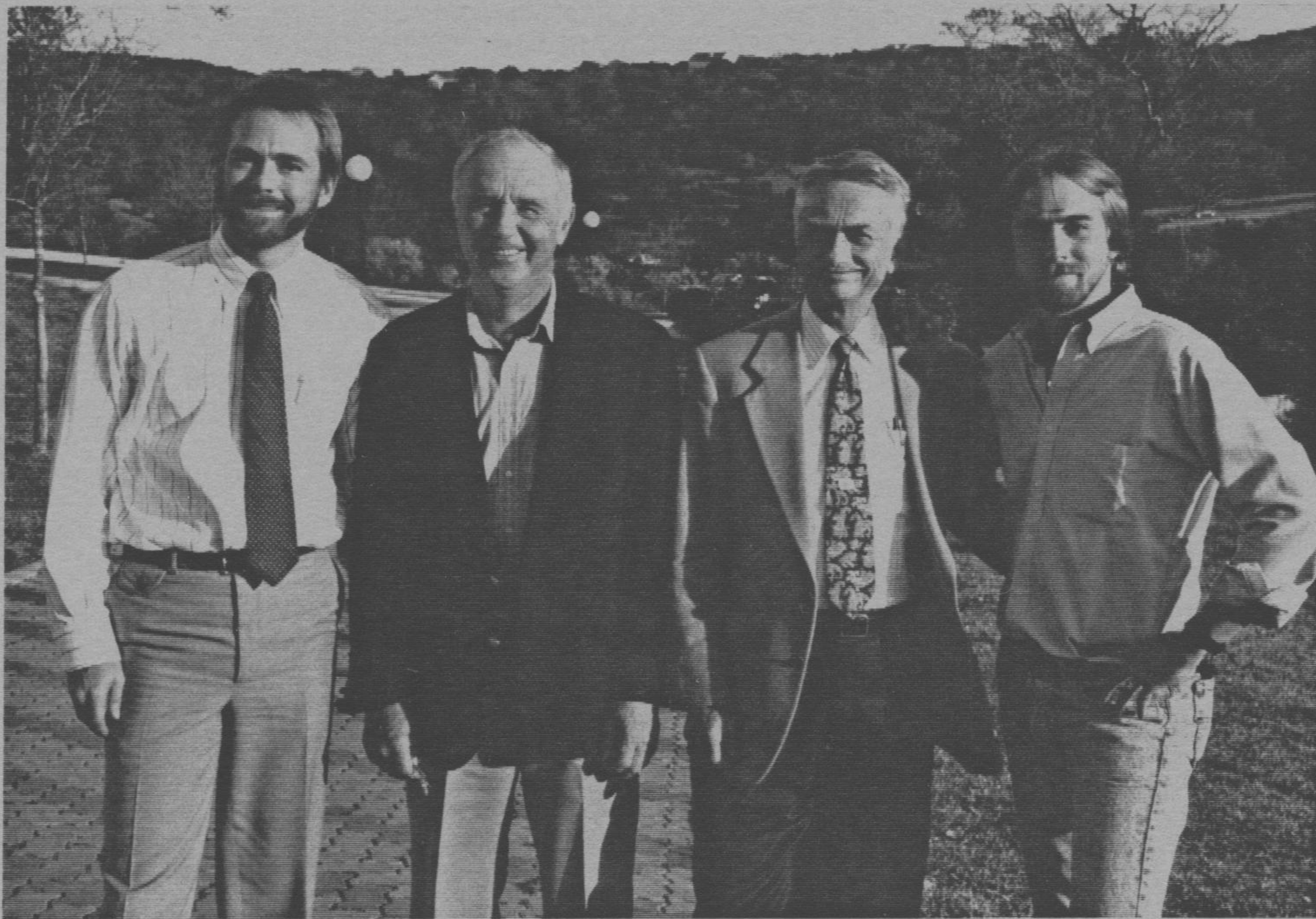


Point of ORIGIN

Vol. II No. 13❖❖

Friday, March 13, 1992

❖❖ Austin, Texas



Chairmen of the Board: (l-r) Robert Garriott, Bill Richards, Owen Garriott and Richard Garriott

A View From the Top

Inside the ORIGIN Board Meeting

Haven't you ever wondered what the Board actually talks about once a year? We'll spare you the 100+ pages of numbers and tables in favor of bringing you the highlights as presented in the Overview of Company Performance:

- It was a big year for the Wing Commander line. Wing I & II and their associated products accounted for 90% of domestic sales revenue. They also brought the company tremendous visibility and established ORIGIN's dominance in action/simulation as well as fantasy role playing.
- Gross sales worldwide hit \$14.9 million, up 46% from last fiscal year.
- The number of "\$1 Million-Plus" accounts doubled, from 3 last fiscal year to 6 this year.
- This is the first year for foreign language translations of ORIGIN titles.

(See "Board" on page 3)

(1)

Bulldogs Take Flight

Karl and Anita

Criss-Cross the Continent

The Sales staff is proving that all you need to survive is a small bag of peanuts and a 6-oz. cup of Sprite. They've been frequently flying to distributors and franchisors across North America, pumping up purchase orders.

The big news so far comes from Karl's quest, a trip to the Micro Age exhibition called Solutions '92. Micro Age is a \$787 million franchise group with 981 franchisees, about 90% of whom had never seen an ORIGIN product before (Micro Age is predominantly business-oriented). Our new products apparently made an impression. Accord-

(See "Dogs" on page 2)

Multiple Choices

One more questionnaire's going to be making the rounds in a couple of weeks: the Company Report Card. It will be distributed to all employees on Monday the 23rd and is due back on Thursday the 26th. Names are optional, but fill-

(See "Choices" on back page)

...Dogs

ing to Marten, "One individual spent several minutes on numerous occasions during the show, coming up and bowing to our computer." To make a long story short, ORIGIN is now Micro Age's fully-approved vendor for entertainment software, possibly its first. Now, the attack plan is to blitz the individual franchises with demo disks and sales pitches.

Before that, Karl hit the Intelligent Electronics Show in Florida.

"One individual spent several minutes on numerous occasions during the show, coming up and bowing to our computer."

IE's the biggest franchise group; it includes Bizmart and Entree, to name a couple. Other visits took him to Seattle, Portland, Vancouver and San Francisco. He should land on Austin soil again next Monday. All his hard work's paying off. Late yesterday, Karl sent word that Costco/Canada (like a Sam's or Price Club) has picked up Underworld and Ultima 7. Likewise, Fred Meyer, a 100+ store chain, has picked up Ultima 7, Underworld and Wing Deluxe. Good work, Karl!

Meanwhile, Anita's been burning up the friendly skies to Chicago to talk with a distributor called Josha. Then it was on to Champaign for a meeting with American, a growing distributor there. She's about to embark on a northeastern tour to New York, Connecticut and Toronto. We'll probably be carrying her success stories next issue.

To update other sales, Electronics Boutique's already re-ordered Second Trilogy. EB sold 167 units in the first two days. Likewise, Software Etc. sold 147 units in the same time frame. Marten says the early indication is that Second Trilogy will be a strong catalog product. Wing Deluxe is moving a little slower, but still sold in excess of 100 units in the first two days of release. Babbages has already placed a re-order for that.

Even bigger news may be on the horizon. If things fall into place, Strike Commander will be in U.S. Tandy stores. Watch this space for updates.

World Media Roundup

Wing 2

Build a new shelf for the trophy case; there's simply no stopping Wing 2. Germany's *DOS International* and *Windows* magazines have named it "PC Product of the Year." Our German rep will be picking up the award at the Cebit Conference in Hanover this week.

Through the wondrous technology of telephone, satellite communications and fax we've learned from our European Brand Manager, Jennie Evans, that Wing will be commanding a lot of attention at the upcoming European Computer Trade Show. Wing Commander has been nominated for "Best CD Game" (re-mastered onto CD-ROM by Software Toolworks), and Wing 2's been nominated for: Game of the Year, Best Action Game, Best Graphics, and Best Sound. The awards ceremony takes place April 12th at London's Limelight Club.

As reported in an earlier

"Point," the Australian mag *PC Games Plus* gave Wing 2 its "Game of the Year" and "Technical Brilliance" awards. Well, that issue finally made it to the states, and guess what...Chris took top honors as "Game Designer of the Year." Congratulations to him and the team for all of this well-deserved recognition. There's really no way to describe the impact that the Commander line has made on the industry.

ORIGIN: On Top Down Under

In the same issue of *PC Games Plus*, Wing 2 was nominated for "Arcade/Action Game of the Year" (edged out by D/Generation) and ORIGIN was nominated for "Software Publisher of the Year" (edged out by Sierra). ORIGIN junkies had more—*so much more*—to enjoy in the same mag. Wing 2 gets a glowing two-and-a-half page review. Special Operations gets a thumbs-up as well. There's a full-page preview of Underworld, a separate full-pager for Ultima 7, a look ahead to Strike, a company update from CES and a mention of ORIGIN as "the future of computing and one of the ultimate companies in clue book production."

Underworld

England's *ACE* magazine is calling it quits, a victim of faltering sales. But in its swan-song issue, it will etch Underworld into immortality by naming it "Best Fantasy Role Playing Game Ever."

France's *Tilt* magazine has rendered its decision on Underworld: 20 out of 20—the highest rating ever given.

Tim Smith, the journalist with England's *PC Format* who visited in January, says Underworld "is going to lead to sharp intakes of breath

(More on back page)

Announcing the Great Ultima GameBoy Map Contest!

Whether you know it or not, there's another Ultima world being created right under your noses... and we're having a contest to see who can design the best dungeon map! People on the project will be the judges, and are not eligible. The winner of the contest will get a) a free lunch — yes, there still is such a thing, occasionally —, b) a free copy of the game, once its out, and c) Official Recognition in the game. So send in your maps by April 15. All maps submitted are eligible to be included in the game and to win the contest.

There are two ways in which you can design dungeons. First of all, you can draw some maps that look nice. Just use standard graph paper, draw us something you like, and then deliver it to one of the GameBoy people — Either Gary Scott Smith, at extension 650, John Onorato, at extension 655, or Alan Gardner, at extension #129/1415. Anyway, you can mark on the maps places you want traps, treasure, and monsters.

Or if you're interested, you can use the editor yourself, put in all the stuff you want, and give us a finished product. Of course, you need to learn how the editor works to do it that way. Just see one of the GameBoy people, mentioned above, and we'll give you some interesting instructions and a fun-filled walkthrough.

In either case, you'll need to know the basics, right? Right. Well, first of all, the maps that you design can be one of four sizes: 16x16, 16x32, 32x16, and 32x32. All of these have walls bordering them.

The player only sees a 9x9 area at one time, though, which is centered on his position. Each square contains one of the many tile designs that we have: floor, wall, door, hall, decoration, missile or monster.

Okay, following is a list of tile functions, so you know what you have to work with.

Water: Can't walk on it, but can shoot over it.

Decorative tiles: These are things like tables, chairs, crates, potbellied stoves, beds, dressers, urns, that sort of thing.

Walls: used to create passageways. There are three types of wall: brick, 'cobblestone,' and 'natural.'

Walls also come in diagonal and jagged varieties, so you can create lots of neat visual effects.

Boulders and barrels: Both block movement, but can be moved themselves, if there's not anything behind them in the direction you want to push them.

Door-like objects: Normally the ordinary door can be opened by the average adventurer. However, there are three different kinds of locked doors, and each requires its own unique key to open it. When a locked door is opened, the action uses up the key. There are also portcullises, which block movement, can be shot through, and can also be opened.

Treasure: Is usually found in treasure chests, but can be placed anywhere, 'in' anything.

Lava: Hurts the player when he walks over it.

Swamp: Slows the player down.

Ladders, etc: There are up ladders, down ladders, stairs facing in the four cardinal directions, and pits, which make you go down, but you can't get up. From pits, that is.

Spiderwebs: There are two types of webs. Both block movement (except for spiders). One type can be destroyed by attacking it with anything, but the other type can only be destroyed with fireballs.

Teleport devices: There are teleport arrows and teleport discs. The arrows move the player to the next arrow facing in that direction that he would encounter, were he to travel straight in the direction the arrow faces. These work up to five tiles away. If there is no arrow within five tiles that faces the same direction, then the player teleports two spaces in the direction the arrow faces. Teleport discs, when stepped on, move the player to the closest other disc.

Trigger devices: Although anything can potentially be a trigger device, the most common are touchplates, mushrooms, floor and wall switches. Touchplates function like this: Player steps on them, and something happens — usually an egg hatching or a tile changing. They work every time

he steps on them. Mushrooms are similar, but they're a one-shot deal — the player picks them, something happens, and he can't pick them again. The switches are a different story. The player changes their position, and something happens. If he switches the switch back, then the change is usually reversed.

Heads: Although mostly decorative in nature, the heads are usually the things that missiles sprout from.

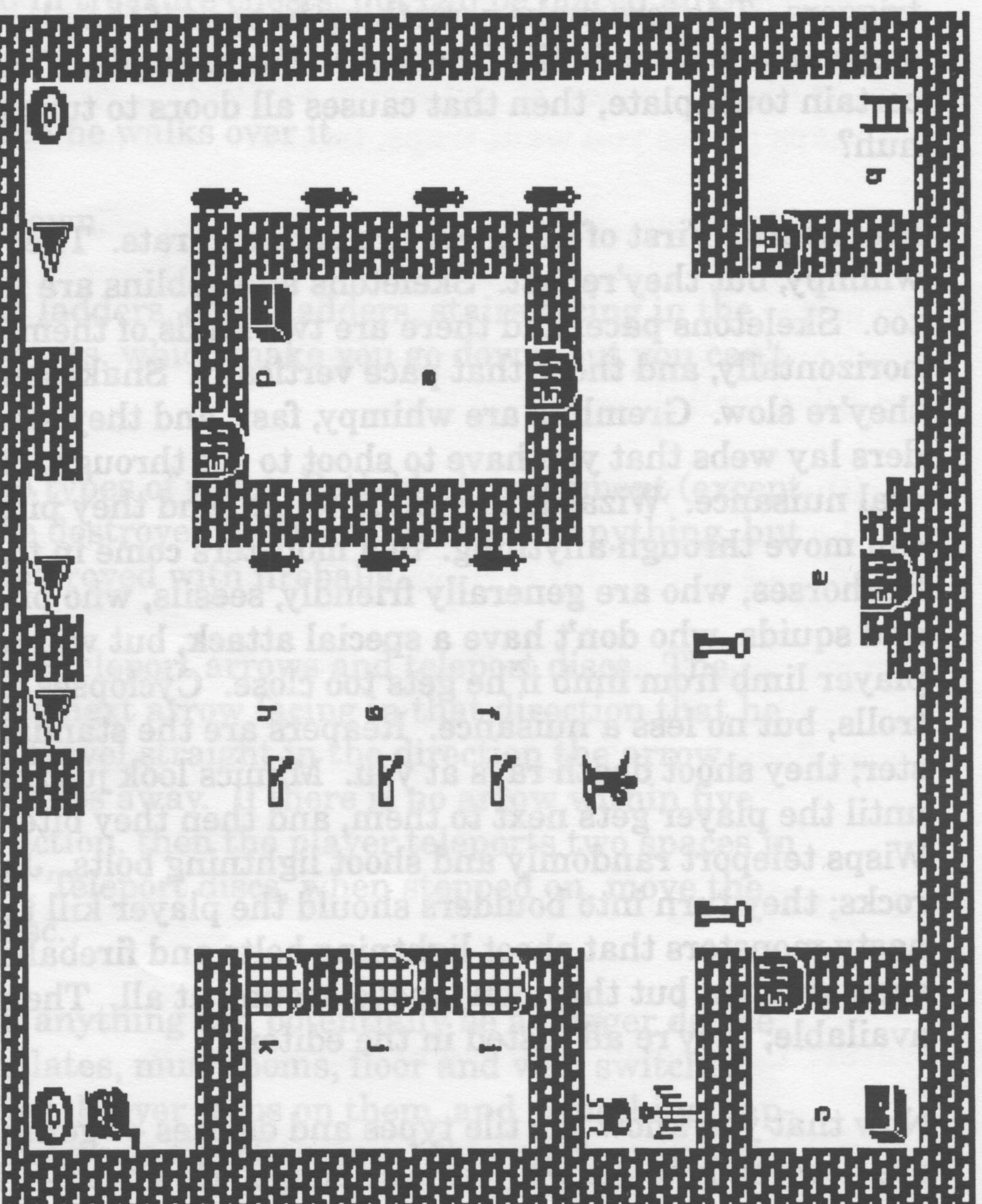
Triggers: Triggers are the way you get tiles to change from one type to another — thereby opening or closing a portcullis remotely, for example — or to get an egg to hatch. You're all familiar with the concept of egg, aren't you? Well, just in case, an egg is something that produces a monster or item when it is activated. Eggs can be used only once, or they can be used many times if desired; every time an egg is hatched, a new set of monsters will appear, or the same item will appear, or whatever. Anyway, back to triggers. Triggers make something happen if the player bumps into or steps on one specific tile (the fool!). For example, if the player steps on a certain touchplate, then that causes all doors to turn to walls. Simple, huh?

Monsters: First of all, there are bats and rats. They're both kinda whimpy, but they're fast. Skeletons and goblins are next; they're whimpy too. Skeletons pace, and there are two kinds of them: those that pace horizontally, and those that pace vertically. Snakes are a bit stronger, but they're slow. Gremlins are whimpy, fast, and they steal food, to boot. Spiders lay webs that you have to shoot to get through. Trolls are just a general nuisance. Wizards are kinda tough, and they pitch fireballs. Ghosts can move through anything. Sea monsters come in three varieties: Seahorses, who are generally friendly, seesils, who pitch fireballs at you, and squids, who don't have a special attack, but will tear the hapless player limb from limb if he gets too close. Cyclopes are a bit tougher than trolls, but no less a nuisance. Reapers are the standard stationary monster; they shoot death rays at you. Mimics look just like treasure chests until the player gets next to them, and then they bite the player's head off. Wisps teleport randomly and shoot lightning bolts. Jaggers are big mobile rocks; they turn into boulders should the player kill them. Hydras are nasty monsters that shoot lightning bolts and fireballs, and dragons are even tougher, but they don't move around at all. There are other monsters available; they're all listed in the editor.

Now that you know the tile types and devices — generally speaking — you are now ready to design your own maps. Go ahead — be creative!

Key for GameBoy Example Map

- a: the way in
- b: the way out (the door to this ladder is locked).
- c: chest contains the key to the door with the ladder up
- d: food is in this chest
- e: skeleton guarding the food
- f: lever is the trigger that opens portcullis 'i'
- g: lever is the trigger that opens portcullis 'j'
- h: lever is the trigger that opens portcullis 'k'



Teleport arrows work as described in the document.
They're here for demonstration purposes.
Note some of the decorative tiles scattered about.

...Board

- European licensing fees grew 40% and international revenue doubled from last fiscal year.
- The number of Product Development personnel more than doubled from the previous year.

The overview had a few caveats, too. Here are some of the areas targeted for improvement:

- Three products slated for release didn't make it out the door. Projected loss from last year's potential performance as a result: \$6.5 million, not counting reorders. There are no real solutions, only to try and refine the near-impossible task of projecting release dates for new technology.
- Product returns were unacceptably high at 12%, more than a doubling of last year's rate. Most returns were not truly "defective" product, but installation-related problems. The solution: continued efforts toward a more uniform installation procedure from a special-

ized programming team. But third-party hardware and software conflicts coupled with consumer confusion may limit the success in this area.

- The "Worlds of Ultima" line, while critically acclaimed, had lackluster sales. The line has been discontinued unless/until a better angle can be found.
- General growing pains meant problems with security, some employee turnover and increased difficulty in communications between the buildings and offices. The solutions: improved security measures, finalizing the management structure and additional communications such as the (also critically-acclaimed) Point of ORIGIN and employee-run Entertainment Committee.

In its objectives for the next fiscal year, ORIGIN wants to expand the domestic sales channel, focus growth on European development, increase the product release schedule, "stabilize" work environment and staffing levels,

develop new business opportunities (such as SNES and licensing) and relocate the entire company to a new headquarters building before the end of this fiscal year. Overall, the projected budget is about \$20 million and could conceivably go as high as \$25 million.

The general attitude was that while FY 91-92 was very good, but it was also a very big gamble. Given the limited success of some products and the slippage in schedule of others, hard work, Wing Commander and a certain amount of luck carried the company through what could have been a very rough year. The Board was reportedly very optimistic about the new budget and appreciated the presentations made by all of the Producers and Department Managers. Next year's meeting may include a sort of "meaty excerpt" segment of those presentations for all of the employees. Our new facility should be able to accommodate everybody in a single room!

Over The Coals

The Entertainment Committee's firing up the barbie (grill, not doll) again for the return of the famous Wednesday Cookout. Listen to everything you get for three measly dollars: two burgers or two hot dogs or one of each, chips, dip, cookies and an ice-cold soft drink. What a deal!

Donna will be working the West side of the street and Norma will be working the East, picking up money on Monday afternoon.

The cookout itself will last from noon until 1:30 next Wednesday at ORIGIN East. Kay asks that you curb your appetite enough so that *everyone* doesn't come out at the same time right at noon. Not to worry, though. She says there will be plenty of food. If you can help set up tables beforehand, let Donna or Norma know when they make the rounds.

We'll have another cookout on April Fool's Day. In honor of this sacrosanct holiday, the EC will hold a "Wierd Hat Contest." The winner will be featured prominently in Point of ORIGIN. As they say in Monkey Island 2, "Big Whoop."

Next Happy Hour's slated for March 27th on the lush and tropical grounds of ORIGIN West.



...Media

and some heavy rethinking by other software houses."

Jennie is working on getting the Underworld demo disk attached to the covers of Generation 4 (France) and PC Format (England).

Sofar, so good. Great coverage for a product which hasn't even hit the shelves yet!

Ultima VII

Tim Smith (*PC Format*) was understandably overwhelmed with the U7 endgame. He calls it "the pride and joy of designers, programmers and Garriott himself... At long, long, long last, the visuals, speech and music make this a worthy way to finish a game that will probably take the average player well into 100 hours of play."

Tilt (France) gives U7 a rating of 19 out of 20—nearly perfect!

Comings and Goings

ORIGIN welcomes two new employees to our corporate bosom. Sharon Miller, of Western Temp fame, has joined us as our new "Director of Product Development Operations and Corporate Human Resources." It's a big title, but it's also a big job. Jennifer Davis, a long-time friend of several ORIGIN employees, comes aboard with an almost equally-lengthy nameplate: Graphic Designer and Desktop Publishing Specialist in Creative Services.

We also bid a fond farewell to two guys heading for the proverbial "greener pastures": Jeff George and Steve Beeman. Best of luck, keep in touch, and many thanks for all the hard work and contributions to ORIGIN's success!

We're working on getting a copy of the magazine.

Kapa, an Italian mag, plans to feature U7 on its cover next month.

Jennie's also working on a major press tour for Richard in Europe with about 30 of the top trade journalists. They're chomping at the bit. "In the last week, I've probably had 30 editorial calls about Ultima 7 and Underworld," she says, "so the coverage is just ridiculous now." (Yankee translation: we're very pleased with the interest of the European press.)

Also...

Look on the bulletin boards for these other articles: Wing 2's reviewed in *PCM* and Japan's *PopCom*, plus some playtips from *VG & CE*. And *Quest for Clues IV* gets a nice write-up in *Enchanted Realms*.

...Choices

ing it out is mandatory.

The Report Card's the opportunity to provide feedback on a variety of issues. You can register how you feel about everything from the quality of your working environment to supplies to management as a whole. There's also a section where you rate each department on your perception of its professionalism, dedication, quality of work and leadership.

These Report Cards will be repeated about every 6 months, a sort of bi-yearly checking of the company pulse.

On the Tube

Wing 2 will be part of a "Reviewer's Favorites" episode of *The Computer Chronicles*, a national PBS show. Locally, you can see it in Austin on cable channel 31 on Wednesday, March 25, at 10:00 pm and again on Friday, March 25, at 6:30 pm.

No, we haven't forgotten about "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." At last check, their Product Development department said it *should* air sometime at the beginning of May (they didn't say which year). We'll keep you posted.

At Press Time:

Status reports from QA:

- U7 Final 3.0
Very strong—could sign off Monday
- UW Final 4.0
Very strong—could sign off Monday
- W2/German Final 1.3
Strong—could sign off late next week
- Spc. Ops. Alpha 1.1
Early stages, but lots of fun

In our next info-packed issue: An on-site report from the SPA Symposium in Seattle, where Wing Commander II is up for awards in 3 categories. Don't miss it!