



Renegades of the Empire: How Three Software Warriors Started a Revolution Behind the Walls of Fortress Microsoft

Michael Drummond

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The "Beastie Boys" did whatever it took to make their revolution happen. . . .

St. John's disregard for Microsoft authority figures was equaled only by the game developers' antipathy for the big Redmond company. No one knew how far he might go until his boss put him in charge of a presentation to the trade press.

St. John emerged on stage at the Microsoft theater and told the trade-press writers: "Yep, I know what you guys think about Windows."

He booted up a computer. The blue start-up screen with clouds and Windows 3.1 logo came to life on a large display. A graphic of a shotgun barrel rose from the bottom of the screen. With the audience looking down its sights, the gun blasted five holes in the logo. The press erupted with laughter and approving applause.

Microsoft's senior marketing vice president turned crimson and told St. John's boss, Rick Segal, "You gotta fire this guy."

Segal set the marketing guy straight.

"I looked him right in the face and, said, 'You don't have a clue. They think you're a slime bag and now they think he's a hero.'

"Competing in the high-tech computer market is a lot like war--especially if you work at Microsoft. Bill Gates's gladiators--his engineers and evangelists and programmers--were famous for seizing new terrain, converting nonbelievers, and always winning, no matter what the cost. No one took the lessons of the Microsoft way more to heart than Craig Eisler, Eric Engstrom, and Alex St. John, a trio of evangelists and software engineers who, more than anything, wanted to conquer a market on their own.

Their first attempt was a top-secret effort to make Windows do what it had never done before: play games. Turning their well-honed combat skills on their own company, the trio--often called the "Beastie Boys"--rammed DirectX, their game project, through, first without permission, then without regard for political correctness, protocol, or budget restraints. The battle spilled from the halls of Microsoft into the international gaming community, but within months, DirectX was being used in every one of the best-selling games for the PC.

The "Beastie Boys" had won the battle, but they received so few rewards that they felt as if they'd lost the war. So they set their sights on the Internet. Their new project: Chrome, a Web browser that could bring television-quality animated graphics to the Internet. It was every Microsoft marketer's dream, every competitor's nightmare. It should have changed the Internet and the lives of millions, none more than those of the three designers.

Michael Drummond gained exclusive access to this trio's story--the tale of a rise, a fall, and, perhaps, a triumph. In telling it, he gives us the most revealing glimpse yet into the world's most successful company. Renegades of the Empire isn't just a story of a nascent technology--it's a primer on how to get rid of your boss, how to bury your expenses on someone else's balance sheet, and when to put on your Viking costume and walk the halls swinging an ax if you want to get things done. It is a story of fascinating science and high-tech boys and their toys, but even more, it is the story of how three engineers turned the might of an empire to their own ends.

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