

Photography by Al Bisasky



Open Gaming (above) on the last day of Origins '77



Gary Gygax and Don Greenwood (above); SPI Trade Booth



LAST TANGO ON STATEN ISLAND



Early this summer, F&M organized a special communications network of smoke signals, carrier pigeons, and insufficient postage to ensure that this issue would have firsthand reports on Origins '77, this year's national wargameconvention. True to form, John Prados, Al Bisasky, and Jack Greene each sent in articles on the Big Event just as we were going to press. To avoid triplication and to present as much material on Origins as possible, we integrated their observations into a single, panoramic report. It is said that two heads are better than one. Here we find that three heads make a game convention...

By John Prados, Al Bisasky, and Jack Greene

John Prados: The previous two 'Origins' conventions were concentrated doses of activity and perceptions that ranged from gaudy colors (even costumes) to intense gaming. This year's Origins, labelled '77' by the New York host Simulations Publications, provided the same components while perhaps lacking some of the intensity of past events... The site of the convention was Wagner College on Staten Island, a pleasant location with an excellent view of New York's lower bay up to The Battery of Manhattan...

Al Bisasky: People who stayed away from the convention because it was being held 'in New York' really blew it. Although part of New York City, Staten Island is actually a rather nice suburb. I was only mugged twice: once by Steve Peek for my article on **Submarine** and the other time by Craig Taylor for a crack I made about his fingers...

Prados: There were three major disadvantages to the location. First, the food at the cafeteria was worse than poor, expensive to boot, and there were no restaurants within walking distance. Second, the site was poorly located for anyone coming from Manhattan by mass transit. Even with the best possible connections between subway, ferry, and bus, the length of the trip was equal to the time it takes a train to go from New York to Baltimore. And third, the exhibition hall was **not** air-conditioned, and became quite hot in the late afternoon. Fortunately, we enjoyed the best weather yet at a national convention. No one has been able to figure out how SPI managed to pull off this coup, coming on top of a sweltering heat wave and a massive power failure that had boded ill for the convention.

Bisasky: I heard they got Simonson to do the weather map.

Prados: Howie Barasch estimated attendance at 2,250, some
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500 more participants than at Origins II... Registration was difficult early Friday afternoon, and again early Saturday morning, and there were particular problems for holders of some doubles dorm registrations...

Bisasky: I thought SPI managed to set up a very efficient and thorough registration process. Unfortunately, no matter how prepared you are, registration does take time and it seems like everybody always arrives to register at the same time...

Jack Greene: Charles Vasey and Geoff Barnard, Editors of **Perfidious Albion**, were there, along with four or five other British gamers. Andrew Smith of Essex, England, was in attendance for his third straight year... Fellow Aussies Dennis Brackman and an Trout came and were asked by Lou Zocchi if New Zealand was a part of Australia. **That** caused a bit of a reaction! I hope the international flavor of Origins continues...

Prados: Most of the tournaments were well-attended. They seemed well-run and satisfying to the participants...

Bisasky: Comments ranged from good to poor... Of course, the winners sang praises and the losers muttered 'shut up and move'...

Prados: There were players who won tournaments for their third year in a row... A few tournaments had start-up difficulties. Greg Costikyan went to some expense to provide boards for the **Diplomacy** tournament after Avalon Hill suddenly refused to furnish the games. The **Diplomacy** tournament turned out to be very good and generated a lot of interest with over fifty quite-involved players...

Greene: Richard Berg ran a fine auction... Taurus' **Raiders of the North** sold for \$10, **Trafalgar** for \$60, and a Battleline copy of WS&M went for \$17. Ironically, Battleline still has original edition copies of WS&M available for \$8...

Prados: The discussion events were popular, but hardly filled to capacity. Best attendance was at the presentation by Israeli General Bren Adan. Adan spoke at length on the October War focusing on the exploits of his division in defeating Egyptian counterattacks on the Chinese Farm and then driving across the Suez to encircle an Egyptian army... The SPI 'Roast' concentrated mostly on specific rules questions, with the repartee coming mostly from SPI staffers. In contrast, the Avalon Hill 'Everything You Wanted To Know' event centered more on business-type questions and reasons for doing or not doing various titles. Interestingly, there was also some discussion of Michael McGuire's 'Wargamer as Nigger' (**F&M** #3); everyone in the room was concerned with the image of wargaming.

Bisasky: This year's 'Charlies' — the Charles Roberts Awards — went to: Best Tactical Game — **Terrible Swift Sword** by Richard Berg (SPI); Best Strategic Game — **Russian Campaign** by John Edwards (AH); Best Graphics — Rich Banner for **Avalanche** (GDW); Best Professional Magazine — **Strategy & Tactics**; and Best Amateur Magazine — **Jagdpantzer/ Battlefield** (now defunct). Tom Shaw of Avalon Hill, designer of **Baseball** and **Football Strategy** and co-designer of **Waterloo**, **Bismark**, **Stalingrad**, and **Afrika Korps**, was elected to the Hall of Fame.

Prados: Almost three times as many ballots were cast for the 'Charlies' this year than at last year's convention. It appears that the awards are growing stronger as industry awards for popularity... Next year there may be a set of professional awards conferred in parallel to the Charles Roberts Awards. This is one result of the formation of the Simulations Designers Guild at a meeting on the night of 22 July. The Guild is an association of professional designers, developers, editors, writers, and artists in the hobby. Members of the first year Board of Directors are Frank Chadwick (President), Randy Reed (Vice-President), Richard Berg (Secretary-Treasurer), and Rick Mataka and John Mansfield as At-Large members.

Greene: The one aspect of the hobby that really struck me at Origins '77 is that this 'hobby' is a **business**...

Bisasky: The trade show was almost twice the size of the one at Origins II. I think that's a good sign; it shows that the hobby and industry are growing — which can only be for the better... There was a large increase in the number of miniatures and

fantasy dealers and in the number of retailers selling hobby-related books and publications...

Prados: Conspicuous by their absence, however, were Morning-side, Taurus Games, and Simulations Canada.

Greene: The game buyers were not as excited at Origins '77. There was a much more mature and restrained attitude. At Origins II, there was a buying frenzy when the convention opened. This year people shopped around before they bought...

Prados: In a way, Origins '77 was the convention of Pacific Theater games: Battleline came out with **Flat Top**; Avalon Hill had a Pacific version of **War At Sea** called **Victory In the Pacific**; GDW had my own **Pearl Harbor**; and SPI would have had their monster **War in the Pacific**, but it was behind schedule... There were also many other games on different topics: GDW presented **Raphia**, the first of their '120 Series' (120 counters and 120 minutes to play), along with a new **Europa** entry, **Case White** (Poland), a rework of John Hill's **Bar Lev**, and new boxed versions of Conflict's **Kasserine Pass** and **Yalu** with mounted mapboards... Battleline turned up with **Objective Atlanta**, a Civil War game using the **Shenandoah** system, a sophisticated space game called **Alpha Omega**, and **Dauntless**, a Pacific extension of **Air Force**...

Greene: Excalibre Games had four new pouch games — the Panzer Battle Series — which are much improved over their earlier Tunis 1943 series.

Prados: Avalon Hill brought out John Hill's (no relation) **Squad Leader**, a tactical level World War II. game with scenarios for both Russian and Western Fronts, and a railroad monopoly game called **Rail Baron**... SPI debuted their Power Politics Series game on the Reformation/Counter-reformation, **A Mighty Fortress**, and **Fulda Gap**...

Greene: SDC sent Dana and Sara Lombardy out from the West Coast. The playtest map for **Kesselschlacht**, their proposed company-level game on the Battle of Stalingrad, was on display and got a lot of attention...

Bisasky: That map was really impressive — hugh and very nicely done. I hope the game turns out to be the picture Dana painted for me.

Prados: With all the new material presented, it's unfortunate that better provisions were not made for open gaming. The dining hall was available for this purpose, as were the lounges in the dorms, but there were limitations to their use. Nevertheless, a good deal of open gaming went on pretty continuously, often until all hours in the dorms...

Greene: Evenings were filled with drink, dope and game playing by all types of people — who were often united only by their being virtually all male, all white, and all game players. All in all, it was a fun weekend...

Bisasky: There were small snags, little problems — things found at every convention no matter how well it is planned... The impressions I got was that the SPI convention staff tried to make Origins '77 a success and did a pretty respectable job...

Prados: Tom Shaw felt this Origins ran about the same as the previous one held at Baltimore. Dana Lombardy thought this year's convention was slower. Redmond Simonson thought things were going as well as he had expected...

Bisasky: Next year, Origins moves to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. It will be under the direction of the Detroit wargamers who do the MICHICONS...

Prados: Overall, Origins '77 was quite a pleasant experience, and left the hopes that next year's Origins will turn out as well... Ann Arbor had better have a good cafeteria, however...

