

## **UBIQUITY INTERVIEW: ALAN LENTON ON GAMES**

A highly regarded game-designer who created IB's award-winning multi-player game FEDERATION, Alan Lenton previously worked as the manager of a rock band, manager of bookshop, graphic designer, and production editor of a London listings magazine.

**UBIQUITY:** Do you look back on your experience as disparate bursts of activity, or do you see it as essentially a straight line leading to your current activity?

**LENTON:** I think a zig-zag path might be a more accurate description! I left University with a Sociology degree, and there isn't very much you can do with a Sociology degree, except lecture in Sociology. I had no desire to do that, even if my degree had been up to it, hence the wide variety of jobs. In fact, the ones you mention are only the highlights of an extremely checkered work history. Nonetheless, I think it's the case that all the different things I did before writing Federation contributed. I originally went to work for Compunet -- a UK network for Commodore 64 machines, precisely so that I would have a platform on which I could run a multi-player game.

**UBIQUITY:** What's important to know about multi-player games?

**LENTON:** I suspect it's the case that multi-player games, whether MUDs (text based) or more graphics orientated, need a lot more depth than boxed (single player) games. If you want to run a successful multi-player game you have to keep players playing for a year or more. You have to keep coming up with new material so that they don't get bored. For that you need a wide breadth of experience, which is what I had when I started to write Federation.

**UBIQUITY:** Not everyone knows about Federation, so tell us about it.

**LENTON:** Federation is a text based space trading game. The players start off purchasing a spaceship with a loan from the bank. At that stage they are what used to be called 'tramp' ships hauling different cargos round the solar system for other people. Next they become couriers delivering high value packages to customers' doors. This helps them become familiar with the layout of the different planets. After that they move to trading on the commodity exchanges on the planets. Basically buy commodities low, move them to a different planet and (hopefully) sell them high.













