

The show began with Paul Franz giving news and updates for SFU, SFBOL, F&EOL, FCOL, and Warlord. Paul knew only one person was waiting on the phone, but not whom, and went to that call. Steve Cole, cleverly forgetting to identify himself, began giving an update of progress on Captain's Log #41. Paul quickly guessed who he was, and commented that many players who normally show up but who had not done so that night would be disappointed to have missed the show since it was Steve Cole's first visit. One of those that Paul mentioned was Aaron Staley, and Steve Cole mentioned that he had been concerned over the health of his old Army buddy (Aaron). Paul mentioned that Aaron had just been diagnosed as diabetic.

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SVC: "Join the club. I've been diabetic for years. I was apparently diabetic at about the time Joe Butler died. I tell everybody that Joe died to save my life because after he died, my wife said, 'You, the guy who hasn't been to the doctor in 18 years, you're going to the doctor tomorrow.' I walked in and the doctor gave me a blood test and my blood pressure and my blood sugar were both way over 200. He said, 'We're going to give you some pills.' I probably would've died of a stroke by now except for Joe Butler."

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Paul Franz: "Thank you, Joe Butler."

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SVC: "Yeah, and we miss him."

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Paul Franz: "Oh, I agree 100%. That first Origins without Joe was pretty rough."

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SVC: "Yeah, it was pretty rough coming to work that morning when I had the email from Stacy that he had gone during the night. Joe had beat it so many times. We all thought, 'Ah, Joe's in the hospital again. Big freakin deal. He's just taking a vacation and getting some lousy food.' But, if you push your body as hard as Joe did, and as hard as I have, sooner or later its not going to snap back. My doctor gets on my case every three months: 'Steve, you gotta lose weight.' I have never managed to do that, but I'm going to have to sooner or later. That, or Petrick's going to be running this place."

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Paul Franz: "I'm sure he would do his best, but I'm not sure he would run it the same way."

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SVC: "Well, I think he might run it better. Steve has a more even temper than I do. My problem is, I'm like everybody else who runs a game publishing company: I'm a game designer who got forced to become a game publisher because no other game company would print my games. In my case, I probably could've gotten somebody to print my games, but I had already had two publishers go bankrupt out from under me without paying me. I thought, 'Let's just try running the publishing company this time.' I still don't know if I did the right thing. I wake up every morning and think, 'Gosh, way back when ... if I'd gone to work at McDonalds I'd be an area manager by now.' So, who knows?"

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Paul Franz: "Yeah, but you wouldn't be working at McDonalds. You'd be doing some engineering thing."

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SVC: "No, I've done the engineering thing. I've still got my engineer license, and it is a part of my life. I still think like an engineer, but, its been 25 years since I built anything. [The last project was a refinery.] Materials have changed. They added on to my house this winter. We just finished it about a month ago and the building contractor knew things I did not. I grew up in the construction industry, from when I could carry a hammer around. The contractors were using materials I'd never heard of."

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Paul Franz: "Uh, huh."

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SVC: "I'd ask: 'What's this stuff you're nailing up on the walls? I thought you'd use plywood there.' 'No, no, this stuff is better! Its triple the insulation value, twice as strong, and costs half as much.' And I'm going, 'Oookay! I don't need to be an engineer any more.'"

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Paul Franz: chuckles.

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SVC: "Maybe they haven't replaced steel yet, but I think they're getting ready to do that. I actually sat down yesterday and read the hardcore engineering reports on the oil well that blew out down in the Gulf and I was kind of scratching my head going, 'Okay, I know what that is, I can look up what that is.' It was kind of good in a way to get back into an area. What was killing me, when I worked as an engineer, was being out of town three weeks out of four. You can't keep a marriage together doing that."

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Paul Franz: "Yep, yep. That reminds me of a person who is actually part of a men's group that I have, a Bible study every single Saturday morning. This guy was interviewing for a job and found out it mean a lot of travel. Then he says, 'Wait, wait, wait. How many of your workers are actually married?' And basically it comes down to very few. Most of them are single or they're divorced."

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SVC: "My marriage means more to me than any job."

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Paul Franz: "Agreed. Same here. While I've actually got you, I have some questions I wanted to talk to you and get recorded. I thought this might be a good opportunity to discuss some questions. I wanted to have this more prepared, but you popped in and, well ..."

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SVC: "Surprise!"

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Paul Franz: "Surprise, yeah. Let's start with some basics about ADB. Why did you start ADB?"

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SVC: "Remember that I've been in the game business since 1975. Back many, many moons ago (1979), a friend of mine and I started Task Force Games. After about 3 or 4 years we were constantly fighting about how to run the company. It wasn't that his way was wrong, it was just different than my way. His way involved a lot of borrowing money, and carrying a lot of debt. My way involved not borrowing money, not being in debt, and if we didn't have the money to do something, we'd just delay it until we had the money. We were just constantly fighting with each other over how to run the company and his result was, 'Let's just split this thing in half. You [SVC] go be the game designer, what you really wanted to do, and I'll be the game company publisher and you won't have to worry about what contracts I'm signing and what debt I'm taking on because you won't be liable for it.' I said, 'Fine!' That was, by the way, a big mistake. I should have bought him out and run the whole thing myself. Oh well."

"We were going to call the two halves Task Force Games Publishing and Task Force Games Design but we realized that would be more confusing than a lot of things we could do. So we decided that he would just be Task Force Games and I'd come up with another name. At that particular time I was reading a book on the history of the Russian aviation industry. Of course in Communist Russia, the USSR, they didn't have corporations, they didn't have independent companies. The government owned everything. So they set up 'design bureaus' and even though all of them were owned by the government, they would compete against each other for government contracts. So I decided that I would be a 'design bureau' and since I was born and raised in Amarillo it just seemed to be natural that I'd call it Amarillo Design Bureau. Within a year I was regretting that because everybody was calling it 'Armadillo Design Bureau.'"

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Paul Franz: chuckles.

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SVC: "Every time I was on the phone with somebody they thought it was 'Emerald Design Bureau'."

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Paul Franz: "Oh, that's bad!"

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SVC: "Well, with my Texas accent. Looking at Steve Jackson Games, which is ten times as big as we are, I really should have called it, 'Steve Cole Games', because I'd be ten times as big a company as I am."

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Paul Franz: chuckles.

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SVC: "Next question?"

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Paul Franz: "A real quick question and a real quick summary because I know you don't want to go into all the details. What happened with Task Force Games?"

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SVC: "Let's see if I can do it quickly. There was Task Force Games. We called that Task Force One just for conversational sake. That was me and Allen. When Allen and I split up, he became Task Force Games Number Two. He sold it to that bunch of guys from California and, even though it was still Task Force Games, we called that Task Force Number Three just to keep straight in our own mind what was going on. And then they sold it to the guys from England and that became Task Force Games Number Four. Task Force Games Number Four was run by John Olsen. John had a particular way of running the company which involved a lot of debt. John ran smack into the 'Magic, the Gathering' thing which cut our sales about in half. It wasn't that gamers, Star Fleet Battles gamers, had switched to 'Magic, the Gathering', it was that the stores switched to 'Magic, the Gathering'. The stores weren't stocking Star Fleet Battles because they were spending all of their money, and they don't have infinite money, buying all the 'Magic, the Gathering' cards they could to sell. Gamers couldn't get out games in stores and TFG had not yet set up a credit card website. A lot of game companies got hurt in the marketplace back then because of that. Task Force, being in a situation of having a lot of debt, couldn't stand the cash flow hit. You get into something that in business is called 'the death spiral' in that something goes bad -- it could be anything -- a piece of machinery could break, a product could run out of print -- rainy day sorts of things -- something that's going to cost you five or ten thousand dollars to fix and if you don't have five or ten thousand dollars in cash, in hand right now, then you can't fix it. If you start carrying around more and more problems you haven't fixed yet, then more and more problems happen that add on top of them. It eventually just got to a point that they didn't have stuff in print and they couldn't sell anything and they didn't have the money to reprint it. All of our product lines are what are called 'integrated product lines' in that if part of it is out of print, it all is kind of screwy."

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Paul Franz: "Uh, huh."

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SVC: "In Star Fleet Battles if you don't have Module C2, then nobody can use those empires. So if you run out of Module C2, all of Star Fleet Battles stops selling, and if all of Star Fleet Battles stops selling, then you can't reprint Module C2. If you scrape up enough money to reprint it, then something else runs out. That was another thing that hurt them bad, was, Star Fleet Battles was the main product line at the time (they also had another product, F&E) -- and SFB was big enough that something ran out of print every month. When you do a new product, you're going to spend five or ten thousand dollars printing it, and you're going to get more than that in sales on the first day, so it doesn't hurt. But when you reprint a product and you're going to spend five or ten thousand dollars reprinting it,

you're only going to get a few hundred dollars of sales on the first day. If you manage your business to where you don't spend all the money and then go borrow more money, you can stand that. I've still got the money I was paid for Fed and Empire done by Allen and Task Force Number Two. That money is still sitting in my retirement fund. Now that was the biggest, best year I ever had as a game designer and that money is still sitting in my retirement fund. I know that because it all went into one particular IRA investment and its still sitting there. Leanna and I call that one the F&E fund."

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Paul Franz chuckles.

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SVC: "Its actually the biggest -- I own, shares in maybe twelve or fifteen mutual funds and that's the biggest one!" SVC laughs.

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Paul Franz chuckles.

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SVC: "So its always remembered. That's one of the reasons that F&E has been my favorite game design."

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Paul Franz chuckles. "Oh, real quick, what is your favorite part of running ADB?"

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SVC: "Going home at the end of the day? Ah, no, the favorite part, I guess, is people who email in and tell me how much our games have brought joy to their lives. Some people met their wives over the games. Some people have their kids playing now. Some people met their best friends over the game, the different games.

"Its also good in that the game industry treats me as an elder statesman, sort of an ex-president sort of thing. I get two or three phone calls a week from other game companies, some of them little itty-bitty game companies I've never heard of, asking my advice on their marketing, or my advice on production, or my recommendation on whether or not a guy they're about to do business with is honest.

"When I go to Origins and sit there in the booth, or last year, beside the booth because Jean kicked me out of the booth, other game companies come by to ask my advice. Two years ago, there was a game company directly across the aisle from us. It was a brand new game company with their first game and these two guys had mortgaged their houses to print this game. Their wives came over to ask me what their husbands got them into. The wives had gone to other people and said, 'We want to learn about the industry. We want to know what we're into.' And they said, 'Go talk to Steve Cole. He loves to talk and that way you won't be taking up our time.'"

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Paul Franz: chuckles.

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SVC: "Being an elder statesman is great. I love the respect I get from people who appreciate my experience. There was a time I did this in hope of making a million bucks. It never happened, and that hope is long past. I don't know that we have any customers who make less money than I do. I could literally increase my income by closing the company and going to work at McDonalds. With a college degree I'd go in as some kind of junior manager, but still, I don't do this now to make money, although I keep hoping that one of these days Paramount will realize what I have accomplished and will put me in charge of Star Trek."

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Paul Franz chuckles. "I don't think that'll ever happen. You'd be too much of a perfectionist when it comes to being consistent and having it actually make sense."

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SVC: "Well, that, and I would have -- you look at franchises like CSI and Law and Order and you go, 'Why wasn't Paramount smart enough to do that with Star Trek?' Now to some extent they did, but they really didn't do it well. Part of it was hiring a

couple of bad choices of actors. Most of it was the writing. I know the writing the last couple of series, Enterprise and Voyager, was just abysmal. I look at the people who write fiction for Star Fleet Battles and go, 'You guys are more clever and better writers than anybody in Hollywood.' Quality tells. One of the reasons I'm still in business is because we put quality out there and people have responded to that and appreciated it. One of the problems with Star Trek was it's a spaceship with four hundred people on it, but you're only going to see seven of them. I would immediately launch a new Star Trek series called, 'Star Trek Prime Directive', and it would be about a Prime Team. It would be five guys and the guy who drives their spaceship for them and they would go to a different planet every week and go down and overthrow the government, or cure a plague, or, negotiate a civil war, or something. Then I'd launch Star Trek: Klingons and then Star Trek: Evil Empire (about the dimension where they're all bad guys). The whole point is the writing has to have quality. If you could have had the quality of writers who write for Law and Order write for Star Trek, it would've been on the air for twenty years."

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Paul Franz: "I agree. Of course the original Star Trek series kind of got killed by its own makers after they realized a little too late that they hit the demographic that they wanted to hit."

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SVC: "Well, they hit the demographic, and some of the writing was weak. They got a bad time slot on the third year which. I think that happened because Hollywood in general has less respect for science fiction than they do for the military. They don't treat science fiction right. They don't manage it right. You look at Firefly. That was one of the best written TV series ever."

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Paul Franz: "I agree."

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SVC: "And it disappeared because it was a science fiction show and nobody at the networks cared. I really don't know why the Sci-Fi channel doesn't pick it up. I guess maybe because they were going into big time wrestling as a business model and I was saying, 'You people are crazy.' I don't turn on the Sci-Fi channel to see wrestling. Now I admit its fiction, but still -- "

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Paul Franz: "Oh, yeah." Chuckles. "Agreed. Agreed. Barry, do you have any questions for Steve?"

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Barry Kirk: "Hey, there!"

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Paul Franz: "Hey, Barry."

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Barry Kirk: "Hey, Steve. Its Barry Kirk here."

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SVC: "Hey, Barry!"

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Barry Kirk: "How are you doing?"

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SVC: "I've never done this before and Jean's been kind of on my case to get out more."

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Barry Kirk: "Well, welcome. Welcome. Its funny you mentioned Firefly. I have two dogs. One is Malcolm Reynolds and the other one is Zoie."

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Paul Franz: "And you son's name is?"

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Barry Kirk: "Patrick James Tiberius Kirk."

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SVC laughs.

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Barry Kirk: "Named after Patrick Stewart."

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SVC: "That's good! What question do you have for me?"

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Barry Kirk: "Well, your game has certainly added to the quality of my life, I will say that! And I have met a lot of friends by playing your game. Paul Franz is one of them. Thank you."

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SVC: "Well, I've been blessed by being around a lot of good people. Somebody asked me one time why the people that played Star Fleet Battles are so good and I said, 'Well, look. We're hand-picking the guys who can be civil to each other while they're trying to kill each other. It's a pretty restricted gene pool, but they're the best of the best.'"

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah. Absolutely. Oh, yeah. The level of play on that gameboard -- you just feel honored to lose!"

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SVC: "The people who play Star Fleet Battles, who play Federation and Empire, are just very intelligent, grown up people. They're alphas. They want to fight, they want to win, but even at that, they want to be civil about it."

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Barry Kirk: "Um-hmmm. Which is important. Yeah, yeah. I've recently gotten, I don't know if you've been following, you had sent me an email asking about my OLT, the Omega LMC tournament."

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SVC: "Paul Franz sent me a very nice little thing about that and I had about seven or eight lines to mention three or four events, but Paul very cleverly managed to get the point and show the concept done in a way that I think people will understand it."

"I think something a lot of people don't realize the way Captain's Log is designed. It includes a lot of different stuff about a lot of different games, but we try to make sure that everything in it is at least pleasantly boring bathroom reading. If you're a Star Fleet Battles player and you've never played Fed and Empire, two months after you get the Captain's Log you're going to be in the bathroom and you go, 'Well, I've read all the Star Fleet Battles stuff four times', and you'll go read the F&E stuff. And its written in a way that you don't have to play the game to actually understand what's going on in the conversation."

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Barry Kirk: "Right."

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SVC: "I wanted to, in a very little space, three lines and two sentences, tell somebody who barely knows what Omega is, what your event is all about. That way, somebody who's bored in the bathroom will read that column on Star Fleet Battles Online, will read that bottom part, and will go, 'I could really get into that!' I want them to, at the very least, not say, 'Why does Steve Cole let these bozos in the Universe?' I want him to say, 'Yeah, I can respect what they're doing, and I might give that a shot.'"

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Barry Kirk: "Right, right. Here's an interesting one. Obviously I play a lot online because it's the easiest way to find an opponent. I was online one night and Scott Moellmer was online and I said, 'I'd like to do something a little bit different. And so what we did was we created what is called a 'first contact, scenario. Now at that time I had never played Omega or LMC, so he took a Souldra ship which I had never seen before and I had no idea what the rules were. I think I took a Seltorian and the scenario was a first contact. We're going into a battle and I have no idea what his ship can do and what it can't do. That was a lot of fun."

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SVC: "That was the point of module C4, the simulators, in that, without having to come up with a history, without having to try to figure out where they fit on the map, here are some totally new empires that you can play against I know when we were working on that product I sat Petrick down and said, 'Now you're going to play that Klingon ship, and I'm going to play this ship which you've never seen before and have no idea what it can do.' It was a Flivver, the one that is a helicopter that can fly sideways and backwards and it drove Petrick crazy, and then I started

launching drones at him. I said, 'Okay, I'm launching a drone.' And he said, 'Okay.' And I said, 'It just hit you.' And he said, 'What?!' Because, as you know, their drones are speed six-hundred and forty -- "

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Paul Franz: "Yes, speed six-fourty."

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SVC: "And it was just a surprise. They're hyperspeed drones and almost direct fire weapons. Not quite, but almost. Steve Petrick finally disengaged. He said, 'I'm leaving.' And I said, 'I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings.' He said, 'No. The Emperor needs to know you're out here.'

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Barry Kirk: laughs.

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SVC: "Petrick said, 'You're just so damn weird that somebody needs to tell everybody you're out here. I'm going to go back and I'm going to be the Klingon who ran away and my career will be ruined and I'm going to be court-martialed and I'm going to a mining colony for the rest of my life, but somebody's got to tell the Emperor about you!'"

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Barry Kirk laughs. "Exactly."

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SVC: "But it is true. I look at your match ups and I look at how you did them. We did something like that in this issue of Captain's Log with battle group in that we recruited people to design weird battle groups without telling them they were going to end up randomly matched against each other. So there were people who had never seen the Triaxians or what they did. They were suddenly told, 'You're going to be playing against a Triaxian.' They had to go dig the rulebook out and look it up. I just finished doing those five pages and sending them to Jean. It was interesting reading the tactics of the guy who didn't know what a Triaxian was trying to figure out how not to get killed on the first turn.

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Barry Kirk: "Uh, huh. Yeah."

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SVC: "He had it nailed pretty good. He really did. There's an awful lot of smart people playing this game. I tell people one year I went to Origins and this couple came up to me (their son was playing our game) and they wanted to know what kind of people their son was associating with. I said, 'Let's walk over here and meet some players: doctor, lawyer, accountant, engineer, Army officer.' And you look at the percentage of Star Fleet Battles players with graduate degrees and it scares me."

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Barry Kirk laughs.

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SVC: "I'm gifted in having very smart players which allows me to do fairly sloppy game design because the players are smarter than I am and can figure out the rules and tell me what I did wrong and that's what errata is. I'm just kidding!"

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah. Exactly."

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SVC: "Its good to hear from you, Barry. I appreciate you running that event and letting people see some different kinds of things."

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Barry Kirk: "You're welcome. You're welcome. What I was looking at, I'm looking at the number of players who are playing and I've seen it go down, which is upsetting. At least for tournaments I'm seeing it go down and I'm saying, 'Well, these Omegas are a lot of the same old, same old.' I figured if we had some new cruiser to inject some new blood into this, maybe we can get it spiced up and people would be drawn back in. 'Oh, look! It's a new ship.' That's the whole reason. I'm trying to playtest these new ships and get them hopefully submitted. I don't think they'll ever be allowed in Gold Hat for Origins, but the whole idea is that maybe

they'll be other tournaments where they'll be allowed. That's the final goal, what I'm trying to get."

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Paul Franz: "And in the meantime, you're being a big pain in my butt because we're doing all the work on the client to support these races which hardly anyone else has played. [Chuckles] But at the same time, its forcing me to support those races and improve the client."

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah, I know. Sorry."

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Paul Franz: "That's okay. [Laughs] I'm just being lazy. Its good to have someone push me every once in awhile."

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah, I'm probably pushing you too much, though. [Chuckles]"

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Paul Franz: "Nah. Not yet."

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Barry Kirk: "Now actually, the other thing is that I have been in contact with Bruce Graw about Omega and I guess there was a lot of stuff that he was -- I'm trying to put the pieces together because I got into Omega eight years after pretty much most of it was published. He doesn't remember much about what was going on back then. I kind of got the impression that they were kind of halfway through the design process when his hard drive crashed."

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SVC: "He did lose a bunch of stuff on the hard drive crash."

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Paul Franz: "Yeah, I know that one because that's one thing that got lost: the source code for Star Fleet Warlord Aide itself. So there was no way to improve it, no way to fix it if there was a problem. He said, 'I got this, but I don't have any source code. Here!'"

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah. Now I've been looking at Omega and saying, 'This place is where I think it can be expanded. I'm not sure if I should be talking to you or to Petrick.'"

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SVC: "Petrick."

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah, I know."

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SVC: "Omega is Star Fleet Battles and that's Steve Petrick. Steve and I have a problem in that we both think the other one is smarter. Contrary to myth, we're not identical twins. Petrick is more analytical, and I'm more creative. We do better work together than separately. Sometimes you get into situations where neither one of us wants to do anything until the other one's checked it. But at one point I sat down and said, 'Look, the company's grown. F&E is much more active. We've got the Fed Commander stuff to take care of. I have to spend more time running the company. You're taking over Star Fleet Battles.' To some extent he doesn't like being in command of it because I created it and he's terrified that I'm going to walk in someday and say, 'You screwed up.' These days, I'm actually astounded when someone asks me a Star Fleet Battles question and I know the answer. Steve and I are very much respectful of each other and its his territory and I try real hard not to tell people this is or this isn't going to happen.

"Every now and then you'll see me go into one of the Star Fleet Battles talks on the bulletin board and type something like, 'This isn't going to happen. Chat if you want to, but we're not publishing this.' That is 90% of the time because Steve Petrick came to me and said, 'I need to close this mess down and if I do it, nobody's going to believe me because you're still the boss. But if you do it, they'll know its over.' So in every case I will make him explain to me what the situation is, what the things are, and sometimes I can see a way around the problem he couldn't see a

way around. Most of the time, its just -- somebody was doing something on the bulletin board the last couple of days about fighters after Y205 or something and I'm going, 'Don't go there. Its not going to happen, guys.' You just don't want to get ridiculous. You can always do a bigger, faster, meaner spaceship. Its kind of, 'What's the point?'

"I look for cleverness and creativity and a sneaky way of doing stuff and I look for the thing that isn't a surprise, and yet nobody knew was there. I got a story outline in today from somebody that actually takes place during a Star Trek episode. A different starship, but the way the Star Trek episode was written, all of us, when we print the story (and I'm not going to give it away), you will all look at it and say, 'Damn, its so obvious that's what happened on Star Trek.' And yet nobody ever thought about it and nobody ever realized, 'Wait a minute. What they did doesn't make sense.' Here's what was really going on. That what you thought was a trail of breadcrumbs was more than one person dropping breadcrumbs. You were being misdirected and its forty-three years later we finally figured out what happened. The story was so clever, so 'Oh, my God, that's what happened! Now I understand! And, of course the bad guys would've done it this way.' Its one of those 'smack yourself in the head, I could've had a V8' things.

"I look for cleverness. I look for creativity. When we were doing R12, I looked for the spaceship that nobody knew was missing, and yet the minute you see it, you go, 'Well, of course.'

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Barry Kirk: "That was from an original series episode?"

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SVC: "Oh, yeah!"

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Barry Kirk: "Good!"

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SVC: "Its obviously how it happened. We just never saw it."

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Barry Kirk: "Is it going to be in Captain's Log 41?"

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SVC: "No, but I hope its going to be 42."

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Barry Kirk: "42. Okay."

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SVC: "And it makes me feel real good to be sitting here three days from finishing 41 and I already know where the story for 42 is coming."

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Barry Kirk: "I need to order up War and Peace. I'm looking forward to that. I still haven't gotten my hands on the Andromedan rules yet."

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SVC: "Email me and I'll send them to you."

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Barry Kirk: "Oh! Thank you!"

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SVC: "I think they worked out really well."

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Barry Kirk: "I was very impressed and I really liked the way the ESGs were done with Fed Commander."

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SVC: "That was kinda one of those, 'Let's go try something totally different, things. Steve and I hate the ESG rules because nobody can figure out what happens if I'm doing a sideslip during a nebula gravity wave and I'm tractorred to a ship with a 2/3 movement cost and which part of the radius three ESG smacked into which one of his shields. We can't figure it out and I just wasn't going there in Fed Commander."

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Barry Kirk laughs. "Right, right. It was very elegantly done. There's a lot of things. One thing I liked was the Souldra dimensional phase device. I said, 'Damn! That's what the Romulan cloaking device should have been!, If you look at it, it

really doesn't lend itself -- its hard to abuse it. Its a cloaking device, a totally hidden cloak, but there's a sixteen impulse block and then its over. And a 128 impulse cool down. It gets you out of trouble. You can move at high speed with it. Its your 'get out of jail free', but you can't stay under cloak for very long at all"

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SVC: "I'll take your word for it. I haven't looked at the Omega rules in so long that I can barely spell Souldra two times out of three. That's about it."

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Barry Kirk: "I'm wondering if at some point there's ever going to be any possibility of doing Omega and/or LMC or some of the other races for Fed Commander?"

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SVC: "Well, the simple answer is, 'Yes,. The more complicated answer is, 'I'm not sure when.' One of the problems you run into is Federation Commander is an incredibly expensive game to print. Those laminated ship cards cost a fortune. I have to write a check in about two weeks for about ten thousand dollars to print just the ship cards for War and Peace and I've already had to write a check for seven thousand dollars for the counters. It would probably be more likely for us to do Omega Fed Commander, or Omega Commander, as a pdf game that you download and print the ships and mark on them with pencil and throw them away."

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Barry Kirk: "Thank you! Thank you!"

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SVC: "Because it's just too expensive to print the ship cards."

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Barry Kirk: "Now you're talking something I really like! One of the things that I do have an issue with Fed Commander is how many ship cards do you buy? Because you sit down with your friends and you say, 'Hey, let's play a battle!, Okay. In the good old Star Fleet Battles days you say, 'Okay, we're going to need three of these and two of those, and okay, so you get out the photocopy machine, you take your old SFB book (I still have the old ones that say Task Force Games on them, the yellow one for SFB book number one -- I still have the Designer Edition and the original Expansion number one, two, and three -- so I've been with you for awhile). But, you take out your old SFB book, you go to the photocopy machine, and you make your copies for your game, and you play your game. With the laminated cards, its like, 'Well, I've got one Klingon D7, but I need three for this battle."

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SVC: "We need to, in all seriousness, be selling pdfs. Part of the reason we aren't is the concerns over piracy. The actual doing thereof involves a certain amount of work and we're all busy. We find ourselves saying, 'Talk to me after Origins.' For the last two weeks, that has been the most common thing around here. No matter what you want to talk about, if its not part of Origins, you come talk to me after Origins. Like somebody said, 'Print calendars.' Well, fine, but its going to take me one entire day, or more, talking to printers just to figure out if we can afford to. Even then, you can't convince me that the sales are there. Color printing is expensive. But we really do need to do PDFs. Steve Jackson does a lot of those. He is a very good friend of mine, of course we're both from Texas. He and I talk every week about the game industry and marketing. One of the reasons I'm actually here is that Steve harangued me for an hour earlier this week on how much fun he has on Twitter."

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Paul Franz: "Yeah, I follow him on Twitter."

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SVC: "I can't spell Twitter and I'll probably never be on it, but he was talking about if he had a choice between going to the Gama trade show or Twitter, but he'd have to cancel one or the other, he would keep Twitter and skip the Gama trade show because it brought him more business. I saw the post earlier today about TalkShoe. I thought, 'Well, I'm just going to call in and see what

happens.' As you know, we used to do real time conferences back on Genie all the time. It became, unfortunately, a game of who could piss Steve Cole off and get him to blow his stack online because that's fun to watch. I really don't want TalkShoe to turn into that."

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Paul Franz: "No, if it turns into that, I will shut those people down."

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SVC: "Well, you're going to have to shut *me* down, Paul, not the people. I know. I do seminars at Origins and I've had people deliberately try to piss me off just because its fun to watch me when I'm pissed off. And I've got to admit, having seen the videotape once, it is fun to watch me when I'm pissed off. It's a barrel of fun!"

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Barry Kirk: "You're colorful, eh?"

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SVC: "But back to the point, we really do need to be doing something about selling pdfs. When I was down in Austin for a week a year ago Steve Jackson spent one entire day explaining his pdf sales to me and going, 'Its not hurting our hard copy sales. We've got a guy who spends an hour a week going to all the pirate websites sending cease and desist orders.' We've already got that. We got problems with that as it is. Its just been a matter that, we've been so damn busy. We've got a meeting scheduled for after Origins and the number one item on the agenda for that -- well, the whole meeting is called, 'Where are we going?', and the number one item is pdf sales. Now that doesn't mean that every SFB book is going to be on sale on e23 on the Tuesday after Origins. Its probably going to be a book a month. We'll see how it goes. If piracy becomes a real problem, we may not be able to keep doing it. If sales are really good and money is coming in, we may start doing one a week! There's not a business in America that couldn't use the cash coming in, and I'm proudly an American business. But we definitely do want to move in that direction. I've been trying to. Its just literally a matter of how many hours in the day are there to do what I have to do. I had to spend an hour on the phone today arguing with the truck line that dropped our bookbinder. And they're going, 'Well, maybe you damaged it when you unpacked it.' And I'm going, 'No, the shockwatch sticker was broken when it got here.' [Meaning it was subjected to a 25g impact.] Everybody's sitting in front of a computer, right. Think about dropping that computer from six foot high and seeing if it still works. No, no."

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Barry Kirk: "Um, got a question for you. What about a subscription service? Like, there are some music services where I pay a certain monthly subscription or a yearly subscription or whatever and then I can access their entire music library, but if I stop paying the subscription fee, the library goes, 'Poof!, I can't have access to it."

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SVC: "I don't know how to do that. I know how to do pdfs. I know how much work its going to be and that's why it hasn't happened yet. I don't know how to do that. I don't know what the security issues are. It's a business model I'd like to look at and plan to look at, but just sitting here today, I don't have a clue how that works."

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Barry Kirk: "Peter, who is a regular on Star Fleet Battles Online, and I believe he is an expert on that."

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SVC: "Get him to send me a memo that I can have during the meeting and if he shows up at Origins, have him sit down and talk to me."

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Barry Kirk: "He lives in Hawaii. I don't think he's going to be able to make it."

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SVC: "Darn."

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah."

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Paul Franz chuckles: "Maybe you should make a business trip?"

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SVC: "I don't travel all that well. I make really two trips a year: one to see the wolves in October and one to Origins. Going to be tough going to the wolf park this year because Genghis died."

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Barry Kirk: "Who died?"

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SVC: "My wolf."

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Barry Kirk: "Who?"

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SVC: "Genghis Kahn. He was the wolf I visited every year in New Mexico for the last several years."

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Barry Kirk: "Oh."

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SVC: "There's a wolf sanctuary over there where they about fifty-four wolves. Timberwolves, arctic wolves, grey wolves."

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Barry Kirk: "Oh, my. I saw that on your website. There's a wolf sanctuary here in Pennsylvania near Paul's house. My son volunteers there every Sunday."

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SVC: "The one in New Mexico is the only one I've ever seen that lets you bring food in and feed it to the wolves. I go down to the slaughterhouse before we leave and get 400 pounds of organ meat -- hearts, livers, kidneys, things American won't eat."

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Barry Kirk: "Cool."

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SVC: "We take it to the wolves. Its an experience to walk up to a chain link fence to a full grown wolf holding a whole cow liver and he says, 'Just throw it over the fence and you won't get hurt.'"

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Barry Kirk laughs. "That is too cool. Wolves are awesome."

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Paul Franz: "Agreed."

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SVC: "I've only got about ten more minutes before I've got to pack up and get home. Anything else I can answer for you?"

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Paul Franz: "Quick question on the ground forces game that has come up in the past week. You've done some more work on it. How's that coming? I know that's not a top priority."

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SVC: "Its coming out this fall. When I get back from Origins it's the first thing on my list. Petrick and I at the meeting earlier this afternoon were actually making plans for how fast he could get Y3 done and how fast I could get the Marine thing done. And the Marine thing is really bizarre in that we've had the design for fifteen years. The last time we did a survey it came up very high on the survey which startled me. That's why it went onto the next sheet of counters we printed. The reaction of all kinds of people on the bulletin board, people that weren't even on the bulletin board who heard about it on Facebook or whatever have sent me emails about it. It has actually gone from just in the last two or three weeks an optional rule for Star Fleet Battles to its own product line with three or possibly four modules. Its going to have its own place on the bbs. Its going to have its own place on the front page. Its going to have its own everything. Its going to be a product. Its not going to be just something new on the other table while you're playing Star Fleet Battles. And yet, if I have anything to do with it, its going to stay an incredibly simple game. I do not want to turn it into another Star Fleet Battles. I've got one of those."

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Paul Franz: "We don't want to duplicate Advanced Squad Leader. Understood."

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SVC: "Somebody actually sent me a rule today for different kinds of bayonets and I'm going: 'We're not going to have different kinds of SQUADS, guys! Klingon squad, Gorn squad, Fed squad is a SQUAD. It moves like this and it shoots like that and they all do it the same. Now, your Gorn squad's only got four guys in it instead of five, but you can't see that; its counter. I do not want a game that is complex. This is intended to be very fast moving. When I was actually doing close quarter battle training in the Guard four years ago, when I was company commander, everything was speed. Snap, snap, snap! How fast can you do this? The professional Army officer we had coming in and teaching us, because we did know how to do it, always pushed speed. The State Guard started as noncombat militia and after 9-11, we all got pistols and became security guards. After Jessica Lynch got captured we all got rifles. It was training for infantry combat and here I am, way too old, way too fat, running up and down hills with nineteen year olds. It was the most fun I've had since I've been nineteen.

But everything is speed. That was one of the reasons Fed Commander was done the way it was done. I was in CQB training at the time and it was ALL about speed. How much faster can you do this? How much faster can you get through the door? How much faster can you change formation? Because if I can do it faster than you can, then I can do two things before you've figured out the first one.

"I want all of my games from now on to be like Fed Commander. We don't need to sit here and look up which brand of batteries are in your phaser, and look that up on Annex 7G4, sub-annex two. We need to just DO it. 'I see you, I point the gun, I pull the trigger, you're dead!' That's what we need. Roll the die. You're wounded. Okay, fine. I don't want eighteen die roll modifiers and eight pages of exceptions to the rules. There will be special scenario rules, but they will be things saying, 'In this scenario the lake on the map is a lava field. Don't go there, you'll die.' We don't need any more rules than that.

"One last question, Paul, and then I'm going to have to go home."

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Paul Franz: "How has Star Fleet Armada done?"

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SVC: "Very well. It has sold a lot of miniatures because a lot of people who played Starmada always wanted to play Star Trek Starmada and couldn't. Now they can. Daniel Kast is really good at what he does. He knows his game as well as Petrick knows Star Fleet Battles. When he does a new product for us, its not, 'Here's the product,' and then for the next six weeks, 'Here's eighteen changes' every day. Instead, its, 'Here's the product', and maybe three days later, 'Can you go change this four to a five?' and maybe three days after that, 'I was thinking about changing it back to a four, but I'm not going to, so you go to press.' The guy is good!

As an engineer, I always told people, 'You can get more done with quality people and lousy equipment than you can with great equipment and lousy people.'

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Paul Franz: "I agree with that sentiment."

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Barry Kirk: "Yeah."

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SVC: "Paul, how many people tomorrow morning are going to wake up and find out, 'Steve Cole was on Talkshoe and I wasn't? How come Barry got to ask seven questions?' Because the rest of you didn't show up!

I'm not promising to be here every Thursday night or at all between now and Origins, but I just thought I'd give it a try and maybe will try to set something up on intervals in the future.

"Paul, I just want to say again that we are just so impressed and pleased with the amount of work you've done, with the kind of work you've done, with the innovations that you've made, with the, 'Let's do the Warlord software over again and let's do it right this time.' Or, 'They've invented new stuff since that was done. Let's try doing it this way.' I have appreciated the warmth and the hospitality. Let's do this again."

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Paul Franz: "Great! Thank you, Steve, for stopping by."

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FILE ENDS