

Origins Report



Mark Herman tenderly holds up Miss G.I. Jane, Victory's "hottest" product at the convention.

Origins '87 Reports

A View From the Trenches

by Neal C. Schlaffer

The dust has settled and the last tired gamer has gone home. It's time for a postscript on the latest wargame convention, Origins '87, held over the 2nd through 5th of July. I have to say that, even though the garners paid more for their rooms and it did cost more to get in the doors this year, the site for Origins '87 was one of the best yet. Even though it was not all under one roof, it was not all that inconvenient (and the air conditioning worked).

The convention staff were very courteous and generally there were few, if any, major problems. One problem which did arise a few times was garners dressed in costumes. Didn't they read the pre-reg package? When told to change or leave they became quite belligerent. Many questions could have been answered by reading the booklet handed out with each package. I know for a fact that there was more than a little confusion with the room codes. Some of the blame can be laid on the number of errors in the booklet while others to last minute changes. Luckily, we all had a fine staff to answer our questions or to complain to.

The event ticket sales were

what can only be described as a zoo. The policy of selling the following day's tickets starting at 6:00pm the day before provided long lines, frustration, and many unhappy garners. The line for advanced ticket sales usually started forming around 4:00pm. not only were garners compelled to wait in a long queue, but when it finally came their turn, those people near the back of the line usually had waited for naught. Most of the events they had wanted were now sold out. It was also impossible for those garners involved with other events to purchase tickets. The only saving grace was the fact that the event givers had approximately 50% of the ticket holders failing to show up at the event. It is my hope this policy will be changed at next year's convention. There is a lesson in there for the general gaming population, and one day they will learn it: *pre-registration forms are there for you to use!*

The only fault I noticed was the poor number of miniatures events given. It appears that once again, they shunned the Origins convention. However, given the face that Historicon was being held just two short weeks after Origins, I feel we can forgive them.

All the big name companies were in attendance at the Exhibitor Area. The only complaint I heard was, the dealers area could have remained open a few extra hours each day for those garners who were tied up with events and therefore had little time to browse around. Garners have to remember, the

people who staff the booths have things to do also, like run events, etc.

The Avalon Hill Game Company had several new releases. Topping the list was **Platoon**, a game of man-to-man combat in Vietnam and based on the hit movie. With only one page of rules (front and back) it is sure to appeal to the beginning gamer as well as veterans needing a break in 100 page rulesbooks. I have it on good authority that the new deluxe ASL module, **Hedgerow Hell**, was the company's best seller. Avalon Hill also continued supplying the gaming public with solitaire games. Their latest, **Patton's Best and Raid on St. Nazaire**, are both graphically pleasing and exciting to play. Also new was **Britannia**, a multi-player game which covers 1000 years of battles and mayhem in **Perfidious Albion**.

Victory Games came to the show with what has to be the most opportune release, **Central America**. Does it really have 68 pages of basic rules, 68 pages of advanced rules and a 68 page scenario booklet? I did not get a chance to examine it that closely. Rumor has it that there is an Oliver North counter in the game. Well, the **G. I. Jane Calendar** outsold just about anything else at the show anyway, so I guess Victory Games can't complain.

West End Games has a prototype copy of their new man-to-man WWII game, **Soldiers** (also the title of SPI's tactical WWI game). Additionally, they released their

Richard Berg and Keith Poulter had nothing off the tops of their heads to say for these F&M photos.



Ed Bever of Microprose doesn't approve of software pirates, but recommends his own game of the same name.



second edition of **Paranoia**. It was also noted that there were a couple of Imperial Storm Troopers guarding the booth to draw attention to their new **Star Wars** game. I guess they got a waiver from the no costume rule...

Game Designers' Workshop was doing well with their **Air Superiority** game which will soon be joined by the ground attack game. I understand it is more complex than **Flight Leader**, but just as playable. **Scorched Earth** had very hot sales, too, at \$60 a pop.

Microprose Software was present with all of their fine simulations software. Topping the list and drawing the big crowds around their booth was their new release, **Pirates**, which is a combination strategy-arcade-text adventure game.

TSR, Inc. released their new wargame **Onslaught** with quite a splash. Their latest product is heralded as a simple, enjoyable "4 hour" wargame. They held several well attended demonstrations and copies could be seen everywhere in the open gaming areas. This is a good sign for TSR's SPI line.

Task Force Games' new release, **Viceroy's** [see Player's Notes last issue -JS], was turning a few heads. It looks like a good multi-player stab-'em-in-the-back kind of game.

The auction was held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel in what has to be one of the smallest rooms to ever hold an auction. I'm not complaining, because I was one of the auctioneers and I was standing a lot anyway, but it was quite a problem for those who had to remain standing during one of the

marathon sessions. Most of the true collector's items, including some of the Charles Roberts collection, were auctioned off during the special collectors session held Saturday night. A copy of **Trafalgar** was purchased by one determined bidder for \$225.00. The bidding was also quite brisk for copies of **War in the Pacific** (SPI) with the highest price for that one at \$195.00. Several copies of **War in Europe** and **Siege of Jerusalem** also provided for some very competitive bidding.

Origins '87 - A Convention Comes of Age

by Peter P. Perla

I'm no expert on Origins conventions. I've only been to two, and both of those have been in Baltimore. From what I saw at this year's gathering of the faithful and what I've read about past Origins conventions, especially last year's L.A. success, Origins has become a class act. Even more importantly, it has done so without losing the unique and even bizarre sense of alternate realities that are so fundamental to the wargaming (must I say *Adventure Gaming*?) hobby. This year's location, in the heart of the Baltimore Inner Harbor, allowed gamers to revel in their hexagons, lead figures, or wild imaginings a literal stone's throw from throngs of lesser mortals stuffing their faces with clams and fries, touring the aquarium or riding boats around the harbor. Such locations are likely to become more a part of the Origins convention experience in the future

One of the most interesting things about Origins is the unique opportunity it presents for experiencing the hobby's past, present, and future, all in one place (more or less) and at the same time. Unfortunately, I never did actually get to play a game, but I did spend a lot of time in the dealer area and in the auctions managed by the Game Collector's Guild.

For an historical board wargamer, the present was not very exciting at this Origins. There did not seem to be any really big hits, despite Milton Bradley's promotion of its new **Shogun**, nor many new surprises. The closest thing I saw to an omnipresent game box may have been Victory Games' **Central America** on Saturday afternoon. Even so, some dealers seemed pleased (Keith Poulter said that Friday was 3W's best day at a convention yet, and **F&M** #53 and **Battleplan** #2 both sold out in 90 minutes on the first day!).

For real excitement, I looked to the past, specifically to the auction, hosted by Bill Jaffe. If you've never experienced one of these crosses between a seminar on the history of games and an experiment in controlled feeding frenzy, you haven't lived. Jaffe, the chief auctioneer, was great. His knowledge of games and garnering was only matched by his wit and endurance. The regular auction was fun and rowdy, and I picked up an almost-mint (one lousy counter missing!) copy of **Gettysburg '77** (for that long imagined redesign I've contemplated) for a mere \$4.00. The collector's auction Saturday was even more fun, if less rowdy, and



Frank Chadwick really stands behind his company name. Their release of *Scorched Earth* help provide the big smile seen in this picture.



Roger Keating and Ian Trout of SSG give a "thumbs up" on their new product: *Battles for Normandy*.

much more expensive (\$50.00 for mint copies of the original English version of *Kingmaker* and *Road to Washington*).

So much for the past. What of the future? I don't want to get tangled up in the debate over computer vs. board wargames, but Dave O'Conner of Panther Games showed me a big part of the future in the forerunner of a new generation of games for the new generation of home computers. **Fire Brigade**, (dealing with the battles around Kiev in 1943) for the Amiga and Macintosh has taken advantage of the power of these new machines to come the closest yet to putting the player in the command post. On top of this brilliant success with **Trial of Strength**, which broke new ground in boardgame modeling of command structures, O'Conner is leading the way toward truly simulating the player's role as commander (if only I had an Amiga!).

I guess that's it for this year. The classic roots of the past continue to branch and grow in new and sometimes surprising directions. But perhaps I wax too poetic. There's a lot of life left in gaming, doomsayers notwithstanding. The incredible diversity of the hobby, so evident in Baltimore, is a strength, not a Weakness. As long as there is imagination, there will be gamers. We need only show them where to play.

The Case for Fleas

by Stephen Hall

I've just returned from the

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Origins convention over the 4th of July weekend in Baltimore, and while I will leave the more general impression to other reporters, there is one particular issue that seems to cry out for reflection: the outlawing of Flea Market activities. Both the registration brochure and the convention program sternly warned all attendees that say unauthorized selling would be swiftly dealt with by the authorities (not just convention authorities, but *civil* authorities!). The policy seemed effective; I did not see a single sidewalk seller during my stay.

Atlanticon's hostility to flea market activities is apparently grounded in the belief that it is haphazard and unsightly, and thus detracts from the image of orderliness that the commercial interests in our hobby (read: GAMA, the Game Manufacturers' Association, who own and award Origins to different hosting groups like Atlanticon) want to project. A further commonly held belief is that the exhibitors resent Flea Markets because they absorb money that would otherwise be spent on new products, and that in many instances, the used games directly compete with products currently in the retail distribution chain. Exhibitors pay sizeable fees for their displays, and don't like to see ordinary people selling the same product on the streets with no overhead.

The trend toward holding Origins convention in hotels and convention centers creates further pressure to suppress Flea Markets. They cause few problems on college campuses, but when amateurs

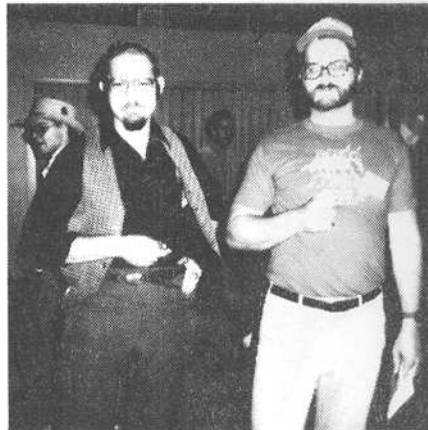
display wares outside hotels and convention centers, they are considered peddlers, an activity which is often tightly controlled by city officials. Thus, the hostility of convention organizers to the Flea Markets is a rational result of fear of offending the local officialdom.

I Hear Five. Who'll Give me Six?

Nevertheless, gamers want to buy and sell used games, consequently the only available outlet for this urge is the auction. Although the majority of convention attendees pay no attention to the auction, it is an exciting and often exhausting fixture of every convention. Here you can see every known game put up for sale, as well as old magazines and miniature figures. The products range from the ridiculous (**Kreigspiel**, or **Dixie and Tito** without the S&T's) to the sublime (**Trafalgar** and first edition classics). The dealers apparently tolerate the auction because it is relatively organized, although many of the games auctioned are identical in condition as well as name to the products in the Exhibitor Area.

The auction, however, has many faults. For several reasons, it is a buyers' market. Many items are sold for the initial asking price (i.e., the "minimum bid"), which is less than the seller had hoped to obtain. Partly because there is no other outlet for used games, the auction is usually swamped with items, leading to marathon selling sessions and rapid fire tactics on the part of

A demonstration of TSR's newest SPI Brand title: Onslaught. A fun little France 1944 game.



Rex Martin, Editor of The General, & Don Greenwood of Avalon Hill.



the auctioneers that do not allow items to fairly seek their market price. In additions, the products are offered up at the auctioneer's whim, rather than on a first come, first served basis. Although sellers were urged to pre-register their products this year, those that did failed to receive the benefit of earlier sales in the auction. Because of a lack of organization at this year's Origins (and, unfortunately, storage space), the products registered first were actually *penalized* by being pushed to the back and thus became the *last* items sold!

The buyers are also at some disadvantage, in that they cannot examine the products prior to sale. Although the condition of the product is announced before it is auctioned, a buyer has to be familiar with the product to know what he is bidding for. In many ways, it can be a total crap shoot.

Compounding all other problems, their auction staff is under great pressure to operate soundly and efficiently. Some buyers run up huge tabs, and the many sellers are eager to get their payoffs. It is all bustling, good natured fun, and the auctioneers are well rewarded for their labor, but the burden on buyers, sellers, and the auctioneers is exacerbated by the lack of a Flea Market to serve as an alternate outlet for the many used games to be sold.

Free the Flea

When Flea Marketing is allowed, it is a great advantage to both the buyer and the seller. The buyer is able to examine the game to

determine his interest in it, and to see just what condition it is in. The seller can set his price and either haggle over it, or await the buyer who will meet it. Although an auction is perhaps more successful at determining the market price of an item, the auction is equally likely to underprice an item due to the environmental pressures of the auction. The seller can also offer up whatever quantity of games he wants to bring to market, rather than being limited, as the auction usually is, to a fixed maximum number of items.

The Flea Market is also an extraordinarily successful medium for bringing gamers together to become acquainted. Many of the convention activities, not the least of which is the auction, are competitive settings where attendees are trying to get the better of their opponents. At the flea market, conversation is easy, people discover common interests and geographical proximity, and much useful information is exchanged. Flea Markets, despite the opinions of their detractors, improve the hobby by increasing communication between gamers.

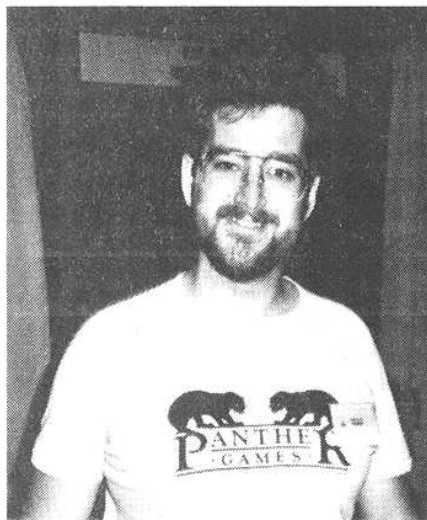
As suggested above, the Flea Market and the auction can work well in tandem, where the market provides the vehicle for moving the ordinary, low value product. Too many items in the auction sell for the \$1.00 minimum bid. This arduous parade of marginalia is wearing on the auctioneer and audience alike, who are there not to haggle over the nth copy of Luftwaffe but are seeking the occasional out-of-print Kursk or a

mint condition Next War. Not every seller wants to devote several hours to overseeing his sales; many are quite pleased to reward the auctioneer for that duty. But when flea markets are expected, the auction managers can increase the registration fee to \$1.00, effectively wiping out the deluge of \$1.00 and \$2.00 games *sans* magazine.

Toleration of Flea Market activity may not be practical at the urban convention sites being selected by organizers of recent Origins conventions. But toleration is not the answer; organization and promotion will be required to legitimize Flea Marketeering. Just as the auction is allocated space for duration of the convention, so, too, should there be a dedicated Flea Market room, equipped with enough tables to support a dozen sellers at a time. The tables would be rented by the hour to sellers, who would register for the time and duration of use. A two or three hour maximum might be necessary to accommodate all sellers, but the advantage for the seller in knowing the timing of his market window is obvious.

Garners attending conventions are treated to a vast array of options, which is what makes them so appealing to the hobbyist. Dealer exhibits, lectures, demonstrations, tournaments, and the auction all satisfy the curiosity and desire for entertainment that every attendee brings with him to the convention. A formal Flea Market operation would add another popular attraction to the gamer who is looking for a bargain or an out-of-print game, or who wants to relieve himself of games he no longer

A typical wargamer maneuvering the Axis forces in a game of Russian Campaign.



Dave O'Conner of Panther Games beams with joy over the reception Fire Brigade received. Watch for it coming soon!

intends to play. Future convention organizers, beginning with next year's Origins/GenCon extravaganza, should seriously consider an organized approach to Flea Marketing. We, the people, would be eternally grateful.

Don't Count Your Fleas Before They're Scratched

*A Rebuttal
by Alan Emrich*

Stephen Hall makes some interesting points in his article The Case for Fleas, but not all of his information is wholly accurate nor current. Allow me to correct and elaborate a few points on what is a very legitimate issue facing convention going gamers.

At this year's Origins, held in Downtown Baltimore, *it is a crime* to "peddle." Now, Atlanticon, the organizers, could either strongly discourage Flea Markets, or be the first Origins to feature surprise arrests of innocent gamers just doing what they always do, Flea Marketing their unwanted games. I don't believe Atlanticon would endorse the accusation that Flea Markets are "haphazard and unsightly" (if that were cause to cancel an activity, would there be any role-playing events at a game convention?).

Outside the laws of Baltimore, you can probably expect that there will be no Flea Markets at GenCon/Origins next year, just because TSR, Inc. doesn't ever have Flea Markets at GenCon. I can tell you that the reason we did not have Flea Markets at L.A. Origins last

year (I was the Convention Manager for that show), was that we were contractually obligated by GAMA *not* to have them. Now we run three convention per year, all in nice hotels in Downtown areas of Los Angeles, and we feature Flea Markets at *every* one. (A separate Flea Market room, by the way, is a bad suggestion. It is far better to set up Flea Market tables along a convention's main thoroughfare so every wandering gamer will see them). The charge that "the hostility of convention organizers to the Flea Market is a rational result of fear of offending the local officialdom" is pretty far fetched. We all bend the laws every time we drive a car or have a garage sale. Does anyone *really think* that game convention organizers beg the police, fire department and tax assessors to come and keep law and order at their shows? No, it's the old game of what they don't know won't hurt them. In fact, the only time I've ever seen a civic official harass people at a game convention is every year at GenCon, when they come to collect state sales taxes from exhibitors visiting Wisconsin for the weekend.

Now, I agree that Auctions cannot accommodate every seller, so there is a lot limit for individuals. Whoever told Mr. Hall that "Auctioneers are well rewarded for their labor" must be trying to sell him a bridge in New York. I've been the Auctioneer at over twenty conventions, and I, like most independent game convention Auctioneers, work for the pleasure of it (though the convention staff is good enough to put out a jar labeled

"tips for the Auctioneer," it usually brings in enough money to take the auction staff out for a post convention dinner). I know the Game Collectors' Guild makes some serious money by doing auctions, but not your average local game convention Auctioneer.

Exhibitor concerns about competition will always exist. The trick is to find a convention more dedicated to the gamer than the dealer. At our STRATEGICON conventions, we manage to have an Auction, Flea Market and video arcade games, and our Exhibitors still clamor to attend the next show. Sales are good for them. So good, in fact, that discounting and price wars go on in the Dealer Room (albeit somewhat subsidized by the convention in the form of a generous prize dollar program and 100% return on prize dollars redeemed by Exhibitors).

I agree that there should be Flea Marketing at Origins. So much so that I started a petition at this year's show for it, and presented to the President of GAMA myself (this was easy for me as I am Vice-President of GAMA). Helena Rubinstein of West End Games (GAMA President) and I have met and discussed this very issue, and we support the idea of bringing back Flea Markets to Origins, leaving the final decision to each local Origins convention organizer. If approved by the board and officers, so it shall be, and so I shall fight for it. Others who feel strongly about this should write directly to the President of GAMA, Helena Rubinstein, c/o West End Games, 251 W. 30th St., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10001.