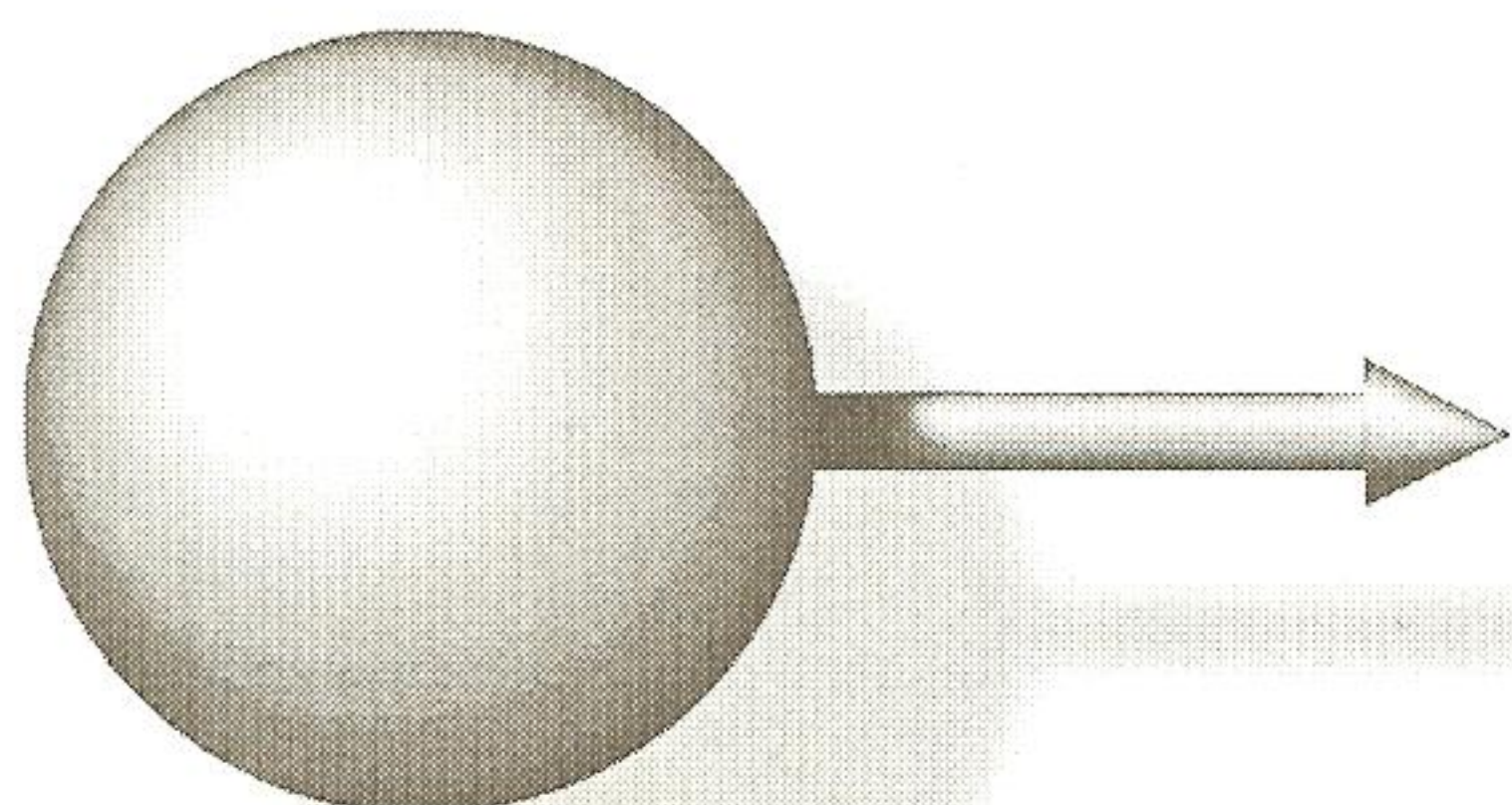


# Point



## Inside

LOVE, EXCITING AND NEW

Volume VII, Number 1, February 14, 1997

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## Spotlight



The hard-working Maverick crew – or as many as we could scare up for a pic.

## Point Exclusive: *What the hell is up with Maverick?*

An interview with Rod Nakamoto,  
Dave Downing and Adam Foshko

**Point:** So Rod, how do you feel about being here at ORIGIN?

**Rod:** Austin is a great town. I like the fact that it has a smaller population than Los Angeles which is where I used to live. I like the fact that I can actually breathe the air without having to worry about my lung condition. I also like the fact it has a much lower crime rate – sometimes in LA, you get lulled to sleep by the sound of police helicopters.

As far as ORIGIN is concerned – the primary reasons for me coming here were the people and the culture. I think there are very few companies like ORIGIN that have developed a unique culture among its employees. It's something of a magnet. There is a high degree of initiative and creativity, and the work ethic is probably far above any other company I am aware of in this industry.

I had to get over my doubts about Texas to come out here for an interview. But once I met the people and saw the process by which they worked, I was extremely impressed. Another "big carrot" for me was my role overseeing Wing Commander and Crusader, two of the biggest products that ORIGIN has.

**Point:** What about Wing Commander?

**Rod:** We have, for all intents and purposes, a new team. Yes, many of the members have worked on





It's getting to be the time of the year when magazines begin touting their "Game of the Year" awards. And at this stage, Longbow is headed toward a sweep in the simulation categories. At press time, *PC Gamer*, *Computer Gaming World*, *PC Games*, *Computer Games Strategy Plus* and *Computer and Net Player* have already crowned Longbow as either the Best Sim or Best Flight Sim (depending on the magazine) for 1996.

Here's what some of them had to say:

- *Online Gaming Review*: All flight simulation fans should have this title in their library."
- *Computer and Net Player*: "Undeniably the best simulation game in the business."
- *PC Gamer*: "Gorgeous graphics, painstaking detail and sheer playability."

Others have joined the bandwagon, including *Online Gaming Review* and *Ultra Game Players* magazines. In addition, *PC Gamer* gave Flash Point Korea an award for Expansion Pack of 1996 saying, "It practically makes it a whole new game."

Speaking of Flash Point Korea, it's certainly living up to its heritage in the eyes of reviewers. It scored a 5 out of 5 star rating from *Computer Gaming World*. "An unprecedented level of realism in this, a new benchmark for flight simulation. More than a mere mission disk." *Gamespot* scored FPK at 9.1 out of 10 and said the game is, "the finest helicopter sim ever made, and one of the best sims of any type." *Computer Games Strategy Plus* graded FPK at 4 out of 5 stars. "Add this disk to the original Longbow and you'll have one of the most sophisticated air combat simulations ever put together."

*Crusader: No Remorse* for both PlayStation and Saturn is getting some early thumbs up from reviewers. *GamePro* magazine rated the Saturn version a 5 out of 5 for fun factor. "Crusader's awesome, in-depth action will utterly addict you. One of the Saturn's best titles." *Video Gamespot* called *Crusader* for the PlayStation, "a great game that possesses an almost unlimited amount of death and destruction." Editors scored the game at 7.1 out of 10 (not too bad under the super strict *Gamespot* grading curve).

Meanwhile, *PSExtreme* gave *Crusader* PlayStation a score of 92% and a Gold Status Award. "Explosions a sight to see. *Crusader* delivers big time!"

No Regret continues to score big with reviewers. In fact some of the more humorous quotes about the game were delivered during the recent holiday season. In his

syndicated column out of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Andy Grieser included No Regret in his Holiday Gift Guide. "OK. Christmas is about love and peace. But we've just gotta mention *Crusader: No Regret* despite its high body count." And in its review, *C|net Gamecenter* called No Regret, "an excellent game." But, Shane Mooney reported, "It's a safe bet that No Regret isn't going to win any endorsements from the Republican Party anytime soon."

Let's move on to *Privateer 2*, which is starting to reel in its

fair share of high scores and great reviews. The news is especially good from across the pond. Here's a quick rundown of European reviews:

- *What Personal Computer (UK)*: 5 out of 5 – Award for Best Space Game of 1996
- *PC Player (Germany)*: 5 out of 5 – Gold Player Award
- *Edge (UK)*: 9 out of 10 – "The Darkening bears the hallmarks of a classic."
- *PC Format (UK)*: 90% – "An utterly engrossing game that combines for the first time, a rich and interesting story, with compelling and fun gameplay."
- *PC Review (UK)*: 9 out of 10 – "Probably the most polished PC game ever and the most rewarding, ambitious and addictive computer game for a good few years."
- *PC Gamer (UK)*: 85% – "It's much, much better than *Wing III* or *IV* but disappointingly still not as good as it could've been."

In the states, reviewers are, for the most part, equally impressed. *PC Gamer* gave P2 an Editor's Choice Award and a grade of 92%. "The most fun you can have in a starship. The long-awaited sequel to *ORIGIN*'s space-smuggler game tops *Wing IV* in just about every way." From *Boot* magazine the report card read 9 out of 10. "3D Studio-rendered cut scenes mixed

GOTO 4



David Swofford, Rick Ponds and Andy Hollis host a passel of European press at a local eaterie. Salut!

The Point of ORIGIN is published every six weeks, coinciding with the Company Happy Hour. Deadline for Submissions is the Monday before publication. Contact the editor for more details.

Managing Editor: Richard Steinberg. Editor-in-Chief: David Swofford. Staff Writer, Photographer and Clip Art Queen: Teresa Potts. Contributing Writers: Kathie Beagle, Marie Williams. Contributing Photographers: Richard Steinberg and David Swofford. Copy Editors: Jennifer Spohrer, Tuesday Frase. Layout and Production: Robin McShaffry. Mascots: Tucker and Stinky.



previous Wing Commanders. But everyone has new leadership, new goals, and new focus on what the product is in terms of quality.

**Point:** *Any hints?*

**Rod:** Wing Commander is still a spectacular single player product, but it has an appropriate multi-player component that will really bring a much larger audience to this particular product.

**Point:** *What's the working title?*

**Rod:** Wing Commander: Prophecy is the working title – it can still change, but it's not being called Wing Commander V.

**Dave:** We've decided to drop the numerical sequencing of Wing Commander because we want to be able to focus on each game and not have to compare this game with future iterations or past iterations. This is Wing Commander, today and now, and we're going to make it the best game it can be. We want to allow ourselves some latitude and flexibility with each Wing Commander. We also want to open up the Wing Commander franchise to different genres of games.

**Adam:** We want people to know that this game has a new face and that this is a new coalescence of the team. With that in mind, we also want to be unfettered about the past. This is a fresh perspective. Why put a number on it?

**Rod:** In the past, ORIGIN, and other companies have used sequels as a way to leverage the marketing. Although, I think using numbered sequels was appropriate at the time. Now, a coming of age has come about for this team and this product. We're looking at what Wing Commander could become. There is a great deal more of the Wing Commander universe that has yet to be explored. And we're the guys who are going to do it.

**Point:** *Any other tidbits of information?*

**Rod:** It's going to be more spectacular than any other Wing Commander released. Yes, I know that sounds like a bunch of empty hype, but actually, we don't want to come off that way. People want to know what more can be put into Wing Commander. My response is, "A Lot."

**Dave:** This is the most well-designed Wing Commander that any one of us has ever experienced. Before we ever started to actually script the missions or write the story, we sat down and designed the kind of game we wanted to build. We developed a structure for how each of the missions is to be played out and that drove the writing of the story, which added the flesh to the bones that the structure was composed of.

Every element of game play – promotions, medals, how you log into the computer, has been well thought-out, well designed, and integrated into an overall game design, rather than being added on. This is how it's being designed from the ground up.

**Adam:** Wing Commanders III and IV were both great products, but they are more like unequal halves. This is a much more synergistic product. It's very team driven – it's not one person's vision and I think it shows.

**Point:** *What is the makeup of the team's leadership?*

**Rod:** The thing that's always made Wing Commander exciting is the live production element. **Dave Downing** and **Frank Roan** are in charge of the entire production of Wing Commander, making sure all the pieces by different individuals come together into one product. Because of their experience in previous Wing Commanders, they will make sure that it lives up to the name. **Adam Foshko** is director of the live production element. His experience with Hollywood plays a great factor in the quality of the production.

**Point:** *Who else is part of the key staff?*

**Dave:** **Mark Day** is producer of the movie shoot, **Frank Roan** is the project director, **Mark Vearrier** is art director, **Billy Cain** is lead designer, **Pete Shelus** is lead programmer, **Jeff Grills** is lead technologist, and **Stretch Williams** is the audio director.

**Point:** *Sounds like there are lots of veteran members of Maverick Productions. It's not like you've just fallen off the turnip truck.*

**Rod:** No, these guys are *driving* the turnip truck. ●



And in that other 4th Floor group, Loose Cannon, Jorg Neumann does a delicate balancing act at the sign-off toast for Crusader PlayStation and Saturn. L to R: Andy Bruncke, Jorg, Tom Godsey, Scott Loyd, Eric Anderson, Kay Gilmore, Mike Grajeda, Dustin Cryer, Brian Wachhaus, and Rod Nakamoto. Congratulations!





FROM 2

with live-action FMV invoke a cinematic experience that would even make Lucas do a double take." And from *Computer and Net Player*, Privateer 2 scored a 9 out of 10. "If you like your space battles fast and furious, chances are Privateer 2 has a mission for you."



This is CNN.

One downer has come from *Gamespot*, which rated P2 at 6.8 out of 10. Greg Kasavin wrote, "An aesthetically pleasing space flight sim seasoned with high budget full motion video and garnished with more bugs and glitches than this reviewer has ever seen in a product boasting ORIGIN's seal of approval."

Still, the bad is completely outweighed by

the great press on Privateer 2 coming from such national publications as *Entertainment Weekly*, CNN (see accompanying picture), the *New York Post* and the *Hollywood Reporter*.

There's good news for Wing Commander IV, which also won an award from *PC Gamer* for Special Achievement in Cinematics. Calling the movies in WCIV "top-notch," editors wrote, "ORIGIN managed to exceed expectations and extend beyond the tiny confines of the computer screen to weave the game's tale of intrigue and deception, propelling the story line and providing us with this year's finest cinematic performance."

Finally, the anticipation continues to grow in the media for Ultima Online. In a feature on online games for the coming year, *Boot* editors wrote, "the game to watch is Ultima Online, bringing Lord British's world to cyberspace, without the namby-pamby morality, in a world bigger than all the Ultimas combined." And from *Next Generation* magazine, which this month features six pages on Ultima Online and Lord British himself. "Ultima Online is not your ordinary game. Later this year, the gates of Britannia will open and literally thousands of gamers will create a brave new world of heroes and villains." ●



## NEWS BLOBS

### Volunteers needed

Experience the merriment of Renaissance and immerse yourself in the age of chivalry. Delight in a banquet of bounty, taste the ambrosia of honey mead, let the belly dancers entice you, but be vigilant. A contest between good and evil is sure to unfold. Join **Lord British** as he hosts Wild Basin's Renaissance Retreat, May 2-3. Doors open at 6 p.m. with festivities starting at 7 p.m.

Tables laden with a variety of meats, fresh fruits, vegetables, and sweets will tempt any palate. Wenches, magicians, and knaves will treat you to an evening of comedy and intrigue. Medieval dress is encouraged.

Prices range from Duke or Duchess (\$500 for groups of eight with your own table) to Lord or Lady (\$50 per couple, \$30 for individual tickets).

Volunteers are also needed. If you are interested in purchasing tickets or volunteering for Wild Basin Renaissance Retreat or the forthcoming Canterbury Faire Festival, contact Georganne Foster at Wild Basin at 327-7622.

Tickets are selling fast for the Renaissance Retreat, and are \$30 per person, \$50 per couple.

### Interested in Nominating An Employee of the Month?

If you know someone who you think deserves an award for exemplary performance of an his or her job responsibilities, why not submit a nomination for employee of the month? Just send an email to Tammy Johnson letting her know. The person's underlying performance factor can be a single activity or a prolonged contribution to improving the ORIGIN lifestyle. When nominating, please include the person's name and why this person is a top performer and should receive special recognition.

The Employee of the Month will receive:

- His or her name on the Employee of the Month plaque in the lobby area
- A personal Employee of the Month plaque for the employee to retain
- 4 points to the company store
- Reserved parking space for one month
- Profile and photo in the next Point of Origin with accompanying company-wide fame, praise and distinction. (well-deserved, I might add!!) ●





# READING, WRITING, 'RITHMETIC, AND ORIGIN

Do you remember your eighth grade math class by any chance?

When it came to geometry, you probably used a protractor, a compass, or a calculator ... can you imagine how much more fun you might have had if you had been allowed to use a copy of Omega, the 1989 release by ORIGIN Systems, Inc. instead?

Well, the students in Andrew Birden's eighth grade math class at Briarhill Middle School in Lewisville, Texas are doing just that – playing Omega as part of their introduction to geometry and algebra.

"I fell in love with Omega about eight years ago," says Birden. "One day, I was playing it at school and my students really liked it. I thought 'what a great way to introduce cartesian planes and how to manipulate variables within them.'"

Omega, you have been hired by a corporation that designs robotic tanks. With a budget of \$1000, you must design and outfit a tank with chassis, armor, weapons, fuel, and sensors. Next, you enter your tank's artificial intelligence code where you write a set of instructions telling the tank where to go and what to do. Birden considers the syntax of these instructions to be a top-down, nested-design programming language similar to Pascal.

"It has looping structures that tell the tank what to do. You can make the tank move forward a certain number of squares, turn right a certain number of degrees, and fire its weapon at a particular object or point, using variables. Once you've written your program, there is a compiler within the game called the authorization module. You send your program through and it either gets approved or not approved. If it's not approved, there's an error in your code – which you then have to debug".

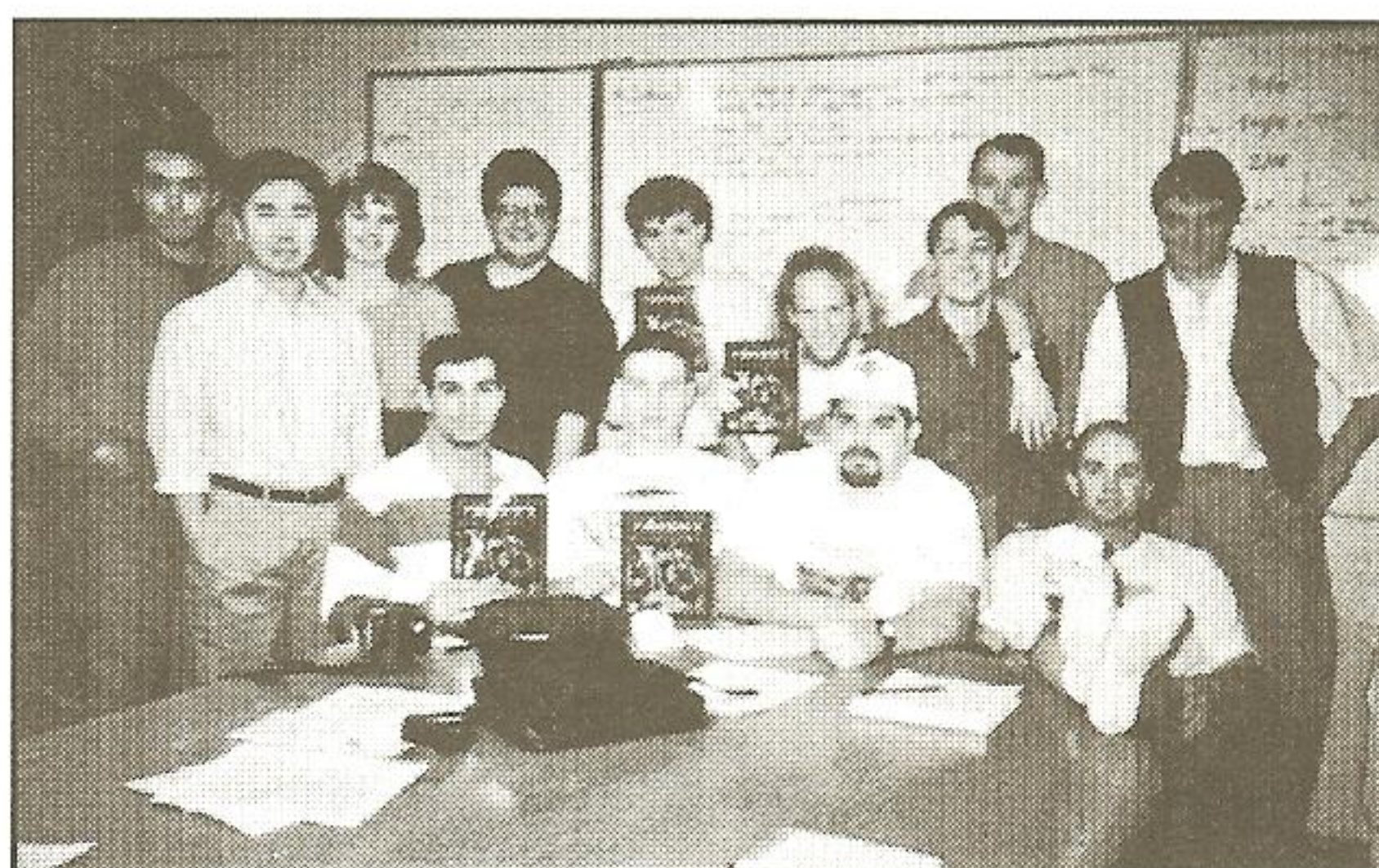
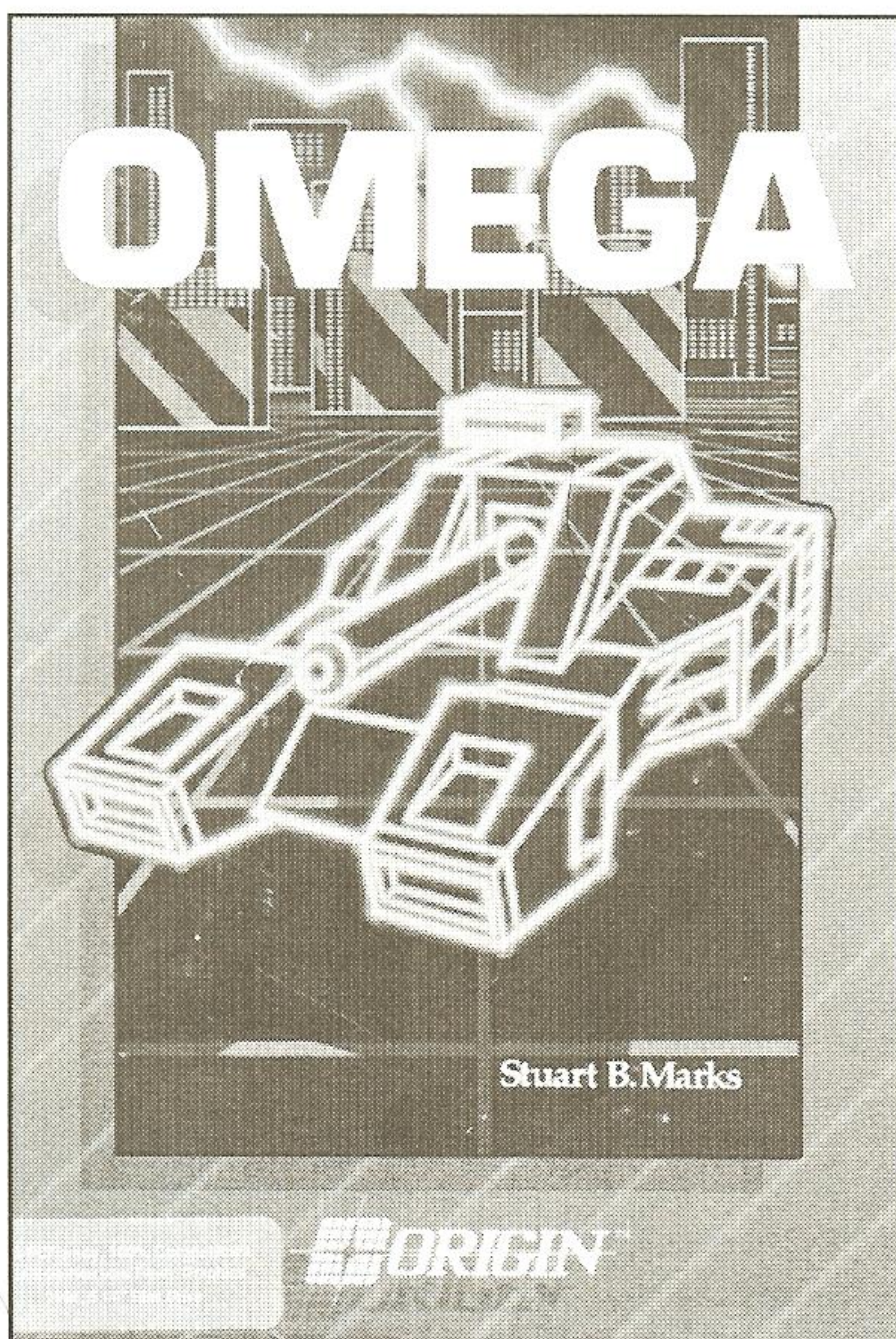
Birden says that with Omega, the students learn about x and y coordinates on a simple grid system, obtuse and acute angles, and plotting the shortest distance between two points. They also get an introduction to computer programming.

"I've seen students write crazy programs to solve problems – tanks that loop around opposing tanks in a crazy fashion. I've seen some programs that are more formal – students working out budget and strategy problems with the game's money system. Students eventually get to fight it out on the battle ground."

Birden says by providing them with this opportunity, students pick up a lot of concepts on their own that

normally would have been introduced in a lecture. "It's almost like learning through osmosis. They have a strong desire to learn in order to do well in the game. This helps them later on when I teach them formal graphing techniques."

"So far, my colleagues have been pretty supportive. When I tell people what I'm doing, they look at me with some skepticism and ask 'How are you going to teach programming to eighth graders?' Everyone is very interested to see how this goes."



**Andy Bruncke and Jorg Neumann with the crew from Realtime Associates, developers of Crusader: No Remorse for PlayStation and Saturn.**





## Kat's Korner of Phon Phone Phacts

- The New voice for our Automated Attendant will be **Rick Ponds!** He will be updating our new phone menus some time this spring.
- We now have a frame relay for the folks in Baltimore. For you technonerds out there, a frame relay is a high bandwidth T1. (We used to just have an ISDN.)
- Now is your last chance for phone books. If you need one, or need to recycle your old one, come see **Kathie Beagle**.
- In the latest batch of moves, we had 56 moves in a period of just 3 to 4 days. Yeah Move Team!
- Need phone parts? Is your cable cruddy? Is your key pad sticky? Contact Kathie Beagle and she will set you up with a refurbished phone!
- The phone list is updated at least once a month. The latest version can be found at the reception desk, as an Excel file on ORIGIN/SYS/OSI/PHONE. The latest version, from Jan. 22, 1997 is called PH0122.XLS and is on the internal ORIGIN web page at <http://www-unix.origin.ea.com/phone/Origin.html>
- Every spring, the biggest and best in the telephony biz gather for a convention in Los Angeles called Computer Telephony. This is "where pigs fly." Our phone system is three years old – who knows? Maybe one day we'll get some new applications.
- Now, all of our in-house T1 lines are fiber-back-boned. So if someone cuts a copper cable across the street, we'll be unaffected.
- Looking for Kathie? She'll be moving soon, but it won't be hard to find her. Just walk straight ahead through the hallway door where her office used to be, and you'll find her in office 115A.

Got any questions? Write Kathie Beagle. Stay tuned for more Phone Phacts next time. ●



## PRODUCT SUPPORT SPOTLIGHT LETTER

Dear ORIGIN Product Support

I would like to take just a little bit of your time to speak to you about Mr. **Chris Errett**.

As an owner of two Origin flight sim games (AH-64D Longbow and Wing Commander IV), I was having a problem running these DOS based games on my Windows 95 based computer. Chris was kind enough to spend all of the time I needed (1 hours and 25 minutes!) to get these games up and running. If it were not for his knowledge and assistance, I would have had to return both games. Something I did not want to do, and I'm thankful to Chris that I did not have to.

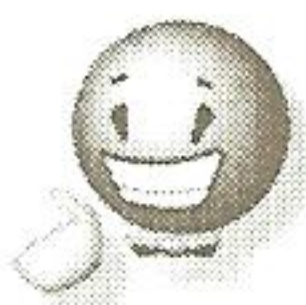
Ms. Williams, valuable employees like Chris Errett do not come along every day. You would be well advised to do what ever it takes to keep him happy. Losing him to one of your competitors could be a major blow to your company. He is by far the BEST product support technician I have dealt with to date. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Jeffrey B ●



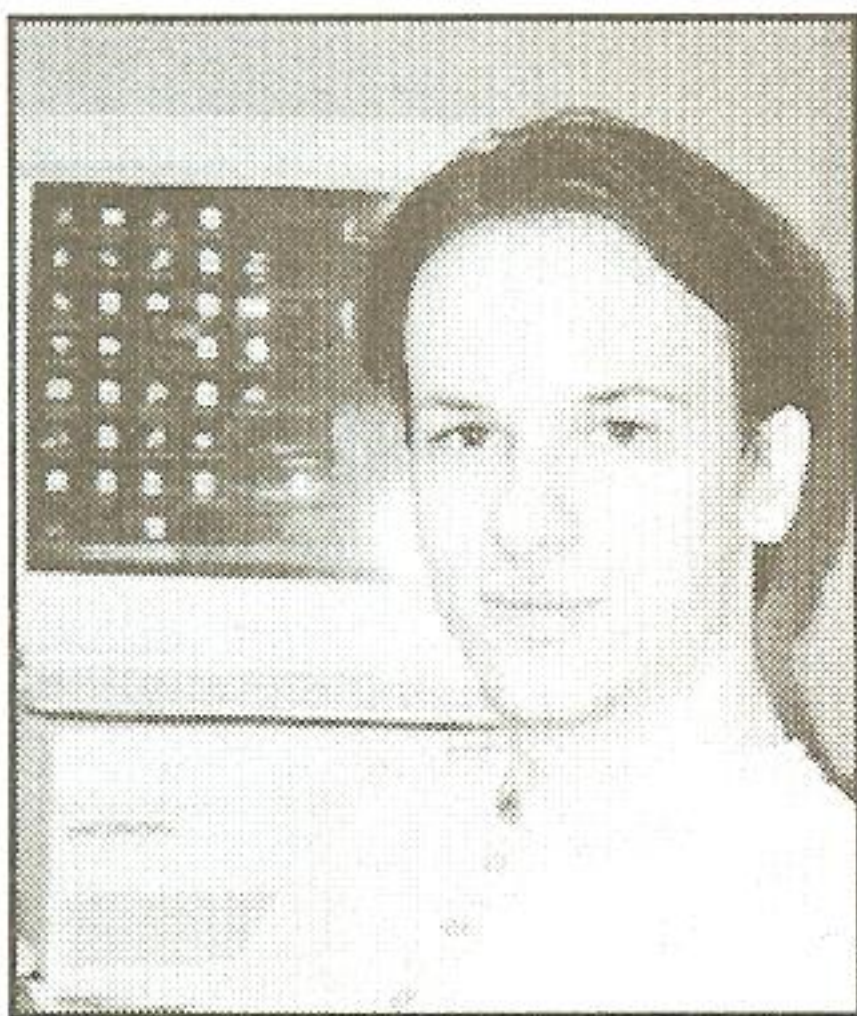
Karol Roberts and Gary McElhaney prepare Christmas presents for the Christmas Bureau families adopted by ORIGIN this year. They both said it was a very rewarding experience!





Congratulations to **Andrew Sega** who recently joined

Jose Cannon. Andrew does what he refers to as a "programming-music hybrid" and in fact, did most of the mission music for No Remorse and No Regret. Andrew recently graduated with a degree in computer science from a school in upstate New York, and has been pleasantly surprised to discover what a great city Austin is. He's also happy to be at ORIGIN and is looking forward to No Survivors, which he believes should be "very, very cool."



**Andrew Sega**

Over in the expanding audio/visual department, congratulations go to the new audio specialist, **Bill Munyon**.



**Bill Munyon**

Prior to joining ORIGIN, Bill worked as a recording engineer, collaborating on a vast array of projects including The Impossibles and The Ugly Americans. Did you catch The Butthole Surfers' song in Beavis and Butthead? That was something he worked on.

Welcome aboard, Andrew and Bill. Glad you're here.

Congratulations are also in order for the following promotions in January:

- Billy Cain** to Designer II
- Tyson Culver** to Video Specialist
- Kathy Dorsett** to Supervisor of Operations and Facilities
- Adam Foshko** to Associate Producer III
- Jeff Grills** to Senior Software Engineer III
- David Kozlowski** to Internet Supervisor
- Dean McCall** to Graphic Designer
- Jorg Neumann** to Associate Producer III
- Kris Pelley** to Advanced Software Engineer
- Pauline Saab** to Senior Graphic Designer I
- Pete Shelus** to Senior Software Engineer II
- Brandon Williams** to Network Assistant
- Allen Zelsman** to Graphic Designer



A little more than a year ago, **Joe Rizzo** left Hart Graphics to join ORIGIN as a Net Administrator so he could help make sure that things on our network were kept up and running. Since then, he has had hardly a minute of peace, tending to our servers all the live long day (and sometimes into the night). His good nature and willingness to help out with network and PC problems led to his selection as EOM for January 1997.

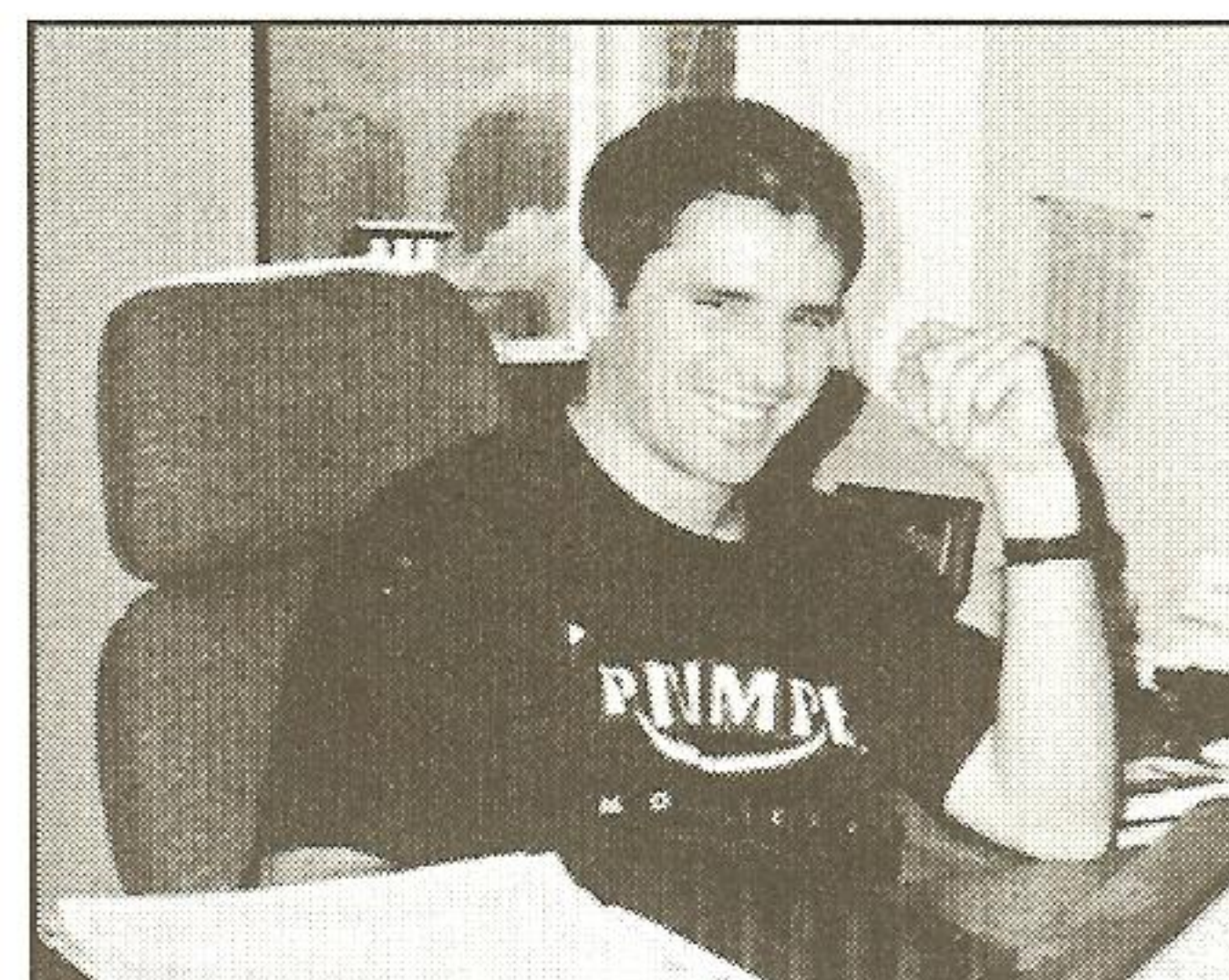


"Every time I go to Joe with questions or problems, he takes care of me with promptness and professionalism," said one co-worker. "This kind of dedication is rare and deserves to be rewarded."

Joe says that he thinks ORIGIN is a great place to work and is really happy to be here. Well, Joe, we're really glad that we've got you on board. Congratulations!

Congratulations to February's EOM, **Trey Hermann**.

Trey joined ORIGIN 3 1/2 years ago as a graphic designer in Creative Services. One of his favorite projects that he worked on was the "Behind the Scenes" electronic press kit for Wing Commander III. That ambitious undertaking went on to win a prestigious "ICON" award.



Most recently, Trey moved upstairs and is now adding his artistic flair to Crusader. Trey enjoys the creative freedom the job allows him and appreciates working on a project he believes is visually well done. Co-workers are glad to have him around for his tireless work ethic and attention to detail.

In his off time, Trey enjoys working on and racing cars. In fact, Trey would eventually like to get back more seriously into auto racing, but that's after he accomplishes his other aspiration: Winning the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes.

Good luck, Trey, and thanks for all your contributions to ORIGIN.





Dear Point Man,

When I first started here about 2 years ago, I remember these really great things called "departmental happy hours." These "happy hours" took place on Fridays every couple of weeks. They weren't big productions, mind you, but they gave us a chance to spend some time outside the office with our immediate co-workers. For example, sometimes we caught an afternoon matinee or sometimes we went to places like Ski Shores and shared a few beers. I really miss these because I think it really helped to boost the morale in the department. So here's my question, have these been eliminated completely, or have they just been forgotten? Is there a company policy, or is it up to the departmental manager? Thanks for checking.

Curious In the Building

Dear Curious,

Well, it sounds like there's no stopping you. Better grab a brewski and read on. There are no longer any "official" departmental happy hours, so there is no policy per se. Managers can schedule events for their departments just like they can foot the bill for lunch now and then. All charges hit the department budget, so there's got to be money available somewhere in the budget to cover it.

## February

- 19 Product Review
- 21 Empire Strikes Back in theatres
- 27 ESPP Buy
- 28 Payday



## March

- 7 Bonfire!! See your local EC member for details!
- 14 Payday
- 19 Product Review
- 26 Fireside Chat
- 28 Payday / Happy Hour



## Game Design Contest Winners Announced

From its inception, Project Brainstorm has offered staff a creative outlet in which they can hone their skills and learn about game design and the process of getting a game from concept to ship.

Recently, it took on a new twist – to sponsor an ORIGIN-wide game design contest. With a deadline that ended just after the holiday break, the contest drew 13 entries from across the company.

The judges, who work in product support, administration, product development, and marketing (and who wished to remain anonymous) judged the entries in the following categories: Most Innovative Exploitation of an Existing Property, Best Use of Existing Technology, Most Humorous, Most Original Design and Best Overall Design.

The winner for Most Original Design went to **Herman Miller** for his entry, *The Best Laid Plans of Mice!* One judge described it as "a strong dose of *Watership Down*, devious but consistent puzzles, and a cute factor off the meter."

The winner for Most Humorous Design went to **Hal Minton** for his entry, *Infection*. Players are given ability to plot out the biological execution of our species. As one judge put it "An idea that can hold a great deal of appeal."

The winner for Best Use of Existing Technology / Most Innovative Exploitation of an Existing Property, and Overall Best Game Design went to **Lance Sites** for his entry, *Condor Legion*. This Spanish Civil War sim includes the technological revolution from bi-planes to monoplanes and rich mission diversity.

"Everyone who entered deserves to be commended," said Project Brainstorm founder **Mike McShaffry**. "They all showed a great deal of attention to detail."

Project Brainstorm will resume its meetings, which take place every other Thursday, at 6 p.m. Feb. 20 in the Mosh Pit.

