

Point of ORIGIN

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Wing 2 Still Flying High

Wing 2 wedged its way into one more category in the SPA ballot: Critic's Choice. That means journalists looked at all 7 of the consumer categories and picked 5 games. Here's the rest of the competition:

Wing Commander II

The Adventures of Willy Beamish (Dynamix)

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe (Lucasfilm)

Sid Meier's Civilization (MicroProse)

Falcon 3. (Spectrum)

You may remember, Wing 2's already up for Best Arcade/Action Game and Best Entertainment Program. Word on the winners comes Tuesday, March 19, in Seattle.

For the record: the SPA has now officially certified Wing 2 as "gold," marking the sale of more than 100,000 units (Wing 1 got its Gold Card last September). Special Operations 1 is awaiting certification as "silver" (50,000 units sold), as is the Speech Accessory Pack—originally expected to top out at 5,000. Marten says this is the first time he can recall being so proud to be so wrong.

Press Roundup

Wrap-up articles of Winter CES are starting to hit the mags now. So far, our favorite comes from *Computer Game Review*, which writes: "We gotta give the 'Best Sense of Humor' Award to the ORIGIN crew, who wore nice little red buttons with the words 'We're SORRY We Missed Christmas.'" CGR also says that one of the most impressive sights at all of CES was the large number of other companies' programmers and execs that spent so much time at the ORIGIN booth, checking out the Underworld demo. "The impression was that many competi-

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Mystical Matrix Management

It's late and you're working on that one last piece of code or artwork the game has to have in order to go beta. Suddenly, the skies open up and a blinding bolt of lightning turns night into day for one split-second. When darkness falls upon the room once again, your monitor is blank. Even top-notch surge protectors have their limits.

Now, the game's in jeopardy and you don't have a machine. Who ya gonna call? Your producer? Your department manager? Actually, this is probably a good time to call both of them. But other cases are a little more clear cut. Enter the famed matrix management system of Product Development.

"Actually, the matrix management system's been in effect for quite some time in large R&D companies in many other fields," according to Fred. "It's been found an effective way to manage large numbers of employees working on varied projects." I'm best with food analogies, so picture a big 5-layered cake. One layer is made

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up of artists, one is made of programmers, another is writers/TDAs, still another is made of musicians/sound people and the fifth is made of quality assurance testers.

Nobody eats a cake in layers; you use a fork and cut through all of them. Producers/directors are the forks. By working with department managers, they get a cross-section of the people they need FROM each department FOR each project. That means most of your questions, suggestions, complaints or requests should have a pretty clear-cut recipient. If they are department-related—operational things like paychecks, vacation time, scheduling, etc.—they go to the *department* manager. He or she is also the only person who can approve purchase req's for equipment or software.

If, on the other hand, your concern is totally project-related, then the *producer* or *director* is the person to see. Producers and directors work through department heads if they need more people or equipment allocated to a project. Isn't that simple?

Right now, we're short two department managers. For the time being, musicians/sound people are reporting to Al Nelson, who also oversees the Art Department. Programmers are reporting to Dallas directly. Karen Conroe handles QA and Mike Sims rides herd over writers and TDAs.

If you have some other questions or still can't quite grasp the concept, just let me know. We'll head over to Chez Fred's Bakery so I'll have a variety of visual aids for further explanation.

Dear Point Man

Dear Point Man,

There was a little something extra in my last couple of paychecks. What (or who) gives?

Actually, that's Uncle Sam advancing you on next year's refund. President Bush announced in his State of the Union address that federal income tax withholding rates would be reduced immediately. That doesn't mean you'll owe any less at the end of the year, you'll just be getting less back. The latest paychecks show that reduction.

If you'd like to keep your withholding at its former rate, you'll have to fill out a new W-4. Check with Mark or Ron in Accounting if you need more details.

Dear Point Man,

I was under the impression that one of the many benefits of working for ORIGIN was the assurance that if you were not working up to snuff, you were going to be told and worked with before any punitive action was taken.

According to the rumor mill, the last two persons to be fired from ORIGIN were neither worked with nor warned about any impending actions. Has this policy been revoked, or merely suspended? Does it only apply to certain grades of employees? Should we quake in fear every time we are called to our superior's office?

The rumor mill *has* been churning, so I deferred this one to Dallas himself. Here's his response:

There is a lot of understandable concern regarding the recent employment terminations several individuals. It is not normal for Origin to let people go that have been here for a year or more, nor is it normal for Origin to let go of so many people in such a short time. It is understandable that it makes individuals concerned for the security of their own employment.

Some people have also expressed concern that Origin is in the midst of a layoff. Others have expressed concern that Origin may be perceived to be firing people without giving them the appropriate opportunity to rectify their problems. This is not true. Since the recent terminations have occurred in Product Development, I'll impart the facts concerning that department:

On January 1, 1991 there were 41 employees in Product Development. At current count, there are 120 employees in Product Development. 40 of those new employees were hired in the 3 month period from October to December. You'll probably recall the anxiety we all felt when bringing on this many new people in such a short period. We knew at the time that assimilation and evaluation of so many new people would take several months. And we knew that once the dust settled, inevitably there would be some problem areas that would

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Hey, Mon!

Join your buds in Jamaica!!!

Richard Garriott and Robin McShaffry (Mr. Mike's Mrs.) have arranged a cool trip to help you unwind from post- , pre- and full-project stress syndrome.

Jack Tar Village, Montego Bay is an all-inclusive resort. Everything you need and some things you don't need are included in this 4-day/3-night package. Look!

- *Airfare from DFW airport**
- *Resort Accommodations - two persons per room**
- *All the food you can eat, both buffet style and sit-down dinners**
- *Unlimited beverages - soft drinks, house wine, beer and cocktails - all the alcohol you can put away**
- *Live nightly entertainment**
- *Shuffleboard, volleyball, ping-pong, games, contests, scheduled events**
- *Freshwater swimming pool**
- *4 tennis courts**
- *Water sports: snorkeling, windsurfing, sailing, paddleboats, water skiing**
- *Exercise and aerobics classes, Reggae dance classes, Rum mixology classes**
- *All tips and taxes**
- *Cancellation Insurance: in case of medical emergency, subpoena, court order, your payment will be refunded.**

All this for only \$499 plus \$33 US and Jamaica departure taxes: a total of \$532 per person. You will only have to bring money for the things outside the resort you would like to do: nightlife, shopping, tours, scuba diving... Jack Tar Village offers a number of daily excursions for its guests.

- *Ocho Rios/Dunnes River Falls: hiking, swimming, spectacular views - \$20 per person**
- *Great Rose House/City Shopping tour: full day of sightseeing, shopping, lunch on your own - \$20 per person**



***Negril beach tour/Negril market: touring, sunning, shopping, lunch on your own - \$20 per person**

***River floating: 2-person straw rafts poled down river, full day - \$33 per person**

All of these and more will be available at the resort. Just sign up when you get there.

The Scuba diving around Jamaica is supposed to be some of the best in the world. Jack Tar Villages have reasonable rates for boat-and-equipment rentals for certified divers:

2 dives: \$55

3 dives: \$75

6 dives: \$120

If you are not certified, the resort offers a resort course with one excursion or certification for \$60. This price includes equipment, and more details will be available at a later date.

You do not need a passport to travel to Jamaica. A certified birth certificate and valid picture ID will do. A passport wouldn't hurt, however, and you can get more information on that from Mr. Mike.

The charter flights to Jamaica begin on April 16, 1992. The first large group availability is April 30 - May 3. This is a Thursday 7:30 AM departure from DFW airport, (you'll be on the beach by 1:00) and a Sunday mid-afternoon arrival back at DFW. Your transportation to and from DFW is on your own, and there are many alternatives in this area. The travel arrangements currently being planned by Robin McShaffry can accommodate a party of 45-50 persons this April 30 weekend with an option on any following additional weekend as long as there is availability. And ORIGIN Prez, Robert Garriott, says it's OK by him for any interested employees (+spouses/friends) to join in as long as the employee has the needed two vacation days available, and that no department is completely shut down.

The clue here is availability. If you are interested in going, you need to tell Michelle Caddel *as soon as possible*. We need to find out how much interest there is so that we can decide if we need to put a cap on the number of people going. (It will probably be a case of first reply, first go.) No money is needed now but, if you are interested, we need to know NOW. The sooner Robin can get a list, the sooner we are guaranteed fares, availability, flight times, and all that. As soon as definite plans are made, those persons who have indicated an interest by submitting their names to Michelle will be fully informed about room arrangements, international customs laws, and other important facts for the occasional traveler.

Don't hesitate to do this. You need this! Tell Michelle you want to go today!

Milestones

There's still time to make it to Hallmark before the March birthdays hit: Richard Mather (March 4), Bill Baldwin (March 8), Jake Rodgers (March 9), Anthony Nichols (March 10), Michelle Lindner (March 11), Denis Loubet (March 13), Whitney Ayres (March 16), Brian Martin (March 22), Mike McShaffry (March 26), Beth Miller (March 27), and John Onorato (March 28).

Two of this month's birthday celebrants have another reason to party—Denis Loubet and Beth Miller got engaged on Valentine's Day. Denis popped the question at the Brick Oven Pizzeria. What a romantic! No firm date's set yet. Congratulations!

In the Out-Door—ORIGIN bids a fond farewell to four people: Sherry Cain, Bob Quinlan, Jeff Dee and Paul Meyer. Your co-workers will miss you and we wish you the best of luck.

Snapshot

Computer Game Review and 16-Bit Entertainment recently ran one of its reader surveys. Of the 456 who responded:

- 94% were male.
- 60% said they own 16 or more games.
- 72% said they have IBM-MS DOS computers.
- When asked which types of games they enjoy: 59% said simulations, 54% said action/adventure and 49% said RPGs.

...Press Roundup

tors felt they had been passed by, technology-wise, even *before* their in-progress games had come out."

By the way, two other magazine notes: David White, the CGR reviewer who was *Underworld's* best friend, is no longer with the magazine. "He's looking at some freelance opportunities," Steve Honeywell told me in a recent phone talk. David says, "I will ascribe my decision for leaving as 'artistic differences.'" Also, *Game Players PC Entertainment* is shut down, part of a move by the bank which fuels the publisher, Signal Research. Inside sources say it's been a few months in coming, and that the head honchos are trying to re-group.

In the February issue, PC Sources reviews Mike's *Wing Commander Strategy Guide*. Russ Lockwood writes, "It contains more than 200 pages of top-notch tactics to obliterate the dreaded Kilrathi." He goes on to say that "the information in this book will make you a better pilot, or at least a more informed one." By the way, Mike's book is going into its *third* printing.

The new *Video Games and Computer Entertainment* has write-ups for all its award winners in the February issue. You might remember, we told you that VG & CE surprised us at CES by dropping off a trophy naming Wing 2 as "Best Computer Game of the Year." A couple of quotes: "It has relentless first-person combat action and riveting non-interactive scenes in one slick, science-fiction package." "Those with the hardware power to install the speech disks can enjoy the most effective, dramatic cut scenes ever included in a computer game." More awards may be on the way. Check out "The Envelope, Please" elsewhere in this issue.

Wing 2 was also written up in the *Chicago Tribune* "Best and Worst" column. Dennis Lynch named it "Most Far-Out Sound of 1991." He also named it "Toughest Game to Run" due to the lengthy installation process. Guess it's the old "is the glass half empty or half full" question.

Special Operations coverage is starting to hit the gaming fans. *Computer Game Review* says Special Ops "has the quality and graphics that you have come to expect from Wing Commander I & II." In Shay Addams' newsletter *Simulations*, Al Giovetti says he enjoyed the game so much that he plans to spend mega-bucks upgrading his system for the next installment. France's *Joystick* magazine (which has always been very kind to us) gives Special Ops a 95% rating. France's *Tilt* gives it 18 out of a possible 20.

Finally, don't miss the fabulous company profile done in Germany's *ASM* magazine. There's something about this one...I just can't put my finger on it. (Really, Richard, I don't know how that huge picture of me ended up in the story.)

In our next issue:

No operational news and the return of
graphics and pictures!

...Point Man

require corrective action. It was obvious to all that Origin was a rapidly growing company.

Our problems were divided into two types: 1) those that involved personnel/departmental issues, and 2) those that involved effective project management. Personnel/departmental issues became so time-consuming at our current size that additional management was needed to keep up. This is what precipitated the Matrix Management structure (see explanatory article in this issue).

It is unrealistic to assume that we can have 120+ employees in Product Development without there being some measure of employee turnover. Some employees decide of their own volition to work elsewhere, even when we wish they would stay, such as Jeff Dee in the Art Department, and Jim Martin the Programmer Manager. Other employees are asked to leave due to their inability to perform the tasks for which they were hired.

One of the benefits of having dedicated Department Heads under the Matrix Management structure is that they can keep a constant awareness of all the employees in their department, and can facilitate positive reinforcement for jobs well done, and present growth opportunities in areas where employees may need further development in order to successfully accomplish their jobs.

The longer-term employees recently released had been given many verbal and written requests each, over the period of more than a year, that there were significant areas of their job responsibilities that were not being satisfactorily performed. This was more time than should have been rightfully expected by any employee, and in future situations of the same nature a faster turn-a-around in the problems areas will become necessary.

Unfortunately, when an upper management employee is not performing satisfactorily, there is even less time and ability to hope that positive changes can take place. There is simply too much at stake. Upper-level management makes decisions on a daily basis that affect each and every one of us in significant ways. Those managers have to hit the ground running and they have to maintain a high level of performance with little variation. Our current size and position within the entertainment industry gives us little margin of error and restricts our desire to give managers inordinate amounts of time to learn how to become effective leaders and decision makers. This is especially true concerning the very critical positions of upper management. Upper-level management is hired to fill demanding positions, are compensated accordingly, and when they cannot meet those demands, the survival of Origin (which means all of us) requires immediate action.

We have very few "trainee" positions in this company. New employees who are brought in on a "trainee" or "probationary" or "temporary" basis are clearly told that up front. All others are hired for their specific skill sets that their prior experience record tells us they should have. Extensive screening and interviewing is done to maximize the probability—for both the employee and the company—that we have the right person for the right job at the right time. As a result, the vast majority of new employees work out terrific...just look around you! Unfortunately, in a few instances, the critical fit might not be there.

Regardless of an employee's position within the company, if they cannot fulfill their current job requirements, EVERY effort is taken to find another appropriate position for them. Sometimes they are moved from one position to another several times until a good fit is hopefully found. Sometimes their salary requirement makes changes of position prohibitive to them. This is especially disappointing when it appears as if they could fill a valuable function in another position.

So in answer to the question posed above, "Should we quake in fear every time we are called to our superior's office?" ABSOLUTELY NOT! I sorely regret and am saddened if any employee feels as if he or she cannot come talk to their direct supervisor, or to me, Fred Schmidt, or even Robert Garriott, at any time for any reason. Your views, concerns, problems, frustrations, etc., are of extreme importance to us.

Dallas Snell