

The Legend of the CD-ROM

Or

“How the Wild, Wild Web Was Won”

At the end of the last century, dreadfully aware of the growing number of young people moving out West and decreasing university enrollments, the President and his cabinet were worried that America's enemies would find her easy prey without an educated populace. It was not feasible to build a large number of universities throughout the western states and territories. The settlers were just too scattered. Numerous attempts at enticing would-be college students to return to the East had likewise failed. The Intelligence Security Department (ISD) had agents in the field studying the situation. Based on the early reports of the ISD field agents, the President personally felt that the answer lay in somehow utilizing state-of-the-art communications technology (i.e., the telegraph) to educate the pioneers.

There were already telegraph offices throughout the West forming a vast “web” of telegraph lines. In fact the President was already toying with phrases such as “on-line learning” and “web-based instruction” to incorporate into his speeches in order to promote the plan. He was hoping to make a *hit* with American citizens. (It *was* an election year after all!)

The problem was that ordinary people didn't understand Morse code, and traditional professors didn't know how to teach via telegraph lines. There *had* to be a way to connect the professors and the students!! This is what led the President to meet with decorated war hero General Truman Davis (of the famous Berlin, Pennsylvania balloon “air lift” operation) to personally oversee efforts to prepare these pioneer “on-line learners.” All the resources of the military and intelligence communities would be at his disposal to get the job done!

As General Davis was reviewing the newest ISD reports, field agents Sulder and Mully entered the office with astonishing news. “We've found an expert who can help!” They proceeded to explain that there was a classics professor from Cornell University who had served as a telegraph operator during the war, Professor Christoph Davidovich Rombendowski (known to his students as Professor Rom). General Davis met with the ISD agents and Professor C.D. Rombendowski to quickly formulate a most ambitious plan.

In a matter of months the general was meeting with the entire task force on the evening before the plan's implementation to congratulate them and to give them their final instructions. Looking around the briefing room, the general made eye contact with each of his “troops.” There was Lieutenant Munoz of the Corps of Engineers and Lieutenant Shaw with his special forces team, the “Techrangers” as they called themselves. Seated nearby were the “Photoscouts” and the “Graphics Guerillas” (artistically talented soldiers recruited from the infantry) under the civilian leadership of the brilliant young

photographer and painter, Betsy James. He continued from face to face around the room until he had looked each man and woman in the eye.

“Ladies and gentlemen”, he began, “we are here tonight to ensure the continued greatness of the United States of America as we enter the twentieth century. For our country to flourish we will need to educate our young men and women to be scholarly, conscientious citizens of this country and of the world. Only an educated and enlightened community will be prepared to meet the challenges this new century will bring. Let us hope that as they do so, these young people will succeed in living peaceably with all our nation’s neighbors. Your efforts have brought us here tonight, poised to make these goals a reality.” The general proceeded to review the plans and to announce the code name of the operation, chosen by the classically-inspired Professor Rom, the *Pegasus Connection*.

At 4:00 AM the following morning the team sprang into action. Three trains left the nation’s capitol and continued on for five days until they each reached their respective destinations on the verge of the western frontier. Three hot air balloons were launched from each train carrying hundreds of aerodynamic, circular pamphlets containing all the detailed instructions and careful illustrations that any “on-line learner” might need. The sky was filled with flying discs soaring from the hot air balloons to the homesteads and towns below.

Two weeks later, the first “web-based courses” were telegraphed across the country much to the delight of the waiting students in each town and outpost. The President was re-elected in a landslide victory with his “on-line with the future” platform, and General Davis was appointed Director for Life of the newly created Course Development & Web Services Administration. The circular training package developed by the professor and the task force became known in his honor as “CD Roms.” And so they are to this day.