

l'idéologie américaine, et qui assaille sans répit depuis quelques années notre culture et notre droit à l'imaginaire.

Depuis 1978, Daniel Sernine se dévoue entièrement à la cause de la littérature; il est l'auteur de 28 romans et d'environ 75 nouvelles destinés aux jeunes et aux adultes. Il est actuellement le directeur de la collection de romans "Jeunesse-Pop", et de *Lurelu*, une revue consacrée à la littérature pour les jeunes.

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REVIEWS OF CD-ROMS

LEARNING A LESSON FROM HISTORY CD-ROMS

History Alive — Northwest Passage. IDON East Corporation, 1996. CD-ROM \$34.95. <http://www.idon.com>. **History Alive — Klondike Gold Rush.** IDON East Corporation, 1996. CD-ROM \$34.95. <http://www.idon.com>.

There is more than just hardware and software in this brave new age of information technology. "Vapourware" describes hyped information technology that never quite materializes. And "shovelware" refers to CD-ROMs that are nothing more than receptacles of unorganized data with little thought put into content or curriculum, though they pretend to be learning tools. *Northwest Passage* and *Klondike Gold Rush* appear to be the latest in shovelware and vapourware.

IDON East promises "interactive modern maps" and an interface that carves "through the vast database with powerful interactive tools" but nothing you might expect from Britannica's CANADISK, or Brøderbund's MYST appears. The interface is kludgy and slow even on an Intel 486DX66. And it takes a lot of patience to get anywhere or to understand where you might be going. One would hope that an educational product would be intuitive and playful, not a challenge in itself. Installing the software is confusing: without warning or without checking the state of the computer, the software moves files and dumps over 16 megabytes of data on the drive.

The content is little better than the interface. Poorly-annotated text appears to be cribbed from textbooks, a far cry from the exciting contemporary works available in both print and on CD-ROM today. And though the pictures are nice images from various archives, they are few and hard to find. Audio is acceptable though meager with 25 segments on *The Northwest Passage* and 27 on *Klondike*. Audio content is mainly sound effects and short quotations, though there are a few songs. There are five movies on both disks.

Klondike Goldrush is organized into five "units" with problematic titles such as "A lusterless Klondike — russian and English traders" [sic] and "Trails to the Golden Mecca of the North." Poor choice of quotations ("They spoke in very loud tones, as do all Indians in their natural state"), lack of audience awareness or a clear sense of pedagogy, all suggest that the offerings were not widely circulated among teachers and classrooms or vetted for language and bias.

There is no indication in IDON East's corporate profile that educators were part of the project at all. In fact, their stated aim — "to carry out research and development projects and continue to exploit the resulting technologies to provide information and communications technology based products and services" — perhaps best expresses the purpose of these CD-ROMs. Learning and literature are more than the marketing of products, and with the wonderful material being produced by authors, teachers and students, especially on the WWW, there is no need to accept less than what print already provides.

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FILM REVIEWS

DISNEY'S *POCAHONTAS*: THE EMPTINESS INSIDE

Four hundred years after a young Native American risked her life to make peace with British colonizers, Walt Disney Studios have trivialized that child's remarkable story in a cartoon which glosses over both generosity and genocide with saccharine songs, designer emotions, political correctness, cute animals, and the love of a "copper-skinned" "babe" for an invading white hunk. "The worst thing that could happen is [for *Pocahontas* to look] like a bunch of white guys from the Valley made it," notes the film's director; unfortunately, that is precisely how the movie looks.

Granted, Native American activist Russell Means (the voice of Pocahontas's father, Powhatan) calls *Pocahontas* "the finest work ever done on American Indians by Hollywood" and Native American Irene Bedard (Pocahontas) suggests that "some little girl [wanting] to be Pocahontas [instead of Barbie]" is "a step in the right direction." But it seems an awfully small step. These "Indians" are noble savages, their spirituality reduced to the profundities of Grandmother Willow, a tree spirit who confides: "My bark is worse than my bite." The English colonizers are as evil as the Indians are good. The dignity of Pocahontas and Powhatan evaporates when they "sing white" (in the voices of Judy Kuhn and Jim Cummings).

The film's constructions of gender and age are equally dubious. The transformation of the historical ten- or eleven-year-old girl into a mature sex object — complete with cleavage, full red lips, flowing black hair, one-strap doeskin dress, and fetishized animal movements — has inspired viewers to call Pocahontas "Poca-Barbie," "Snow Brown," and "a busty native Babewatch-style gal and her commanding white lover, who looks like a dancer from Chippendale's." Who, one must ask, is this movie for? Both my ten-year-old son and my five-year-old daughter like Pocahontas. But what they like is not the Pocahontas-Smith romance, but Meeko, the raccoon, Flit, the hummingbird, and Percy, the dog. When critic Mal Vincent asks, "Does anyone expect accuracy from a movie that