

Solomon Swift and the ADAM.

The "Solomon Swift debacle" was the story of a swindle which didn't start out as a swindle. Around 1986, a man calling himself Dr. Solomon Swift (not his real name, not really a Dr. either) began publishing a good, highly technical and assembler-oriented newsletter called "Nibbles and Bits". It was full of neat assembler routines you could POKE into memory from SmartBASIC, to access OS routines, manipulate sprite graphics, format and edit disks, etc. Some came from disassembly of Coleco programs like SmartBASIC and SmartLOGO, others came from hardware manufacturers who gave him their latest add-ons to play with. From time to time, Sol, through his company, Digital Express, would release integrated, commercial versions of the hack utility programs he published in his newsletter. Some of these, especially the graphics program PowerPaint, stand among the best ADAM software ever written (for the end user; on the inside, Sol's programs were all cruft and spaghetti--he was totally self-taught and dyslexic as well; nothing had a true source code, it was all block edits in hex or POKEd in from SmartBASIC).

In about 1988, Sol announced that he was developing a new operating system for the ADAM, called GoDOS. GoDOS would be a graphical interface, mouse/joystick driven, with icons, pull-down menus, dialogue boxes, MacOS for the ADAM, as it were. He also planned to develop new applications to work under GoDOS, replacing the original Coleco software--GoBASIC (an enhanced BASIC interpreter), GoFiler (a database program), GoWriter (a word processor), GoLink (a telecom program), and I believe GoPaint (a graphics program). Soon after this announcement in all the leading ADAM newsletters, publication of "Nibbles and Bits" began to get erratic. Sol finally said that he was in a temporary financial squeeze, but that work was proceeding on GoDOS; GoBASIC was almost completed. He asked for, and received, substantial prepayments from many ADAMites for the entire Go software series, as seed money to keep the project afloat. In 1990, he did release a password-protected, time-bomb version of GoDOS with GoBASIC to everyone who had prepaid (after a certain number of boots, even with the correct password, it self-destructed); but then he disappeared, and there were no more issues of "Nibbles and Bits". He took with him (I believe) over \$5000 in prepayments.

The ADAM community was completely shocked, because Sol had been an important source of good software and useful technical information. After much legal wrangling on the part of some who had been left holding the bad, Sol was finally tracked down, tried, convicted, and sent off to prison. He's still there today. In an attempt to make restitution, he left the rights to his other commercial software in trusted

hands, with the direction that all profits go towards paying back his creditors. GoDOS with GoBASIC were released into the public domain. Out of curiosity, I've disassembled some of GoBASIC, and it's a prime example of creeping featurism run amok. You can do *everything*--music, graphics, menus, dialogue boxes, you name it--but there are so many features, there is no workspace left to do *anything*. It fills an entire 64K memory expander and all but 8K of standard RAM; the most you can do is show that individual commands work, but you run out of memory before you can build anything other than a toy program. And all the new command names are 15 characters long (Sol had evidently been reading some MacOS documentation), wasting even more memory. The other projected Go software evidently never existed--Sol's hope had been to write them in the GoBASIC...

The scam soured lots of ADAMites; they left, betrayed, and have never come back. Those who remained became very skeptical of new software or hardware claims--something I ran into when I appeared on the scene in 1992 claiming to have disassembled and commented the EOS operating system and to have written a new, improved SmartBASIC interpreter. I actually had to get "name" people in the ADAM community to vouch that I was not Sol Swift in another guise; there is good evidence that before "Solomon Swift" appeared, the same man was "The Data Doctor", another early source of ADAM software and technical information, whose telephone stopped being answered one day...

The Fight Over FidoNet

Around 1992, a lawyer out of Kansas City, Missouri named Barry Wilson (who ran his law practice on 4 ADAMs) promoted an idea which eventually came into being as the ADAM News Network (A.N.N.). The concept was to issue (on disk) a sort of Reader's Digest of all the ADAM newsletters, every month, at a subscription cost a little over the materials cost (so A.N.N. could make a little money, to be used for other projects to benefit the ADAM community as a whole). This way, an ADAMite could keep up with current happenings without having to subscribe to 10 different newsletters. Barry had other visions for A.N.N., including having it act as a centralized administrative body, coordinating the dissemination of information, helping to organize the yearly ADAMcons, providing a dispute mediation service (a vestige of the Sol Swift scandal), etc. There was little objection to these ideas in principle.

In practice, however, most of the long-distance communication between ADAMites was via the several newsletters and about 10 ADAM BBSes located throughout the US and Canada. As Barry began to spread his ideas around, he naturally began

to run up a large long-distance telephone bill as he made the rounds of the BBSes. As a way to reduce his own costs, he seized on some local FidoNet nodes, whom he convinced to start carrying an ADAM Echo; and he belligerently began to encourage ADAMites to move to FidoNet. Some followed; the BBS crowd resisted, partly because of turf, and partly because Barry was being really insolent and intolerant about the entire issue. A fullscale flamewar erupted over the ADAM Echo. Naturally, the local node operators began to tire of the whole business (since they were just passing along the ADAM Echo to be nice guys). ADAM BBS traffic dropped to almost zero (because everybody wanted a freebie from the ADAM Echo instead of paying for their own long-distance BBSing), and, since there was no fun in it any more, many of the sysops took down their BBSes. The ADAM Echo stopped getting propagated because of Barry's badgering of various nodes and because the other traffic was all flames and whining. The result was that now there was no regular long-distance electronic communication among the ADAM community.

Some of the diehard ADAM BBS operators tried to resurrect traffic by carrying their own ADAMnet Echo. Each participating BBS would have its own Echo area; local callers could post there. Periodically (maybe once a week), each sysop would call all the other BBSes, grab *their* Echos, and repost them locally. This worked at first, but then the originator of the ADAMnet Echo idea, a young vendor from New York named Steve Major, began another turf war: he wanted to collect all the local Echos, then have all the other sysops call just him to get a master copy. As I recall, he wasn't being timely about getting the local Echos, so the other sysops ignored him. Steve then began to assert his rights to the Echo software, in loud and nasty enough terms to (again) scare off all the traffic. The ADAMnet Echos are still there today, but nobody uses them; Steve Major sold all his ADAM inventory and went to the Amiga.

Since the FidoNet flamewar, there are only about 4 ADAM BBSes still in operation, 3 running the ADAMnet software, 1 (maybe 2) running PBBS under CP/M. None of these has any traffic to speak of. Since A.N.N. started sending out monthly news disks, almost all the local newsletters have gone under--why subscribe to several newsletters when you can get the best of all of them from A.N.N.? Barry Wilson, leaving devastation all around him, has retired from what's left of the ADAM community, in very poor health, aggravated by all the flamewars. Sigh.

These histories are to the best of my recollection, from some things I've observed personally, but mostly from things I've been told by others. Any of you others out there, please feel free to jump in and correct me :-)

Rich

--

Richard F. Drushel, Ph.D.
Department of Biology, Slug Division :)
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio 44106-7080 U.S.A.