



ROBOT BAR MEETS PRESS

Pour one for yourself, uh...

Ron Meyer—an established inventor—was no stranger to San Francisco's numerous bars. Two years ago, he realized that bartending required the kinds of mechanical skills and knowledge that current robots were capable of learning. He had no idea, however, of the perils to come.

In March, Meyer unveiled Scarab X-1, the world's first robotic bartender. The design had been difficult—true to Silicon Valley culture, none of the young engineers Meyer hired actually drank, so they required coaching in mixology. But the results were impressive. Made of mostly off-the-shelf technology—an Apple IIe computer, a Votan voice-recognition system, 5 motors, 52 sol-

noids, 8 pumps—the X-1 understands spoken orders, and responds with a cheery "OK, next drink please!" A robot arm then mixes one of 200 different drinks, or serves wine or beer, in a surprisingly expeditious manner.

The problem came when Meyer held a press conference. The media, recognizing an amusement, filled Meyer's small warehouse with reporters, television lights and camera crews. In the crush, Scarab X-1 may or may not have knocked over a glass (accounts vary), but the result was some distinctly snide reporting. Weeks later, Meyer can only shake his head as he reads the press clips. "They're running 10-to-1 negative." In Michigan, he reports, all the articles were negative. "They hate robots there."

Meyer, undeterred, is at work on a faster and more intelligent version of the robot. Now, if he can only design a robot reporter. . .

LAST BYTES

Not one company in the home-computer business has given the American public any compelling reason why it should buy a home computer.

—James J. Morgan, chairman, Atari

One of the principal pursuits of the computer age is the re-creation of fearsome medieval fire-breathing dragons.

—Roe R. Adams III, "Digital Deli," Workman Publishing.

Software, Hard Cash

Programmers: John Brockman wants you to be rich

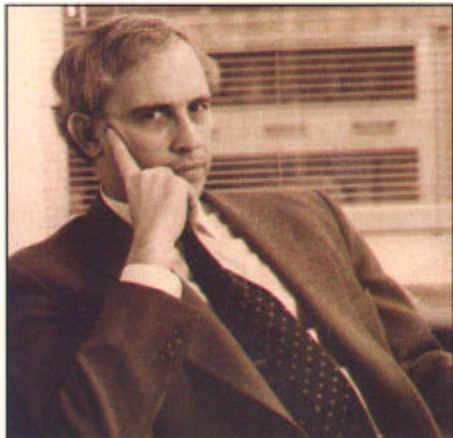
Two years ago, when New York literary agent John Brockman decided to automate his small agency, he bought several computer books—and became thoroughly confused. His mind suddenly cleared up when he read a projection that 25 million people would be using personal computers by 1985. "I realized that everyone who bought a computer was a potential software author," says Brockman, "and that was an interesting figure."

Brockman immediately appointed himself the publishing industry's first software agent, although he did not abandon books in favor of floppy discs altogether. For instance, Brockman made history when he closed a \$1.3 million deal with Doubleday & Co. for the rights to Stewart Brand's the "Whole Earth Software Catalog," and coaxed a \$600,000 advance from Harper & Row for a book series based on reviews from the magazine InfoWorld.

In Brockman's agency, the typical book deal rarely tops \$30,000, but the typical software contract nets \$400,000. And it can go much higher. Brockman recently rocked the 250-year-old, tradition-bound publishing industry by licensing the North American rights of "Typing Tutor," the best-selling educational program from Kriya Systems, to Simon & Schuster for a figure reported as high as \$20 million in royalties. "This is a Wild West show," says the jubilant Brockman. "Anything goes. It's exciting and painful at

the same time."

To Brockman, software is the most lucrative form of literature around, and he now devotes most of his time to bringing standards to boomtown. "We're making the rules because no one knows what a software contract looks like," he says. In the past, publishing companies treated software authors as developers, and encouraged customers to identify the publisher as the brand name. "But you don't go into a store and ask for a Random House novel or a CBS record," says Brockman, who, for a 15 per-



Brockman: Making millions in "a Wild West show."

cent cut, secures for his clients all the rights usually afforded to authors—including the right to receive full credit on the package.

Brockman's business has leaped from \$3 million to \$20 million in one year, and he regularly hosts "millionaires' dinners" to introduce software authors to publishers. "Publishing companies have deep pockets," he says. Not surprisingly, Brockman encounters considerable hostility from those in the book business. "People always say agents are destroying the market," he says. "What I've done is upped the ante."

Jennet Conant