

Point of ORIGIN

Vol. II No. 9 ❖❖

Friday, January 17, 1992

❖❖ Austin, Texas

Origin Blitzes Winter CES

At last week's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the ORIGIN crew was ready. Each member had a button which read "We're sorry. We missed Christmas." Buyers and distributors were invited to vent their anger with a large foam sword from the Excalibur Hotel. Surprisingly, we came away with only a few scars.

"They've bought into the philosophy that a company like ours will release no wine before its time," Fred said. "The good news is that they are understanding. They loved the products. They loved *Ultima VII* and *Underworld* was really taking people by storm."

That obviously came as good news to Marten, who was working the sales channel along with Anita and Karl. "It was a major positive. The reality is that the market is with us. It's very supportive of us. It was disappointed that we didn't get stuff out at Christmas. But it's excited that we can have a big first quarter because we have two big boomer products coming out any week now."

Both Fred and Marten believe that there's a window of opportunity in the post-Christmas market. "Although we're incredibly strong anyway, we might really clean up big because there's not that much competition to go head-to-head against," Marten said.

Nobody in the entire SPA booth doubted ORIGIN's drawing power. While attendance at the show was reportedly down, the ORIGIN panel of



Russell Sipe of Computer Gaming World "Beheads" Richard for missing Christmas.

the booth was perpetually jammed with people. Some of them—including other American game publishing companies which will remain nameless—shamelessly brought video cameras with them to tape our *Strike* demo and game plays.

The *Strike* team did a fabulous job on the opening sequence. In fact, a few camera-toting spies complained that they wanted more actual flight action to record.

Across the aisle, everybody wanted to try their hand at moving through *Underworld*. Among them: David White with *Computer Game Review*, who ended up taking over as a demonstrator for the press and playing right through two appointments with other publishers.

If you've never watched Richard demonstrate an *Ultima*, you're missing both an experience and an education. Nobody does it better. You could see *Ultima* fans chomping at the bit after Richard showed them the new mouse-driven interface.

Wing Commander II enjoys its own cult following. Just about everybody who picked up the joystick at that machine already had an intimate

knowledge of the spacecraft, their weapon systems and the wingmen's personalities. Over on the Software Toolworks booth, *Wing Commander* playing off a surprisingly fast MPC-standard CD-Rom drive kept *Wing* fans equally enthralled.

On the first day of the show, *Video Games and Computer Entertainment Magazine* helped decorate the Origin exhibit area by dropping off a foot-tall glass trophy for *Wing 2* as "Game of the Year." *Wing 2* also received a large plaque from *Computer Game Review* for "Best Computer Game of the Year." The folks over at *Compute* came by with the trophy for *Ultima VII* as the "1991 (sic) Choice Award" in the category of Fantasy Role-playing/Adventure.

Just before the show, we learned that *Wing 2* picked up "Game of the Year" and "Technical Brilliance" awards from Australia's *PC Games Plus Magazine*. Congrats to both teams.

Back at the show, Marten, Karl, Anita and Jennie handed out a few awards of their own. They honored the distributors and retailers for helping *Wing 2* achieve 500,000 units sold worldwide.

IN OTHER SHOW NEWS...

MicroProse held a party to unveil its entry into fantasy role-playing: *Darklands*. Basically, it's an adventure set in medieval Germany. MicroProse President Bill Stealey said, "Until now, role-playing games had to take place in the limited scope of imagination. Now, with *Darklands*, they will take place in the limitless scope of reality." MicroProse also announced that it was working on an animated graphic adventure code-named *Johnny Crash*, previewable by private screening to select members of the press. Alan Gardner tried to BS his way through. No dice. I, your humble Editor, tried to get through as well—not as a representative of Point of ORIGIN, but under a publicational pseudonym. I almost made it, too. I think the word "Austin" on my badge gave it away.

Not to fear, though. Another operative was able to penetrate the ranks. He described the *Johnny Crash* demo as a 3-minute presentation with *Strike*-style animation. He wasn't quite sure what the story line would be from the brief demo, but he thought it was a humorous alien-type adventure set in space. All in all, he thought the technology looked very good. "Almost ORIGIN quality," he called it. MicroProse is keeping a tight lid on this one, but says *Johnny Crash* will be ready for a June rollout if "some technology can be worked out." We'll keep you posted. Also at MicroProse, an announcement was made that Falcon 3.0 and the entire Spectrum-Holobyte product line would now be distributed by MicroProse throughout Europe. Afterward, rumors were flying

that a complete buyout/merger was in the works between these two flight simulation arch-rivals.

Here's a tip: keep an eye out for *Guest*, a made-for CD-ROM title from Oregon developer Trilobyte for Virgin Games. In it, you explore a 22-room haunted mansion, complete with elaborate staircases, elegant dining rooms, a gloomy laboratory and see-through ghosts. *Guest's* designers say they've been working on it for one year and they have at least another year to go. The version we saw is in a *very* primitive stage; there's no real story line yet and many of the rooms are only rendered in black and white. But the flowing movement and brilliant detail in a few scenes which have been fleshed out are nothing less than spectacular. Ask anybody who saw it.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AFTER HOURS

Customer Service had two record-breaking weeks, fielding more than 200 calls the first week and 1500 the second!

Last week alone, rep's took 200 calls between 5:00 and 7:00 pm (the extended hours started with the release of *Wing 2*). Customers are even writing in to comment on the professional help they received. Kay sends her thanks (as do we all) for the hard work. Hopefully, you'll get a break before *U7* and *Underworld* roll out.

FUN, FUNNER, FUNNEST

On another front, the Entertainment Committee will be circulating a questionnaire next Tuesday. You'll get it from your manager or supervisor. The questionnaire's designed to elicit some feedback on last year's activities and pull in some ideas for this year's. Completion is *required* by each employee so we can get a complete picture of everyone's thoughts. An *optional* (but highly desired) questionnaire completion is also being sought from spouses who have attended any of last year's events. Just a reminder: the EC would still like to have some people from Product Development join the group.

AND THE WINNER IS...

The election season has begun. Forget about what's going on in New Hampshire; the real campaign's going on in the SPA right now for the annual Software Awards. ORIGIN has nominations in three categories.

BEST ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAM

Wing Commander II
Links Championship Courses (Access)
Elvira II (Accolade)
Winter Challenge (Accolade)
Mike Ditka Ultimate Football (Accolade)
Tristan (Amtex)
The Adventures of Willy Beamish (Dynamix)
Sherlock Holmes—Consulting Detective (ICOM)
Battle Chess (Interplay)
Castles (Interplay)
Civilization (MicroProse)
Microsoft Entertainment Pack (Microsoft)
Harvest of the Sun (Philips)
Lemmings (Psygnosis)
Joe Montana Sports Talk Football (Sega)
Sonic the Hedgehog (Sega)
Quackshot Starring Donald Duck (Sega)
Police Quest 3 (Sierra)
Adventures of Robin Hood (Sierra)
Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum Holobyte)
Symantec Game Pack (Symantec)
True Golf Classics (T&E)
JetFighter II (Velocity)

BEST NEW USE OF A COMPUTER

Wing Commander II
Speech Accessory Pack
The Far Side Computer Calendar (Amaze)
VinylCAD (Amer. Small Bus.)
QuickTime (Apple)
ObjectVision for Windows (Borland)
Kid Pix (Broderbund)
Compton's Multimedia Encyclopedia for Windows (Compton's New Media)
Kid Works (Davidson & Assoc.)
Stories and More (IBM)
IBM VoiceType (IBM)
Sherlock Holmes—Consulting Detective (ICOM)
Keyfile (Keyfile)
Dress Shop (LivingSoft)
SimAnt (Maxis)
Wagon Train 1848 (MECC)
Civilization (MicroProse)
Time-Life 35mm Photography (Philips)
Lemmings (Psygnosis)
The Sierra Network (Sierra)
Perfect Calligraphy from Laser Printers & Pen Plotters (Social Software)
ClickArt for Faxes (T/Maker)

BEST ACTION/ARCADE PROGRAM

Wing Commander II
Home Alone (Capstone)
Nova 9 (Dynamix)
Super Munchers (MECC)
Lemmings (Psygnosis Ltd.)
Sonic the Hedgehog (Sega)
Streets of Rage (Sega)
Super Tetris (Spectrum Holobyte)
Spectre (Velocity/Peninsula)
The Rocketeer (Disney)

Although we don't have an entry in the Best Fantasy Role Playing/Adventure Program, here are the nominees:

Martian Memorandum (Access)
Elvira II (Accolade)
The Adventures of Willy Beamish (Dynamix)
Monkey Island II (Lucasfilm)
Might and Magic II (New World)
ToeJam & Earl (Sega)
Phantasy Star III (Sega)
Shining in the Darkness (Sega)
Leisure Suit Larry 5 (Sierra)
The Adventures of Robin Hood (Sierra)
Police Quest 3 (Sierra)
Space Quest IV (Sierra)
Eye of the Beholder (SSI)

Editor's note: (We put WCI into "Simulations" last year and got blown away by a crowded field of heavy-hitting competitors. It looks like the same might have happened this year with 12 titles duking it out, among them 5 flight sims. This year we went for the other possible Wing classification—Action/Arcade—and might actually take top honors if we can just blast away some Lemmings and Hedgehogs once we're through with those darned cats!)

Anyone think we couldn't have taken Best Fantasy RPG/Adventure this year had Ultima VII made it out? (The last two times that Ultima was in the running, it went head-to-head with King's Quest and sadly lost. This year, both the King and the Lord sat out of the race but Sierra still sent in a regiment of reinforcements.

MORE PAGES & PRAISES

MPC World rolled out its premier issue and included *Wing 1* and *Secret Missions* in its Buyer's Guide. *MPC World* bills itself as *the* magazine for learning, working and playing with multimedia PCs. It says *Wing* "is in a category all of its own. It's a gritty, real-feeling simulation of the future. The *Secret Missions* is an impressive multimedia title."

The January issue of *Compute* has the annual "Choice Awards" in which *U7* wins "Best Fantasy Role-playing/Adventure." David Sears writes: "Adeptly crafted non-player characters and a superb interface ensure that this visit to Britannia is destined to be the most epic yet." The same issue includes Richard in an article on "Principles of Good Game Design." The article also features Dave Jones (*Lemmings*) and Dan Bunten (*Command HQ*). A few pages later, Fred and other company heads defend designing games for high-power hardware. A lot of good reading.

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PCM Magazine reviews *Martian Dreams* this month and calls it "action/adventure at its best... (It) involves hundreds of hours of intense concentration and pure fun."

You know what they say about the sincerest form of flattery. The latest *Questbusters* has a review of *Shadow Sorcerer*, the latest AD&D from SSI. This game is supposed to have a slick, new interface. So slick, in fact, that the reviewer says it is "as easy to learn and as intuitive as the recent *Ultimas*."

RANDOM ACCESS

Sierra's really online now with the Sierra Network. Players can log on and face off in chess, checkers and bridge or use the e-mail and conference rooms.

Two other areas of the service—SierraLand and LarryLand—are slated to open next year. Sierra's shipping start-up software for \$29.95, which includes a \$25 usage credit. Connect time is \$2/hour on weeknights and weekends. Day rates will be a little higher. A major feature of the service is "local connect hubs" to avoid long-distance charges. The Network's projecting 10,000 subscribers by Christmas. We'll keep you posted.

The Bluebeard Award goes to London-based Mirror Group Newspapers. A 9-hour raid at the publisher's office by the Software Police allegedly turned up tons of illegally copied software. The police force in this case is made up of two groups, the Business Software Alliance and the Federation Against Software Theft (FAST), really front names for heavy hitters

Aldus, Autodesk, Lotus, Microsoft and WordPerfect. For the record, Mirror Group denies the charges.

Am I missing something here? The current ad for Lucas film's *Monkey Island 2* reads, "Incredible VGA art: We hired 256 out-of-work artists from Los Angeles and crammed them six-deep in an office until they came up with pictures we liked. Incredible music and sound effects: All of the musicians we wanted are working in '70's comeback bands. So we scored a few tunes ourselves, added some great sound effects and went home. *We did the best we could.* We're not perfect. But we think scanned art, scintillating soundtracks, rehashed jokes and a great story get us close—and over budget, too."

Must be that unique California sense of humor.