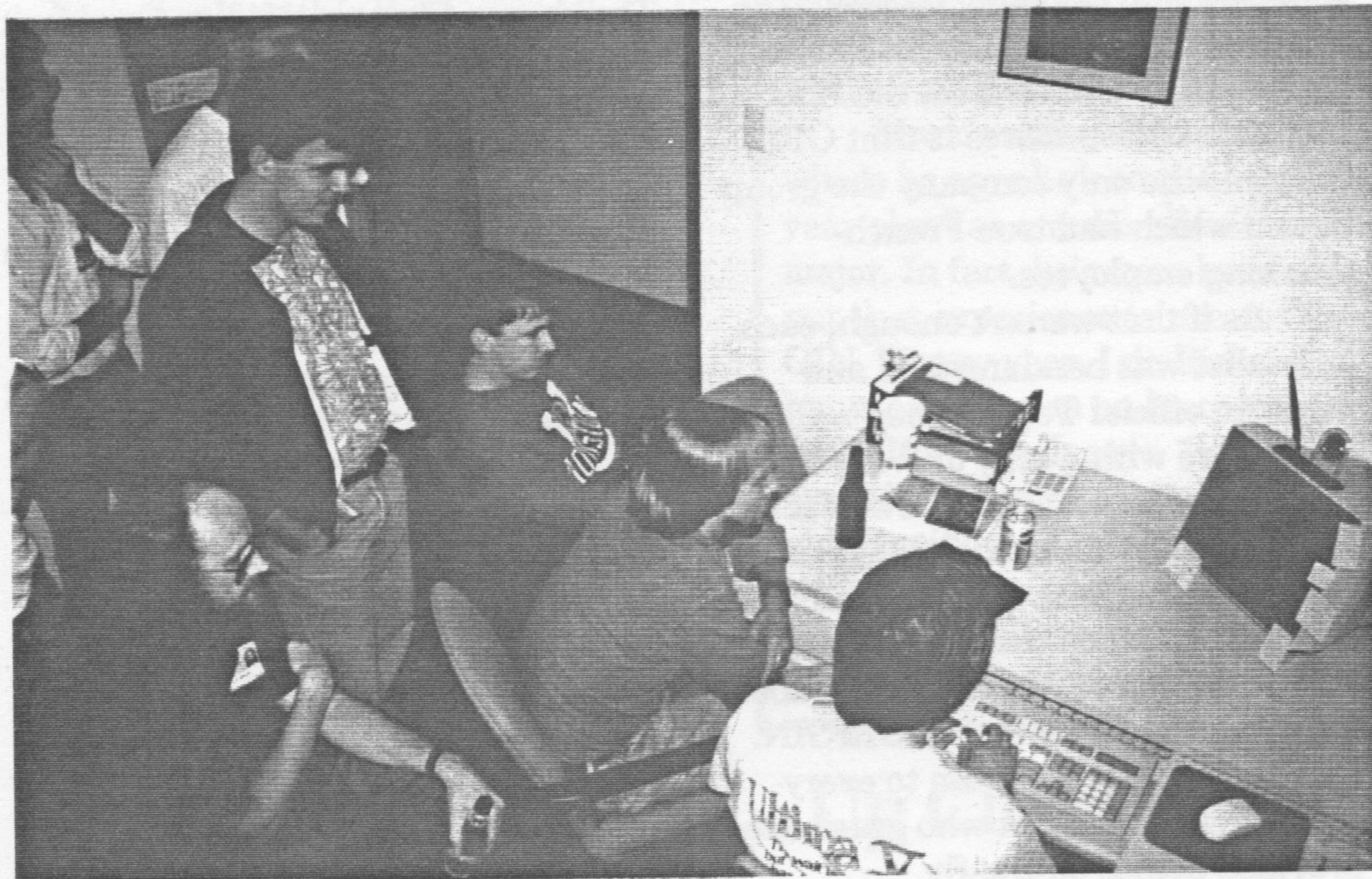


Point of ORIGIN

Vol. II No. 17❖❖

Friday, May 22, 1992

❖❖ Austin, Texas



Dial "U" for Ultima

Lord British and the U7 gang gather around the old terminal for an on-line conference on GENie Thursday night. A full download of the conference will be available in the ORIGIN Library.

Target: Chicago

CES To Blow Into Windy City

A lean, mean promotional-machine cranks into action next Thursday at Summer CES. This show has a decidedly different twist: the admission of the general public during the last two days. Unconfirmed reports already place ticket sales at more than 20,000. With tickets running \$10 each, it's not hard to see how the idea came up.

Manufacturers (including ORIGIN) aren't as thrilled with the prospect. It's not that we all don't want to rub elbows with our No. 1-important customers, it's just that our exhibits are not built to handle that type of traffic. It's also harder to negotiate and close "the big" business deals with retail and distribution buyers amid all the clutter and commotion. While show organizers stand to collect more than \$2 million, booth and meeting room space has not been discounted. Many press, retailers and distributors have indicated that they will bolt from the convention center the minute the doors open to the public, in effect making CES a consumer take-over show from that point.

(See "Target" on page 3)

U7 Update

There's good news to report on the U7 front. A search-and-destroy team's been able to zero in on the game's occasional lockup problem (6% of total U7 Customer Service calls, but still aggravating). Fixing it may take some doing. Apparently, the root cause is an early revision of the 386 chip, known as "Step B." This chip has some problems performing 32-bit processing. So the team's asked Intel for some design specs to see if there's a way to program around it. We'll keep you posted.

Those of you familiar with the disappearing key problem know that it stems from about two bytes out of about 450,000 lines of code. It was originally intended to apply to inn keys only, so that after you slept (and presumably checked out of the inn), the inn key would disappear from your inventory. But it ended up spreading to all keys. That part of the code's been eradicated in a new version of the game, so all keys will stay in your inventory, even the inn keys. QA's testing it this week and is

(See "U7" on page 2)

Up Close and Personnel

Carolyn Cutler comes aboard as a new writer. She's also going for her master's degree in RTF at U.T. Carolyn had a sort of "in" at ORIGIN; she was one of Mike Sims' writing students almost 15 years ago.

Scott Kreuser is already waist-deep in Customer Service.

(See "Up Close" on page 3)

...U7

also testing a patch which will remove that code from U7s already in the market. Meanwhile, players can avoid the problem altogether by placing all of their keys in a container and placing it on the ground before they sleep.

The clock's still ticking in regard to the random disappearing inventory items bug (3% of all U7 calls). It's rooted even deeper and is tough to replicate. If the search-and-destroy team can't locate it by today (Friday), we'll probably go ahead and duplicate the new version of the game that fixes the key problem and keep looking for the other stuff.



ORIGIN U.

There's no end to higher education around here. Producers, department heads and others involved in project management and scheduling will go through a 16-hour course June 1-4. It's being done through the Industrial Education Department at U.T. The ORIGIN Library's also looking into the possibility of getting a set of project management tapes.

Through our association with the Austin Chamber of Commerce, the following business-building seminars are available at the Business and Technology Center for very affordable rates (dutch treat on these):

Women in Business (\$24)
Supervisor Skills and Styles (\$63)
Starting a Small Business (\$47)
Records Management (\$59)
Negotiation Techniques (\$15)
Business Project Management (\$40)
Time Management (\$15)

All classes are from 6:30-9:30 pm at 5930 Middle Fiskville Road. Call 322-5695 for more info and see Sharon for class schedules.

Full-Court Press

We've been doing some heavy media-relatin' the past couple of weeks. First of all, we had the contingency of French journalists come through the offices last Tuesday.

Jean-Marc Chemla and **Betty Peltier** proved to be *merveilleux* as ambassadors, rambling on about the games and taking questions in their native tongue. Word from the Austin Chamber of Commerce is that ORIGIN was the only company the group visited which had true French-speaking employees.

As if that weren't enough, each journalist was bandana-ized and made an official Texan. They walked out of here with a copy of Wing 2 in French and a glowing review of the translation from *Joystick Magazine* in their press packets. They moved on to Motorola to see a "clean room" setup, but reportedly continued to talk about the great time they had at ORIGIN. By the way, thanks again to everybody in ORIGIN East who graciously provided demos on-the-fly.

Wednesday, Anne Maier from *People Magazine* came out to do a follow-up profile on Richard. She interviewed him as an "up-and-comer" ten years ago, so this should be a great piece. It doesn't hurt that 20-million read *People* every week. As soon as we know when that piece will be published, we'll give you a heads-up.

Check It Out!

New items in the OSI Library

The CD Rom Library (on the net)

Software:

Eye of the Beholder II: The Legend of Darkmoon (with cluebook)
SimAnt
SimEarth
SimCity Terrain Kit

SimCity Graphics Set I
SimCity Graphics Set II
SimCity Planning Commission Handbook
SimEarth for Windows
Korean Sound Card
Leisure Suit Larry
Gunship 2000
Police Quest 3
10 Copies of the World of C++ for C++ training

Books:

The Forge of Virtue by Lynn Abbey
Thriving on Chaos and When Good Isn't Good enough (management books)

Other:

Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous Video
Collection of Game Boy cartridges from Alan Gardner
COMPLETE collection of Origin Games
ORIGIN game reviews on file (coming soon)

Mary Margaret sends thanks to all those who have generously donated materials. Keep her in mind when cleaning out your personal software and book libraries.

Potpourri for \$100

Norma wants to apologize to everyone for the errors on the phone list in the last issue. She was the victim of an aggressive newsletter editor who had to have things in a hurry.

Not to worry, though. MIS Magnate **Steve Morris** is creating an electronic version for the network which will be easily updated by Norma and printable by the end-user. To that end, Norma would appreciate anybody whose number was incorrectly listed or has recently switched extensions to let her know ASAP. A "formal" announcement of the electronic list and how to use it should come soon on the "Company Notices" BBS.

Programming Pundit **Thomas Blom** has been carting off cola cans lately to help an equestrian center for

(See "Potpourri" on page 4)

...Target

The Electronic Industries Association, the deep-pocketed parent of CES, claims that it will give companies a chance to talk face-to-face with consumers, even though sales from the floor are taboo. Bear in mind that CES features everything from Nintendo to car alarms to stereo furniture, so the average consumer probably won't be there just to talk to ORIGIN.

That's why ORIGIN has scaled back its plans this time around. Instead of the usual team of 10-15, we're taking a small, core group of only 7: **Marten**, **Karl** and **Anita** from Sales; **Mike** and **Galen** from Marketing; **Jennie Evans** from our office in England; and **Robert** to handle all the international chores. We've opted to go with meeting rooms only, doing our business behind closed doors. It's also a way to keep prying eyes and video cameras from other companies away from our technology.

The Strike team's pulled together an impressive display of the game interface and animations. We'll also be touting Trade Commander (or Privateer (or whatever the heck it ends up being called), Serpent Isle, Forge of Virtue (once again, a working title for the U7 add-on module) and Underworld 2. For a little pizzazz, there's a nifty Special Ops 2 demo, the video done for the SNES presentation and Rich's recent profile on "Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous."

ORIGIN will be located in M6066 in McCormick North/Upper Level. Check out the next Point for pictures and a complete CES wrap-up.

"ORIGIN's latest double whammy has sent role-players everywhere into a state of trouser-bulging excitement."

Computer Trade
Weekly Magazine
(Europe)

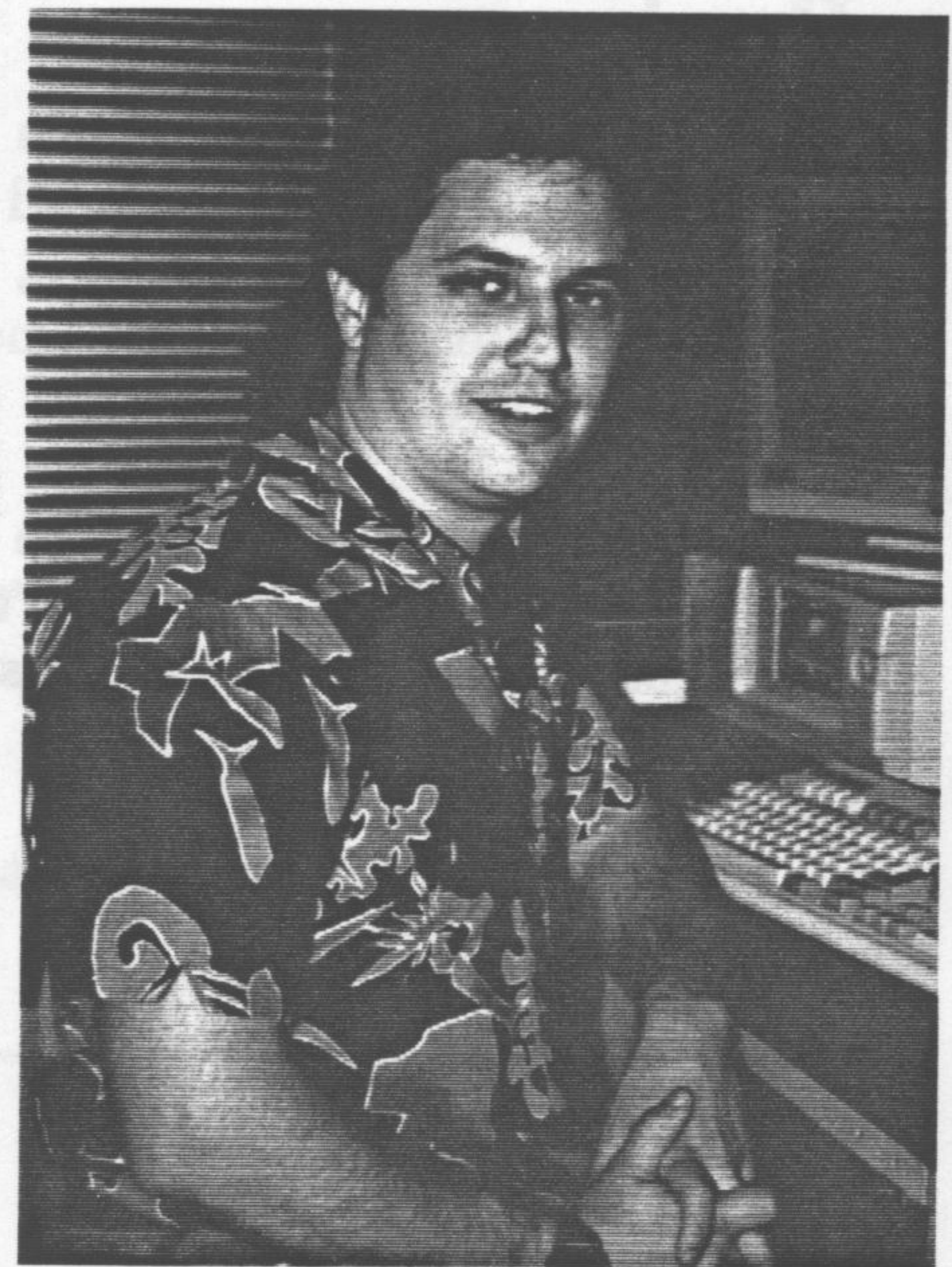
Bio: Mark Vittek

The Quiet Guy With the Loud Shirts

Mark Vittek's been with ORIGIN for about eighteen months now and he's already moving up. Mark's just been promoted from QA to TDA on Serpent Isle, where he'll do map design work laying down sections of the world. Even though he's happy with his new position, Mark says he'll miss all the gang he worked with in playtesting.

Mark's still going to U.T., where he says he's on the "eight year plan" as a radio-television-film major. In fact, he's even been able to put that experience to use at ORIGIN. "Every year, I do Richard's haunted house as an hour-long show for ACTV," Mark says. "I basically shoot it and edit it." Mark lists videotaping as a hobby, too, along with computer gaming, of course.

When we caught up with Mark, he was wearing a signature



shirt of bright red, orange and purple on a black background. "It's probably my wildest," Mark admits, "but since the Point of ORIGIN picture will be in black and white, it really won't matter." You can check out these wearable works of art in person, though. Mark's upstairs in ORIGIN East or at extension 693.

...Up Close

Even after Scott's baptism by fire in the ways of computer gaming, he says he's having more fun than he ever had when he was doing data entry.

Last issue, German translator **Erica Hanson** was introduced as a new employee. This issue, she's listed as an outgoing employee. Instead of working with the Guardian, Erica will be teaching housewives computer skills so they can return to the work force.

In her place steps **Mark Grunert**, a German native who's studying for his PhD at U.T. He'll be working on the German version of U7 and working with QA as well.

That department's about to lose two people itself. **Robert Hill's** last day is/was today (Friday). He's going to work on mainframe computers at another company in town. **Tim Hardy** has one more week at ORIGIN before heading back to Houston, where his parents (and hopefully a job with Dell) reside. Best of luck to all!

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Book 'Em, Danno

ORIGIN recently issued a three-book license for the Wing Commander paperback novels. All of them will be from Baen Books, which has solid distribution and circulation provided through Simon and Schuster.

First comes *Freedom Flight*, scheduled for release in early December. The story takes place during and immediately following the events of Secret Missions 2. The lead characters include Hunter, a young Kilrathi and two Firekkans. Teaming up as authors will be Mercedes Lackey and our own former wordsmith, Ellen Guon (they've already collaborated on two books).

Next summer will probably see the release of the next book—a tag-team effort. Christopher Stasheff (*The Warlock in Spite of Himself*, *King Kobold* and others) will write the first
(See "Book" on next page)

...Book

half, focusing on one character. Then, Bill Forstchen takes over at the word processor and writes the second half, dealing with a different character who has to deal with the fallout from the first half. Get the idea?

The third book may include the death of the Tiger's Claw, but it won't hit stores for at least 18 to 24 months. This one will be penned by Jerry Pournelle of BYTE fame and once again, Ellen Guon. Maybe we ought to put her back on ccMail...

...Potpourri

handicapped kids. He's taping extra trash bags to the aluminum can containers in ORIGIN East. If a container fills up, TBlom asks that you put in an empty bag and give him a call or ccMail. That way, he can take the full bag home, where his soon-to-be-parents-in-law will pick it up and take it to the center.

For those of you who missed her the last time around, **Jennie Evans**, our Brand Manager from Europe, will be here on Tuesday and again the week after CES. She'd like to meet everyone here, so feel free to say hello.

You may have noticed the cork "Company Notices" bulletin boards in both buildings which sport more compact models of the Point of ORIGIN boxes. In this era of Glasnost and Solidarnosc, Point and Human Resources have decided to join together. The effervescent **Sharon Miller** will be posting job openings, promotions and legal stuff while I (the multi-layered **Galen Svanas**) will provide back issues of Point. The boxes are meant for everything: questions, complaints, compliments and suggestions for immediate supervisors, department heads or even *plus gros fromage*. These boxes are especially useful if you'd like your comments to be made anonymously. "Dear Point Man" fodder can also be ccMailed to me directly.

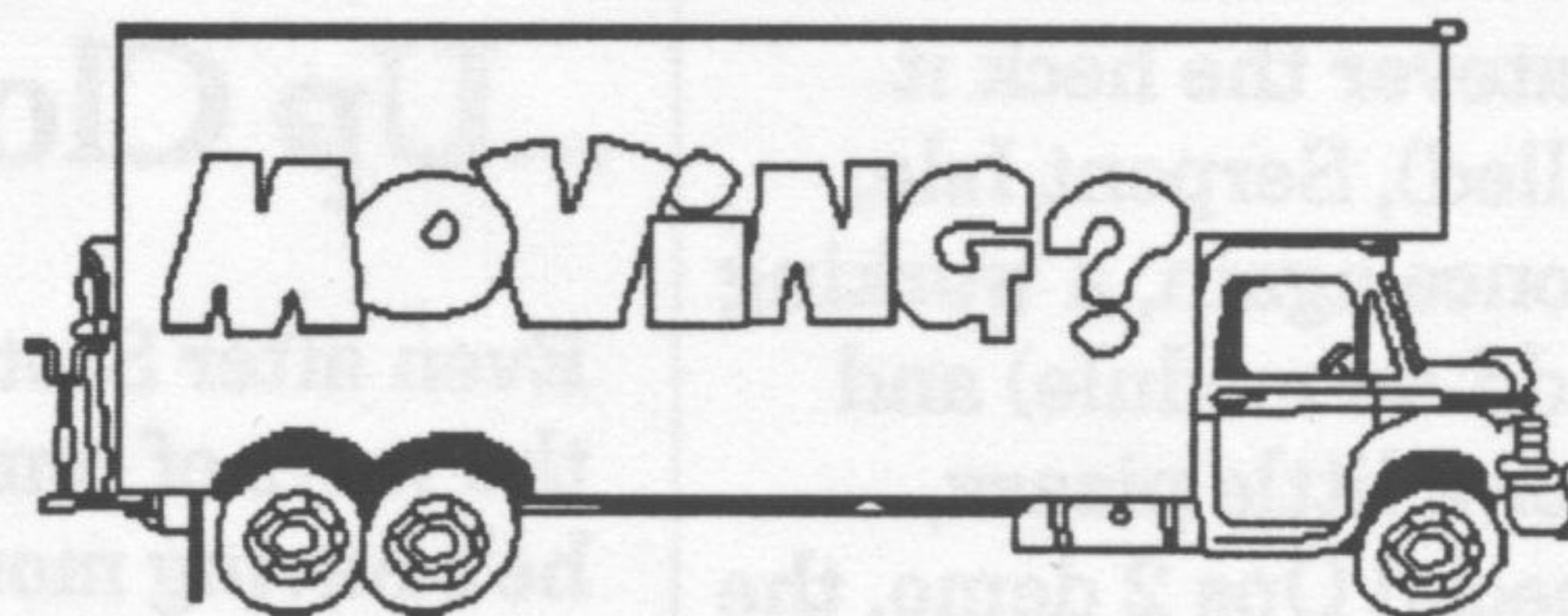


Get to Know Me....

Before I got to know Robert, I was a nothing, a nobody, just a young computer hacker spending way too much money. Then I GOT TO KNOW HIM...and today they call me...Lord British.

(Rob's "Get to Know Me" Get-Together at Pinatas)

Dear Point Man



Dear Point Man,

Could you tell me the current scoop on ORIGIN "Dances With Buildings" Systems? I've heard that (this time for SURE) we're buying the building up in the frozen north deadly-traffic wastelands...truth or evil rumor mill? Should we care? When will it happen?

For that matter, just what IS the scheduled 183 construction in that neighborhood?

Yours,
Confused

Dear Confused,

If everything goes as planned, we're scheduled to close on the building next Tuesday (5-26). If you've ever bought a house, then you know nothing's absolutely certain until everybody's signed on the dotted line, but it looks good. The rest of the year will involve building-out the new place; it's only a shell. Since we have our lease here until February, there's no huge rush.

As to construction on 183: that section of road's not due for work until 1995. The new building also has a side exit to a residential street and subdivision, offering possible escape routes when that time hits in 3 years. If papers get signed next week, the Entertainment Committee will probably be staging one of the June Happy Hours at the new digs so everyone can have a look around.

Dear Point Man,

I understand that ORIGIN's poor pockets are poorer with the purchase of the new building. However, I don't understand why new employees are doing without name plates, business cards, etc. ORIGIN doesn't even have a policy that says, "Hey, we're too cheap to buy these things for you, but you can purchase them through us if you want to." I think with our numbers, people need these little things that say, "ORIGIN's big, but you're still an important part of the group."

Signed,

Disgruntled What's-His-Name Who Works for ORIGIN

Dear Disgruntled,

Yow! You really are disgruntled! Nameplates *are* available to everybody, but they just take a little time. Coincidentally, Supply Specialist **Norma Vargas** is waiting for an order of 42 plates which may be delivered the same day this newsletter hits your hands. She takes care of nameplates periodically so that we don't place orders for one or two at a time. As for business cards: historically, they have been made available to everybody. Two things have changed that, at least for the time being. First of all, with the move to a new building imminent, many cards ordered now will be obsolete before a fraction of them get used. Second, our current two-color cards cost a mint and take forever to get, so we're exploring ways to get comparable cards produced cheaper and faster for everybody who wants them. The only people getting cards right now are those required to have extensive out-of-company contact (i.e., sales, PR, etc.).

Dear Point Man,

I miss the news from around the company that we used to get at the Happy Hours. You know, the introduction of new people, the sales track, the dollars of product shipped and general information that keeps me feeling a part of the whole. Point of ORIGIN articles are excellent, but lack the personal feel of announcements.

Regards,

Much Can Be Observed By Looking

Dear Looking,

Management is still trying to provide all of the same info, but from just one person. According to the big cheeses, Richard was deemed the best conduit for all of the announcements due to his overall likeable karma. That decision was reached after some other employees said they felt the Happy Hours had become "soap box meetings," a place for company policy speeches. What do the rest of you think? If you have a strong feeling one way or another, post it on the "Waterin' Hole" BBS and I'll keep an eye on it. In the meantime, tell Richard what you'd like to hear more about or feel free to shout out a general interest question at any happy hour.

Dear Point Man,

I protest the policy of mandatory vacation days during Christmas week. If the company is going to close, we should just get the holidays. Being forced to reserve three of our hard-earned and few vacation days is not really fair, is it? What if we want to take a vacation in the summer?

"There's nothing to keep people from taking vacation during the summer," according to Veep-GM **Fred Schmidt**. "You just need to manage the number of vacation days you have remaining. ORIGIN shuts down at Christmas because the entire industry shuts down. Most companies give you one week of vacation after six months of employment and another week after a year. ORIGIN

(See "Point" on next page)

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Industry News & Notes

According to Computer Trade Weekly, Virgin Games has signed a \$2-3 million deal with Nintendo for its very-hot, in-development title, "Guest" (which many of us saw demo'd at CES in January). Virgin has actually renamed the game as "The 7th Guest," although we don't know why, and it will be a title in the launch of the Nintendo CD unit. For those of you who aren't up to speed on this story, ORIGIN is also in a "lead position" to work with Nintendo on an introductory title or two for the CD unit—maybe Strike Commander, maybe something else.

MicroProse has announced an outright purchase of Paragon Software, a development company whose titles MicroProse has been distributing for the past couple of years. Paragon's best known for its range of Marvel Comic licenses (Dr. Doom, Spiderman, and the X-Men) but the general consensus is that Paragon hasn't come up with a decent game based on any of them. In any event,

(See "News" on page 6)

PC Research Hits List March/1992

1. Star Trek (Interplay)
2. Civilization (MicroProse)
3. Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum)
4. Police Quest III (Sierra)
5. F-117A (MicroProse)
6. Robin Hood (Sierra)
7. Sim City (Maxis)
8. Links (Access)
9. Leisure Suit Larry V (Sierra)
10. Flight Simulator 4.0 (Microsoft)
12. Ultima Underworld
15. Wing Commander II
20. Wing Commander Deluxe

Based on units sold by Software Etc., Babbages, Waldensoftware and Electronics Boutique.

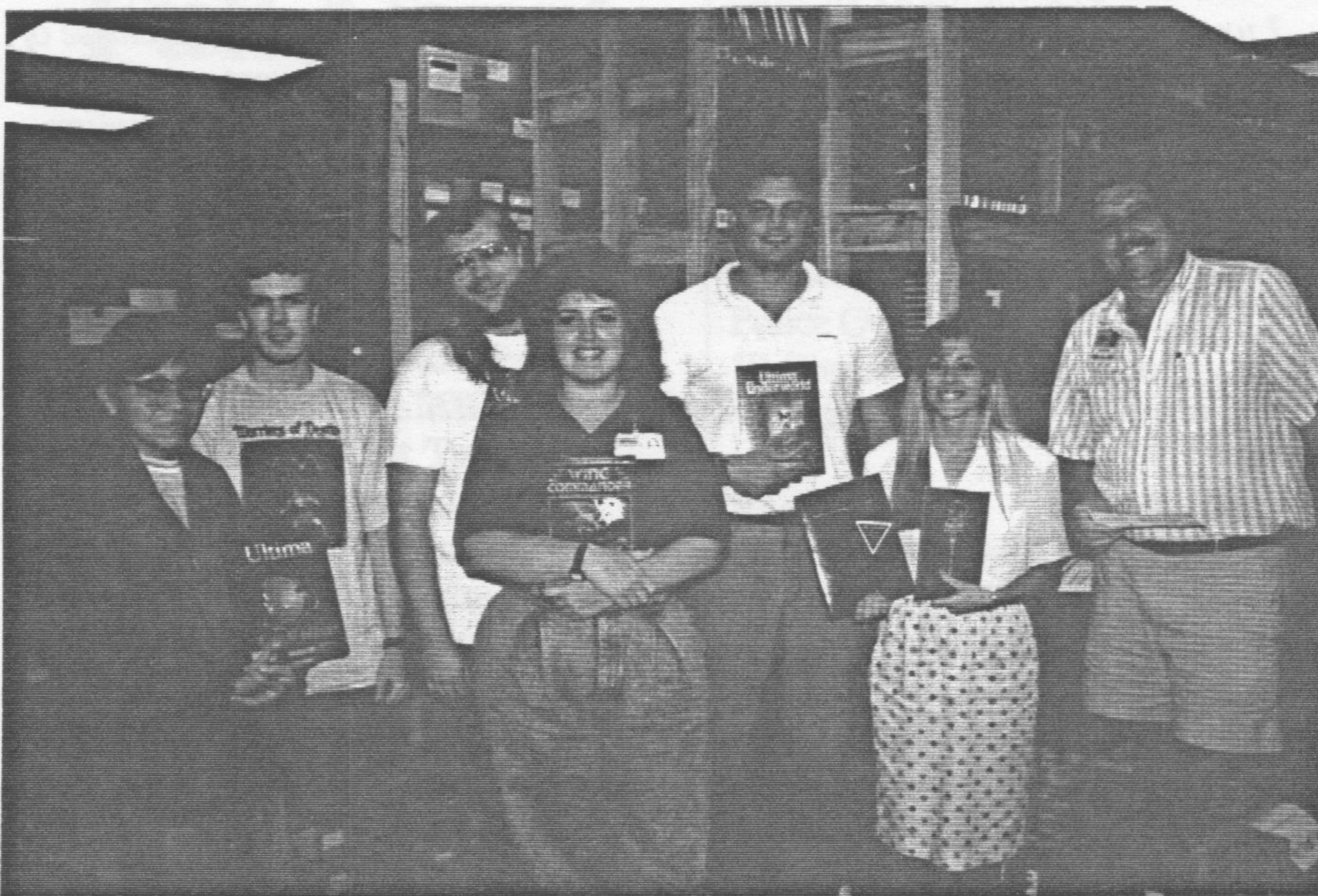
...News

ORIGIN can expect this to be part of MicroProse's general strategy of strengthening its presence in the categories of FRP, adventure and strategy.

Interplay has picked up some licensing rights from Nintendo to use the Mario Brothers characters in the creation of some new "non-leisure market" products. The first will be "Mario Teaches Typing" (dead serious). This will be interesting since Mindscape/Software Toolworks has also snagged some Mario rights from Nintendo for something-or-other, and Toolworks is the creator/owner of the insanely successful "Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing." As Thomas would say, it makes you go hmmmmmm.

The newest issue from Computer Gaming World (June) is out and it has some ads for an entertainment software company from England trying to invade the U.S. market. The company's called Impressions and nobody seems to know anything about it. They managed to get *our* attention in a hurry, though. On page 61 is a full-page B&W ad proclaiming Impressions as "Europe's leading developer of quality strategy games." It goes on to say: "Look out for All-American strategy hits from Impressions coming soon." Turn the page, and you're hit with a four-color ad for Impressions' apparent first release, Air Force Commander. Not only a new developer/publisher, it appears, but someone who's bracing for some head-on competition with the likes of Wing Commander and Strike Commander. ORIGIN already has lawyers looking into the proposed title usage for potential trademark infringement, trademark dilution, unfair competition and likelihood of confusion issues.

The new Soft-Letter (an industry newsletter) has its regular Soft-Letter 100, a ranking of "the software industry's largest, independent US-based firms that generate at least 50% of their revenues from personal computer software development or publishing." ORIGIN weighs in at #49 (#55 last year). Microsoft is #1 (imagine our surprise) with 30% of *all* the revenue reported!. Look for the entire list in the OSI Library.

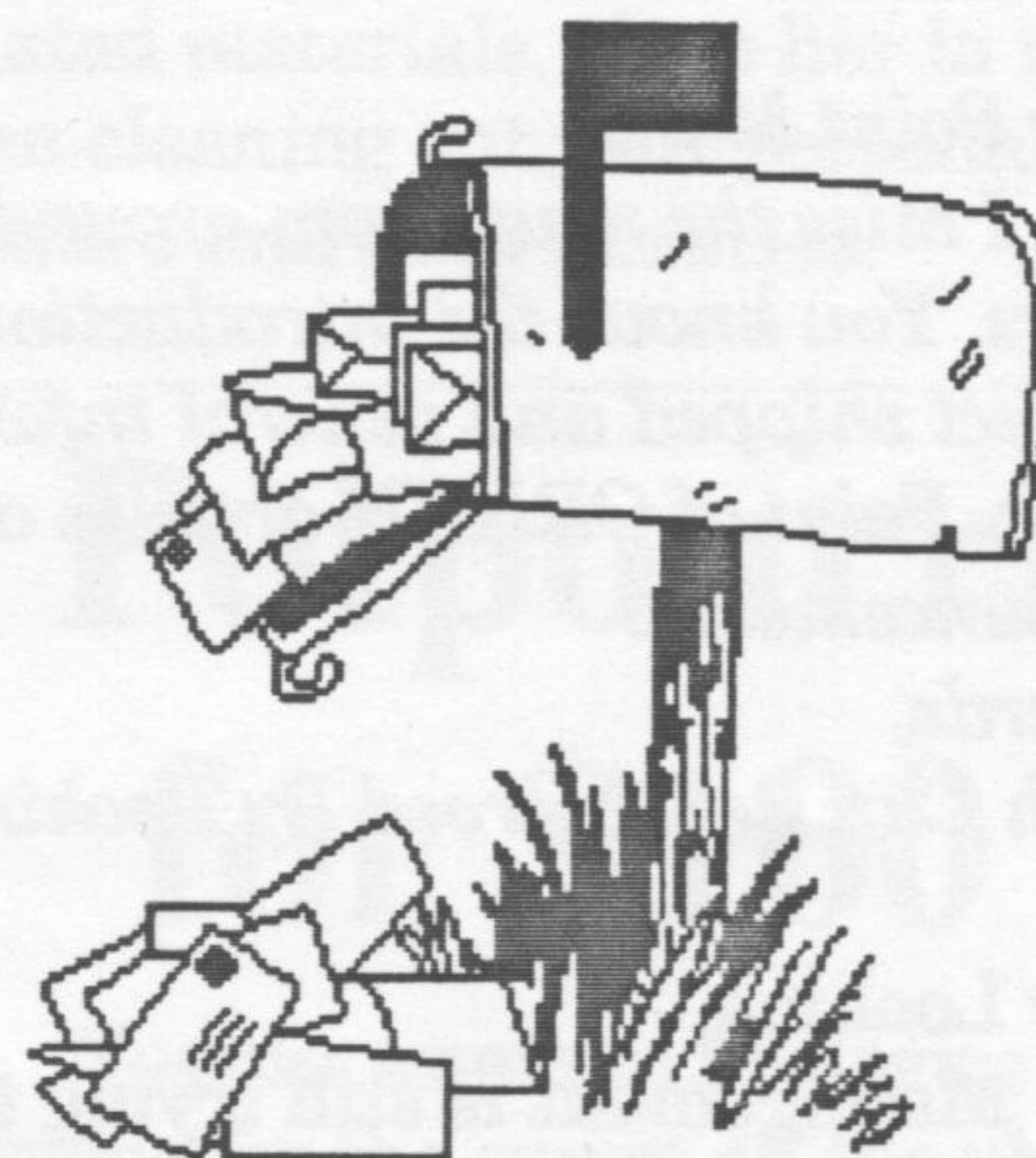


Smooth Operators

Kelley Neil, our representative at Starpak, dropped by the offices Wednesday for a visit and a look around the Operations Department. That included a stop in the Warehouse with (l-r) Mattie Martin, Pat Shelton, Don Webb, Donna Whitaker, Jeff Hillhouse, Kelley and Curtis Wood.

...Point

employees accrue vacation days at the rate of one a month and they can be used right away. By accruing at that rate, you end up with twelve days a year. That means you actually get two *extra* vacation days to cover the week of Christmas. This year is one of those where you'll have to use a third vacation day at Christmas time, since Christmas Eve is Thursday and Christmas Day is Friday."



(The following is a crystallization of an actual letter, printed on real paper, and remarks on the Waterin' Hole BBS)

Dear Point Man,

Why doesn't the company provide t-shirts for employees who work on projects? They could be sold to the public and we could end up making a killing!

There has been a painful precedent for management, marketing and direct sales in this arena. That's why there are still about 2,000 Ultima V (yes, FIVE) shirts in the warehouse. Direct sales of things like shirts and caps (Wing) didn't go as well as planned. There was even an effort to get software retail outlets to carry them, but the channel didn't bite. So the Marketing Department's looking for other avenues to push merchandising.

There's another answer to employee t-shirts. Money has been set aside on a per employee/per month basis for department heads and project leaders to use as they see fit for the benefit of their specific team or department. The funds are administered through the Entertainment Committee and can be used for shirts, food—whatever.

Keep those cards and snide remarks coming in!