

Charles Van Doren

January 7, 1983

Mr. Bob Stein
Atari Corporate Research
1196 Borregas
Sunnyvale CA 94086

Dear Bob:

A number of items, to wit:

(1) Your latest letter, sent by ordinary mail, was postmarked Jan. 4 and arrived here this morning -- Jan. 7. I think you cannot expect too much improve on that by any of your high tech devices, and it is certainly easier for me, since they deliver ordinary mail and I have to drive 30 miles to pick up extraordinary mail.

(2) Gerry and I are now scheduled to arrive at San Jose about 9:30 on Monday morning, Feb. 7. I presume that will be satisfactory. If you want us to come up the night before please let me know. Would you reserve a room at the Sunnyvale Sheraton for Feb. 7 and 8? We will go back to Hartford on Wednesday morning, Feb. 9. I have accepted a dinner invitation for Tuesday evening, which was a bit of a problem for you last time -- so you can think of us as being out of your hair at the end of the business day on Tuesday. (We will be dining with Harry Eustace and his wife, the guy who may be translating EB into Arabic with computer assists.)

(3) I am going to send you some stuff on the meeting, but in a separate letter. For the moment I continue to feel that it would be useful to devote all or part of Monday to discussing the ways in which electronic treatments of various subjects might differ from print treatments. I will be sending you a list of subjects in a day or two, which you guys could begin to think about.

(4) I had a long talk with Pat Wier yesterday. She talked with Linda the day after our breakfast meeting on the 21st of December. Apparently they are moving -- but still with glacial slowness -- toward some kind of agreement about the sale of computers. They also discussed in that phone conversation the research proposal that Linda had forwarded to Pat, but to which Pat had not responded. Apparently the problem was that EB was already doing some similar research, and efforts are being made to see if it will be adequate to the purposes. My impression is that Pat thinks it may be. I am now writing my report for December -- which will also be my omnibus report on the status of relations between EB and Atari, and my request for a meeting at EB on Feb. 2, with Gwinn as well as Swanson. We'll see. I understood that you and Steve were going to visit with Pat during January

to discuss the research proposal Steve is working on. Is that visit still scheduled? Pat knew nothing about it. I think the meeting ought to occur unless there are compelling reasons against it.

(5) In your Jan. 4 letter you asked about the current status of BJ and Compton's. Regarding BJ, here is the situation:

BJ has not been "thoroughly revised" for many years. Instead it has enjoyed annual revisions that tended to concentrate on more volatile areas and articles. Thus parts of the set are rather old, although not necessarily thereby out of date, while other parts are quite current.

Annual revisions of BJ are no longer being done at this time. All of EB's efforts are being devoted to Britannica and to Compton's. As far as I know there are no plans to begin annual revisions of BJ again.

The last serious annual revision was for the 1981 printing, but it was not exactly a major revision. For the 1982 printing we merely handled U.S. population data to accord with the new figures from the 1980 census.

The set is still being distributed in various places -- notably Canada by International -- and by various organizations -- notably EBEC, which has always sold the lion's share of BJ's in its school market. EB Home Field has never sold BJ; it has always used it as a premium. BJ has recently been replaced in the package by Compton's and other items.

I admit that there are a number of old hands in the sales department who regret this. They have always liked BJ as a premium, partly (no doubt) because of its name. I think there would be pretty general agreement that an electronic BJ would be (a) healthfully nonthreatening to the field force and (b) very possibly the best premium EB has ever had. We must discuss this opportunity seriously -- preferably before the Feb. 2 meeting with Gwinn.

Regarding Compton's, here is the situation:

CE is currently in the second full year of a major overhaul, one of the most extensive ever given to any of our encyclopedic publications. For the 1984 printing some 7 out of the 26 volumes will have been thoroughly revised and overhauled. The scope of this revision is globale, as the French say -- everything is being handled, and the set completely newly "strung out." However, the final product, although up to date and improved in many, many ways, will not be all that

The revision is scheduled to be completed in five years - i.e., by the 1987 printing - but I think they will need at least an extra year.

different to the nonexpert eye. Many pages -- at least 35 percent and maybe 45 percent -- will be carried over to the new edition unchanged, or with only a folio (page number) change. Hence the overall look will be similar. And the organization of the set will remain the same, or will be only subtly changed.

In my opinion CE will remain a good ^{*}print encyclopedia for young people. It will not be any better as the source of an electronic product because of this revision, except of course that the text of many articles will be more up to date.

This is something we can discuss on Feb. 8, when we get down to some practical hands on experiments with all your sets.

I look forward with considerable excitement to seeing Steve's research proposal. Send it at the first opportunity -- even if it is as badly typed as this letter, which I am not going to retype!

Best to all.

As ever,


Charles Van Doren

* even excellent!