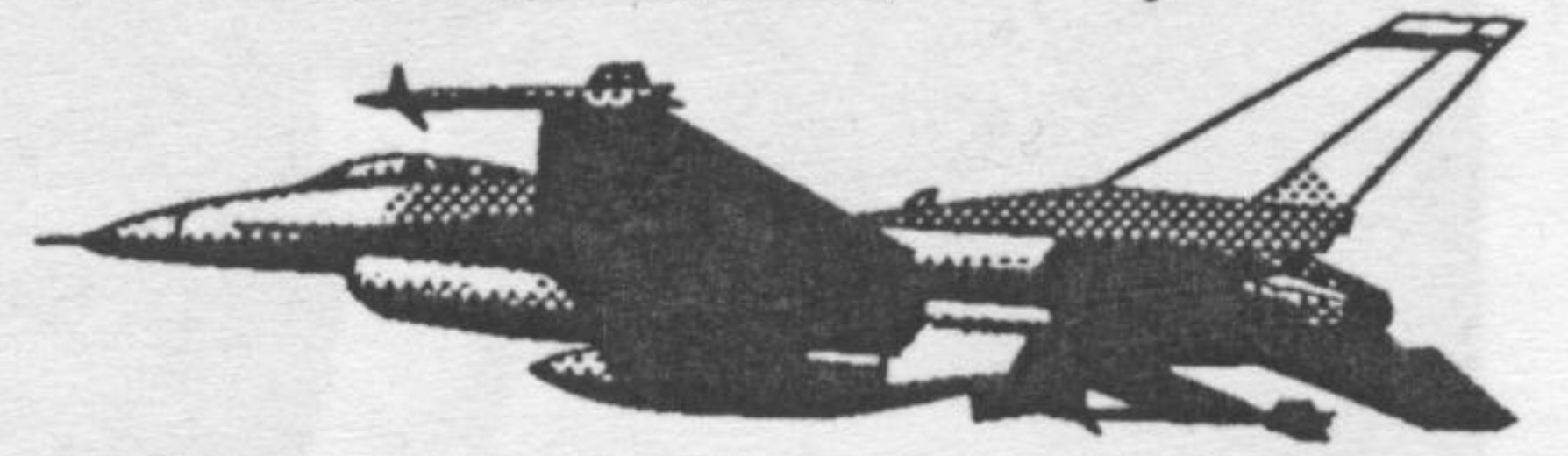


Point of ORIGIN

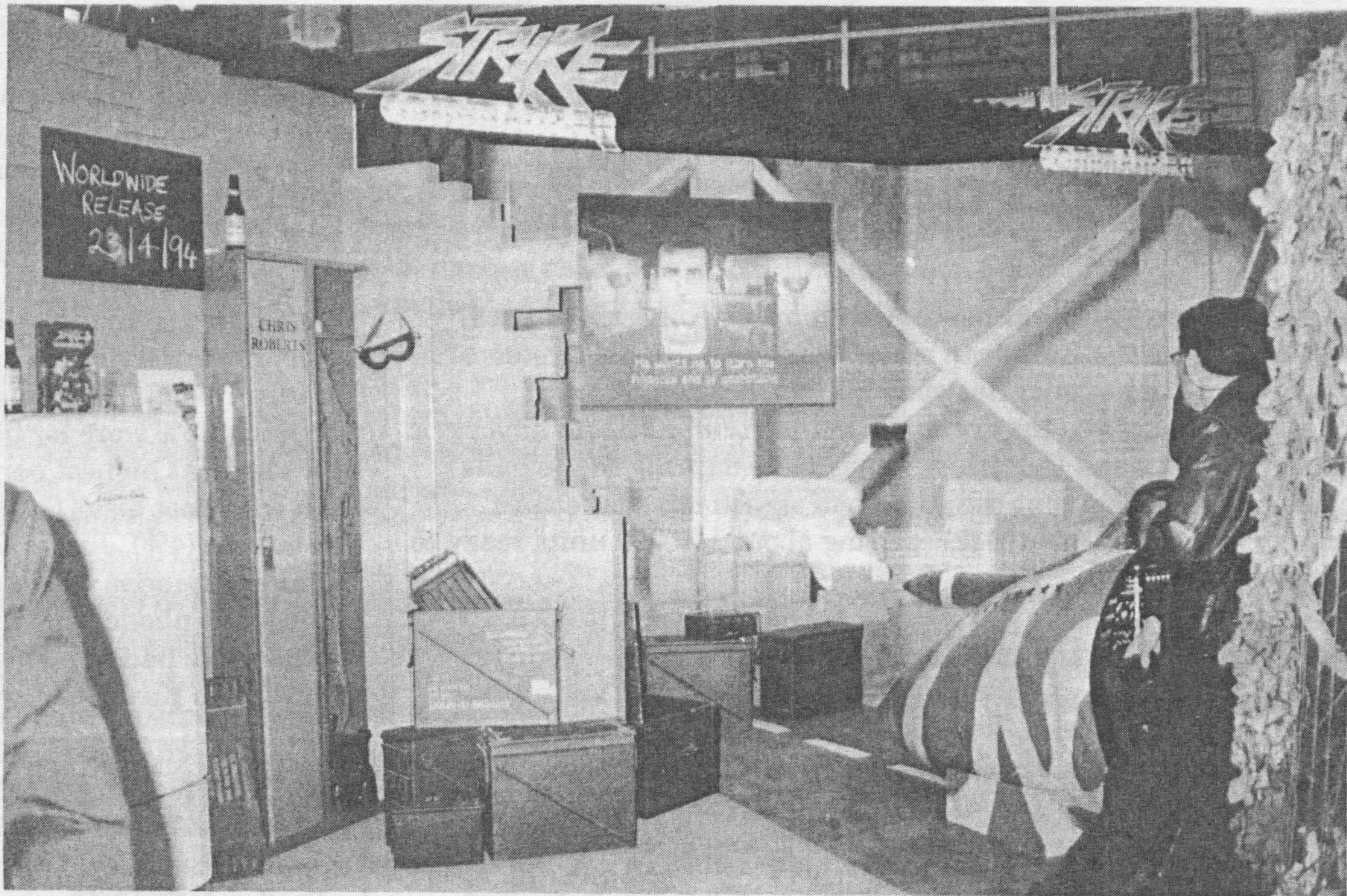


Volume III, No. 36

Friday, April 9, 1993

Austin, TX

Strike Signs Off!



Blitzkrieg in London...

Strike commands at the European Computer Trade Show in London earlier this week. The entire EA booth was a re-creation of a Strike hangar, complete with F-16 cockpit, 30-foot projection screen and hot-and-cold running journalists. See "Strike" on next page.

The Assault Begins April 23



Erin Roberts takes control of the F-16 cockpit mockup while hordes of gawkers look on.

Strike Ready to Roll

Don't forget to check your local news: "Our top story tonight—tactical nuclear warheads light up the European skies. But first, ORIGIN Systems has announced that Strike Commander has gone into duplication..."

Okay, okay. It may not be *that* dramatic, but try telling that to anyone on the Strike team or in Sales and Publishing. They were dancing in the halls when word came one week ago that the game had signed off. Now comes another seemingly insurmountable task—getting about 140,000 units ready to roll out worldwide.

Of those, about 95K are domestic. Europe's seeing its biggest ORIGIN rollout in history (about 44K). The rest are sprinkled throughout Japan, Australia, Canada and Singapore. The European numbers grew earlier this week as the result of the European Computer Trade Show. EAUK went all out to create a hangar to resemble a Strike option screen. "The EA booth was nothing but Strike Commander," according to Lord British, "and it had the words 'Electronic Arts' on it in only one place. Everything else was ORIGIN and Strike Commander."

Jennie Evans was ecstatic. "All the journalists and buyers were completely gobsmacked." (That's a term referring to what someone would look like after being punched in the mouth.) Jennie went on: "Chris and Erin played the game solidly starting on Sunday and they finished just before the end of the show. That's three days of straight play and it didn't crash once. It really is beautiful and rock solid."

Strike certainly made an impression with the retail channel there. Germany raised its order to 20,000. One retailer reportedly raised its order another 5,000 units just from seeing the game and the booth. On top of it all, EAUK took the award for European Software Publisher of the Year. That, coupled with a similar honor at Europe's big industry bash, the InDin, puts EAUK at the undisputed top of the heap across the pond.

The announcement has officially gone out that Strike will ship on April 22 worldwide and hit stores the next day. Congratulations to *everyone* responsible for getting this one out, and let's make sure Customer Service gets all the support it will richly deserve from this point on.

Slick Serpent Sales Sizzle

Even with all the hoopla surrounding Strike, another ORIGIN product is really making a splash right now—Serpent Isle. It was #2 on Software Etc.'s top-seller chart for the month of March, second only to X-Wing (which, by the way, had four weeks of sales compared to only one week for Serpent; in terms of units per week, they're running about even). Babbage's became the first retailer to turn in its second order for another 1200 units. All in all, SI's sold about 31K domestically, another 9.5K in Europe.

Cruising the online services like CompuServe, America Online and GENie, it's easy to see that the game's going over well in the marketplace. The overwhelming opinion is that SI is clean, fast and the next step forward from its predecessor, instead of being just U7 with new characters. That's reflected in the calls coming in to Customer Service. Of 1086 calls from the release date until April 5, a whopping 65% were for hints and tips. The next highest percentage dealt with boot disks (11%), then files and buffers (4%). Just about all of the remaining queries were solvable by CS over the phone. "It's the cleanest rollout we've had in a long time," according to Kay Gilmore.

In This Point...

Another New SKU
Wing Academy Pg. 3

Is there a plot to kill fun at ORIGIN?
Dear Point Man Pg. 4

ORIGIN FX wins big
Review Revue Pg. 5

Our first "EOM"
Jennifer Davis Pg. 5

Safe and sound security ideas
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Wing Commander Academy

Universal Appeal

(This is the second in a series of articles dealing with upcoming products. It is intended for employees' use only and shouldn't be discussed outside the company.)

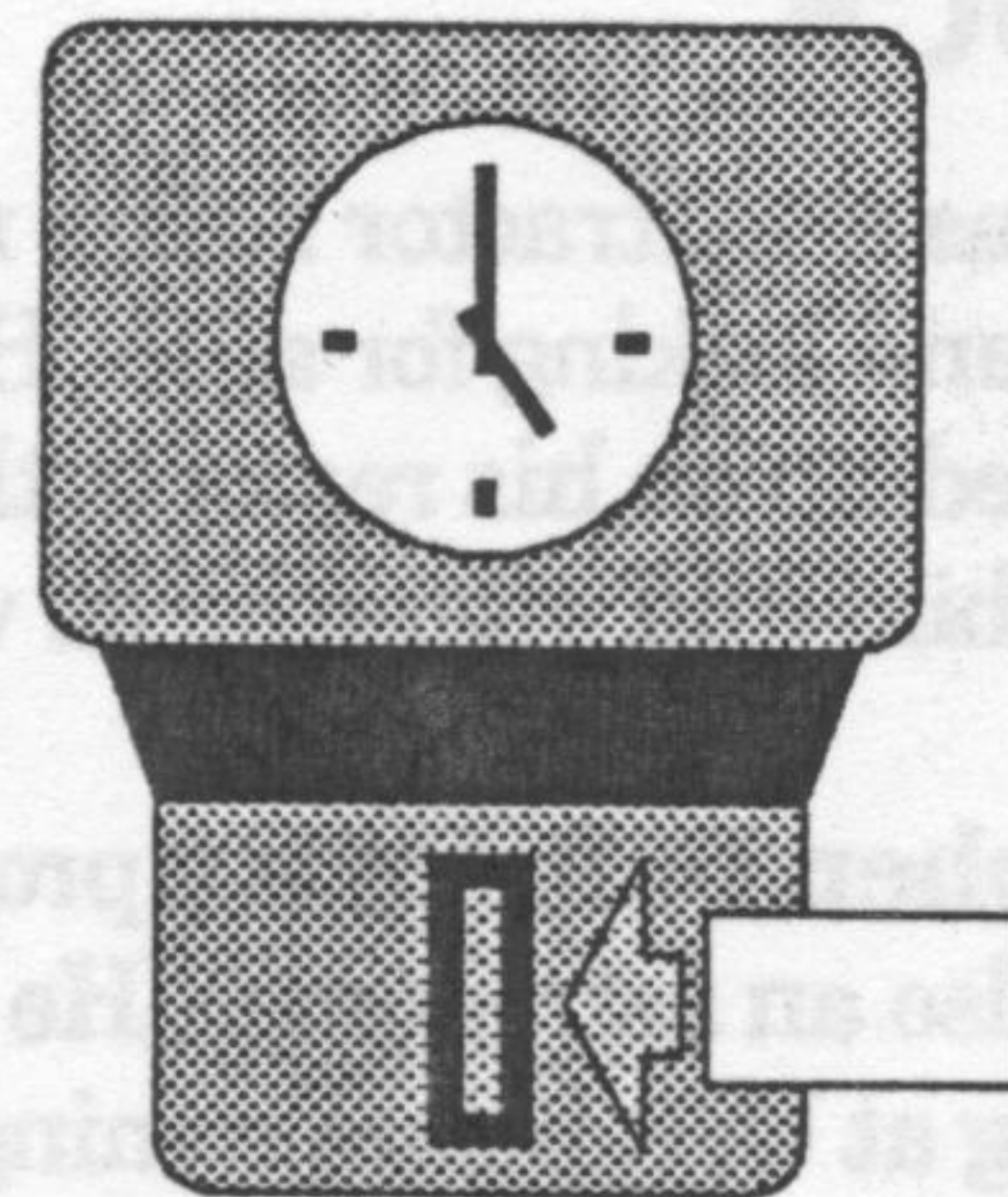
Face it: there's a little egomaniac in every pilot who's flown a Ferret. The "brag factor" is what makes Wing Commander Academy (the current working name) look like it could be a big seller. Basically, WCA is a do-it-yourself mission builder in the Wing Commander universe. Programmer-turned-Producer **Thomas Blom** explains it this way: "There's no real story line, except what you design for yourself. Each mission can have an objective; maybe you have to retrieve a data pod or ejected pilot, or maybe you just want to do some dogfighting. In any case, you have total control over the design."

"WCA should really appeal to people who care about how good a pilot they are. After you design a mission, it will have a score based on its degree of difficulty. The files will be small enough so that you can dump the scenario onto a disk or post it online someplace like CompuServe. That way, you can challenge your friends or other players to try and beat you at your own mission. Players who whizzed through Wing Commander can actually create impossible missions, while other players may just want to use it as a way to play around with different kinds of spacecraft or study the way the Kilrathi fly."

WCA has another couple of big selling points. First of all, it's not as hardware-intensive, so there will be a lot of happy 386 owners out there. Second, it will be at a reduced price point (currently \$49.95 as opposed to \$79.95). WCA is planned as a fall project. Right now, it has a lean and mean team. **Jeff Everett** and **Brent Thale** are working on the programming and **Whitney Ayres** on the art. Thomas' goal is to have it in the box by the end of June (perfect for CES). In the next Point, we'll take a look behind the scenes of Interactive Movie #1.



WCA Producer Thomas Blom



On the Clock

Al Nelson is continuing his expansionist policies. He's take over the raw materials room from Creative Services (what's next, Poland?) and he's hired even more raw art firepower.

Sam Yeates is another of the recently honored poster artists. He's been happily dragged in to the organization here by our other legends. Under hobbies, Sam lists "painting." Now that's a stretch.

Paul Sessums joins the AD (Art Dept.) from the Black Cat Lounge and Bee Bop Printing. How did he find his way to ORIGIN? "By nagging artists already employed," Paul said.

Thomas Evans says it's too long a story as to how he joined the AD. But in his spare time, he likes classic cars, music and archaeology. (Too bad he'll no longer have spare time.)

The other two artists are already familiar faces. **Eric Lund** and **Shelly Hollen** have been working as temps but now move to coveted full-time status. Eric worked at both DC Comics and Marvel Comics before ORIGIN, and said he came here because he "didn't want to become a fanboy." Shelly, on the other hand, said she "got really hungry" and decided to apply. Besides, she'd heard some good hype about ORIGIN. While passing the Point offices, Shelly uttered one of those sentences that's best heard out of context: "I think I'll sun my lizard on the deck."

On the programming side, **John**

(See "Clock" on next page)



Dates to Remember

Computer Game Developers' Conference/Santa Clara, CA—Apr. 15-18

COMDEX/Atlanta—May 3-6

CES/Chicago—June 3-6

Pulse Check

In addition to our sporadic Point Polls, Pulse Check will have a new and hopefully more regular feature.

Beginning next issue, our own **Donna Mehnert** will report on what's going on out there in Playerland. She'll tell us what gamers are saying about our newest releases and problems they're running into. Watch this space!

...Clock

Reeme was a contractor before moving to Austin and looking for a job. He never listed comedian on his resume, though; under hobbies and interests, he wrote "yes."

Stephen Balkum is a programmer and also an astronomer. He did star-gazing at U.T. before coming here and says he's into large-scale live steam model railroading.

Another programmer, **Brian Heard**, comes to us from Texas Instruments. He classifies himself as a game fanatic who came to ORIGIN because "I wanted to help release games faster so I could play them." Best of luck.

Adam Foshko comes aboard as a TDA. After graduating from U.T., virtual reality research and development led him to ORIGIN. Adam's another one for the bulletin boards. His interests are philosophy, independent filmmaking and writing.

Off The Clock: ORIGINites at play

It's never been said that ORIGIN employees don't spend enough time at ORIGIN. In fact, the trend has always been just the opposite. This means that after-hours time tends to be even more valuable.

Through a new column, Wayne Baker will share some of the interesting things ORIGINites are involved in off the clock. We'll soar past new horizons, race with the wind and perhaps even pick up a new language along the way. Who needs the Sci-Fi Channel?

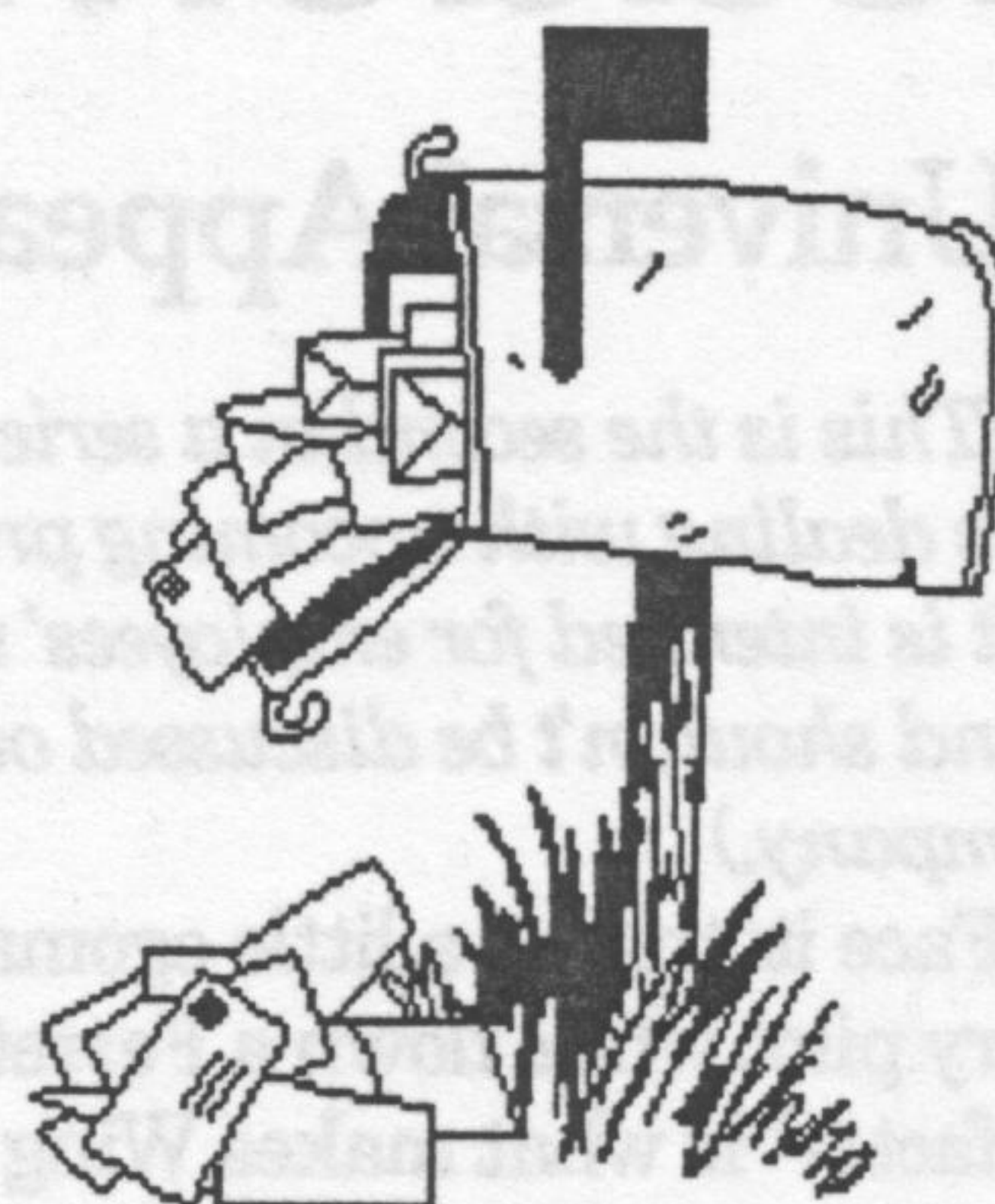
If you, or someone you know at ORIGIN, leads an interesting life outside of work, let us know. Just submit a name and activity either in the Point of ORIGIN suggestion box or through ccMail to the Point of ORIGIN address. We already have a couple of ideas to start, but we'll need more soon.

Dear Point Man,

Dear Point Man,

What happened to the "Wall of Fame"? I enjoyed reading those letters in the old building. It would be nice to put them up again and add to the collection.

The wall will be back very soon. That's another one of those things that got put in a low-priority position after the move, but cork board is going up next week and letters should be there soon after. For those of you who don't know about the Wall of Fame: it's a collection of some of the more outrageous and interesting fan letters and Customer Service thank-you's we've received over the years. There are even a few hate letters (i.e., Glinkie) that are entertaining in their own right.



Dear Point Man,

Why does EA management and corporate policy celebrate the EA corporate culture (i.e., rents entire movie houses for the company, nerf balls, projectile weapons, makes sure that EA is a fun place to work), while ORIGIN management seems determined to eradicate the culture that makes ORIGIN such a fun place to work? I hear that at Operations meetings, they discuss policies such as mandatory hours, mandatory eating areas, no basketball court, no late hours, no visitors, no green guns and no fun.

EA celebrates their culture, and consequently, are 10 times the size of ORIGIN (and release SKUs that make more money than ORIGIN ever has) while our management discourages fun at work and we can barely break even.

*Just wondering,
Mr. Fun*

Dear Mr. Fun,

Yow! Where to start? First of all, I think you may have a case of the "grass-is-always-greener" syndrome. The Point Man hasn't personally visited the EASM office yet, but as I understand, it's nowhere near as free-wheeling as ORIGIN. Everybody who visits there remarks about how incredibly quiet the offices are in "cubicle hell."

Let's take a shot at some of your other observations. The last time I looked, we hadn't outlawed nerf balls, green guns or basketball—just projectile weapons. The other things—hours, visitors and eating areas—are related to other issues like security (which has been a big problem lately) and building maintenance. I have attended just about every management meeting since September of 1991, and can tell you that eradicating ORIGIN's culture was never a topic on the agenda.

You're right; EA has done some big things like renting an entire theater, but then again, like you said, they're 10 times bigger. ORIGIN hasn't reached that point yet, but it has had some big events like the boat excursion on Lake Travis and catered Happy Hours off-site at places like the County Line. And the Entertainment Committee is always trying to outdo itself. In fact, the EC is planning a big road trip to Fiesta Texas right now (check out the EC bulletin board).

Obviously, the only way to settle this thing definitively is a first-hand look. Within the next month, Point of ORIGIN will pay a visit to EASM and come back with pictures and observations. Then you can judge for yourself.

(See "Point Man" on last page)



Jennifer Davis and Marketing Director Mike Harrison with the first EOM plaque presentation.

Employee of the Month

Jennifer Davis

Strange as it may sound, Jennifer Davis, ORIGIN's inaugural "Employee of the Month," didn't really want to apply here.

"I'd known Richard for years through the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism), and I didn't want the impression to be 'Jennifer got the job because she's Richard's friend.' But I was working for a two-person graphics design firm. When those two people decided to go their separate ways, I started looking for a job," she recalls. Finally, out of desperation, she brought in her resume last March. "And it's turned out to be great for me." Another happy ending.

Jennifer's EOM honor comes as a result of her tireless work on the Strike Commander play manual, arguably the finest ever produced for a computer game. In Creative Services, she does layout, design and proofreading for manuals, docs, packaging, cluebooks and Sales and Marketing support materials. Her role in the SCA comes from "an incredible interest in anything to do with the Renaissance." She says the SCA lets her learn about history by living it. She's created period arts, crafts, costumes—even crossbows and daggers.

Jennifer wants to turn future endeavors to more spectacular boxes for ORIGIN games. "There are some great boxes out there right now, like for Comanche. I'd like to create something that's almost a work of art in itself, but still something that won't fall off the shelf."

Review Revue

Call this the quiet before the storm. Since American gaming mags have such ridiculous lead times (3 months), coverage is only beginning to trickle in for Underworld II, to be followed by Serpent Isle and then, of course, Strike. Meanwhile, there have been some other notable mentions.

At the Chicago Tribune, Dennis Lynch named ORIGIN FX "Best Screen Saver of the Year." He wrote:

"FX gets the nod for its totally groovy psychedelic displays and stunning music." We're not quite sure what he was smoking when he wrote that, but we hope he has plenty more. Lynch also named UW1 as "Best Computer Game of the Year" last year in the Trib.

The current VG & CE has a glowing review of UW2, saying it "proves that games can have the perfect balance between technological achievement and solid role-playing enjoyment." But the write-up was lukewarm at best in Computer

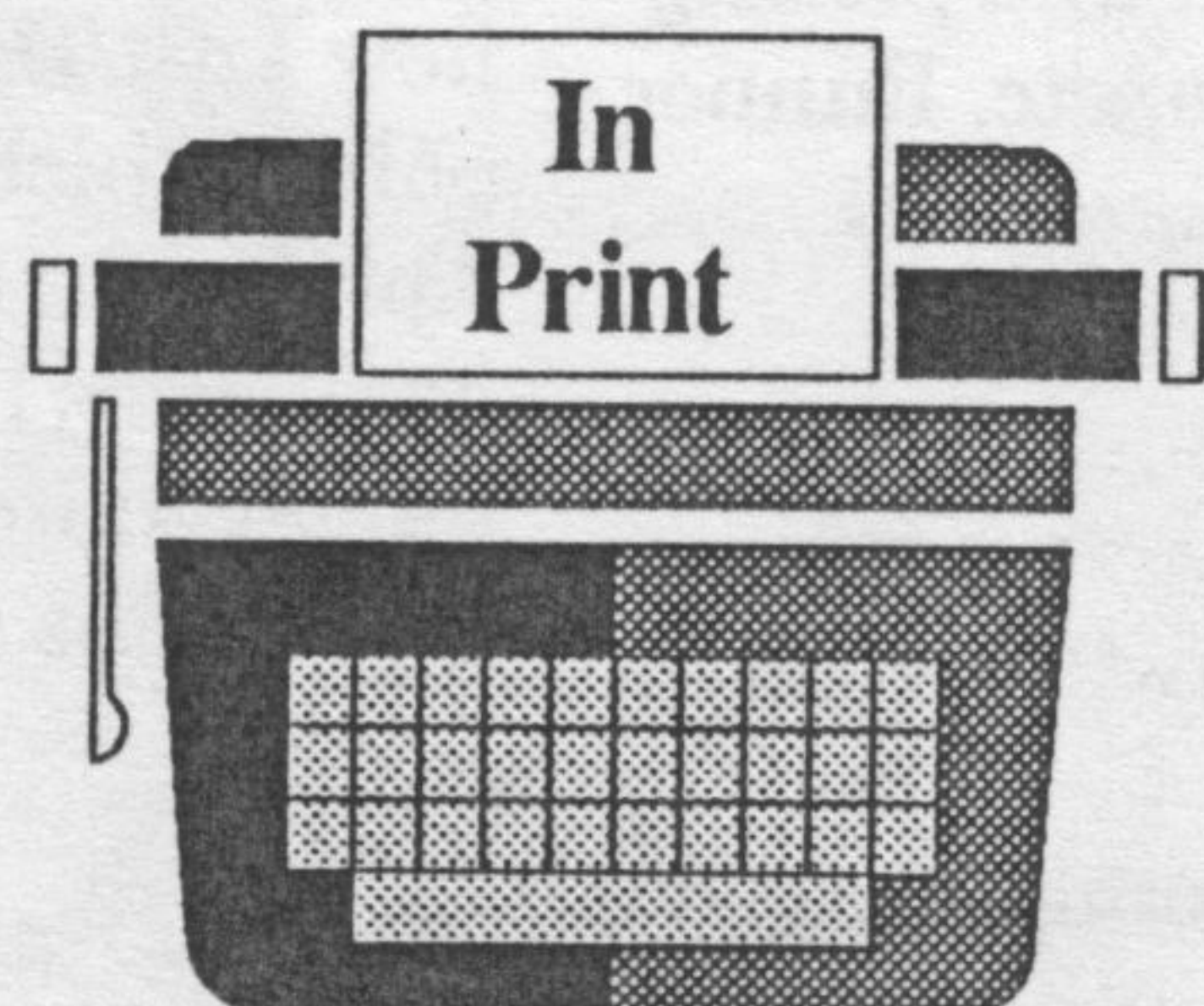
Gaming World, where Doug Seacat (who has not reviewed an ORIGIN game in the last few years) rambles on and on about what he would have done differently.

Sounds more like a frustrated game designer wanna-be.

In Germany, PC Games magazine was a little more complimentary. "Underworld 2 will astonish even hard-core critics and surely take the top position in RPG,"

the editors write. As if that's not enough, they go on to say, "ORIGIN kann sich mit Labyrinth of Worlds woieterhin loben, im Genre Rollenspiele die Nr. 1 zu sein." Wow!

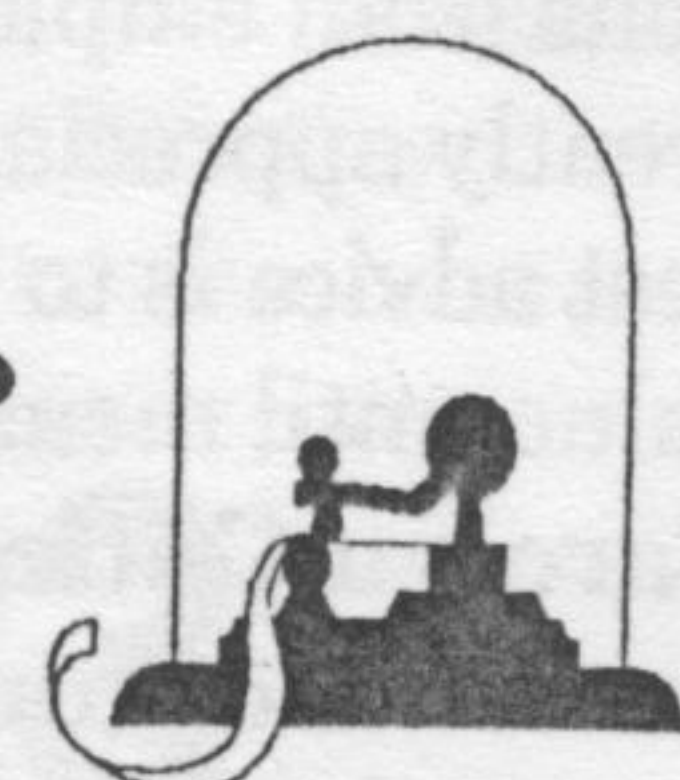
On the Today Show watch, the piece is finished and has been sitting on a shelf in the New York studios since a week ago Monday. It's just a matter of the producers deciding when they want to use it; that could be Monday or it could be a month from now. As we always say: "We'll keep you posted and tell you just as soon as we know."



Ticker

(Noon)

ERTS	30.25	+1.125
BROD	39	-1.5
MPRS	7.25	
SIER	10.25	-.25



...Point Man

Dear Point Man,

I'd like to thank you for getting the AT&T Voice mail quick reference, but it isn't quite what I asked for. What I want to know is how to call forward, call transfer, etc.

Signed,
Still Bitching

Dear Bitching,

Let it not be said that a Point question went unanswered. Now listen carefully:

To transfer your extension to someone else's, pick up the receiver and hit #70, then the extension number you want your calls forwarded to. To cancel it (from your phone), hit ** and your extension number twice.

You can set up a mini-conference (only three people total). While talking to someone on the phone, hit the switchhook (or punch Flash, if you have it), dial the other extension number, and hit the switchhook or Flash button again.

To tell the truth, I didn't know these features existed either. Enjoy.

Misc.

In light of the recent property thefts from the building, UM is calling in some experts. One of them is the security consultant who visited ORIGIN about a year ago. He was in on Thursday to offer some ideas. UM is also getting some recommendations from the Austin Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit. Other ideas under consideration include locks on doors, limiting visitor hours and having employees sign-in during the late evening and on weekends. Any suggestions from employees would also be greatly appreciated. Meanwhile, the best advice is to take home anything of value until measures are put into effect. **Carolyn Cutler** has graciously offered use of her engraving pen to mark other personal property on the premises. Don't steal it.

Santa Claus (a.k.a. **Mike Sims**) is proud to announce some "formal" moves into the Writing/Design



Cardiac arrest...

Melanie Green is led away in handcuffs (not her own) as part of the American Heart Association's "Cardiac Arrest Day." To get out of jail, Mel raised more than \$400 for the Heart Association.

Department: **Bruce Adams, Phil Brogden, Joel Manners, Joye McBurnett, Anthony Nichols and John Watson.**

We also have some extra hands in Administrative Support Services. **Annmarie Mathis, Randy Dizon, Scott Blankenship, Robert Clark and Jerrilyn Oates** are "runners" available for dropping off and picking up things, making copies, etc. Runner requests should go through **Lori Wiley.**

Copyright infringement is the sincerest form of flattery. Two new, first-person dungeon crawls are available as shareware now. One of them is titled *The Catacomb Abyss*; the other is *Ken's Labyrinth*.



Check It Out (and Bring It Back)

Management has approved a new Lost/Damaged Library Materials policy which will take effect Monday, April 12th. Under the new policy, employees responsible for lost or damaged items will incur payroll deductions according to the following schedule:

Basic Games	\$40-\$80
Expansions	\$15-\$25
Applications	\$50+
Paperbacks	\$5-\$10
Hard Backs	\$20-\$100
Video Tapes	\$20-\$60
Magazines	cover price

Please be aware of these possible monetary penalties and take appropriate action to avoid them. All ORIGIN Library games, books, and application software will now have a Contents Check List for you to refer to upon check-out and prior to check-in. Thanks for your cooperation.

"Smiles" Lewis