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# Shades!

by  
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Here's a topic that every collector has to face sooner or later. You have two covers, exactly the same, except one's darker than the other...same color, just different shades. What do you do? Do you keep one and put the other in your trading stock. Do you keep one a toss the other away? Do you keep both as two legitimately different colors? Hmmmm...

Judging from my own experience, most such shading variations are to be seen in the basic background color of the cover, which is normally the biggest part of the cover's outside surface, and, thus, the most readily notable portion. In actual fact, if one cover is lighter than another it's almost always the case that every color is lighter on the cover—background color, foreground color, text, graphics, etc. It should be noted, though, that the shade variations in colors that we're concerned with here don't have anything to do with the color or shade of the striker. The latter is an entirely different topic and has been the subject of an entirely different discussions elsewhere.

Well, what causes these shade variations, anyway? There are two major factors. The most common cause is in the manufacturing process. The ink begins to run out during the printing process...less ink = lighter shades. The printer has to reload the ink during a run...and the new batch of ink isn't quite the same shade as the previous batch, etc.

It's a ticklish situation, since shade variations may be anywhere from very slight to very significant. Consequently, there is no hard and fast rule within the hobby to cover it. There are just too many possibilities on the one hand, compounded by too many opinions on the other. Thus, it's one of those gray areas in the hobby where everyone makes his or her own individual decision on the matter. And that, of course, is part of the freedom that we enjoy in phillumeny. We can put anything we want into our own collections, even making up entirely new categories, definitions, and standards to fit our interests and whims.

Once we go beyond our own collections, though, we have to consider the opinions of other collectors. Is that trader going to see those two covers you sent him as two different covers? Or not? Since the latter may lead to some frustration, and resulting friction, between you and he, it's something that would have to be straightened out ahead of time.

The second major cause of shade variations is fading from sunlight. When that *is* the cause, it's usually pretty easy to spot because the fading is not uniform all across the cover's surface...and that's because when the process was taking place, the cover was normally still a matchbook, so one side of the cover may not have been exposed to that light. I've noticed that if there's any part of the cover *not* faded, it will normally be the area around the striker and/or the top flap. Again, that because it matchbook form, those two areas are the least likely to be subjected to continuing strong light.

Personally, I count differently shaded covers as separate, distinct, collectible covers *only* 1) if it's a manufacturing difference, and 2) if the shading difference is obvious and outstanding. And, regardless of the actual cause, I try *not* to send both to a trader, since he may simply see the second as an unwanted dupe of the first.

It's all something to take into account when collecting, and I think every collector has to be fairly careful to 'tip-toe' through the standards he or she depends on. It's only my opinion, but your standards shouldn't be *too* easy, here, or you open yourself to accusations of artificially inflating your collection numbers.

