

Point of ORIGIN

A Texas Tradition

Volume III, No. 39

Friday, May 21, 1993

Austin, TX

Impressions of the Mother Ship

(As promised, the Point Man made a pilgrimage to San Mateo for a first-hand look at life behind the corporate walls of EA.)

SAN MATEO, CA—The scene was hauntingly familiar: an aerial approach toward San Francisco's Transamerica Pyramid (and let me tell you, the hazing *does* look pretty realistic). The 737 lumbered to a three-point landing at SFO.

San Mateo is one of those cities with no identity of its own; you wouldn't even know you'd left San Francisco except for the small, green city limit sign wedged in among the businesses on the side of the road. About 15 minutes south of the airport, you see the exit with a name familiar to anyone who's addressed mail to corporate—Fashion Island Boulevard. Electronic Arts is holed up in two impressive, white buildings with smoked glass known as the Century City complex. Here, EA leases five floors of one building and three of the other. (A third building, known as "Phase II," is currently being outfitted down the road. It will hold EA Kids as well as other project teams.)

Right now, EA makes ORIGIN look like Fort Knox. When you walk through the unlocked front door on the ground floor, you're greeted by a recep-

(...see Impressions, page 2)



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Sales Dogs

You really can't dive into the retail channel right now; it's more of a wading game. "Serpent's doing real fine," reports Global Mogul **Marten Davies**. "Strike's doing okay compared to everybody else in the market, and the market's very flat." That statement's bolstered by the latest results from PC Research, a firm which tracks software sales. For the month of April, Strike came in as the #2 seller at the four major software chains, following X-Wing. One important difference, though, is that Strike was only on the shelves for one week in that month. Serpent ties for #3 with the Comanche mission disk, moving up from #5 the month before.

(...see Sales, page 5)

(...Impressions, con't. from page 1)

tionist, but there's no sign-in or questioning. Doors upstairs are controlled with a simple, key-punch pad. In fact, I strode right on in to the main development area of the building and began taking pictures unchecked. The attitude seems to be that if you're in there in the first place, you're in there for some reason. Perhaps EA's grown so big so fast, employees have just quit trying to keep track of who's who anymore. In any case, nobody here wears a badge. All of these measures are reportedly under review.

Like ORIGIN, the offices are done in bright colors, predominantly teal and purple. What strikes you instantly is the maze-like array of cubicles. They form corridors so small you can almost touch both sides with your elbows as you walk down the halls. And the cubes are much smaller than ours (only about 2/3 as large). They are decorated with the same kind of creative clutter: Godzilla models, inflatable sharks, original "sketchings," etc. I even spied a live, white mouse in an aquarium atop one of the stations.

Everybody—and I mean everybody—has a cube, right on up to Ruth Kennedy, EA legal counsel, and Larry Probst, EA's president. Offices with doors are almost nonex-



Everybody—and I mean everybody—has a cube, right on up to Ruth Kennedy, EA legal counsel, and Bing Gordon, senior vice president.

istent. You'll also notice the pin-drop quiet in the place. Nobody plays music and you usually hear conversations in hushed tones. My theory is that it's because of the close quarters; whatever you say, the world's going to know.

Meeting rooms are the accepted alternative to getting together in your cubicles, and the meeting rooms are

plentiful. There are at least 35 in the main building with rich-sounding names like Bingladesh, Hans & Franz, Love Shack and Bubbaville. Some of them are big conference-type rooms for 10 or more, others are small enough for 4-6 people. As for amenities, the place has nice kitchen facilities and two large auditoriums. It also has a sort of get-away area, a game room with 6 stand-up arcade games (nothing real cutting edge, although Erin Roberts and Paul Isaac seem addicted to Rampart) and a couple of Game Boy display stands.

The new media lab is up and running with a reported \$1.2 million in equipment, all devoted to full-motion and digitized video in games. Plans are in the works for ORIGIN to have some access to the gear and technology as projects warrant.

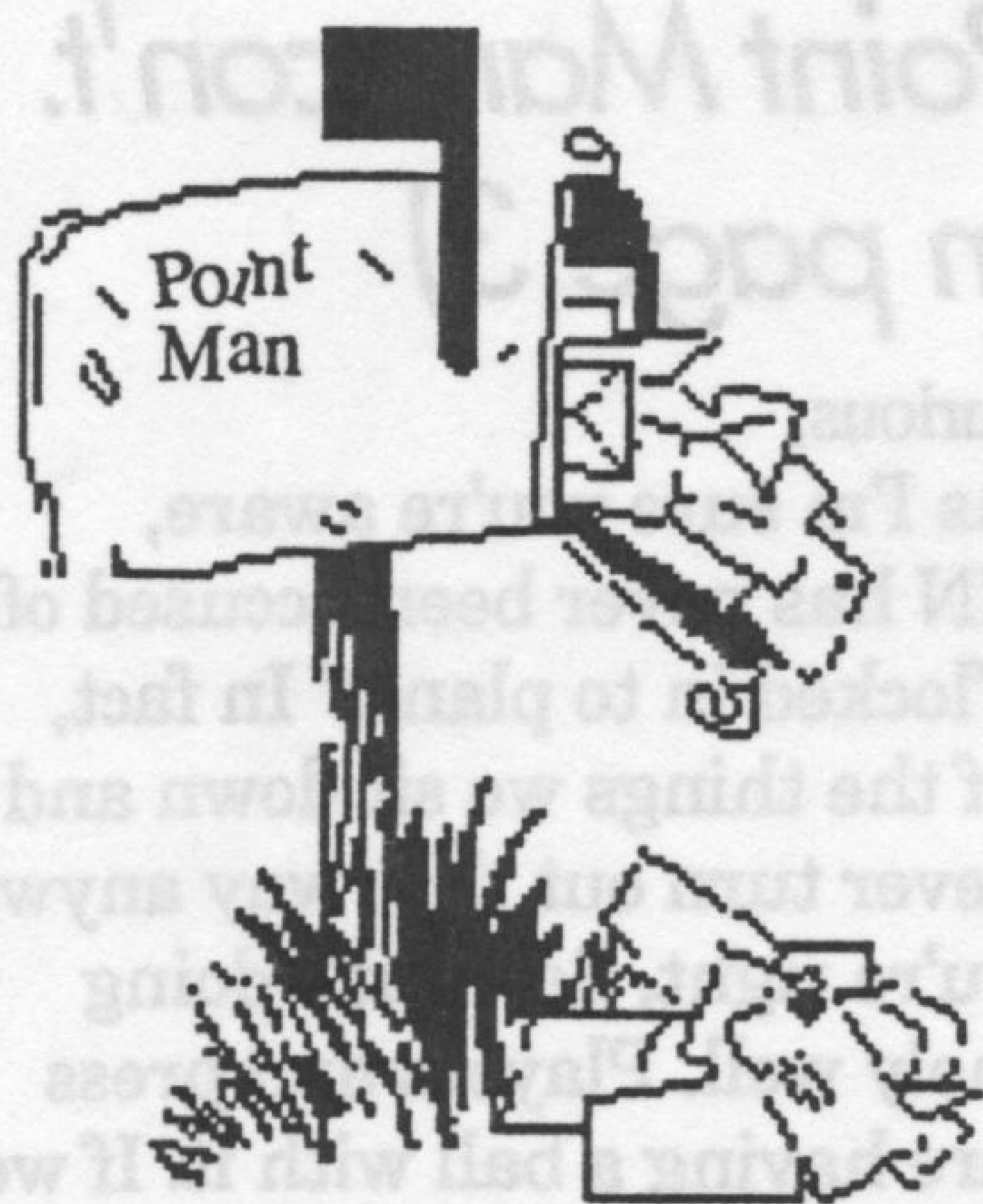
All in all, it seems like they're happy campers at EA Corporate, although only about 70% of people were in the office that Thursday afternoon (sound familiar?) It was hard to get a feeling for the creative process or team cohesion, since everybody was squirreled away in their own little worlds. Now, if any of you want to know what it's like at the EAUK HQ or in Australia, my bags are still packed.

SAG BOY™



by Dicko Mather

Editor's Note: We don't know exactly what this means, but what else would you expect from Dicko?



Point Man

Dear Point Dude,

Since I've been working in this building before early December, before any of the sheet rock was up, I know for a fact that there are no dead bodies behind these walls. So can you tell me where the smell from Jimmy Hoffa's armpits is coming from? Most particularly, near the men's restroom on the first floor (no, no one was in there—I checked).

Signed,
No Nose Hairs Left

Dear Nose Hairs,

That mystery is almost as baffling as the location of Hoffa himself. According to the Pharaoh of Effluent, **Jeff Hillhouse**, all signs point to a plumbing problem, but so far, crews haven't been able to track it down. It may be time for more serious measures. I happened to "run across" a fax to Jeff from a specialty company that leases Sewer Cams (at least, that's what they should be called). Basically, it's a small video camera mounted on a sewer snake that gives you a visual means of flushing out the problem. Heck, if we end up paying for the tape anyway, why not turn it into a game: Sewer Rat? Escape from the Bowels of ORIGIN? You get the idea...

Dear Point Man,

Given the surprise success of *Serpent Isle*, is there a chance of doing more games in that vein? Or are we locked in to current plans?

Signed,
Curious

(...see Point Man, page 4)

Global Press Roundup

Our press roundup has an international flair again this issue because the American mags are still scurrying to get their reviews ready for CES issues. The only domestic exception comes from the Electronic Gamer, CompuServe's online magazine which has a 7-page Strike review. "Simply put, Strike Commander is a fun, at times graphically awesome game," they write. In all, it's a good review which does a decent job of identifying Strike's position in the gaming/flight sim market.

Abroad, the response is more enthusiastic. In Germany's Power Play, Strike is the featured three-page review and is rated at 90% (no quotes available yet). In the same issue, Serpent gets two pages and an 85% score.

Still in Germany, PC Games features Serpent on the cover with a Strike banner taking second prominence. Serpent gets a five-page review, including a 500 screen-grab map which reportedly took 12 hours to create. Serpent picks up a rating of 92% as well as a PC Games award for excellence. Strike gets three pages as a preview. In the May issue, ORIGIN FX gets a nice write-up. "If you think that good animation is not possible under Windows," the editors write, "you will be speechless after watching these little movies."

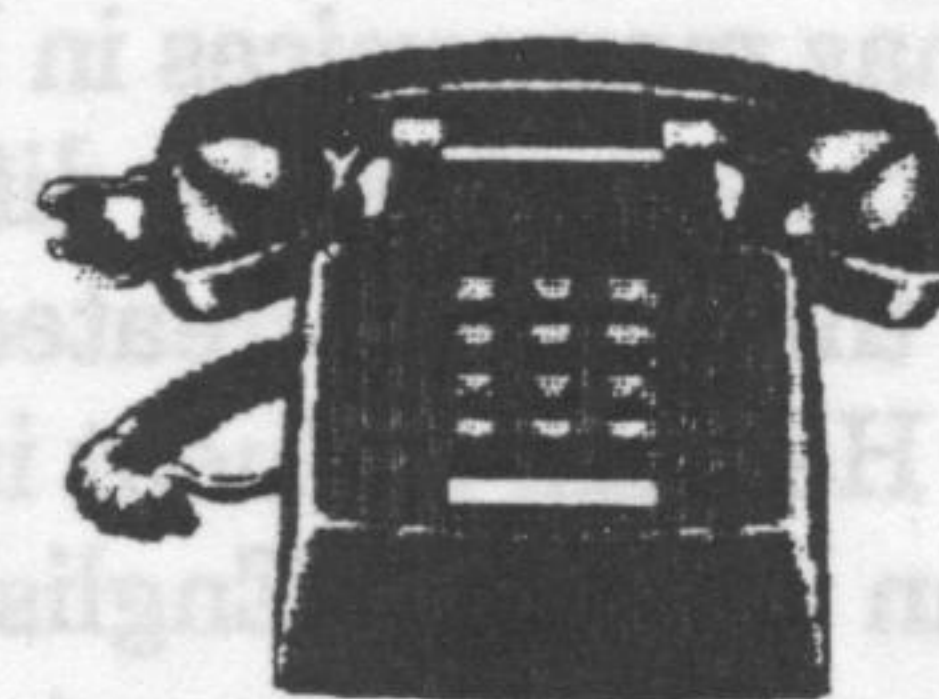
PC Games has also produced a 100-page special issue dedicated to role-playing. Guess who's on the cover? Our own beloved Guardian. U7 is rated 5 out of 6 overall. Serpent, UW and UW2 all get 6 out of 6! The next special edition is centered around flight sims and promises to showcase Strike significantly.

Germany's PC Player features Strike on the cover, along with 7th Guest (the second time Strike's been on that cover, too). Strike's review gets five pages and an 88% rating (the

Germans, by the way, are tough when it comes to ratings). Strike still tops all the magazine's other flight sim ratings, including Comanche, Falcon, Strike Eagle and even Wing Commander.

Before we say *Auf Wiedersehen* to Deutschland, let's thumb through Playtime magazine. Hmmm... Strike's on the cover. Strike gets two inside pages with box art and screen shots. A four-panel Strike poster is bound into the magazine. Strike gets a four-page review (96%). Serpent Isle gets a two-page review (82%). And there's a six-page feature on UW2 hints and tips. Guess that'll do.

On to France, where Generation 4 magazine can't say enough good things about Serpent. Overall, it gets a 94% rating and the reviewers write: "Best RPG on PC. Technically faster (than U7), but it's the scenario that is really captivating, and finally enables us to explore other worlds than Britannia." (Where were these guys when Worlds of Ultima released?) In the words of our own **Jean Marc**, "*Felicitations à tous!*"



TOP 10 Calls

(April 26 through May 14, 1993)

Serpent Isle Hints	3813
Serpent Boot Disk	505
Strike Commander Boot	380
Strike "19XX error"	164
(AMD chip, out of HD space)	
Strike Thrustmaster	130
Strike Installation	128
Serpent Installation	118
Strike Speech Install	114
Strike Disk Compression	111
Strike Hints	111

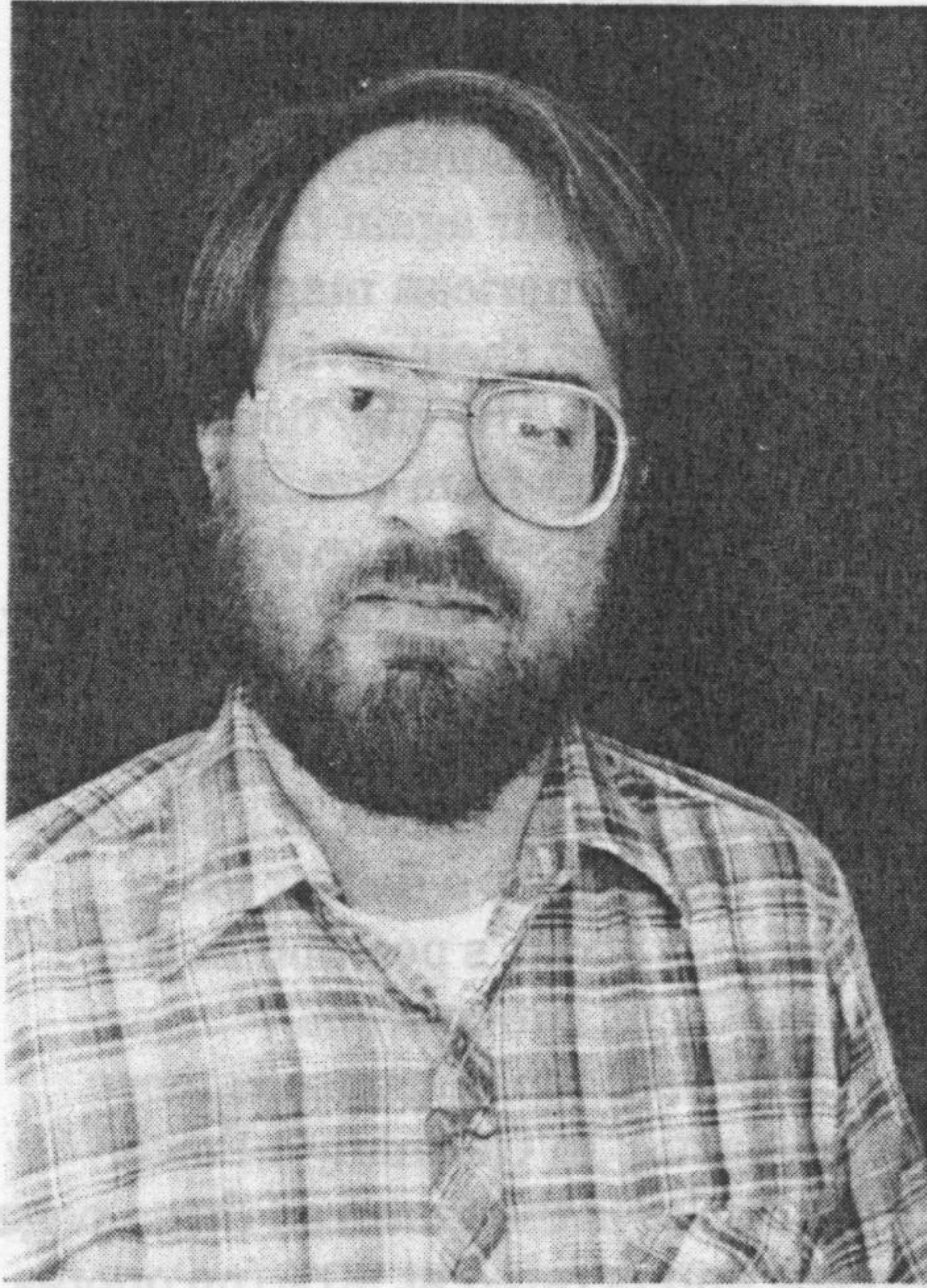
Off-the-clock: with Herman Miller

by Wayne Baker

[illegible]

The above passage probably isn't recognizable to any of you, but if we could translate the first few words, "Oh say can you see, by the dawn's early light..." I'm certain that we would all know it. It is, of course, The Star Spangled Banner, but to Herman Miller, ORIGIN's resident linguist in training, it was a translation experiment when in school. Like the popular T.V. show, our own Herman has many voices in his head, but these speak the different "tongues" that he has created. Although Herman is fluent in only one human language, English, he has designed and documented about ten unique and individual languages of his own.

When Herman first began his personal language studies, he was primarily interested in sounds. He would listen carefully to music, nature noises and people, and then would create unique names and words for the objects around him. (Anthropology tells us that this is how human languages basically began as well.) He then drew maps of places that he imagined and



focused on how the peoples of these lands might think, act and speak. All of Herman's languages have their own documented grammar, spelling, and cultures, which are described in the stories placed on his door.

Eventually, Herman hopes to write a book with fundamental elements from the languages that he has created. So far, his publishing efforts have extended to the Gargish language in *Ultima VI*, but Herman also uses his languages while participating in D&D type role-playing games. Currently, he is working on an unnamed rational language based upon scientific terminology, Latin, Greek, and other languages. Where this will take him, only Herman can say. But even if he does, you probably won't be able to understand him.

NOTICE:
POINT OF ORIGIN WILL RETURN
ON JUNE 18TH WITH AN
EXCITING CES WRAPUP.

(...Point Man, con't.
from page 3)

Dear Curious,

As I'm sure you're aware, ORIGIN has never been accused of being "locked in to plans." In fact, most of the things we sit down and plan never turn out that way anyway. But you're right, Serpent's doing extremely well. Players and press alike are having a ball with it. If we were to do U8/Part 2, it would be in the Fiscal '95 plan, which hasn't been fully fleshed out yet. You can bet EA's bottom dollar that Serpent's success will figure into that decision-making process when it begins.

Dear Man o' Points,

There is an area or two in the middle of our back parking lot labelled "Keep out / Private Property" or words to that effect. The question is, whose private property is it? Can we frolic in the little green valley to our hearts' content, or are we among those who must keep out?

*Signed,
Compulsive*

Dear Compulsive,

First of all, be careful where you frolic; this is Texas, you know. Second, it's ORIGIN's property and we're all expected to "keep out." All that's down there is drainage and storm sewers (and according to Curtis "Where's Jessica?" Wood, an open shaft that leads to the core of the Earth itself).

*Dear Point Man,
I peddle to work every day,
To save fossil fuels from going away,
I peddle through rain and sleet and
hail,
I feel like I should deliver the mail,
But I don't.
Give me a bike rack so I won't have to
write another stupid poem.*

*Signed,
Poetry Man*

Dear Poetry Man,

Are you the guy responsible for that nasty Point limerick in the second floor men's room? To answer

(...see Point Man, page 6)

Pulse Check

by dr. donner

Letter of the Week

The letters to C/S have been arriving in a steady stream lately, and the one that stands out for the week is pretty amusing. Here's a condensed version:

I am currently playing Serpent Isle and enjoy it very much. One thing that is unmissable is that the Avatar is the biggest Two Timer next to Leisure Suit Larry! Just look at the list:

Aiela (and her sister) of the Savage Empire

The Gypsy wench in Ultima 6

Charlotte in Ultima 7

The hookers in the Bathhouse in Ultima 7

The barmaid in Monitor in Serpent Isle

Frigidazzi in Serpent Isle

What I would like to suggest is that in Ultima 9 all these women

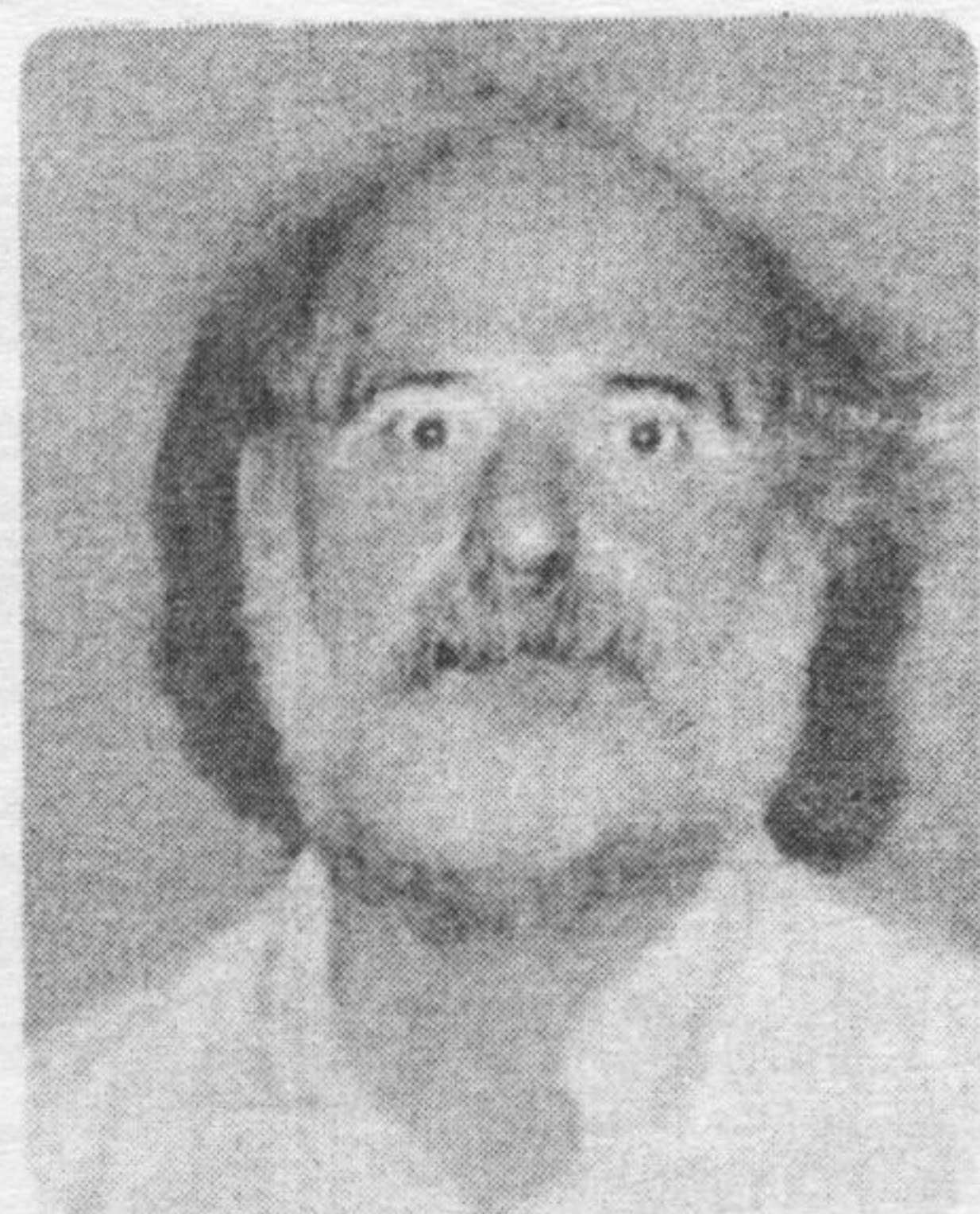
show up to kick him up and down the street for being such a womanizer!

Training in the Land of OZ

Since the merger of the two departments (a mini merge, like Origin and EA!) Customer Service and Quality Assurance have been getting acquainted with each other's jobs and everyday doings. Things have been going well - we've got new blood on the phones in C/S, and some of the C/S flying aces have been testing Wing Academy in QA and are helping to rid the world of pesky bugs every day.

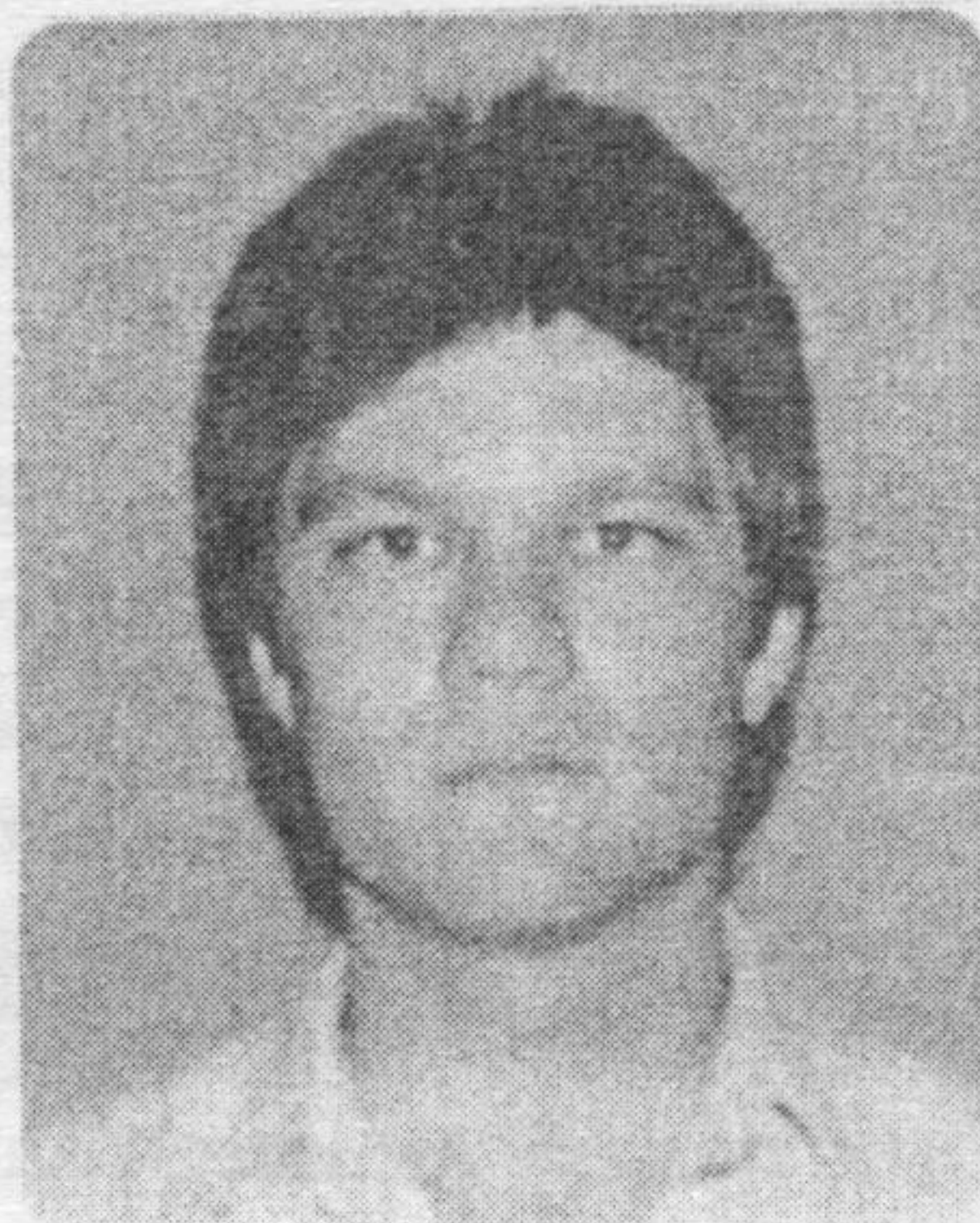
New Hires

Apparently the new hire stork only brought us two new employees for this Point of ORIGIN. They are **Jim Kalan** and **Christopher Séan** "I go by Séan" Murphy.



Jim is an Advanced Software Engineer and has multiple degrees from Purdue (B.S., M.S., Ph.D.) and did post-doctorate work at Stanford. He said that these are just the degrees that he pads his resume with and has countless others that he doesn't care to mention. He taught at "a few schools," including UT, Texas A&M, SMU, University of Florida,

Virginia Tech, Ontario, and New Mexico Tech. Jim has a few musical interests, including the jazz trumpet and string bass. He plays basketball and baseball and is interested in auto-repair. Jim comes to us because of our energy and talent. (Gee, Jim, it looks like you could show us a few things.)



Christopher, I mean Séan, is a Graphics Specialist. He got laid off from Dynamix in Eugene, Oregon and came to ORIGIN to give Texas a try. Séan is into computer and role-playing gaming, martial arts, and movies. Welcome aboard, Séan.

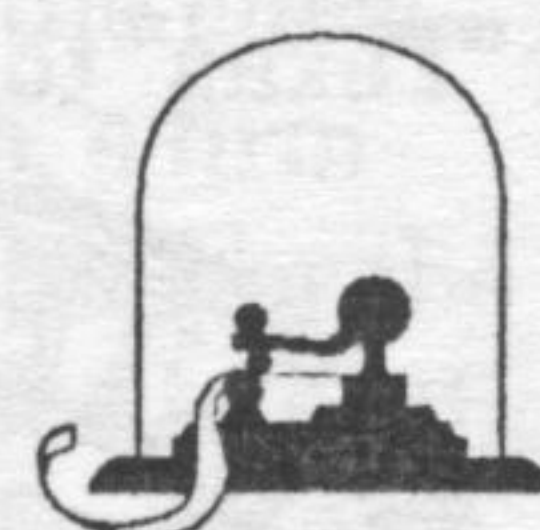
(...Sales, con't. from page 1)

The Strike Speech Pack is doing even better than expected. It is tied for #9 in the PC Research poll. While we originally thought stores would sell 50% as many Speech Packs compared to the core game, that percentage is actually running at about 69%. In terms of overall sales, we're noticing that we're doing best at Egghead. One theory is that the Egghead customer may have more high-end hardware than the average user, since you have to make a special trip to shop at Egghead (unlike the other major chains, Egghead is not mall-based).

The Software Publishers Association bases its sales certification awards on units sold to the retail channel, so we've already applied for "gold" status (100,000 units) for Strike and "silver" (50,000) status for Underworld. Strike Speech Pack should go silver soon and Marten believes Serpent won't be far behind.

In the even-bigger picture, ORIGIN is faring pretty well as part of EA's PC business. In Europe, ORIGIN accounted for 70% of EAUUK's floppy business last month. Domestically, ORIGIN has become EA's #1 PC publisher and is contributing 39% of EA's top-40 PC volume activity (in number of units) and 44% of EA's top-40 PC gross revenue (in dollars). Not coincidentally, the top ten EA (and affiliate) floppy titles are: Strike, Jordan in Flight, Strike Speech Pack, Ultrabots, Serpent, Tony LaRussa Baseball, Comanche, Comanche Mission Disk, Wing Commander and Great Naval Battles. Underworld 2 and Wing 2 check in at #22 and #23, respectively.

Ticker



Stock prices at press time (11:00 am)

ERTS	35	-0.50
BROD	38.625	-3.75
MPRS	7.50	+0.50
SIER	11.5	+0.25
THDO	22.25	+0.25

(...Point Man, con't.
from page 4)

your question/demand, the issue has been forwarded to the Operations gang for a possible purchase req discussion. We're also planning to put in some halfspace motorcycle spots when we restripe the parking lot over the Memorial Day weekend.

Dear Point Man,

Whats up with this "EA in tExAs" stuff? Texas is never to be spelled with a lower case "t," no matter what the intent. This is simply not acceptable. A large number of Origin employees are not from The Great State of Texas, and they do not feel the shock and anger I feel when I see this blasphemy. This is no way to promote our state, ORIGIN, or Electronic Arts. Perhaps putting the EA in italics or bold letters would be an acceptable substitute, but if this practice of spelling Texas with a lower case "t" continues, there's gonna be hell to pay.

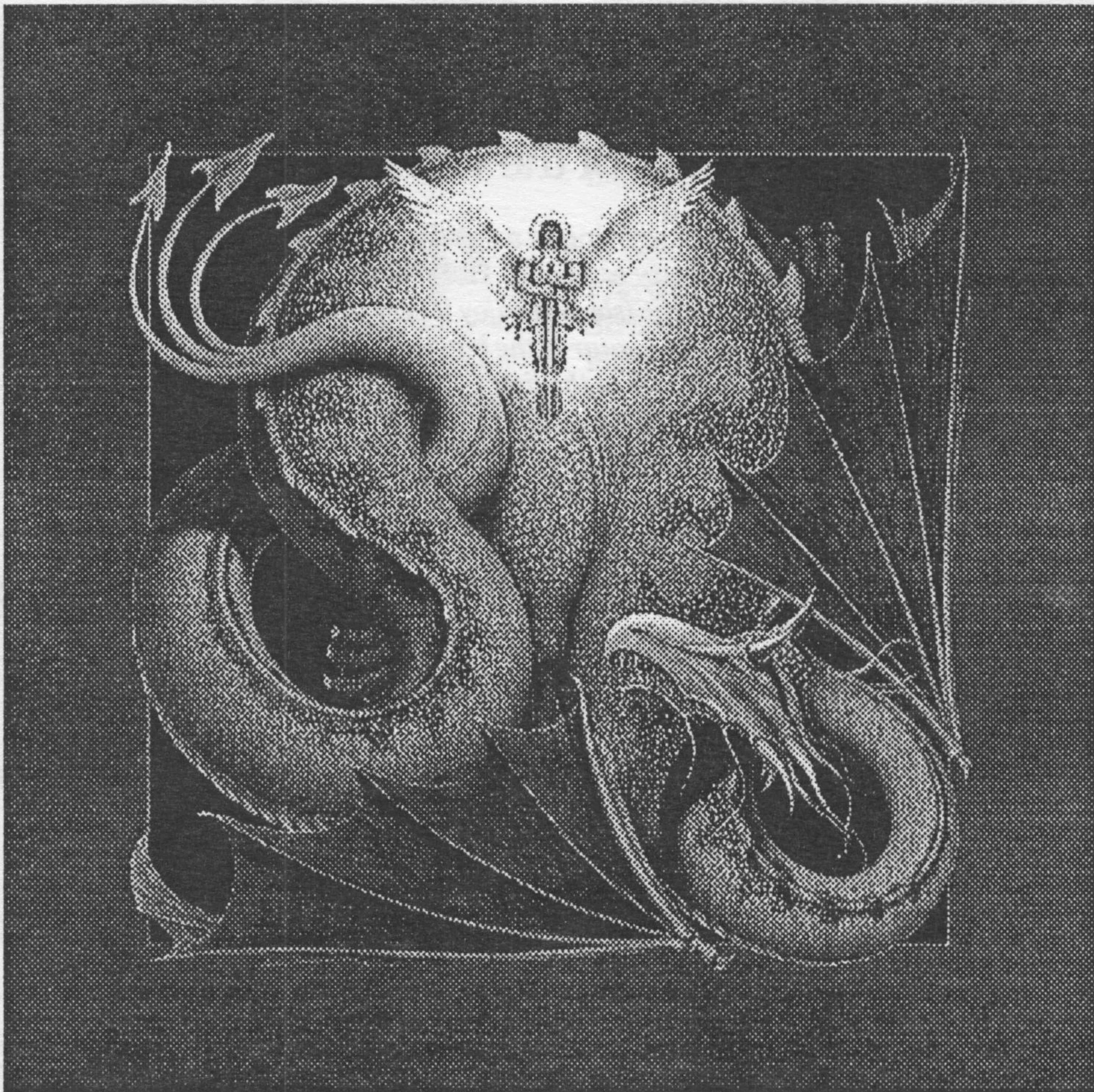
Signed,
oRigIn

(Really Irritated in Origin)

Dear oRigIn,

Ya hadda expect it. Everybody wants to glom onto the Texas mystique. If it makes you feel any better, that "EA in tExAs" slogan ain't anything official; it just popped up one day and got thrown around some (I think EA may have even had some buttons made up for some reason). They just use it to describe us out here, much like their fascination with acronyms like EASM and EAUk.

I'm with you, though. Until I hear something like: "Electronic Arts—We put the corn in CalifORNia," it's best to leave the word "Texas" to Texans.



Awards & Honors

We all know the great work ORIGIN artists do for ORIGIN games, but you may not know that these artists are honored elsewhere as well.

Steve Pietzsch last week won a silver award of excellence from the Dallas Society of Illustrators for his depiction of Saint Michael, who was a dragonslayer (pictured above).

Gary McElhaney has been honored with a display of his work at the National Sculptor's Society in New York. The wax casting is on his desk if you would like to see it. Apparently, Gary was first asked to show his first sculpture in Texas, but when the gallery realized that it depicted a male form "au naturel," they declined and Gary got his break in New York. (So much for keeping someone down with censorship.) Incidentally, Gary's second hydracal plaster casting is being displayed at the Artworks Gallery here in Austin.

In an article about handicapped artists at work, **Karl Dolgener** was interviewed by the Texas Rehabilitation Magazine for his involvement at ORIGIN. Great work, guys!

Hudson's Grill
Mondays & Wednesdays
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Receive a special
20% off of your
meal by showing
your ORIGIN
badge