

Point of ORIGIN

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Austin, TX



Bounty hunters...

Mark Chandler counts beans (pinto) as he joins others at the ORIGIN Thanksgiving lunch.

Return to Sin City

Winter Consumer Electronics Show ORIGIN's First as Part of EA

The countdown begins again. That's right, another CES is right around the corner, and the sounds of tortured groans are already echoing throughout the hallways and offices in Sales, Marketing and PD. "Getting ready for a show is about as much fun as having wisdom teeth pulled," according to Marketing Magnate **Mike Harrison**, "but the end result is worth all the pain and swelling." Well put.

At the upcoming Winter CES, to be held in Las Vegas from January 7-11, ORIGIN will exhibit in Electronic Arts' gargantuan 2500 square foot booth. It's a prime location in the South Hall, bordered by Sega, Accolade, Camerica and a couple of smaller booths. The Electronic Arts exhibit includes 10-title, large-screen demo areas for EA video games, edutainment products, sports titles and upcoming CD releases, and separate kiosks for ORIGIN (2), SSI, Novalogic, Humongous/Millennium, ICOM, Mindcraft and EA's own floppy titles.

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(1)

Didn't We Just Leave?

The last Point of ORIGIN came to you direct from the floor of COMDEX in Las Vegas. As we reported, the big battle was waged between Microsoft and Borland over new databases. Bill Gates threw a big party to unveil Access, the Microsoft effort, and guess what—the demo crashed, while thousands of guests and press looked on aghast. Just goes to show that it happens to the best of 'em.

Contrary to popular belief, the "Upgrade Man" pictured in the last Point is *not*, in fact, Galen Svanas. Nor did the shower head at the fabulous and opulent Town Hole Hotel fly off and hit Galen in the head. That was physically impossible, since the shower head was only chest-high to begin with. It did, however, come off in his hand and spray him with scalding water. Still good for a few yuks.

The next COMDEX will be held in Atlanta in May of 1993. As always, Point of ORIGIN will be there.

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Hire and Hire

To paraphrase Al Pacino: "Just when they thought they were out, we drag them back in again." The latest to return to the ORIGIN fold is the dynamic duo of **Joye and Will McBurnett**, to whom we had bid farewell in Point issue #15. Joye is taking up residence as Creative Design Assistant, doing editing passes on Serpent Isle. Meanwhile, Will's picking up some programming duties and testing Serpent.

Robert Hill is using the revolving door in QA, at least temporarily. Robert was one of our big playtesters for Underworld. He was eager to accept our invitation to come back and put UW2 through its paces. He's joined by **Bill Lacoste** and **Mike Pell**, who are here for the first time through Western Temps.

Another face here through Western is **Eddie Stringer**. He's taking an Ultima crash-course so he can get on the phones in Customer Service. Eddie did a little time in the Operations Departments at Dell and CompuAdd.

Mark Holly has surfaced in MIS as a new Technician. Mark comes to us direct from the United States Navy, where he was an Integrated Underseas Surveillance Systems Technician (he took care of computers on subs).

Incredible things are going on in the Art Department—**Melinda Bordelan** and **Michael Presley** to name two of them. Melinda and Michael have worked together for 15 years and have created art for places like the New Yorker, Rolling Stone, National Lampoon, plus countless record, paperback and magazine covers. Art Manager Al Nelson says, "**Jim Franklin** is to armadillos what Disney was to the mouse." Jim is another of the legendary crew who has left his mark on the Austin and Texas music scenes. As far as anyone can document, Jim was the first to use the armadillo as a cultural icon for Texas. He later made it the stamp of the Armadillo World Headquarters.

Welcome (and welcome back) to everybody.

Dear Point Man

To whom it may concern:

What have you done with our Point Man? Once upon a time, any question got answered. Tough problems and conflicts could be sent and he would get out there and find the answers, no matter how good, bad or political. But now, many of the really tough questions just disappear. Sometimes they just get a puffy little nothing response.

We want our Point Man back! We know he's out there! Stop holding him hostage so once again we can find out the real scoop on what's going on, who's doing what, which policy got changed, or what really caused someone to do something. What's the point, man?

Signed,

Looking for Mr. RealTruth



Dear Looking,

Obviously, you missed my probing investigation into what makes mozzarella pizza cheese stringy some time back. In all candor, though, I've been here waiting for letters and questions. Imagine my surprise when I discovered your letter (and a few others) in the Point box upstairs at ORIGIN East. I didn't know that box even existed anymore. So let me offer my apologies for the late responses. I'll make sure I clear it out regularly, along with the box downstairs in the lounge near Michelle's office.

The rest is up to you, Seekers of Truth. I'm open to just about anything. Some of my favorite ORIGIN memories are of walking into Fred's or Robert's office and saying things like "You're not going to like this question, but I need an answer." Happy happy joy joy. Feel free to ask about anything: policy, planning, strategy, etc. But, as they say on Jeopardy, "Please make sure it is in the form of a question." Suggestions disguised as bitch letters will also be considered, such as the following letter....

Dear Point Man,

How about a company rule which prevents people from leaving their damn birthday banner up for more than 7 working days after their birthday?

Signed,

Irate Tall Person

Dear Irate,

I doubt a company rule would get very far. However, if you run across somebody else who thinks their birthday should be a month-long celebration, I suggest you raise their banner out of their reach.

Dear Point Man,

Whatever happened to the courtesy of only calling someone at home (when sick or on vacation) in the case of an emergency?

Since this query came from a box on the Product Development side (and since none of us in Marketing is ever sick or on vacation), I posed it to Dallas. "As far as I know, we leave everybody alone, unless we're trying to get a product shipped and they are the *only* one who can accomplish a certain task. Otherwise, they should tell the person calling, 'Hey, leave me alone. I'm on vacation (or sick, or in Marketing).'"

(More on last page)

...CES

"We're sure to get requests from surrounding exhibitors to turn down the volume," Mike says, "and, as usual, we'll totally ignore them. With a 37" monitor, two 27" displays, a speaker array for each product driven by dual sound boards, the usual collection of literature, promo materials and the new ORIGIN audio CD, we expect to keep the aisles jammed with buyers, press people and more than a few spies from the competition."

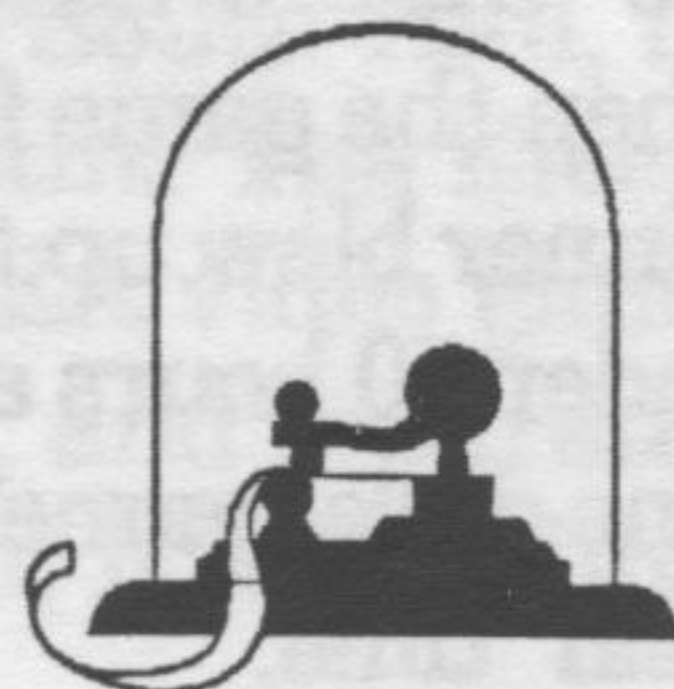
This year's display isn't limited to the show floor. ORIGIN has two private meeting rooms for the sales team, each with a demo system for private showings. In addition, ORIGIN will present Underworld and Serpent Isle at a gala EA press party on Thursday night. Our own Multi-Project Producer **Warren Spector** and the inimitable **Richard Garriott** will be on hand to wax philosophical on the "Evolution of Ultima Over the Decade" (to tie in with EA's "Ten Years Leading the Way" theme).

This show could also mark another ORIGIN milestone: the first time PD teams aren't pulling all-nighters to hack together demos right up until the jet hatch closes. If all goes well (and after all, why shouldn't it?), then we'll be taking almost-complete versions of Strike and Serpent as well as the finished products of ORIGIN FX and Underworld 2. (Please, please, oh please....)

Ticker

A look at Wall Street at press time (this morning).

| | | |
|------|-------|------|
| ERTS | 33.5 | +.75 |
| BROD | 40.75 | -.75 |
| SIER | 17.0 | +.25 |
| MPRS | 14.0 | |



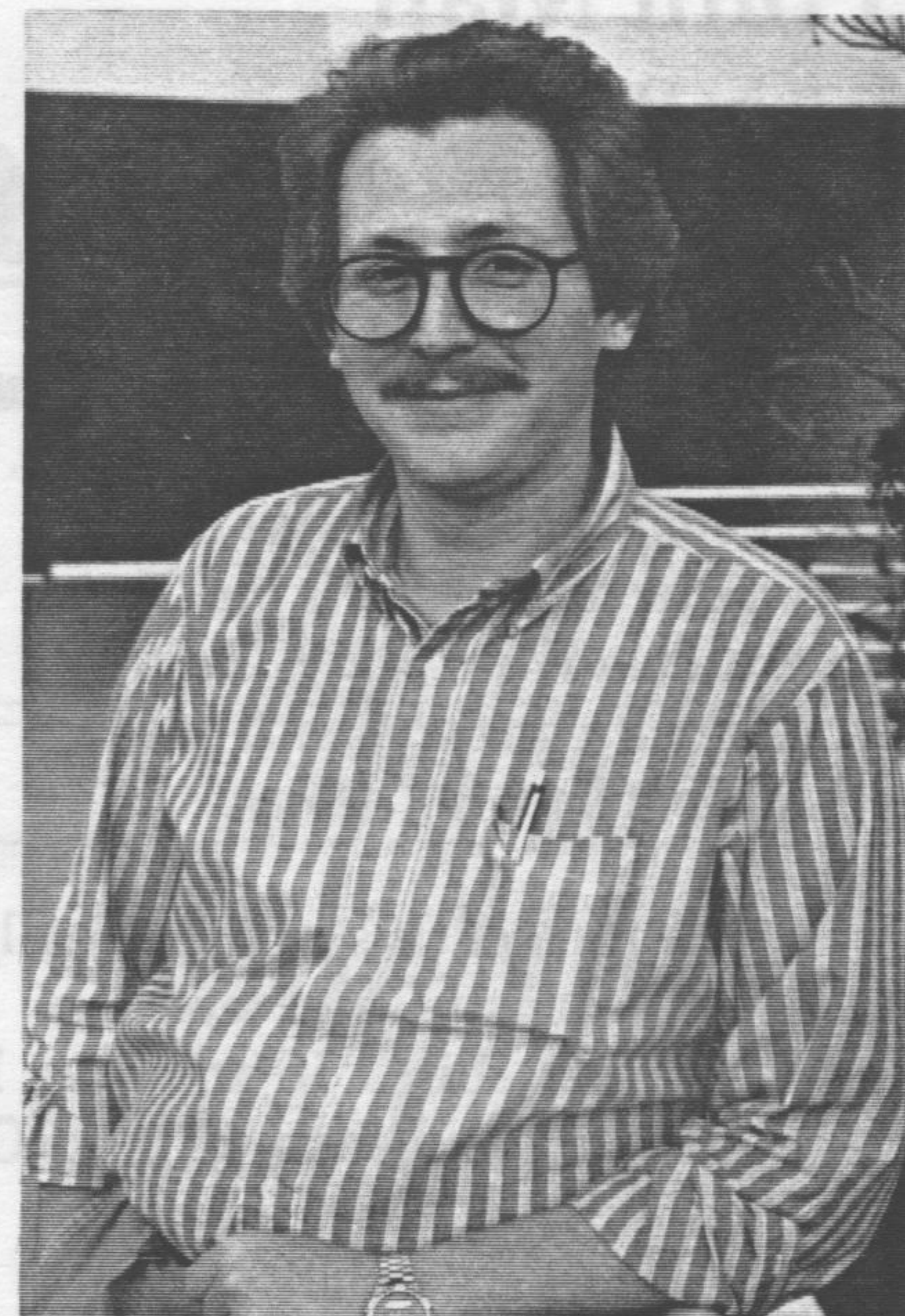
Bio:Al Nelson

Portrait of the Artist

Al Nelson's story has one of those "you-knew-it-had-to-happen-sometime" beginnings. When he was just 10 years old, he enrolled in a drawing class. Soon after, an artist named Herman Hernandon came to the class looking for an apprentice. Hernandon was working on pieces for the State Capitol, among them, a painting of the Alamo. "He took me because I could draw a straight line, even though I was basically a brush-washer," Al says.

Despite that auspicious experience, Al never considered art for a living. He paid the bills doing television and video production. Only while recuperating from an accident on location did he take up drawing again and move to Austin. "I really lucked out. The first day, I went to Sixth Street and landed two accounts, doing things like signs and print ads. That was a misleading day. I thought it was going to be easy," he remembers. As the workload grew, Al formed Unique Productions, an artists' cooperative where he crossed paths with guys like **Dicko Mather** and **Whitney Ayres**. During the seven years he ran Unique Productions, the artists moved from paper and canvas through a variety of computer mediums. "It was like my skills (production) and my hobby (art) got married. It was perfect."

Al admits to being overwhelmed when coming on as Art Manager at ORIGIN. Suddenly, he was working with artists he'd always admired. "But they wouldn't let me leave," Al says. Now, the marriage of art and technology is producing some exceptional offspring. Al is building upon the creative power base in the Art Department and bringing in other renown artists, designers and illustrators who have never worked with computers before. His goal is clear: "In 18 months, I want to have an Art Department that will scare the competitors out of the market, if we don't have one already."



ORIGIN Picks Up Killer Coverage

Underworld I is hitting full stride now. It picked up Fantasy Role-Playing Game of the Year honors at the Tilt magazine awards in France last month. Word now from Strategy Plus (here in America) is that UW is up for Fantasy Role-Playing Game of the Year in that mag, too. The winners will be announced in the February issue.

While we're talking about awards, the nominations for the Software Publishers Association went out this week. U7 is entered for Role-Playing Game of the Year. To avoid splitting votes between our own products, UW went in under Best

Simulation. The challenge is to convince the voters that flight sims really don't stack up against the level of detail and interaction UW provides. Wing 2 Deluxe CD is entered as Best Arcade/Action, "taking full advantage of the incredible capacities of compact disc technology and bringing the entire Wing Commander II saga onto a single disc." Okay, it's a stretch.

PC Magazine's Bernie Yee gives UW a great write-up in the November 24 issue. He calls it a "groundbreaking fantasy role-playing game" and says: "Underworld allows

(See "Coverage" on next page)

...Point Man

Dear Point Man:

Who is in charge of the EC these days? It seems it has really fallen by the wayside lately. For instance, they ran out of plates at a cookout and didn't even have enough for some of us late-comers. Come on, how hard is it to get plates?

Another thing: why is the Christmas Party on a Wednesday. Did they forget to make reservations? It seems they just don't have it together.

By the tone of this letter, I really thought it was destined to mention doughnuts and t-shirts. In any case, I have to come to the defense of the EC. It's 100% volunteer effort that goes into things like grocery shopping before and after work, setting up tables—exciting stuff like that. The paper plate episode is probably something that just slipped through the cracks. You have to admit that, on the whole, EC events go off without a hitch. Just look at the Thanksgiving lunch last week. The EC also faces a constant member crunch. If you think you can help, get with the ever-entertaining **Norma Vargas** or the constantly-committed **Sharon Miller**.

The Christmas Party (now renamed to the politically correct "Company Dinner") has now been moved to the Stouffer Hotel because Green Pastures just wouldn't hold everyone. For full details, check your cc:Mail inbox or the EC bulletin board. Location chief and menu-planner **Michelle Caddel** says you're right, we did get a late start. "By the time we were able to make a reservation, every place was booked for Friday and Saturday nights. But we're already starting to work on next year's reservations now so we won't have the same situation."

Dear Point Man,

How about can crushers for all the lounges?

Dear Point Man,

Get a deep freeze or put all the meat in one freezer. All the ice tastes and smells terrible!

Aaahh, nothing adds to a refreshing glass of Dr. Pepper like the hearty taste of beef. Both of these letters are good ideas. "I'd really never thought about can crushers before," says Lounge Lizard **Jeff Hillhouse**. "If someone wants to find a few and get me a purchase requisition, we can look into getting some." The ice problem will probably be short-lived. Jeff's already searching for a brand-new industrial-sized refrigerator and separate ice machine for the cafeteria in the new building.

...Coverage

you to explore a virtual world, above and below ground, in a realistic fashion that has only been seen previously with this much detail in movies and nightmares."

Dragon magazine is equally gushy. The editors write: "To put it mildly, Abyss will leave you quite dissatisfied with other adventure games. It will leave you wondering

"Richard Garriott has created a masterpiece that transcends the edges of 'role-playing' into the worlds of 'virtual reality'."

how other game entertainments can ever stack up against the new standards it sets." Underworld also gets the exclusive honor of a six-star review on a five-star system, following in the footsteps of Wing Commander.

It's inevitable that December magazines bring Gift Guides, and UW and U7 are showing up in them. In PC Games, Greg Keizer included Underworld. "ORIGIN delivers a first-rate game that's a technological breakthrough," he writes. COMPUTE says UW is "superior visually to all other spelunking hackfests" and notes that "ORIGIN scores another hit" with U7.

On the other side of the world, Australia's PC Games Plus November issue is a veritable ORIGIN orgy. Eric Chew's three-page review of UW: "As far as I know, there is no other first-person RPG on the market that matches the quality of Ultima Underworld." In

Misc.

Congrats go out to Customer Service rep **Marie Williams** and her husband, **Stretch**. Marie delivered a bouncing baby boy on November 20, just in time for Thanksgiving. His name is **Ezekiel John Williams**. He weighed in at 7lbs 13oz. Marie was reportedly in hard labor just 45 minutes, during which she took six calls on U7, three calls on Underworld and one call for Omega. (Are people still playing that?)

Underworld Overlord **Doug Church** just jetted in from LookingGlass Productions. He's here to make a final assault on the bugs in UW2 and hopefully sign-off the game within the next few days.

Looking ahead to the future, **Kevin Potter** has been promoted from TDA to TDA Manager. Meanwhile, **Thomas Blom** will give up his responsibilities as Programming manager to become a Producer. Congratulations to both of these guys.

Where do you turn for the latest news with pinpoint accuracy? Point of ORIGIN, of course. After all, it was Point which first told you about a new woman in QA named **Starr Long**. That came as quite a surprise to Mr. Starr Long. So, in keeping with fine journalistic practices, we printed a correction that Starr Lane was the new man in QA. Once again, Mr. Starr Long was surprised. So now, let the record show that Mr. Starr Long is the new employee in QA. At least we hope he's still with us after all this time.

the same issue, U7 gets its own three-pager from Andrew Phang. "Richard Garriott has created a masterpiece that transcends the edges of 'role-playing' into the worlds of 'virtual reality'," Phang says. The U7 review is followed by three more big pages with a Lord British interview (great pictures with it, by the way) and still one more page on the "UltiMarathon" the editors held when the game first shipped. The winner blew up the Black Gate in just under 50 hours actual "playing" time, nine days "game" time, and five days of "real" time.