

# Point of ORIGIN

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Austin, TX



## Gaming Mecca...

About 15,000 gamers cram the MECCA convention center in Milwaukee for the GEN CON/Origins show.

## Of Books and Board Games

### David Ladyman reports from ComicCon and GENCON

As with all conventions, a lot of fun, too much work, too little sleep and too many miles of cement convention floors.

The trip to the San Diego Comic Book Expo (trade show) and ComicCon (consumer show) was to troll for comic book license contacts. I talked with Malibu (which now includes Image, the group that broke away from Marvel), Valiant, Harris, Marvel, Mr. T, Spiderman and Vampirella. I'll be following up with DC and Dark Horse, as well.

The most positive meetings were with Marvel and Harris. (Harris Comics are the folks who recently bought *Creepy*, *Eerie* and *Vampirella*, and are looking to expand their line with something other than superheroes. They also publish the most specialty magazines in the U.S., including mags like *Guitar World*, so they have some cash to back up their plans.)

(See "Games" on next page)

## Lunchtime Lectures

(from guest columnist *Thomas Blom*)

Beginning next week or the week after, the programming department will start conducting "brown bag seminars" over lunch in the conference room on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. These seminars are to serve as a forum for the exchange of expertise and interest within the programming department and across projects.

Notices of upcoming seminars will be posted on the Programmers Corner bulletin board, and will include a description of the topic to be covered, who will be presenting it, and some sort of general prerequisite or guideline as to who would likely benefit from such a discussion. The idea is to have a group of people bring lunches and meet for an hour or so for informal technical discussion.

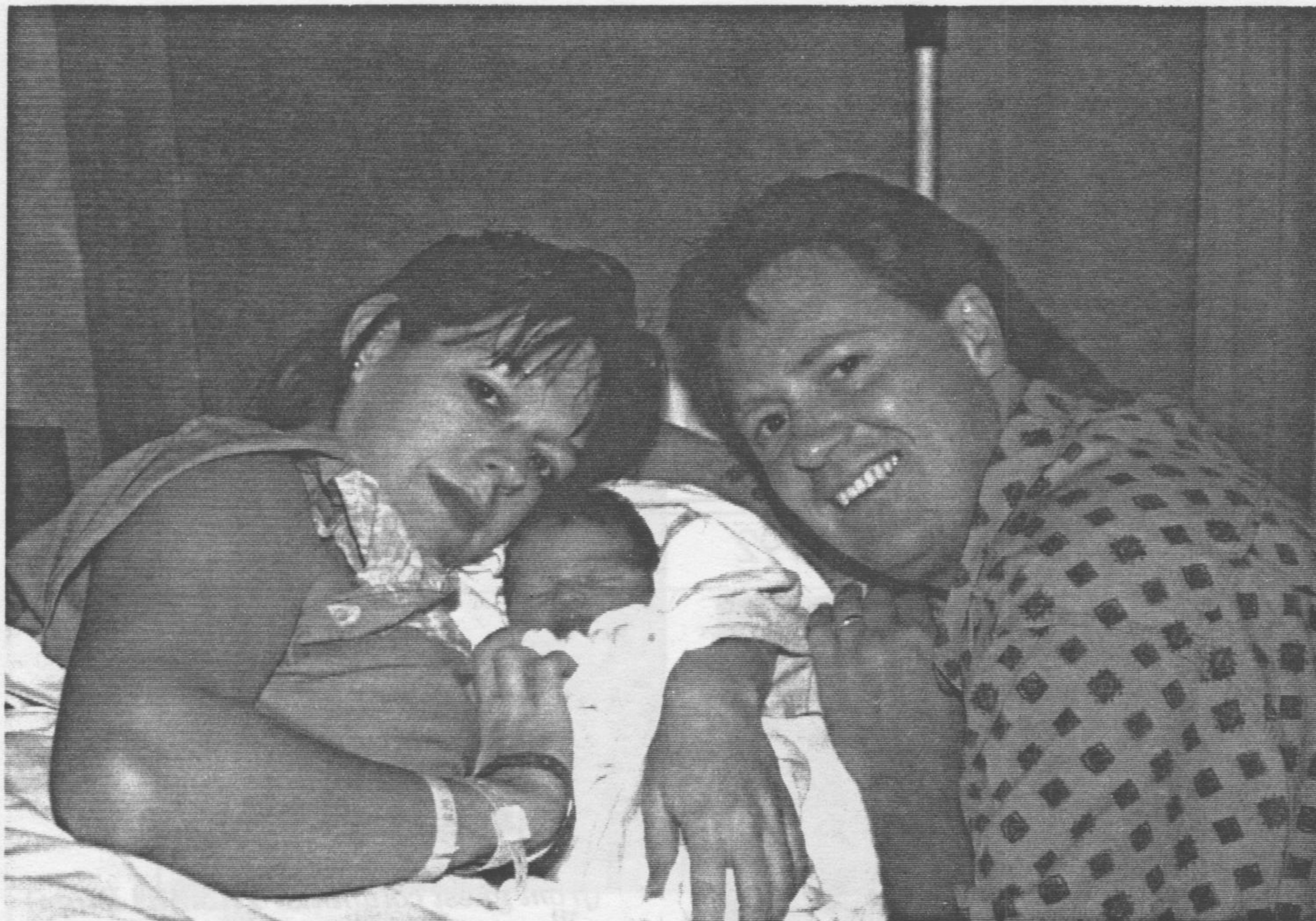
Typical topics might include general 3D-graphics techniques, texture-mapping, genetic algorithms, neural networks, writing compilers, use of the MemoryManager class, network programming, and so on.

Some topics will focus on better educating people about the code that currently exists in our libraries, while other discussions will be driven by individual interests in programming which may or may not pertain directly to the current work being done at ORIGIN.

Some meetings may venture away from programming altogether (such as

(See "Lunch" on last page)





### Ooooh, baby, baby....

Customer Service Manager Kay Gilmore and her husband, Bruce, welcome a new addition to their family. Little Alicia Faye came into the world weighing 6 lbs. 12 oz. at 7:00 a.m. on August 21. PD, take note: Kay delivered her product on-schedule, coming in 24 hours ahead of her due date. Congrats to the proud new parents.

## Dear Point Man

Dear Point Man:

What is the deal with QUADS 401K, anyway? I submitted a form to have my money transferred to a money market last April. I've not received a reply or a financial statement for the past two quarters about where my money is. And is it still possible under QUADS to purchase stocks individually?

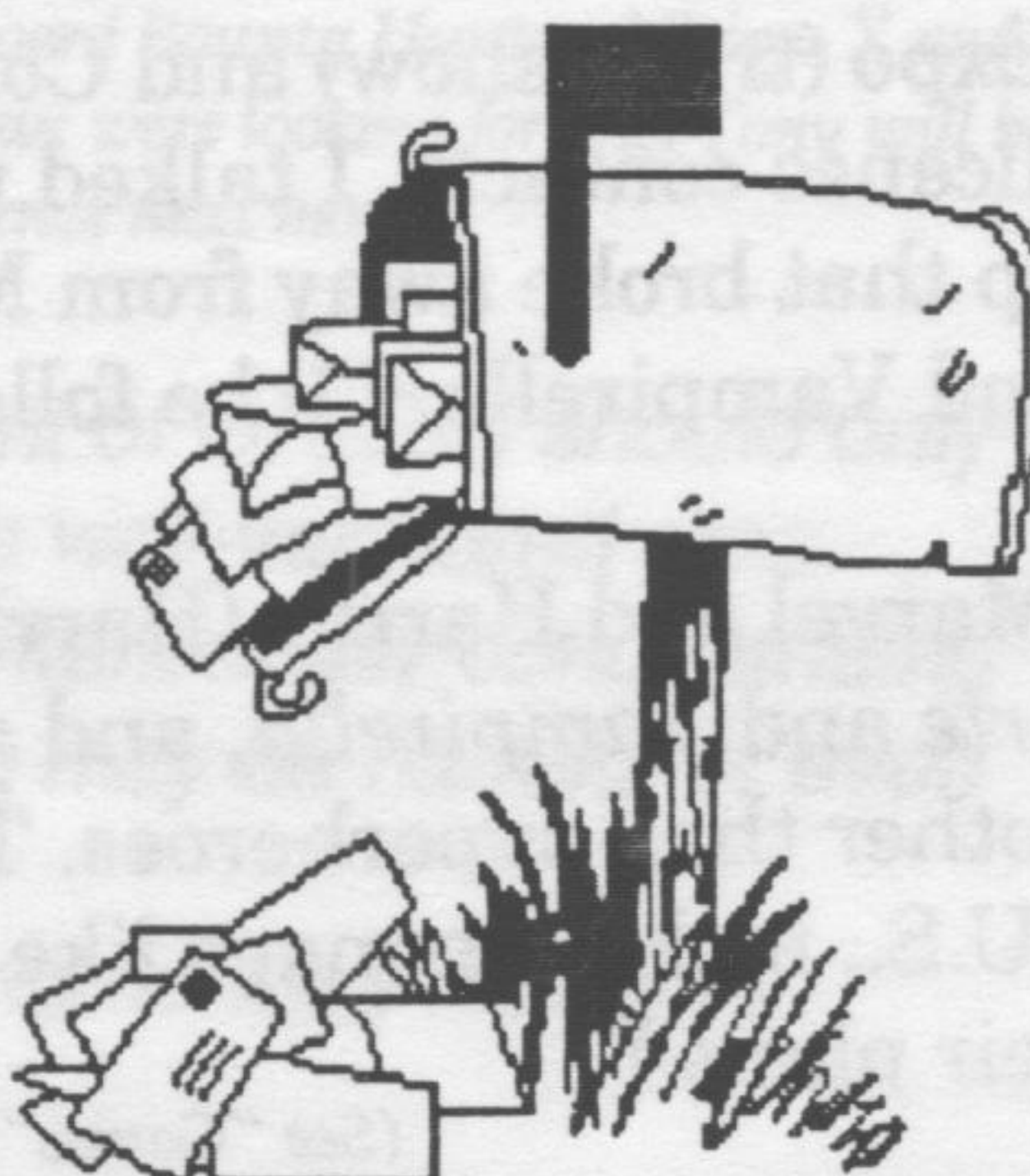
Yes, it is still possible to buy stocks individually, or choose one of the QUADS mutual funds. When it comes to confirmation, you're not the only one who reports missing a financial statement. For some, the only confirmation that the money's being taken out is the deduction notation on their paychecks. Paperwork is one of the things that we've been trying to rope down with our rep, **Don Stark**. In fact, Don was in-house here on the 19th, but word didn't get out and he only met with about half of the new and current employees he needed to see. So he'll be making a return visit in early September, probably right after Labor Day. Meanwhile, if you want to personally check up on your account, call **Anthony Delgado** with the Loren Stark Company at (713) 961-5777.

Dear Point Man:

What is this I hear about Product development getting additional bonuses?

They aren't exactly additional bonuses; they're part of the end of the year bonuses awarded during the February review process which are split into separate payments. There are also "end-of-project" bonuses. Check with your department head to see if you qualify for those.

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## ...Games

San Diego was a solo show, but we hit the Origins/GEN CON Game Faire with **Warren Spector**, and received valuable help from **Richard G.**, **Andrew Morris**, **Brennan Priest**, Warren's lovely wife, **Caroline**, and the FCI crew: **Amanda Seaman** (in her convention swan song) and John Stockhausen. **Paul Lidberg** was a fellow traveller, promoting his new Crunchy Frog works over at the Lance and Laser booth.

We went to accumulate consumer feedback, and received that with a vengeance. In addition to four seminars (average attendance about 40), we were deluged with more than a thousand completed questionnaires. If you want to know what percentage of computer gamers regularly play via networks, or what magazines they read, stay tuned for survey results. (One quick preview: when asked what comes to mind when they think of ORIGIN, by far the three most common responses were "Ultima," "Wing Commander" and "quality games.")

In addition, we discussed ORIGIN board game licenses with a few folks – I hope to give an update on that, as well, in the near future.

## On the Job

Two new people are on-board and we're looking for a few more. **Miles Lewis** is a true Librarian. When he's not running our library (see "Check It Out" for the new hours), Miles works at the Austin Public Library's main branch. He also produces audio/video projects and investigates "anomalous phenomena," including research into the UFO phenomenon through Austin MUFON (Mutual UFO Network). Okay...

**Jennifer Mason** is getting up to speed in Customer Service. Computers are in her blood, so to speak: "My dad brought me up on computers. He works at PCR Computer Rentals and my mom handles the payroll at CompuAdd. My boyfriend has been taking me to arcades to try



and teach me video games, but I just don't like them as well."

In the "Help Wanted" category, there's a TDA position available on the Privateer team. Interested parties should get in touch with **Mike Sims** or **Norma Vargas**. If you know anybody who would like to be a Project Administrator, somebody with good clerical skills, familiar with DOS applications like Word and Excel and experienced in data entry, have him/her contact Norma as well. **Thomas Blom** is looking for 1-5 programmers over the next few weeks to beef up some understaffed projects. Finally, the Art Clan wants to induct someone who can do bit-map graphics. That person should talk with **Al Nelson**.

## Misc.

Our own **Denis Loubet** and **Beth Miller** will be tying the knot tomorrow. As part of their honeymoon, they'll be taking in the World Science Fiction Convention next week. Best of luck to Denis and Beth.

Congrats to the Forge of Virtue team. Forge, which is ORIGIN's (and possibly computer gaming's) first "add-in" disk, signed off Wednesday and will ship before the end of the month, even if **Marten Davies** has to strap a box to his back and walk to Babbage's. The two new CD SKU's, the Wing 2 Deluxe Edition and Wing/Underworld will also be hitting store shelves at the same time.

Speaking of Marten, he and **Richard "LB" Garriott** himself will be jetting to England next Thursday for the European Computer Trade Show. They'll be latching up with our Brit Bombshell, **Jennie Evans** to pump up the buyers and press about our upcoming products.

The rumor of the week goes to Internet, which reports that Strike Commander has been cancelled due to a falling out between Lord British and **Chris Roberts**. According to the crack team of Internet reporters, Chris is starting up his own company to put ORIGIN out of business. Sound too far-fetched to be true? PC Games Plus in Australia sent an urgent fax today asking for an official reply. Inquiring minds want to know.

## Bio:

# Mike Harrison

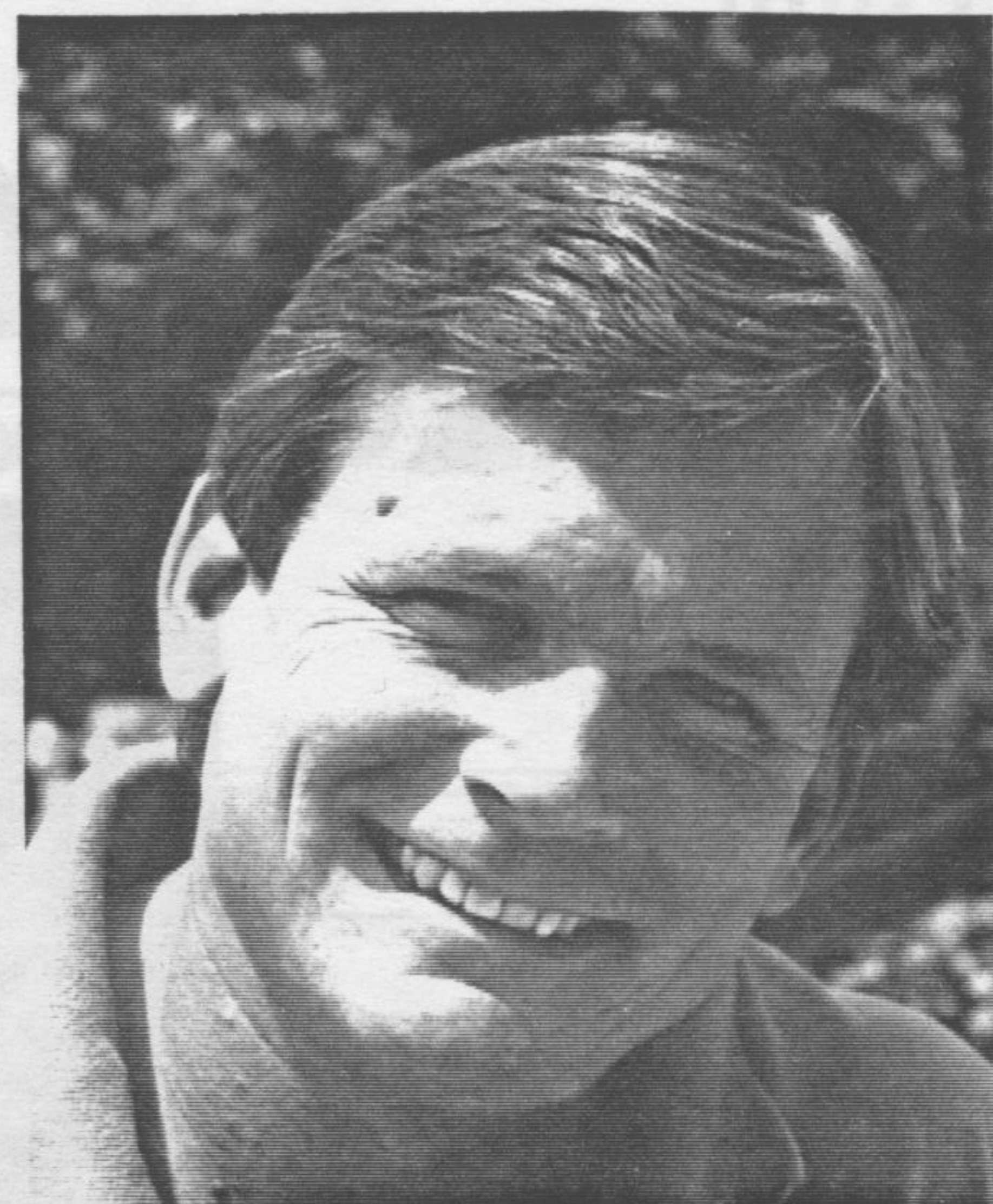
## New Depth in Marketing

Marketing Monarch **Mike Harrison** works on the first floor of ORIGIN West. But not too long ago, he reported to work on the muddy floor of the Choptank River on Maryland's eastern shore. "From September through March for seven years, I spent five to ten hours a day picking up oysters from the bottom of the river. I also worked underwater for a Louisiana construction company," Mike recalls. "I'd do things like drill holes in bridge footings so the demolition guys could blow them up."

That's just a snapshot from an anything-but-ordinary career. Here's how it tracks: radio/tv college student — documentary maker — deckhand on a crab boat — equipment tender on a commercial diving barge — underwater construction worker — oyster and clam diver — college student (again) — newspaper reporter — freelance reporter — technical writer — MicroProse Media Relations Manager — MicroProse Marketing Services Manager — freelance writer and consultant — ORIGIN Marketing Director. "The jobs just kind of came up for various reasons. Opportunities presented themselves, and if they were anything that I had an interest in, I'd give them a try."

For four consecutive years, Mike had the distinction of being ORIGIN's most frequent non-employee. Every Fall would find him in New Hampshire or Austin. "ORIGIN was one my first clients as a freelancer and accounted for about 40% of my business," he says. When the position of Marketing Director came up here, VP/GM **Fred Schmidt** wanted to duplicate the Maryland Miracle (Fred hired Mike at MicroProse) and the rest, as they say, is *histoire*.

Mike oversees the crews in Creative Services, Public/Media Relations and Publications. He also



creates ORIGIN's advertising concepts and placement while looking for strategic marketing possibilities. Despite his technicolor resume, Mike knows where he wants to go in the future. "I see a lot of room for growth in the department—especially in the continued development of publishing projects, increased sales support and cross-marketing opportunities, and direct marketing. Now that we have a database from our registration cards, I want to support our customers on a personal level. The first part of that plan is ORIGIN's first consumer newsletter this Fall. I think we can build our company identity by giving ORIGIN game players the 'inside story' and making them feel like they get more than just a game when they buy our products. We're also expanding our one-on-one online communications in places like CompuServe, America Online and GENie."

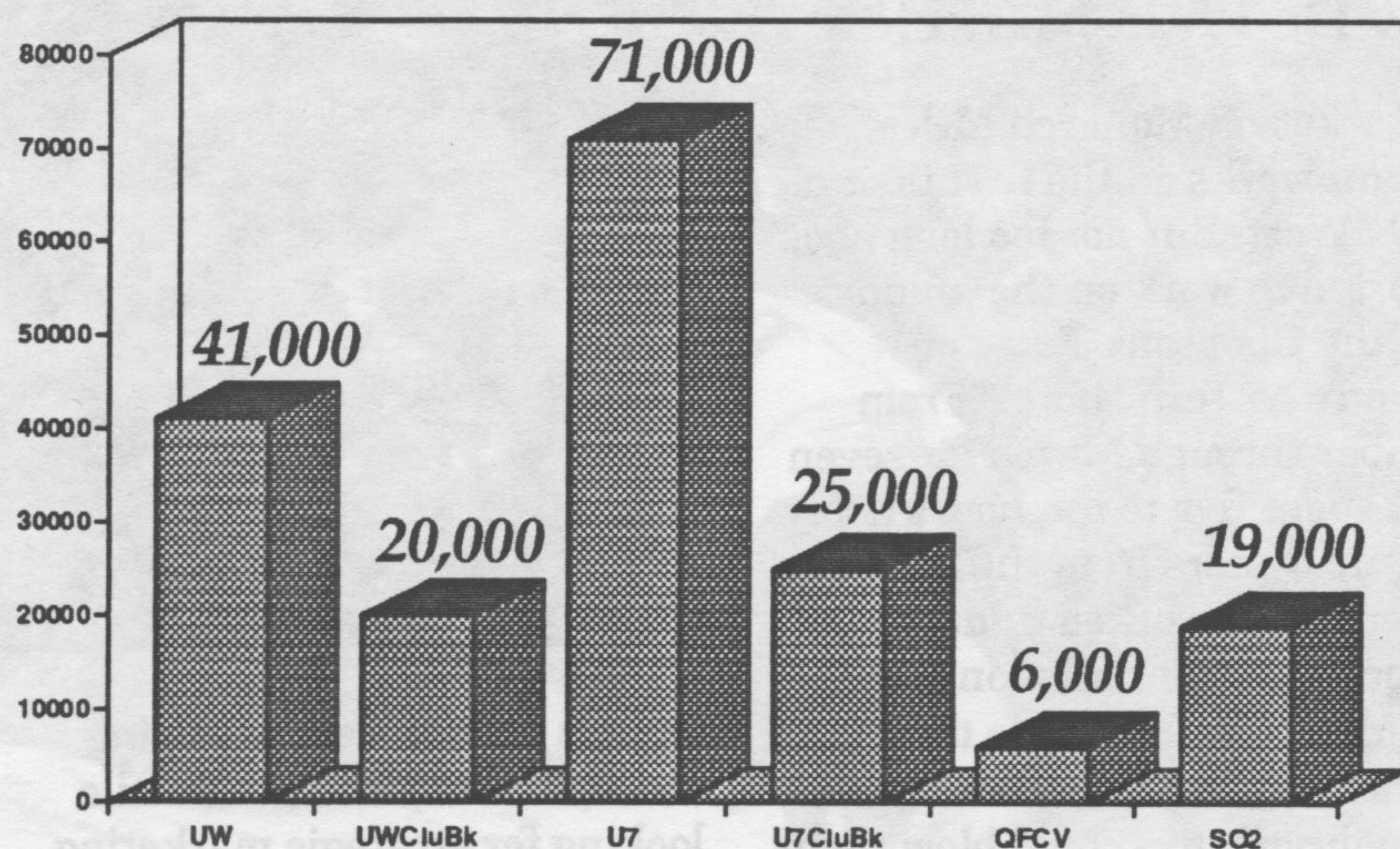
Mike may even have a hand in game design someday. His addiction to golf is no secret, and he'd like to see ORIGIN do a golfing game, a la Links or Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition. His sporting expertise makes him a natural, but he'll probably steer clear of the programming. "When I applied for the technical writer's position, it was at a company which produced computer accounting systems. They told me nobody had ever scored lower on the computer aptitude test. But they liked my writing."



## ...Point

Dear Point Man:

How about sales figures for some of our products (a la SO2, U7 and Underworld)?



Here you go. These figures reflect Underworld, U7, their clue books and Special Ops 2. The number is units sold to the retail channel through July 31. There's no real way to compile actual unit sales to consumers, except through PC Research. We'll post those figures as they become available.



## Virtually possible...

Tony Bratton straps on a loaner virtual reality helmet, looking ahead toward Bounty Hunter, Ultima X and perhaps even a future Strike Commander. This helmet wasn't quite what we were looking for, but Tony will be picking up more VR info when he checks out a conference next month.

**Don't forget: Sept. 7  
is a company  
holiday.**



Point of ORIGIN should only be used in a well-ventilated area. Misuse by intentionally concentrating and inhaling may be harmful or even fatal.

Avoid contact with skin.

## ...Lunch

mathematics, if I can find enough interested parties!). Programmers can submit any topics they wish to present, and can also submit areas which they feel would be interesting but are not qualified to teach.

Some seminars will probably not even have a "speaker," but instead will take the form of general discussion about a particular topic.

While designed primarily for the programming department, the meetings are completely informal and open to anyone in the company. Since we will initially be meeting in the conference room, seating will be somewhat limited, but depending on attendance, we may move to a larger room. People planning on attending any advertised seminar should cc:Mail me so that I can determine if such a move is necessary.

Wednesday currently seems to be a good day for these, but this is likely to change frequently depending on when presenters are ready and what other demands are being felt on individual projects. Look for a post in the next week outlining the first such session. As you can see, these meetings are currently very free-form and things are apt to change on a weekly basis. In any case, they will include tons of intelligent conversation and should be a lot of fun.

## Check It Out

The Welcome Wagon rolls out to the Library this week, where **Miles Lewis** takes over the reigns from the outgoing **Mary Margaret Ipser**. Here are few other new things there:

Hong Kong Mahjong Pro (Nine Dragons Software/EA)  
Road & Track Grand Prix Unlimited (Accolade)  
Of Heaven and Earth (Disney)

You'll also want to make note of the new Library hours— Monday-Thursday: 3:30-6:30 p.m., Friday: 10:00 a.m. until noon.

