

Point of ORIGIN

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❖❖ Austin, Texas

Underworld Hits the Shelves!

The day that would never come...has come. As you're reading this, 20 CompUSA stores across the country are ringing in the first sales of Ultima Underworld. CompUSA was the only retailer to "drop-ship" the product, meaning it hit the shelves the next day. The other big retailers (Software Etc., Babbage's, Egghead, Electronics Boutique, etc.) will probably get their copies on Saturday or Monday. Hopefully, we should have some ideas on sell-through by the beginning of next week.

Paul Neurath (Designer) and Doug Church (Project Leader) from Blue Sky Productions are in town this week to share the launch experience. "It's by far our best release," Paul says, "and our most ambitious. It has about 12 man-years behind it. The last game I did (Space Rogue) had about 3. This is the Big Change and it shows in the quality of the product."

So far, so good. Booked orders were only expected to be around 20,000, but rose to cover all of the initial 25,000 unit rollout. The next build will be on April 17th. "We've ordered enough materials to build another 5,000,"

(See Underworld on page 3)



The Blue Sky/ORIGIN connection: (front l-r) Doug Church, Richard, Paul Neurath (in back) Warren and James Dollar, artist for Underworld 2

Always a Bridesmaid

Wing 2 Deserted at the Awards Altar

(Seattle)—A long-standing ORIGIN tradition continued last Thursday night at the annual Software Publishers Association (SPA) Excellence in Software Awards. Wing 2 was up for awards in three separate categories: Critics' Choice, Best Entertainment Program and Best Action/Arcade Program. But when the envelopes were opened, ORIGIN representatives remained ensconced behind cold plates of rubbery chicken.

"We never win at SPA," says President and would-be recipient Robert Garriott, "I don't know what it is." The U.K.'s Psygnosis ended up trucking home the trophies as Lemmings took the award for Best Arcade Action Program and tied with Civilization (MicroProse) for

(See Awards on page 4)

Making Noise in Europe

Congratulations to all the sound gang for Wing 2, which won the "Best Sound" award from Generation 4 magazine. It's the latest in a string of several audio/music/sound/speech honors bestowed upon the WC product family. Great job, guys.

Wing 2 was a leading nominee in a few other categories, along with ORIGIN in the "Best Overseas Software House" category and Martian Dreams as "Best FRP." We were edged out by the homer French publishing group Delphine. LucasFilm Games won "Best Overseas Software House," but according to Fred, you have to remember that LucasFilm's been doing French translations of its titles for about 2 years now. He says, "We have nowhere to go in European market share and awareness/recognition but UP, UP, UP!"

Check It Out

In the future, you'll never need to leave ORIGIN to satisfy any of your intellectual needs. Sharon Miller's working on a comprehensive library plan which would include not only software, but books on programming, application manuals, science fiction, medieval history—just about anything you can imagine.

In fact, that's exactly what she's asking you to do. Sharon would like input from the entire company as to what should be in the library. Send your suggestions to her or her new assistant, Mary Margaret. Sharon's also working with Mike Sims on the continuing-education project. "If someone wanted to learn more about programming with a certain language or using an application, for instance, we might sponsor training in-house or look into classes being offered," Sharon says. If you haven't answered the "ORIGIN Education" questionnaire Mike sent out by cc:Mail, take a few minutes to do it. That data will help to grease the planning skids.

In Future Issues

Point of ORIGIN will have roving reporters bringing you exciting coverage from these magnificent events:

COMDEX in Chicago
April 6-9
(New business/markets evangelism)

European Computer Trade Show
April 12-14
(The ULTIMA assault on Europe)

Computer Game Developers' Conference in San Jose, CA
April 26-29
(Richard & Chris bask in the limelight)

CES in Chicago
May 28-31
(ORIGIN upstages the competition..again)

In fact, the next Point won't come out until April 17th, with wraps from COMDEX and ECTS.

Now We're Cookin'

The first cookout of the year was one of the best ever, according to Kay Gilmore. She wants to remind everyone that there will be another next Wednesday from noon until 1:30. And as if that isn't enough all by itself, the Entertainment Committee has also proclaimed it "Crazy Hat Day" to coincide with April Fool's Day.

"We're also working on the vegetarian issue," Kay says. "But it probably won't be in place until the cookout after this one. Mike Mc-Shaffry will be putting out a memo about it."

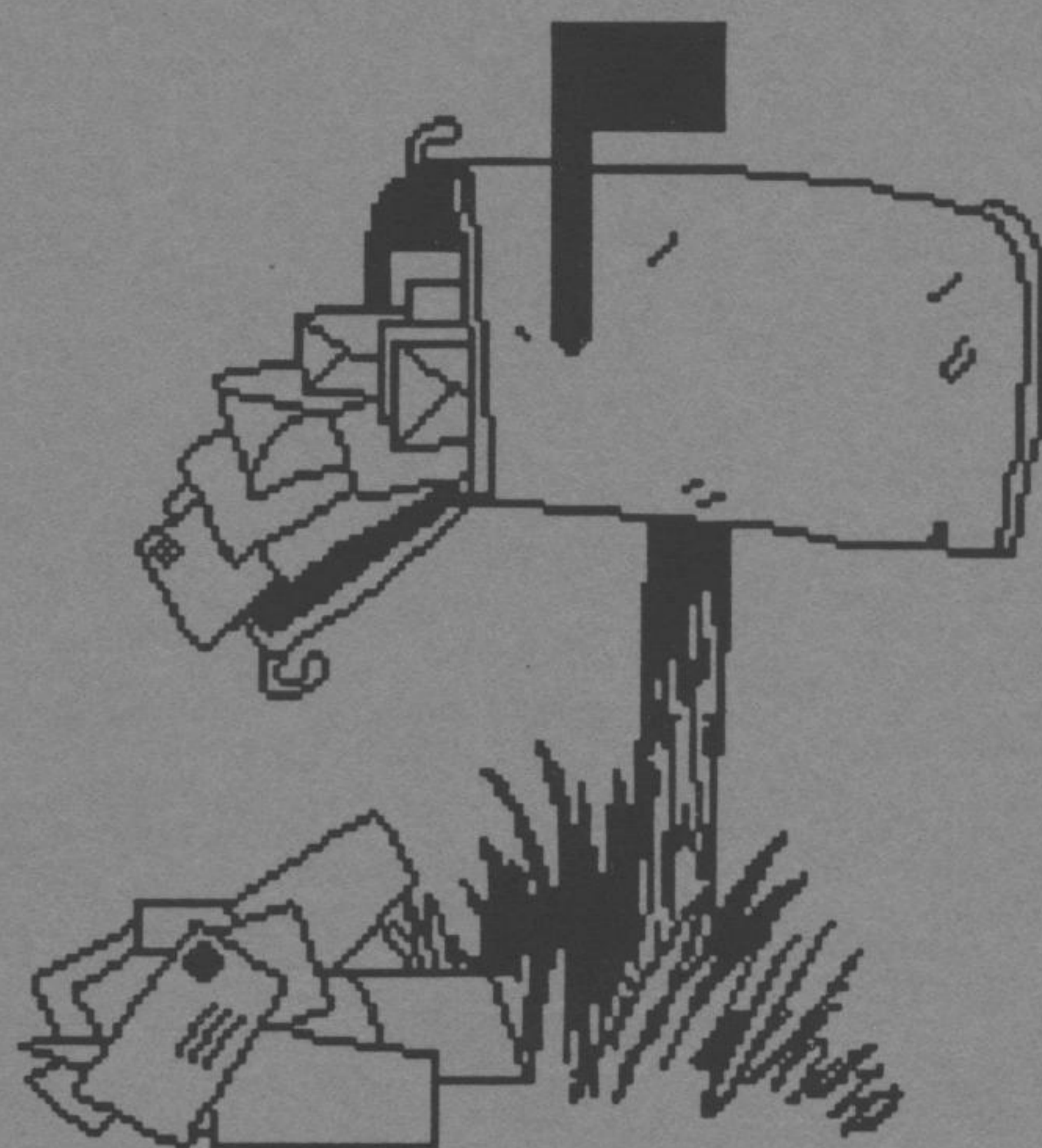
Sales Switches

The Sales staff's continuing its full-court press now that new products are rolling out, but there's been some shifting in the positions.

Karl Kabler's new title is National Sales Manager. That means he'll be handling the day-to-day business of domestic sales, freeing up Marten to sink his teeth deeper into the European market and look for OEM bundling opportunities (i.e., including ORIGIN titles with hardware purchases and such).

Anita will be taking on some extra duties, helping Robert with secondary international markets: places like Chile, South Africa and Israel. We continually get calls from distributors and retailers in these countries who are chomping at the bit for ORIGIN products...well, a couple dozen copies of them, anyway.

Dear Point Man



Dear Point Man,

You seem to be a good source of info. Any news on how the company handbook is coming along?

*Signed,
Philip*

Dear Philip,

A handbook's actually been in the works for about a year now, but ORIGIN's been getting so big so fast, it's been hard to hit a moving target. That's changing, though. By late April, Fred—along with help from Sharon Miller—hopes to have a 10-12 page "mini-handbook" ready, covering basics like vacation, sick leave, etc. By the end of the summer, Fred, Sharon, Dallas and Robert hope to have the complete employee manual on the network as a read-only document. It will be much more in-depth, enveloping just about every policy imaginable. By having it on the net, it can be changed as needs or situations dictate, and new policy statements can be created on just about any subject needing clarification.

Dear Point Man,

What's the scoop with getting site licenses for all the software which ORIGIN uses on a daily basis? Is there going to be an official pass made of all the computers? If so, is the user going to be warned so that they can make sure that anything personal isn't wiped?

Just Curious

Dear Curious,

"Yes, to all three questions," says Steve Morris. "We're going machine by machine, installing all the legal stuff, looking at what's on the machines, asking if it's personal, and if anything is left over, it's gone." This weekend, he'll be wrapping up the PC crowd, so if you have any software on your machine you personally own, be sure to leave a note attached to your monitor. Word from Robert: we've actually invited the SPA to conduct a software audit at ORIGIN at any time without notice. Company policy is that unapproved and/or unpurchased software usage will no longer be tolerated. This will be *strictly* enforced and Steve and his gang are The Enforcers.

Our last two letters are best taken in tandem:

Dear Point Man,

The final paragraph of "Mystical Matrix Management" (Point Vol. II, No. 12) says, "If you have some other questions..just let me know." Who is "me?" ORIGIN is so big now that authorship and introductions are important.

(More on next page)

and...

Dear Point Man,

There are so many new people! How about a column like "ORIGINAL Faces" or something, with a few short bios each issue chosen at random? If possible, it'd be great to add a picture, too, so we can start putting names to faces.

I'd like to get to know these folks, but we're getting too big for wandering introductions.

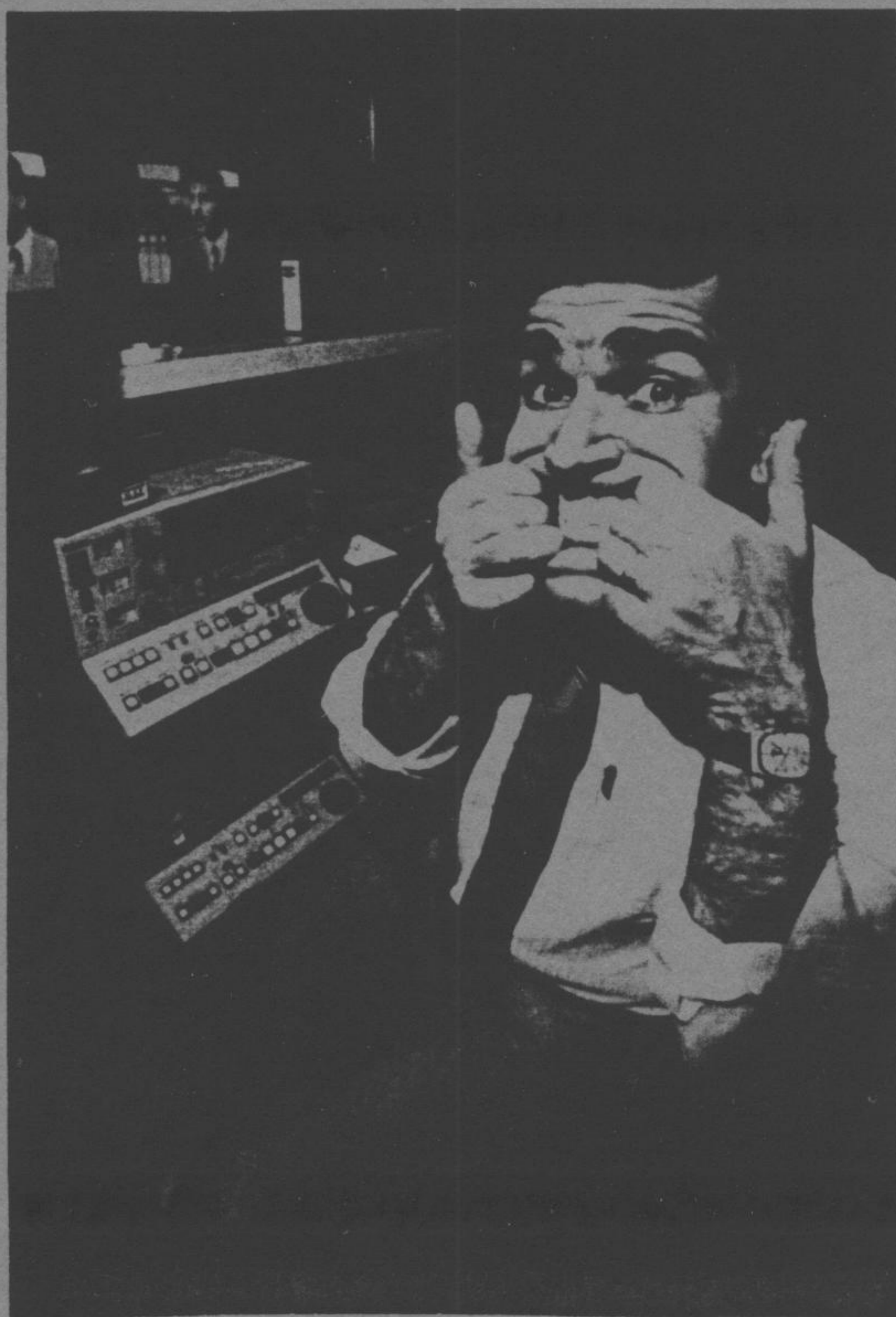
Signed,

Overwhelmed

You're both right. A bio column's a great idea. We actually started this last year (before I took over Point) but never got back to it. The first Bio was a lengthy piece about Dallas which many of you are probably just finishing about now. Since I'm the eyes, ears, voice and spleen of Point of ORIGIN, let me start by introducing myself. I'm Galen Svanas, the Media Relations Manager. My first dog's name was Tiger, my favorite ice cream is Ben & Jerry's Raw Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough and my left hand is smaller than my right (does that mean anything?)

I came to ORIGIN last September after 10 years in television news as an anchor and investigative reporter. My wife is Bettie Cross, a reporter at Channel 7. To put a mug with my moniker, check my favorite picture below. Sorry it has to be so big. It's a sleazy way to fill the rest of the page.

I handle all of the reviewers and general press clawing at the door to give our games glowing write-ups and I'm constantly on the lookout for other avenues of visibility for the company. My beat includes game magazines, computer magazines, ALL magazines, TV, radio, hundreds of newspapers—from local to national—both domestic and foreign. Point of ORIGIN is another of my regular projects. It's not exactly an underground paper, but it's no corporate mouthpiece, either. It's the *employee* newsletter. If you'd like to contribute an article—or an idea for an article—just drop it in one of the Point boxes or send me a cc:Mail. And look for more Bio's in future issues.



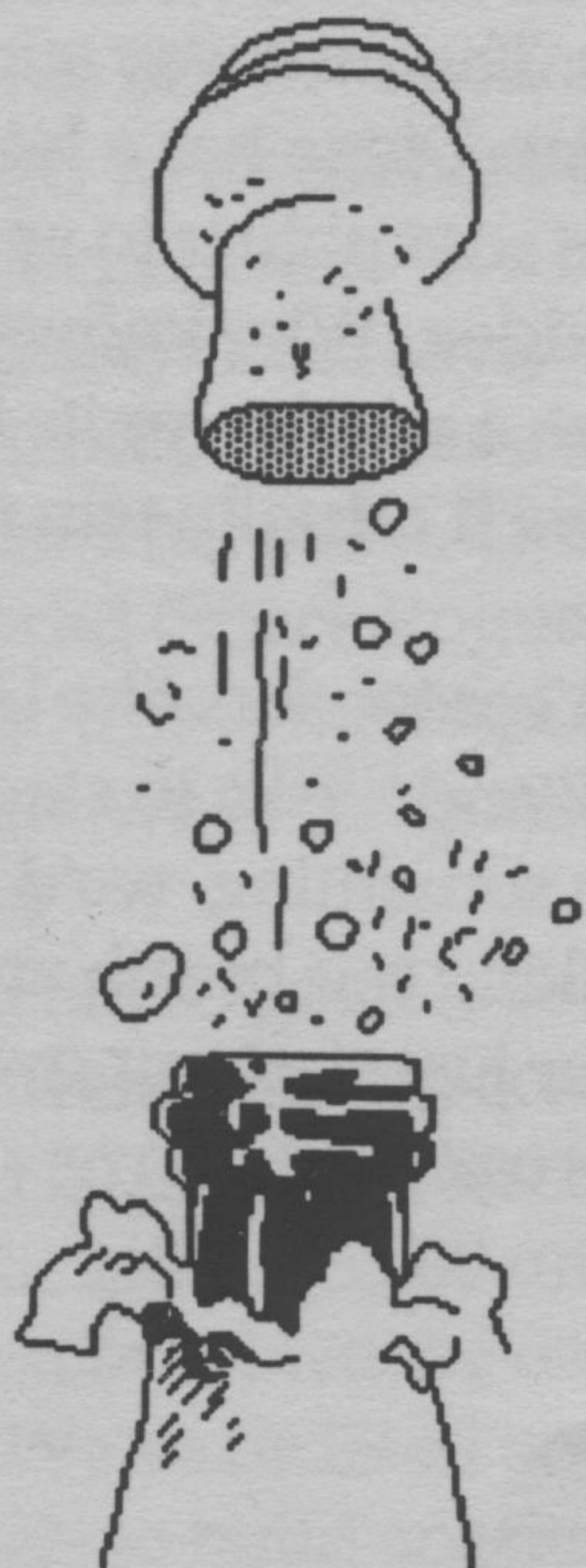
The Editor

...Underworld

says Operations titan Jeff Hillhouse, "but we could go up to 10,000 if we see things are really picking up."

For the time being, it's anybody's guess. Newly-christened National Sales Manager Karl Kabler (see "Sales Shifts" in this issue) says the buyers for the major distributors and retailers are taking a wait-and-see attitude. "They're just a little skeptical right now," Karl says, "but we're hearing great things from the individual stores themselves. They're really excited about this product."

That optimism could be buoyed by the fact that the Sales crew sent out roughly 6,500 copies of the Underworld demo. Several reviewers say it's the best demo they've ever seen. In fact, in the short span it's been on CompuServe and GENie, it's been downloaded more than 700 times. No doubt that ORIGIN management is optimistic; the contract's already inked for Underworld 2.



Still To Come...

Underworld is just the hook of the Ultima one-two punch this Spring. Ultima VII will be the uppercut. U7 is slated to ship so that it will simultaneously hit shelves worldwide on Easter weekend, April 18 & 19 (is that ironic, or what?)

"We want to give Underworld a little shelf time of its own before Ultima VII arrives," says marketing czar Mike Harrison. When that wave does hit, it will be huge. Right now, booked orders for U7 stand at 54,300 (not counting Europe). The feeding frenzy should continue; the Underworld demo will be included with every copy of U7 on rollout for a little cross-promotional punch.

Richard will start splitting personalities with Lord British again on the heavy press tours. The first biggie is a real English castle sleepover with about 30 trade journalists just before the European Computer Trade Show in two weeks.

Comings & Goings

Brian Smith climbs aboard in the Art Department. And get this: every Western temp is now full-time (way to go, Sharon!)

Karen Conroe and Ellen Guon decided to take different paths than ORIGIN's. Goodbye, good luck, good health and good times.

December Hits List

1. Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum)
2. Police Quest III (Sierra)
3. Mike Ditka Ultimate Football (Accolade)
4. Leisure Suit Larry V (Sierra)
5. Robin Hood (Sierra)
6. F117A Stealth Fighter (MicroProse)
7. Civilization (MicroProse)
8. Chessmaster 3000 (Software Toolworks)
9. King's Quest V (Sierra)
10. **Wing Commander II** (14)**Special Operations 1**

Press Roundup

Get ready for the press flood to start again, now that new titles are hitting the streets.

The Atlanta Constitution says Underworld "tiptoes right along the edge of virtual reality" and urges readers to "get a taste of what the future has to offer."

France's Tilt Magazine gives Underworld a rating of 20 out of 20. "From now on," it gushes, "we'll talk about 'before-Underworld' and 'after-Underworld.' It's the greatest and finest game of the year."

The Circuit City Report claims Underworld is "the first game to really deserve anything close to a Virtual Reality nametag."

The Guardian gets a mention as one of the "Ultimate Bad Guys" of roleplaying in the current MPC World. Peter Spear also writes that U7 is "destined for greatness."

Stark Talk

Don Stark, our 401-K/QUADS rep will be at our offices all day Monday (3/30/92). He'll follow up with people's issues from his visit three weeks ago and answer new questions. He'll also be enrolling newly-eligible participants and explain the plan to anyone who wants more information.

To update current 401-K participants: ORIGIN decided to stick with the QUADS administrative system for our plan for the time being, with the hope that Don Stark will be able to quickly correct the communication and paperwork problems we've experienced. No suitable alternative's been found yet with anywhere near the investment opportunities of QUADS, but Robert and Fred will continue to evaluate other systems out there just as a backup.



Birthdays

We have a brand new birthday to celebrate this month. Evan Reece Davies was born unto Marten and his wife, Cheryl, Tuesday afternoon at about 4:30. The newest bulldog weighed in at 8 lbs. 12 oz.

Other b-days in April: Phil Sulak (4-8), Randy Buck (4-21), Steve Muchow (4-27), and Mary Margaret Ipser and Terry Manderfeld(4-28).

...Awards

Best Entertainment Program. Civilization split honors with Secret Weapons (LucasFilm) as the Critics' Choice for Best Consumer Program.

From the "I-can't-believe-it" department comes SimAnt, which won Best Educational Tool Program, beating out contenders like Accelerated Reader and Mathematica 2.0. It also won Best Simulation. For the record, Martian Memorandum (Access) won Best Fantasy Role Playing/Adventure Program, Links (Access) won Best Sports Program and Civilization won Best Strategy Program.

Elsewhere at the SPA Symposium, there were some heavy hitters. It was standing room only for Thursday's keynote address by Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft. Hard to tell whether everybody wanted to hear what he had to say or whether they just wanted to see what a gazillionaire looks like.

Overall, the publishers' attitude seemed to be one of contentedness. "Everybody seems fat and (burp) happy, like after a big meal," said Maxis President Jeff Braun. Braun, while not fat personally, was undoubtedly happy. His is the company responsible for SimAnt.

A real showdown's shaping up in the gaming system arena. According to Ed Thomas, Senior Buyer for Walden Software, Sega Genesis was *the* machine for Christmas at his stores, outselling SNES 3-to-1. "I was even offered more SNES products and turned them down," Thomas said. Still, Nintendo wields the biggest political stick. Witness this statis-

tic: if you took *every nugget* of the gold discovered in California during the rush (1840-1860) and adjusted it to 1992 prices, it still wouldn't match one year of Nintendo's revenues. Enclaves of game publishers giggled like giddy schoolgirls who met the captain of the football team. "I think Nintendo really likes us," they squealed.

Will this be the year for CD-ROM? Nobody really had a handle on that one. Reportedly, CD only accounts for about 2% of the total market right now. One symposium attendee said, "Yeah, I went to 5 COMDEXs in a row where they declared it 'The Year of the LAN.'" Although the gaming system companies (Nintendo, Sega and NEC) are heading for CD territory later this year, don't pull out your checkbook yet. John Rosseau, Publisher of GamePro magazine, says all three companies still have *big* budgets earmarked for pushing 16-bit cartridge-based games.

No real trends emerged on the PC side, with the possible exception of "edutainment" programs. The runaway success of Carmen San Diego has a lot of publishers scrambling to get smart all of a sudden. Who knows: if the industry as a whole ups its IQ, perhaps we'll actually win next year.

With contenders like Underworld, U7 and Strike to start, if we don't win something, we'd better start checking our breath and armpits, or just start our own awards program!