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The history of Activision reminds me of the month of March. The company came in like a lamb (in September 1979) and has become a true lion in the industry. Parent company Mediagenic is now financially sound; they've posted eight quarters of profitability after four years of losses. The company started as a video game developer and has beaten the odds and survived a rapidly changing home entertainment industry (and internal turmoil) that might have destroyed the average software developer. What is the secret of their success? Once upon a time . . .

The Early Days 1979 to 1983

Larry Kaplan was one of the founders of Activision Video Games Division. He can give us an inside look at how the company got off the ground.

John Jermaine: What led to the founding of Activision?

Larry Kaplan: In the late 1970's, after Atari introduced their 2600 home video game system, the video game market began building up speed. With millions of hardware units and game cartridges sold, industry sales revenues for the year topped the $330 million level. Activision was founded to take advantage of this lucrative market.

Activision was founded by four designers—Alan Miller, David Crane, Bob Whitehead and myself—and Jim Levy, president. The designers were all working at Atari Inc., on Video Computer System (VCS) 2600 games. We decided to form a company to make games for the VCS on our own, and through a mutual friend and lawyer, met Jim Levy, who was then a vice-president at GRT (a cassette tape company in Sunnyvale, California).

Over the summer of 1979, a business plan was written and submitted to a venture capital firm, Sutter Hill Ventures. The plan was approved in late September. All four designers left Atari at that time.

We were a very close-knit group in those days. We ate lunch together almost every day. David and Alan lived at the same apartment complex and played a lot of tennis together, which is how they met in the first place. The four of us spent a lot of time at local video game arcades and movie theaters.

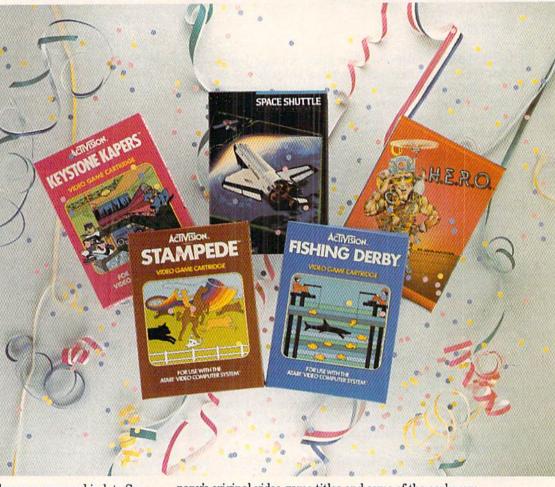**Jermaine:** Why was the focus on the Atari 2600?

Kaplan: At the time Activision was founded, a great deal of excitement was focused on the home video game market, which was beginning a rapid growth curve. Realizing that a large market for multi-function home computer software was still several years away, Activision funded its long-range software plans by entering the growing video game industry. The company was founded by a group of programmers who had worked

as video game designers at Atari. So naturally, we continued developing video games for the Atari 2600. Atari had the largest market share for hardware systems at that time.

Jermaine: How was the company name selected?

Kaplan: Prior to choosing the name *Activision*, several others were actually considered. *Computervision* sounded pretty good, but that title was already taken. The company was finally incorporated under the name *VSYNC, Inc.*, a hardware signal term from the VCS (it stands for vertical sync). The founders wanted a name that reflected various forms of art, television, computers, games, etc. Jim Levy derived the name *Activision* from a combination of *action* and *vision*.

Jermaine: Tell me about the creation of the corporate logo.

Kaplan: The first Activision logo, displayed on all the company's original video game titles and some of the early computer entertainment titles, is internally referred to as "the flying V" logo. One of the factors considered in its initial design was that it had to fit in a 32-pixel eight-line space on the bottom of all game screens. To accomplish this feat, the "T" and "V" in Activision were connected. In 1988, the flying V logo was reinstated and is now used for all computer entertainment titles published by Activision Entertainment and all video games published by Activision Video Games.

Jermaine: Was your business originally a "back bedroom" operation?

Kaplan: The first company operation—reverse engineering the VCS and building a software development system—was accomplished in David Crane's spare bedroom in his Sunnyvale apartment.

By the 1980 Winter Consumer Electronics Show—the first trade show attended by Activision—the company employed eight people. Later that year, the number had grown to 15. By 1983, we were over 400 strong.

Jermaine: Tell me about the early days at Activision.

Kaplan: We all worked long hours in a very hectic environment in order to do something no one else had ever done before (make third-party cartridges for the VCS). Employees played games for fun and created them for work. The kitchen was always full of doughnuts and candy, the favorite snacks of designers. Everyone was always munching on something.

By Christmas of 1980, the company was growing out of its 1,000-square-foot office space. Since there was no space to set up a Christmas tree, David Crane programmed one and dis-

The first line of products for the Atari 2600 was available for the 1980 holiday season. Once these games hit the market, calls from enthusiastic consumers began pouring in. One elderly woman who had purchased *Bridge* called to ask us how to insert the game cartridge into her system. Activision's consumer relations representative asked if she had a VCS (meaning a Video Computer System). She innocently responded, "No, I have an RCA!"

Another customer called to say he was close to reaching one million points on *Laser Blast*. Incidentally, when a player reaches one million points in the game, the points displayed on the screen become exclamation marks! He later admitted that when his pregnant wife told him it was time to go to the hospital, he asked her to wait a few minutes because he was only a few points away from his one-million-point goal.

At the height of the video game craze (mid 1983), Activision was receiving more than 10,000 pieces of fan mail per week. The company was also mailing approximately 400,000 newsletters to Activision customers around the world. Close to 50 original video game titles have been produced from 1980 to the present day. Activision sold several million cartridges from the time of the boom in the early 1980's, through the less popular mid-1980's, and again during the current revival of the industry.
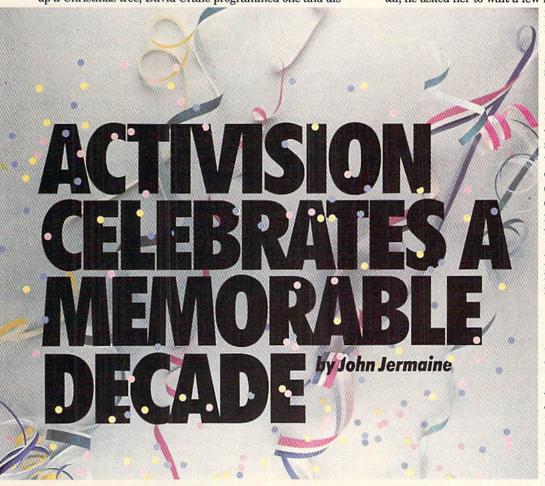
I recently talked to Charlotte Taylor Skeel, a former Activision employee, about her tenure at Activision. Today Charlotte is public relations manager at Accolade, Inc.

Jermaine: What do you remember about the "good old days" at Activision?

Charlotte Taylor Skeel: The company became famous for throwing huge Consumer Elec-

ACTIVISION CELEBRATES A MEMORABLE DECADE

by John Jermaine

played it on a television set. The TV was put on a chair outside one of the offices, and employee Christmas gifts were placed beneath the chair.

During the early days, we also had our share of practical jokes. One year the vice-president of human resources became the victim of an April Fool's joke. Several employees moved his office furnishings into the men's bathroom. Then they duplicated his office with other furniture and even replaced his children's pictures with photos of someone else's kids.

Another time, some crafty individuals lined the floor of the finance controller's office with Dixie cups filled with water. On one of his birthdays, the marketing research manager (responsible for sales forecasting) received a crystal ball that looked a lot like his IBM personal computer. His office was also decorated to look like a fortune teller's den.

tronics Show parties. Among the most memorable galas were the 1982 "Rumble in the Jungle," to promote the game *Pitfall!*, and the 1983 "Decathlon party" to promote, of course, the *Decathlon* game. Bruce Jenner, who provided the celebrity endorsement for the program, made a special guest appearance.

In 1983, we also held the infamous "Barnstorming Parade," to introduce the *Barnstorming* cartridge to the media. At 6:30 a.m. three busloads of press, trade, Activision employees and friends were taken to the street in front of the Las Vegas Convention Center and presented with authentic *Barnstorming* jackets, flight scarves and old-fashioned pilots helmets. They were then greeted by a real bi-plane that taxied down Las Vegas Boulevard carrying none other than Steve Cartwright, *Barnstorming*'s designer. Afterwards, the entire group was treated to a sunrise breakfast at the nearby Desert Inn.

In 1982, Jim Levy rewarded his hard-working employees by taking the entire company (along with their spouses or "spouse equivalents") to the island of Maui for four days. It was there that the famed Beach Olympiad was held. The company was divided into teams named for tropical fruits, and events included sand-castle building, canoe racing, hula hooping, and the lei pass. The gold medal went to the Kumquat team (and I was a member of that team!).

Charlotte also recalled Activision's darkest day.

Skeel: No one will ever forget the big layoff on November 10, 1983. As people carried boxes of personal items to their cars, they were met by local news cameras. One individual commented to reporters, "There will never be another Activision." It was a very sad day because most of us thought of the company as sort of a modern-day Camelot, and here we were leaving it for the last time. No one will remember that day better than Jim Levy, the president of Activision at the time. It was also his birthday.

The Transitional Years: 1984 to 1987

As the video game market faded into oblivion, Activision started on the path to become a major force in the microcomputer software industry. It wasn't all fun and games during that period of the company's history, as Loretta Stagnitto, director of corporate communications, explains.

Jermaine: In December of 1984, Activision computer games took on a new appearance. Why did this happen?

Loretta Stagnitto: In terms of packaging, Activision computer entertainment products took on a different look to help distinguish the computer games from the video games, thus the "album style" was adopted. In addition, original artwork or photography was used for package displays instead of generating artwork that resembled the game screens from the video games.

Jermaine: Tell me more about what Activision was like during this period.

Stagnitto: When Activision began publishing computer entertainment titles, the strategy at the time (and prior to the diversification strategy that led to the acquisition of Gamestar and Infocom in 1985 and 1986, respectively) was to create truly innovative games. Most of the subsequent titles featured state-of-the-art graphics and sound, but they lacked depth of gameplay—an important element that can determine the success or failure of a product. Games like *Web Dimension, Alter Ego* and *Portal* were truly innovative, but the consumer was more interested in action-oriented, strategy games, and/or fantasy/role-playing titles. In other words, the programs weren't geared to the needs of the average user. Then the company spent a lot of money trying to convince everybody they wanted these types of programs, instead of publishing what the people really wanted. It was a very confusing time in [Activision's] history.

Jermaine: Is it true that Accolade was founded by former members of the Activision team? Why did they leave the company in the first place?

Stagnitto: In 1984 Alan Miller and Bob Whitehead, successful software designers and co-founders of Activision, thought we should be working on other forms of entertainment software. These individuals finally broke away from the company and did their own thing at their own company. Accolade was founded in December 1984, and their first product *(Hardball!)* was released in July of 1985.

Jermaine: Can you give me some information about Gamestar?

Stagnitto: Activision acquired Gamestar in January of 1985. Scott Orr stayed on to head the group, while his people created a series of popular microcomputer sports games. They include: *Star Rank Boxing I and II, GBA Two-on-Two Championship Basketball, Star League Baseball, GFL Championship Football, Pete Rose Pennant Fever* and many others. Scott Orr and his team of experts are gone, but Gamestar continues to turn out quality sports entertainment software.

The year 1984 saw the release of Ghostbusters, *Activision's most popular computer game to date. Two years ago, David Crane (a founder of Activision and the program's creator) and Dick Lehrberg (Activision's vice-president of product acquisition at the time) told me how the project came together. Little did they know it was destined to become the best-selling Activision product of all time.*

Jermaine: Tell me about the development of *Ghostbusters.*

Dick Lehrberg: *Ghostbusters* appealed to us for several reasons. It was a very popular movie, the subject was original, and the basic story itself provided a number of interesting elements for David Crane to work with. Columbia Pictures also contributed a great deal to the project. They were very strict when it came to approving our ideas for the program, but they worked closely with us throughout the entire project. Once the initial storyboards were completed, the rest of the approvals were fairly routine. There were no last-minute changes in our game concept.

David Crane: *Ghostbusters* was a strange project. At the time, I was in the process of creating an animated city-wide adventure. The player would be able to drive a vehicle, use a map to plot his way and add equipment to the car to give it special capabilities. This program might have evolved into a James Bond-type game if *Ghostbusters* hadn't come along.

Anyway, I had worked on this concept for several months when I took a night off to see *Ghostbusters* at a local movie theater. I really enjoyed the film. A day later, I went to work and ran into one of the people from our acquisition group. He asked me if I'd be interested in doing a *Ghostbusters* computer game.

I was truly interested in the project, but they wanted it to be completed by the end of August so the game could be released before Christmas. This was May of 1984, which gave me approximately ten weeks to develop the program. Normally I couldn't possibly program a game in that amount of time, but my new untitled creation could be adapted to fit the *Ghostbusters* storyline, so I agreed to do the project.

In the weeks that followed, I found myself attending several showings of *Ghostbusters*. Looking back, I wonder what the people thought I was doing—there I was seriously studying the movie, taking notes and drawing diagrams. Later in the project, Columbia (under strictest security) provided me a videotape of the film. They also sent a copy of the shooting script and hundreds of slides and stills from the movie.

Activision has also produced other games based on popular movies. In 1986, Aliens *(the movie) became the model for* Aliens: The Computer Game. *Steve Cartwright (the creator of programs like* Hacker, Hacker II, *and* GeeBee Air Rally) *developed this software classic, and here is how it was done.*

Jermaine: What led to the development of *Aliens?*

Steve Cartwright: Believe it or not, Activision owned the

rights to *Aliens* a year before the movie appeared in theaters. However, the in-house programmers, artists and game designers knew nothing about that arrangement. After seeing *Aliens* one afternoon, we all left the theater with the same idea: *Aliens* would be the perfect subject for a computer game. The next day I brought up the idea and found out that Activision already owned the rights to that particular property.

Jermaine: Tell me more about how the project began.

Cartwright: We planned out the entire program in 15 minutes. It was just a matter of analyzing the movie, breaking it down into key scenes, and coming up with a game concept which re-creates each particular situation.

The games were designed to share a common quality. When you participate in an *Aliens* challenge, your fate is truly in

around on the floor. These little devils are called "Face Huggers." In short, the owners of the license were concerned about legal technicalities, correct terminology and "good taste" at this time. We had kept in close contact with Twentieth Century Fox throughout the making of the program, so they knew all about the games and really liked the finished product.

Not many people know that the company had an east coast design center. Back in 1982, Garry and Dan Kitchen, John Van Ryzin, Paul Willson and Kevin Kalkut started the east coast design center (based in Glen Rock, New Jersey). I talked with Garry Kitchen to learn the secrets of this lost tribe of Activision.

Jermaine: How did you start out?

Garry Kitchen: We joined Activision because they needed developers with innovative ideas, and we wanted to keep busy.

Little Computer People

The Great American Cross-Country Road Race

Ghostbusters

Hacker II: The Doomsday Papers

Last Ninja 2

Predator

your own hands. Each game is a tough little assignment where experience is the best teacher. You can play to win or experiment with different ideas, but you can't blame your failure on random events or bad luck. Those factors don't exist.

Jermaine: Did Twentieth Century Fox ask you to make many changes in the final program?

Cartwright: There were some minor changes alright, but nothing we couldn't take care of right away. Twentieth Century Fox was very concerned about the fact that our transitional scenes contained direct quotes from the shooting script. I was led to believe that Activision might have to pay for the privilege of using that material in the program. Thank goodness our legal people investigated the situation and said everything was fine.

Another problem concerned the fact that you couldn't say the aliens were killing people. They were actually capturing human beings for later use (which would be the cause of their death). We also had to use the correct terminology for everything. You couldn't talk about a small alien creature crawling

In 1980 my older brother Steve moved to the west coast and started his own company, Woodside Design Associates. Woodside did a lot of military contracting as well as designing games. Steve also knew a number of people at NASA. So he eventually contacted Activision and negotiated a deal to produce *Space Shuttle: A Journey Into Space*. *Space Shuttle* was more than just an arcade-style game because the product was designed in concert with NASA. It was an accurate simulation of a space shuttle mission, containing the orbital mathematics and physics of a real space flight. We still think it's the best space shuttle simulation ever done on any machine.

Meanwhile, back in New Jersey, we started working on Atari video game projects. *Keystone Kapers* featured a little man chasing crooks through a department store, while *Pressure Cooker* simulated a chef cooking hamburgers in a fast food restaurant. These early games were humorous and a lot of fun to play, but the video game market was losing ground. So I started playing around with the Commodore 64.

Jermaine: Why did you develop the *Designer's Pencil* program?

Kitchen: I wanted to do a baseball game, but Gamestar had recently been acquired by Activision and they already had a baseball game on the market. I was also tired of working on "little man" arcade games and wanted to do something totally different. Shortly after that, I came up with the idea of drawing a pencil on the screen and writing a little program to move it around. Things came together fairly quickly after that. Yes, this was the beginning of the *Designer's Pencil* project.

Jermaine: What led to the creation of *GameMaker: The Computer Game Design Kit?*

Kitchen: That's an interesting story. In 1985, we received a lot of mail from *Designer's Pencil* fans. In some cases, teachers were actually using the product to teach their pupils the principles of programming. However, most of the letters asked the same basic question: Can I actually design games with your program?

After reading this same response over and over again, I thought it was time to produce an arcade game development package that everyone could use. Keeping this in mind, I planned out a package containing five tools—a drawing program, background generator, sprite animator, music generator and of course, a sound effects utility. It would have a programming language similar to that of *Designer's Pencil* but more powerful and specifically designed for arcade game development. I actually thought I could finish this project in 18–24 months.

It soon became apparent, however, that I couldn't complete *GameMaker* on time, so we hired Alex DeMeo to work on the music and sound effects generators. Alex did a great job because he's a real musician and has a lot of talent when it comes to making music.

I did the overall language, the sprite utility and the background generator. Then there was a matter of creating sample graphics, animation, music and sound effects. If you're not artistically inclined, for example, we gave you 30–40 images to play with. *GameMaker* also featured sample games including a version of *Pitfall!* The project filled two sides of a disk and contained about 320K of data.

Activision wanted us to complete the program and show it to the world at the Chicago Consumer Electronics Show. This meant we would have to work on the project until the eleventh hour, so we didn't get much sleep leading up to the show. It got so bad that Alex said the sprites on the screen were actually talking to him. When they started laughing at him, it was definitely time to go home. We got the job done, and the program was well received at the show. Considering everything that went into it, *GameMaker* was a bargain at $39.95.

Jermaine: What is your relationship with Activision now?

Kitchen: We left Activision in 1986 and started a new company called Imagineering, Inc. Imagineering was set up to be a design firm that would work on microcomputer and video game projects for a number of different clients. Absolute Entertainment [a Mediagenic affiliated publisher] was founded a short time later. This label is used when we develop something and publish it ourselves. *X-15 Alpha Mission* was the first product bearing this label. Believe it or not, we purchased the program back from Activision and released it on the 64 late in 1986. [**Editor's Note:** *Most recently,* F-18 Hornet *was released under the Absolute Entertainment label.*]

The Mediagenic Metamorphosis 1987 to Today

In response to the company's expanding variety of product offerings, last year Mediagenic was formed to serve as parent company to all these diverse publishers. Loretta Stagnitto was able to bring me up to date on the reason for this new corporate entity and what's happening at the company today.

Jermaine: Tell me about the developments that led to Activision becoming Mediagenic.

Stagnitto: After the collapse of the video game market, Activision's fortunes changed. Activision was unable to successfully implement a diversification strategy, and the company lost money for four consecutive years. In January 1987, then senior vice-president Bruce L. Davis was appointed president and chief operating officer and took on the challenge of initiating a financial turnaround.

Davis was able to begin the turnaround by revising the product strategy to include producing more market-oriented software in popular categories (such as fantasy/role-playing, action and arcade-style games). He eliminated several products that were already on the market, as well as many under development. He also eliminated two unprofitable product lines—Personal Choice and Electric Dreams. (These lines were established or acquired by the former management as part of the diversification strategy and longer-term plan to become a diversified publisher of entertainment, creativity and productivity software.)

As a low-risk means of extending market share and expanding the product offerings, Davis started an affiliated publishers program, where Mediagenic began serving as exclusive sales and distribution agent for smaller independent software publishers. Hence, the company began offering entertainment and presentation tool products under the Activision, Gamestar and Infocom brand names.

This revised product strategy and other changes resulted in Mediagenic achieving two full years of profitability after four years of losses. To improve the profitability and encourage substantial revenue growth, the organization was restructured into two publishing divisions—Entertainment and Presentation Tools.

To signify the transition from a yearlong revitalization program and symbolize the expanding and diversified product lines, the company created the name *Mediagenic*. The new name also helped distinguish the company from the Activision product line, which was restructured to publish only action, arcade and simulation-style computer entertainment. Today, all sports simulations are published under the Gamestar label, while fantasy/role-playing and story-telling titles are released as Infocom products. Mediagenic serves as the parent organization to these numerous publishing entities. [**Editor's Note:** *see box on page 73 for a complete list of Mediagenic affiliates.*]

Jermaine: Who are the people behind the programs developed within Activision Entertainment Division today? Tell me something about each of them.

Stagnitto: The Activision line of computer entertainment is headed by Sherry Whiteley. She's responsible for strategic planning, product selection and development, positioning and the marketing of all programs published under that label.

In addition to Sherry, some of the key people in the Activision Entertainment Division include: Kelly Flock, product marketing manager; John Skeel, producer; Mark Johnson, producer; Mike Suarez, producer; and Kelly Zmak, product specialist.

Activision is also the name used to market the company's video game titles for the Nintendo Entertainment System, Sega Master System and Atari 2600 and 7800. Chris Garske heads the Activision Video Games Division.

Activision Celebrates A Memorable Decade

Sherry Whiteley (general manager) and Kelly Flock (product marketing manager) have their own stories to tell. Here are their versions of what is happening at Activision Entertainment these days.

Jermaine: Tell me what it's like to work at the company today.

Sherry Whiteley: I love working for Activision Entertainment because it gives me the opportunity to work with seasoned professionals. These individuals care about producing high-quality products and provide a people-oriented work environment where everyone is encouraged to participate. But somehow these people remain children at heart. My imagination is constantly running wild around here. Creativity is always appreciated, and fun is a way of life at the company.

Kelly Flock: Toys and games can be found in everyone's cubicle. No one is willing to grow up and forget what it means to have fun. The best products—the ones that are the most fun to play—are generated in this type of environment. No one wants to create a program they wouldn't want to buy themselves.

Jermaine: Can you give me some information about your product line strategy?

Whiteley: Activision puts out action arcade, adventure, simulation and strategy products. We are committed to publishing high-quality software in all popular categories. Products that do not meet our standards are quickly cancelled or sold off to other publishers.

Flock: The company released its first simulation product—*F-14 Tomcat* in February of this year. In *F-14,* you get the realism found in most flight simulations, but it's a lot more fun to play. *Fun* is the key word here. We conduct studies to determine what the "fun" and "exciting" elements of a simulation are. Then we construct a game around these factors, instead of modeling every aspect of the project after the real thing. The final product contains the best of both worlds.

Jermaine: Can you share a few stories about some recent game releases?

Whiteley: *Ocean Ranger* was submitted to us on the 64 by a brand-new development group. The product arrived one day in the mail. Our producers simply could not believe a product of that quality, nearly complete, would come by regular mail. We quickly called the developers and worked out a deal to acquire the product. A port to MS DOS commenced shortly afterward.

Shanghai, an award-winning puzzle game based on the ancient oriental game of Mah-Jongg, was developed by Brodie Lockard. Brodie worked at Stanford University, writing educational software for use in classes there. He earned both a Bachelor's and Master's degree at Stanford and while studying there was a member of the varsity gymnastics team. He had an accident while on the team and was rendered a quadraplegic. Shortly after his accident, Brodie became interested in the game Mah-Jongg. He saw an opportunity to design and produce a similar game on his personal computer, which came to be known as *Shanghai. Shanghai* has since been published on more than 30 computer systems worldwide and is a popular arcade game in Japan. *Shanghai* remains one of Activision Entertainment's most popular titles.

Rampage has become a mega-hit title for Activision. Kelly Flock, the product manager, gave his people a special incentive to get the 64 product shipping on time. He bet his development and test team that if they made their deadline, he would get a Mohawk. Luckily for Kelly, the group missed their deadline by two days.

Technical support receives a lot of calls from *Predator* players. It seems that most of them don't know how to win the game once they meet the "predator" in the final confrontation scene. We recommend watching the movie because it contains a clue to solving this mystery. Another clue: the player must pick something up and use it as a weapon.

Getting the programmer to finish *The Last Ninja,* was a tough job. One day he decided that he needed a stress reliever. So he hopped in his car, drove to L.A. and spent the day at Disneyland. He didn't tell us about the trip, so we feared the worst when he didn't return our calls. Little did we know he was simply visiting Mickey Mouse. By the way, *Last Ninja 2* for the 64 will be on the market by the time you read this.

I recently heard a tale about *Chop 'N Drop.* During the final testing of the product, our people made an unusual discovery. The original programmer had added a special feature to the game for the amusement of players who happened to stumble across it. If you press a certain combination of keys all at the same time, the characters in *Chop 'N Drop* will drop their pants. However, You really don't notice it much because the figures keep right on chopping away at each other. This is a nice little challenge for the consumer who wants to try something different, and the graphics are not X-rated.

Jermaine: What's going on at the company today?

Whiteley: One of our product testers has an interesting hobby. For inspiration, he covers his wall with the most bizarre tabloid headlines you've ever seen. Two of my favorites are "Adolf Hitler Was a Woman" and "Cheeseburger Kills Space Alien." I wonder how this inspires our wacky testers? By the way, our testers still favor the original Atari 2600 joystick over all others on the market today.

How does our graphic artist feed his creativity? He adorns his office area with various "blow-up" creatures that hang from the ceiling. Some of his groupies include ghosts, skeletons, dinosaurs, clowns, snakes and even an alligator.

Some of the folks in technical support are receiving strange phone calls from people they've never met asking for advice on things other than their programs. There is a 14-year-old boy, for example, who calls to discuss the problems he's having with his girlfriend. We never thought it was necessary for our technical support teams to take a course in psychology until now.

Jermaine: Is it true that Activision has perfected a laser disc game?

Whiteley: We recently released the first entertainment CD-ROM title, a graphic adventure game running under Hypercard on the Macintosh computer. The product was called *Manhole.* It contains over 50 Mbytes of code and features 30 original songs, many of them recorded at a professional music studio with live musicians. There was nothing on the market like it, or even close, so people had a hard time comparing it to other things.

Many lengthy conversations went on internally, but we decided if Activision Entertainment was going to be a market leader and innovator, the company had to take chances when it saw glimpses of the future. *Manhole* was finally published, and the story has a happy ending. The product is successful beyond expectations, and Activision is once again on the cutting edge of technology. In the future, you may see this game (and similar products) available for other computer systems.

Jermaine: Do you have other CD-ROM projects on the drawing board?

Whiteley: You'll have to wait and see.

Jermaine: What are your five top-selling entertainment products of all time?

Whiteley: Believe it or not, all five of these titles are video games. The market for video games is much larger than for computer games. It's possible to sell more than a million units of a single title world-

wide. *Pitfall!*, *River Raid*, *Laser Blast* and *Freeway* all fit into that category.

The five top-selling Activision computer games in reverse order are (5) *Rampage*, (4) *The Last Ninja*, (3) *The Great American Cross Country Road-Race*, (2) *Hacker* and (1) *Ghostbusters*.

Next: *Ghostbusters II*

Mark Johnson (an Activision producer) gave me the details on the sequel to Activision's best-selling computer game ever.

Jermaine: How did you obtain the rights to develop another *Ghostbusters* game?

Mark Johnson: It was the result of our previous arrangement with Columbia Pictures. We knew there was another *Ghostbusters* movie in the works, so it seemed like a good idea to create a sequel to *Ghostbusters* [the game]. By the way, it will closely follow the events of the new movie.

Jermaine: Where does the story take place?

Johnson: Once again, our heroes are traveling around the streets of New York City—Manhattan to be precise—and visiting the Statue of Liberty.

Jermaine: What is the sequel's storyline?

Johnson: Everything revolves around the portrait of a wicked medieval ruler named Vigo the Carpathian. This guy was a real slime ball (no pun intended) in his day. He is coming back to life, due to the restoration of the painting, and intends to rule the modern-day world in a truly evil fashion. The ghosts are his instruments and are somehow tied to a river of green slime that flows beneath the city. This river is gradually growing in size because of "bad vibes," i.e., the New York stereotype of meanness, etc. The Ghostbusters use the Statue of Liberty (a sign of "good") to defeat the ghosts, green slime and Vigo.

Jermaine: When will the game be released?

Johnson: The game will hit the market a few months after the movie. *Ghostbusters II* (the movie) is scheduled for release on June 16. Incidentally, *Ghostbusters II* (the game) is currently being developed for the Commodore 64 and a variety of other systems.

As I wrap things up, I'd like to thank the Mediagenic employees past and present for taking time out of their busy schedules to share the secrets of their company. It's been a pleasure to work with all of you. **C**

Mediagenic Affiliated Publishers

Absolute Entertainment
Affiliated publisher since August 1987
Products include: *Crossbow* and *F-18 Hornet*

Interplay Productions
Affiliated publisher since March 1988
Products include: *Neuromancer* and *Battle Chess*

Company-Owned Publishers

Infocom
Products include: *Zork Trilogy*, *Zork Zero*, *Battletech*, *Shogun*, *Quarterstaff* and *Journey*

Gamestar
Products include: *Pete Rose Pennant Fever*, *Take Down*

Activision Entertainment
Products include: *Rampage*, *Last Ninja 2* and *F-14 Tomcat*

Activision Video Games
Products include: *Stealth*, *A.T.F.*, *Three Stooges*, and *Bomber Raid*

Activision Commodore 64 / 128 and Amiga Computer Titles

Product List in Chronological Order of Release

Titles	Format	Release Date
Pitfall	C64 Disk	5/84
Beamrider	C64 Disk	5/84
The Activision Decathlon	C64 Disk/Cart	6/84
Pitfall!	C64 Cart	6/84
H.E.R.O.	C64 Disk	6/84
Toy Bizarre	C64 Disk	6/84
Pitfall II	C64 Disk	7/84
Beamrider	C64 Cart	7/84
Zenji	C64 Cart	7/84
Toy Bizarre	C64 Cart	7/84
Pitfall II	C64 Cart	8/84
H.E.R.O.	C64 Cart	8/84
Zone Ranger	C64 Disk/Cart	9/84
Zenji	C64 Cart	9/84
Park Patrol	C64 Disk	9/84
Designer's Pencil	C64 Disk/Cart	9/84
River Raid	C64 Disk	9/84
Space Shuttle: A Journey Into Space	C64 Disk/Cart	10/84
Ghostbusters	C64 Disk	10/84
River Raid	C64 Cart	10/84
Pastfinder	C64 Disk/Cart	11/84
Tracer Sanction	C64 Disk	12/84
Mindshadow	C64 Disk	12/84
Rock 'N Bolt	C64 Disk	2/85
Master of the Lamps	C64 Disk	3/85
Web Dimension	C64 Disk	4/85
Alcazar: The Forgotten Fortress	C64 Disk	5/85
The Complete Fireworks Celebration Kit	C64 Disk	6/85
Countdown to Shutdown	C64 Disk	7/85
Fast Tracks	C64 Disk	9/85
Little Computer People	C64 Disk	9/85
The Great American Cross Country Road Race	C64 Disk	6/85
Hacker	C64 Disk	8/85
Borrowed Time	C64 Disk	11/85
Hacker	Amiga	11/85
Mindshadow	Amiga	11/85
Garry Kitchen's GameMaker: The Computer Game Design Kit	C64 Disk	11/85
Borrowed Time	Amiga	12/85
Alter Ego (Male)	C64 Disk	2/86
Music Studio	C64 Disk/Amiga	4/86
Murder on the Mississippi	C64 Disk	5/86
Alter Ego (Female)	C64 Disk	5/86
Little Computer People	Amiga	6/86
Filer's Choice	C64 Disk	6/86
Writer's Choice	C64 Disk	6/86
Planner's Choice	C64 Disk	6/86
I Am The C-128	C128 Disk	6/86
The Personal Choice Collection	C64 Disk	6/86
Hacker II: The Doomsday Papers	C64 Disk	7/86
Hacker II: The Doomsday Papers	Amiga	8/86
Tass Times in Tonetown	C64 Disk	8/86
The Transformers: Battle to Save the Earth	C64 Disk	9/86
GameMaker Designer's Library: Sports	C64 Disk	9/86
GameMaker Designer's Library: Science Fiction	C64 Disk	9/86
Shanghai	C64 Disk	9/86
Tass Times in Tonetown	C64 Disk	9/86
Shanghai	Amiga	10/86
Paper Models: The Christmas Kit	C64 Disk	10/86
Labyrinth: The Computer Game	C64 Disk	10/86
Howard the Duck: Adventure on Volcano Island	C64 Disk	11/86
Aliens: The Computer Game	C64 Disk	11/86
Greeting Card Maker	C64 Disk	11/86
Term Paper Writer	C64 Disk	11/86
Portal	Amiga	1/87
Postcards	C64 Disk	9/87
The Last Ninja	C64 Disk	9/87
Gee Bee Air Rally	Amiga	10/87
Rampage	C64 Disk	10/88
Ocean Ranger	C64 Disk	8/88
Predator	C64 Disk	11/88
Chop 'N Drop	C64 Disk	11/88
F-14 Tomcat	C64 Disk	2/89
Rampage	Amiga	3/89