computer to you. The repair manager indicated that to replace the RAM would take 8 to 9 days. I, therefore, requested a loaner. Guess what? That is absolutely correct--they had NO loaners. And guess how long it took to repair my machine? Two hours, not 9 days! Incredible (as in Universe), is it not?

