

# Point of ORIGIN

Vol. II No. 11 ♦♦

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♦♦ Austin, Texas



## My Funny Valentine....

Richard and Raymond Benson lend their talents to "Love Letters," a Zachary Scott Theater fund-raiser. Richard recited from Song of Solomon while Raymond played the love theme from Ultima VII. Raymond's union, the American Society of Composers, Authors & Publishers (ASCAP), recently honored the love theme with its Popular Music Award.

## The Envelope, Please

Still more congratulations are in order for the Wing Commander II team. On Tuesday, we got word that Wing 2 had been voted a finalist in the 1991 Software Publishers Association Excellence in Software Awards in not one, but two categories: Best Entertainment Program (the big one) and Best Action/Arcade Program (big in its own right). 880 SPA members voted in the preliminary balloting; the same 880 will make the final decision. Here's how the competition stacks up:

### Best Arcade/Action Program

- **Wing Commander II**
- Lemmings (Psygnosis)
- Sonic the Hedgehog (Sega)
- Super Tetris (Spectrum Holobyte)
- Spectre (Velocity)

### Best Entertainment Program

- **Wing Commander II**
- Sherlock Holmes (ICOM)
- Civilization (MicroProse)
- Lemmings (Psygnosis)
- Jet Fighter II (Velocity)

## Rollout!!!

### Collections & Conversions Hitting the Shelves

In a budgetary game of beat the clock, three products will be heading out the door before the fiscal year ends February 29: the Wing Commander Deluxe Edition, which includes Wing and both Secret Missions; ULTIMA The Second Trilogy (you can figure that one out); and Ultima VI for Amiga.

The former two products were originally scheduled for 2nd quarter release, but the Christmas dry spell prompted a bump. That sent Marketing and Operations into their own "crunch modes," trying to get

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*"These products will put us back into business and help end the fiscal year on a decent note."*

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boxes designed, manuals printed and shipping scheduled. Some extra in-house effort from Mike Harrison, Debbie Nettingham, Craig Miller and Curtis Wood shaved two weeks from the normal five-week process, so everything

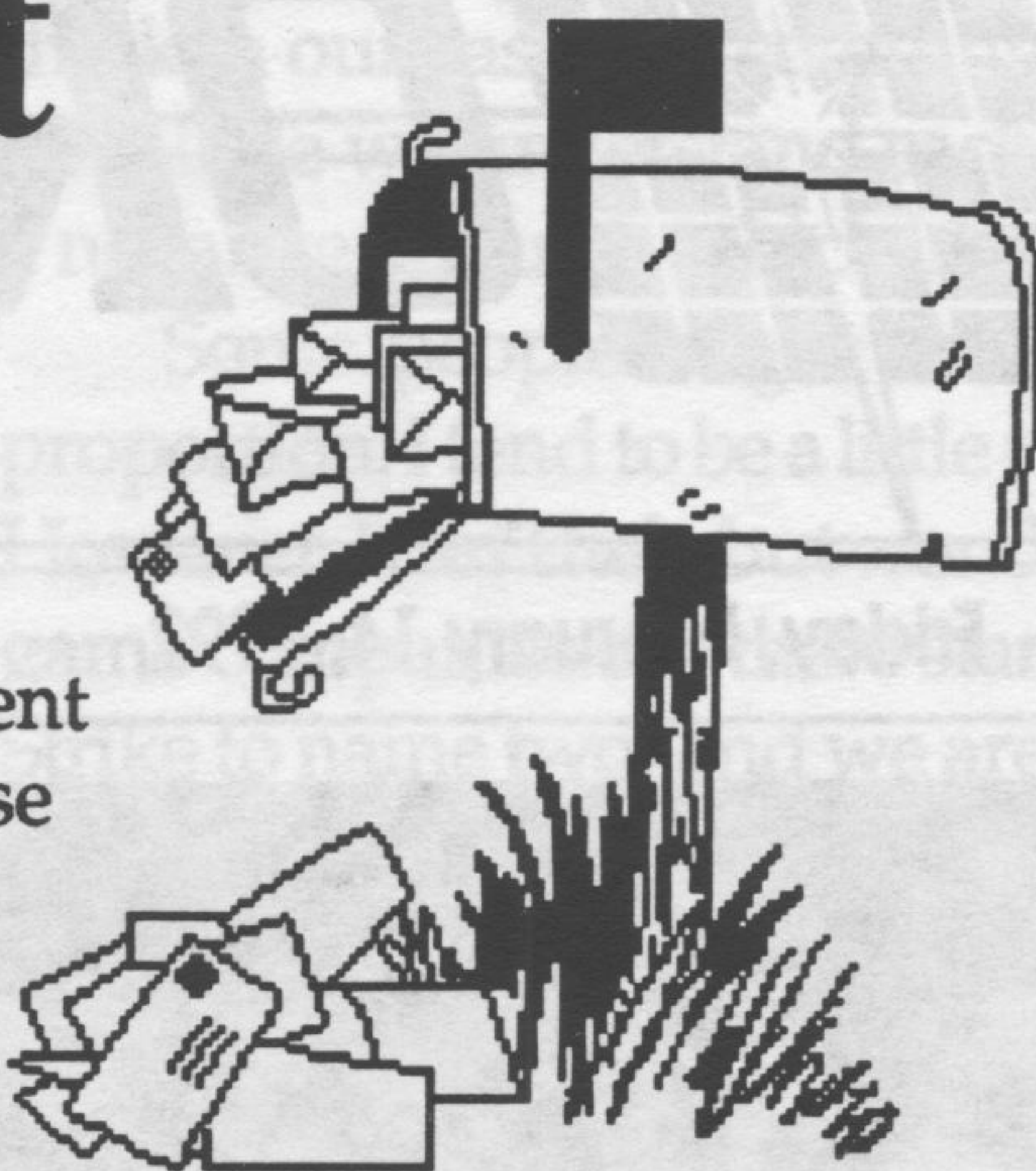
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# Dear Point Man

Hail, oh Ace Reporter—  
Could you find out what the current scoop is regarding our possible purchase of a building?

Signed,  
PB



*That is the most frequently-asked question of the old Point Man, and now, I have an answer. We have made an offer on a building on north 183 near Spicewood Springs Road, about 5 miles north of the intersection of Mopac and Research (183). The offer's been accepted by the seller, but it's going to take at least 30-60 days to close the deal. That means it's not set in stone yet, but it looks pretty positive.*

*The second most frequently-asked question is: "When will we move?" This new building is not built out yet inside. The kind of outfitting needed would take about 6-7 months from the date of closing (assuming the deal goes through). "We wouldn't want to move during the critical time just before Christmas," Rob says, "so, in all likelihood, we'd move during our Christmas break or between that break and February."*

*As part of my ongoing service to the ORIGIN community, I have acquired maps and pictures of the proposed site and placed them on the bulletin boards in ORIGIN East and West. I'll keep you posted as things progress.*

Dear Point Man,

How about some sort of family-oriented activities to thank the unseen folks who have to live with our ORIGIN hours? Mostly warm-weather stuff comes to mind—softball, hiking, rec day w/ obstacle courses and stuff, boating, etc.

Any support for this idea or suggestions?

Signed,  
Wondering

*As fate would have it, the Entertainment Committee is in the process of coming up with next years' schedule of events. Kay and the EC want to thank everybody for filling out the questionnaires. They really opened some eyes. For example, the EC found that quite a few employees favored outdoor events at places like Lake Travis. Some employees also said they have special needs in regard to food (for health or political reasons, I'm guessing). All of these responses will be used in coming up with a plan. I'll make sure your suggestions are passed along.*

*On another front, in March, Happy Hours are returning on a regular basis—every other Friday, opposite of paydays. That way, every week will have a nice ending. Social hours are scrapped for the time being. We'll let you know about cookouts and other events.*

## Milestones

There seems to be a rash of babies pending in mid-March. Marten Davies and his wife, Cheryl, are expecting this month. Fred and Donna Schmidt are re-working their budgets for July. Steve and Dianne Muchow will add on in August. Kay Gilmore and her husband, Bruce, are also in the "family way" for August.

Fred noted that some of these (Marten and Steve) are "repeat offenders" from the last ORIGIN baby boom about two years ago. Just goes to show you what happens when new software runs behind and people need something to do...

Others are marking their own births this month: Donna Whitaker and Zach Simpson (Feb. 14 TODAY!), Debbie Nettingham (Feb. 2), Mark Vittek (Feb 3), Sheri Hobbs (Feb. 15), Mark Chandler (Feb. 18), Danny Garrett (Feb. 21), , Brendan Seagraves (Feb. 23), Tim Hardy (Feb. 24), and Craig Miller (Feb. 28).

Believe it or not, some employees have been with ORIGIN longer than six months. Michelle Caddell leads an elite group of employees celebrating five-year anniversaries. Michelle's red-letter day was Feb. 4. Others are Denis Loubet (May 1), Paul Isaac (June 1), Alan Gardner (July 6), Herman Miller (Aug. 4) and Steve Morris (Dec. 14). The only other two longer in the tooth are Dallas (1985) and get this: next year, Jeffrey the Giant will topple the TEN year goal post. Hope his 401K plan is in order.

**In Our Next Point:**  
"Matrix Management"  
Explained.  
Fascinating reading!



## ...Rollout

will be at STARPAK in time.

Fred says these releases will put us "back into business and help end the fiscal year on a decent note." The persistent memory problems which plagued U6/Amiga have been ironed out and is going through final sign-off this week. ORIGIN will be releasing a North American version. The European version being released by Mindscape will have a test during the installation process which looks for 50Hz electrical current, so it won't run here. While the domestic Amiga market has declined substantially over the past few years, this new conversion might still find an audience. Expected sales are in the 7-10,000 range (USA & Canada) and perhaps as many as 20,000 in Europe. Early word is that Mindscape did an excellent job of keeping the graphics sharp. European press which has been looking at beta copies have glowing reviews. Mark Ramshaw of *Amiga Power* writes "This is my favourite Amiga game ever. Nothing even comes close."

The Sales staff is optimistic about all three products. "The retail channel still has very high confidence in ORIGIN. It's really incredible," Marten says. He adds that there is a virtual vacuum of competition out there, leaving a window of opportunity wide open when *Underworld* and *U7* follow suit. The optimism's been bolstered by good news from Software Toolworks, which released the CD-ROM versions of *Wing Deluxe* and *U6/Wing* a few weeks ago. Sales have been even stronger than expected, indicating that the installed base of CD drives is getting established.

# Growing Pains

*(The following is from guest columnist "Mr. Mike" McShaffry)*

Many people I talk to these days are concerned about how big Origin has grown and the problems that arise from this growth. Specifically, I am referring to the walls we have all built around our departments. The "us versus them" attitude seems to get worse with time, and I for one think that we as a company should do something to get rid of this attitude as soon as possible.

I have been at Origin about 14 months (it's funny, I feel like an old hand...) and I notice that the subject of conversations increasingly focuses to departmental conflict. Since I am part of Product Development much of what I hear is focused on us, but I'm sure departments like Customer Service or Quality Assurance hear the same kind of things. Statements like "Well, they don't understand how hard we work" or (even better) "Why does that department get pampered and we get to work so hard" tend to dominate these conversations. It seems as though we have banded together rather well as departments, but not very well as a company as it has grown.

The result of all this conversation, strangely enough, has been to construct walls of varying thickness throughout this company. I say strangely enough because conversation (communication) usually has an

*See "Growing" Page 4*

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## Buy: The Way

Budget time tends to shine a bright light into dark corners of company policy. That's why everybody put their departmental heads together to settle the issue of purchase procedures. Following is a "Reader's Digest" version of the outcome:

The Purchase Requisition—This is the core, the nucleus, the basic building block of any purchase. Leave no stone unturned or blank unfilled when submitting this to your Department Head. Any employee can initiate a purchase req, but it might be a good idea to talk it over with your Department Head to see if it's likely to get past square one. That way, you don't spend a lot of time filling out unnecessary paperwork. List your name as the "requisitioner" and give a detailed description of the item(s) to be purchased, including *exact* brand/model desired, or whether a similar product will do the same job. If you shop around for the best price yourself, you'll also need to include the vendor, address, contact name and telephone number along with a few names of other places you checked in the "comments" area. Don't forget freight, delivery and payment terms (ORIGIN prefers "Net 30" invoicing). Otherwise, the company will do the shopping.

*See "Buy" next page*



## ...Buy

The Manager or Department Head takes it from there, checking info, assigning a G/L account # and forwarding it to the proper company Purchasing Agent. There are three of them—depending on the type of item—who make the purchase and handle the paperwork. That's all there is to it.

Of course, there are a few bureaucratic landmines out there if you stray far from this path:

- If you decide to buy something with your own money and submit an expense form for reimbursement, be forewarned: Dallas will now automatically deny any expense form which he didn't okay in the first place as a Purchase Req. That means you'll be eating it.

- On purchase req's, CODs are **strongly** discouraged, and not allowed at all without at least 2-day advance approval from Mark Chandler.

- Incomplete purchase req's won't go far.

- Any single item over \$250 or order over \$500 will need Mark's approval as well as the Department Head's.

- All hardware and software purchases will need Robert's nod.

- Even though you may get permission to deal with ORIGIN's travel agency for logistics, only Norma can confirm arrangements or authorize billing. Of course, this can only happen after the proper Purchase Requisition procedure (see above).

Fallout from improper procedures can be fatal: disciplinary action, no reimbursement, even possible dismissal for repeat offenders. But look at it this way, you'll be able to take your brand new 486/33 (and its payments) home with you.

## ...Growing

effect of tearing down walls that people have built between each other. I think in our case, the communication between departments has shown how little we understand each other. This lack of understanding fosters a negative attitude, which in turn makes the whole situation worse.

Some people might think that I'm blowing this problem out of proportion. I tend to be a little reactionary anyway, so I might even agree. However, I can't help but wonder what it will be like when a lot of starving game companies out there start copying our technologies (Ultima 7 and Strike to name two) and we are forced to produce products that are even better. I can tell you, I don't think anyone in this company can work any harder (I know I can't!!). The only way to succeed in a market as competitive as ours is to rid ourselves of internal conflict so we can all concentrate on making games.

I challenge everyone at Origin to help rid ourselves of this "us vs. them" attitude. If you read an E-mail that rubs you the wrong way, or an announcement that makes your teeth itch, or something in Point of Origin (like this letter, for example) that brings thoughts of medieval torture to mind, find the source of the irritation (and it could be in your own mind) and do something about it. Nobody wants to be seen as a pest (except maybe me...) and they would probably thank you for informing them that what they did may have had a different effect than what was desired. By the same token, if you do something that irritates other people and they start telling you about it, keep an open mind and try to understand what really happened.

The road ahead for us is a bumpy one. Many companies do not survive the "boom town" growth phase that we have just experienced. Our chance lies in the quality (and quantity) of truly dedicated people and their ability to not only produce the best products on the market, but also their ability to pull together as one single team. Believe me, my bets ride with our success.

## Comings and Goings

Tommy Petrovic is joining ORIGIN as the new Librarian, keeping up with all the code programs. Tommy's from Croatia. He and Neno Vugrinec didn't know each other over there, but it turns out they didn't live far apart. Small world.

Paul Steed climbs on as a new TDA. He'll also be a flight-sim ringer, having spent some

time in an Air Force F-15.

Sadly, Programming Manager Jim Martin has decided to take a position with another company. We wish him well. Meanwhile, Dallas and Sherry will be splitting those duties during the search for a replacement.

