

## THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

One of the most unusual events that this industry has witnessed took place this summer, - The Charles Roberts Auction. Charles Roberts, founder and first President of Avalon Hill, sold off his private collection of mint condition games, mostly circa 1962-3, including a copy of the original TACTICS first produced in 1954, which sold for \$1200. For the hardcore game collector, I can think of only two other events that could rival this auction. That would be if Avalon Hill itself were to sell off the examples of their products or one of the collector's who has a virtually complete collection of early games were to do the same.

To give you an idea of some of the prices that these signed and certificated games went for, let me quote some high and low bids. A copy of DISPATCHER went for \$351, another copy went for \$160. A Hex version of GETTYSBURG went for \$165, TRUCKS, TRAINS, BOATS, & PLANES went for \$130, D-DAY went for anywhere from \$35 to \$57, and BISMARCK went for \$180. A set of counters and rules only to TACTICS went for \$226.68!

On TACTICS, it must be understood that I have knowledge of only 6 copies to be in existence of which 3 are in poor condition. Over \$11,000 exchanged hands for 100+ games and items. A beautiful full color catalogue on the games has been produced and is available for \$5.00 from Peter Bromley, P.O. Box 5987, Chicago, Ill. 60680.

So that are the cold facts. The story on how this all came about is equally fascinating. The roots of the auction lies with the "Game Collector's Guild", (P.O. Box 2675, Washington D.C., 20013). This group, whose President is Bill Jaffe, has been in existence for some years now, though maintaining a low profile. Members are always present at the game show auctions; they are slowly systemizing

of 2nd-hand and out of print games the pricing structure^in the Hobby; and they look for what they want at the price they think is fair. So, there was in existence a core group of individuals who value games and generated an almost professional "game collectionist" attitude.

I was back East for Origins '82 and had the opportunity to interview Charles Roberts. Before going to his home I was asking around at Avalon Hill, to the staff, if they had any particular questions they wanted me to field. One point, raised by Alan Moon, was if any copies of TACTICS still existed, as one Collector had offered \$1,000 for the Avalon Hill copy of it. To make a long story short, I mentioned it to Charles Roberts at the time of the interview, and later, he was to get back in touch with me. He felt that this was a good time to auction of his collection, he had inventoried it, and, while at Origins '82, I had made contact with individuals who would be interested in participating in an auction of his games. The final formula saw me cast in the role of agent and co-ordinator (working very closely with Bill Jaffe) and that approximately half of the games would be sold by mail auction and the other half by public auction at Origins.

It should be noted that some of the hardcore collectionist will not participate in mail bids. The main reasons for this attitude is that by-mail auctions tend to generate higher prices for items and the fear exists that the person conducting the auction can be "gotten too." by other participants and prices can be affected thereby. I insisted upon having half the games go by-mail auction as I realized that not every collectionist would or could attend Origins '83, where the public auction was to be held.

The atmosphere at the Origins '83 auction was not the circus-gong show auction attitude exhibited at the regular game show auction. For example, at Origins '83, the most popular event was the regular auction which could not run enough hours to satisfy everyone. Buyers in there were happy to get a copy of UPSCOPE for \$3 or A battered copy Parker Bros' 1863 for \$30. The crowd at the Roberts' auction was much quieter, much much smaller, and thoughtful. Many of the participants were really investors as well as collectionists.

The other dimension to this event is that all the games were already sold. That is, if an item did not sell at the two auctions they were to be bought at minimum prices set before hand by a group of individuals who approached Charles Roberts early on in the auction. This was the investment aspect of the auction. For example, MANAGEMENT did not do well at the auction considering that there were 11 copies of it to be sold. So a few copies remained afterwards. These particular copies, bought in bloc, will probably reappear in 5-10 years time at various auctions and will most likely fetch prices even higher then what they went for this summer

To most of us who play games, and don't really collect, this all sounds incredible. But it is one of the smaller, yet important aspects to the Hobby. It must be understood that in the '70's there was a group labelled "collectors", e.g. they would buy anything that appeared on the market. Eventually the glut of games from various companies killed this group off and we all became more selective. This group was probably born from the '60's when 1 or 2 new games a year was the only fare on the menu. So when suddenly

there were more games out there (the product or curse of SPI to a large degree)  
one bought any and everything that appeared. This new, much  
smaller group of collectionist is more akin to the art collector  
who sits back and admires, especially many of the early well  
put together games like TRAFALGAR or the classic AH games.  
They are going to remain and grow with us for years.

I must pass on one fantasy that I had at the height of all this.  
Most collectionists types want mint games with unpunched counters.  
I had a vision of bidding on TACTICS, buying it, and then opening  
it up and punching the pieces out and playing it right then and  
there! Not only would my life had been endangered but I could  
have been responsible for several cardiac arrests. It would  
have also been an expensive "joke".