



I get asked several times each year “What do I click on to see the actual covers?” or “Where are the pictures of the covers?” It’s clear some explanation is needed.

First, just what are ‘blind auctions’? When you only have the lot descriptions to go on, and can’t see the actual covers, *that’s* a blind auction. Since the inception of collecting covers, auctions have become one of the integral pillars of the hobby...and almost all such auctions are blind auctions. Indeed, I’m not aware of any that aren’t, except the live auctions featured at conventions, swapfests, and the like.

The question that immediately comes to mind, then, especially from newer collectors, is ‘Why?’ Well, there are a number of reasons...and advantages, all serving to offset the disadvantage of not being able to see the covers before bidding.

First and foremost, there are just too many covers to run pictures of everything. Most auctions feature hundreds, even thousands of covers. My own auction, for example offers app. 2,000 covers weekly. Imagine the scanning and posting time that would require. And, from experience, I can verify that that is a very tedious and time-consuming process, at least I’ve found it so.

For the clubs which have auctions accompanying their hard-copy bulletins, it would also be far too costly, and the resulting auction would be, at a minimum, several times larger than the actual bulletin. That would greatly increase paper and postage costs, and most clubs already have problems keeping up with normal costs. Additionally, photos of auction covers would have to be in color, and the ensuing cost of printer ink cartridges, or professional printing costs, would prohibitive just by itself.

With blind auctions, you have to be willing to take your chances, but collectors already do the same thing all the time when trading. And, the big advantage of such auctions is that the eventual lot prices are substantially lower than those realized in live, in-person auctions. So, for example, I might only find 3 or four covers that I actually need in that lot of 10 covers, but I only spent a couple of dollars on a particular lot that otherwise would probably gone for much more in a live auction, and I don’t have other bidders constantly upping the price.

Another obvious advantage of the blind auction is the convenience. Rather than you having to travel to the auction, the auction comes straight to your mailbox or computer...with no accompanying travel, lodging, and dining out costs to be incurred. As a new collector, I used to gloat about all the great covers I came away with from conventions...and they were all FREE!...except it cost me several hundred dollars just to be there.

Blind auctions are also much more frequent. Those live auctions, such as RMS, UES, AMCAL, and so on, only happen once a year, while those blind auctions are available virtually year-round, whether on a weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly basis. No need to wait twelve months for those hoped for lots.

And, along with that additional frequency comes less pressure. With the one-time live auctions, you definitely experience pressure to buy “something”, if only to justify the time and expense spent in traveling to, and staying at, the convention, swapfest, etc. With frequent blind auctions available to you, the pressure is off. If you don’t like this week’s or this month’s offerings, no problem. Another auction is right around the corner. Those blind auctions, by the way, are also what most of your local regional clubs depend on to pay the bills!

The blind auctions are also more ‘timely’. You’re never going to ‘arrive late’ at a blind auction. You have anywhere from a week to a month or more to peruse the lots and decide on your bids. You needn’t worry about cancelled flights, derailed trains, bus strikes, lost room reservations, or just congested traffic conditions delaying your arrival. They’re also more timely in the sense that they’re much more closely geared to match your peak periods of interest, again because they’re more frequent.

You just started a new category that you’re very enthusiastic about, but it’s October, and your next live auction isn’t until August. But... You have access to several blind auctions before then. Or, perhaps it’s September, and you’d like to send out Christmas covers with your Christmas cards in December. No big live auctions coming up. Still, again, you always have those several blind auctions.

While the one-time live auctions certainly tend to be bigger than any of the single blind auctions, at least some of the latter are actually bigger and offer a greater variety when considered on an annual basis. A monthly blind auction, for example, may only feature 100 lots, but in 12 months that amounts to 1,200 lots!

That also normally translates into a larger variety, as well. The blind auctions, again taken on an annual basis, tend to offer a wider array of categories, and thus you normally have a greater chance at finding what you’re looking for, unless you’re looking for something spectacular, such as whole collections or a Lindbergh, which are usually offered only at the big live auctions (because they’ll bring higher prices there).

And there’s more! How about less competition? I’m not privy to all the auction participation stats, but I can guarantee that the number of collectors bidding in any single blind auction isn’t anywhere near the “crowds” at the live auctions. Less competition = greater chance of your bids winning.

The ideal blind auction participant...well, the ideal any type of auction participant...is a collector who has lots of categories and smallish collections. That collector will be able to use more of what he or she gets in auction lots and, thus, will make much more efficient use of both the auctions and offerings.

Collecting in lots of different categories also means that many of those purchased covers that you find you already have can then be used in your ‘other’ collections. Five covers of the 10-cover Chinese Restaurant lot you purchased are new to you, for example. One of the remaining five is a Full-Length that you can use in your Full-Length collection; two of the others have dragons...Ohhhh! They go in your dragon collection; one has a tiki, thus qualifying for your Tiki collection, and so on.

The overall point here is that collectors shouldn’t disregard blind auctions because the actual covers can’t be seen beforehand. Even in live auctions, most of the covers can’t be seen unless they’re in very small lots, such as a page of Midgets. Normally, the lots are bundled in such a way as to prevent, understandably, collectors from pawing through the individual covers. So, you ‘pays your money and takes your chances’...and isn’t that life?