



This board game accurately forecast the demise of the Soviet Union. (AP Laserphoto)

# Game Depicting Downfall of Soviet Invented before Union Came Apart

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SMETHPORT, Pa. — Past. Hey, buddy. Wanna good deal on the Kremlin? For a few million rubles, it's yours.

KGB Headquarters, the Bolshoi Theatre and Gorky Park are available, too.

These Soviet landmarks, and more, can be yours if the price is right in "Moscow! Auction!" a board game invented by a Smethport high school teacher and auctioneer.

"The start of the game was more than 15 months ago. I wasn't doing research to do a game to sell. I was doing research to do a game for my students," said Ross Porter, who teaches political science, world history and geography at Smethport Area High School.

"The game went on the assumption that the communist government would fail," Porter said. When the Soviet Union began crumbling and in October the first real auction was held in Moscow, Porter had turned prophet.

To Porter, the sale of Soviet properties is the ultimate auction. He runs the Porter Trade Wind Auction Company and dabbles in a professional fantasy by listing each property for sale with a logo from his real business.

Porter took a group of students to the Soviet Union in 1990 and found the government "a house of cards." To illustrate what could happen, and eventually started happening, he developed the game.

"I had it with my students playing in March 1991," Porter said. "Sometime by the end of the month, it was so popular from a game point of view that I decided to produce it."

On an Apple computer, he drew up the board, taking an occasional liberty with geography so the landmarks could fit on a circular map. A Pittsburgh firm prints color plates of the game which are mounted on a four-fold board at a Buffalo, N.Y., box company.

The game is for sale in a few Eastern markets, primarily Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., with most shipping done from his home.

"Our house has turned from a very nice Victorian home with period furniture to a game factory," Porter said. He has spent the Christ-

mas shopping season at a kiosk in the Carousel Center mall in Syracuse, N.Y.

On a return trip to the Soviet Union in June, he smuggled in two copies of the game by replacing the cardboard backs of legal pad holders with game pieces and property cards.

The Kremlin dominates the center of the 19-by-19 game board, and is circled by headquarters of the Tass news agency, St. Basil's Cathedral and the GUM department store. The outer ring has KGB headquarters, the airport and the Capitalism Cafe, with a distinct, arched "C" that looks like half a McDonald's logo.

Players "travel" to each site by airplane. But if the KGB arrives at the sale site before the end of the auction, using only cars and the subway, it gets the commission. Players rotate roles as auctioneer and KGB.

Escape cards can save the commissions. Items from the black market provide wild cards:

"You are chased by a butcher for taking photos of food lines. Sell photos to US magazine for 2 Million Rubles," one card reads.

"It really happened to me," said Porter, who has taken a sabbatical from school to promote the game. "Another lady came out and yelled at me for taking photos of the lines (at a women's clothing store). I also inadvertently got a picture of her butt."

Another card reads: "Visit a Lenin Monument. Lose a turn for being a hypocrite."

One showing an illustration of Yeltsin on the back of a military tank during the August coup attempt says: "Stand up for Democracy. Earn 2 extra turns & the leadership of the Russian people."

In the hygiene department: "Discover a clean toilet. Receive 2 Million R from each of the other Buyers."

Porter calls his game division the "Porter Planet-3 Games Co." with goods "expressly designed for residents of the third planet from the sun." The game's logo is a hammer and sickle with an auctioneer's gavel and a broken blade.

Key phrases are in both English and Russian, but one phrase on the game's logo and on all the property cards is found only in Russian.

"It was the translator's choice of words," Porter said. "The party's over. The party's liquidated."

Which is exactly the object of the game.