

## Dealing With

Few things are as frustrating to a collector as holding a much-needed cover in one's hand only to either see it disintegrate before your eyes or find that it has been inadvertently seriously damaged in some way...and often the culprit is the collector, himself, which only makes the frustration worse—you're even denied the outlet of blaming someone else! So, let's take a look at what we can and can't do to deal with such problems as this...and be sure and check out this issue's relevant *Insta-Poll*.

First, let's deal with those covers that are already damaged when you receive them. In most cases, unfortunately, there's nothing you can do. Covers that have been bobtailed, written on in ink on the outside, bent to such an extent that the outside veneer has been broken, faded by sunlight, stained by any number of substances, etc. are irreparable. In cases such as these, it simply becomes a question of whether you're going to toss them or save them anyway.

### Striker Problems:

**Struck covers** make up, by far, the largest single type of damaged covers seen in the hobby...and we all prefer our covers *unstruck*. So...What to do? What to do? It seems to be that there *is* a little room for fudging here. If the cover is very *lightly* struck, it may be possible to simply wipe away the residue from the striker with a wet finger and make the cover look unused again. Hmmmm...I could live with that. But, recoloring the striker with a felt-tip pen and other such practices are definitely *not* acceptable. Normally, a struck cover by any other name is...*still* a struck cover.

**Brittle strikers** is one of the most common types we run into—*Oh, when I think of all those great covers whose strikers simply disintegrated at my touch! Sigh!* Well, what can we do about it? First, as soon as you see that telltale discoloration, don't touch the striker. Handle the cover elsewhere. Then, from the *inside* of the cover, apply a piece of tape to the back of the striker area to give it additional support and hold it all together in the event that it does begin to break sometime in the future. I use scotch tape, but I've seen other types used, such as archival tape.

**No striker at all**, as in bobbed covers, equals a fatally damaged cover. There is no hope...and, no, taping on a striker from another cover is *not* acceptable. If the cover is bobbed, it can't be repaired.

**Misapplied strikers**, as in part of the striker material being absent, don't constitute damaged covers. Those are manufacturing errors and are thoroughly collectable, but some collectors may not want to receive them in trades, since they're looking only for 'normal' covers.

**Broken strikers**, as in corner(s) of the striker already missing, are also irreparable. There's no way of fudging that will fix this. Another one for the trash bin...unless, of course, you really want to keep it as a temp, hoping that someday you'll run across a more acceptable replacement. I do that, myself, I must admit, but I'm always worried at the same time that I'm bringing the overall quality of my collection down by putting ripped, torn, and otherwise brutalized covers in my collection.

### Color Problems:

**Faded covers**, caused by the matchbook being left for an extended amount of time in strong light (i.e., direct sunlight) is also a problem that cannot be fixed. Since a matchbook has the cover folded, it's almost always the case that only *parts* of the cover have faded, whereas other parts still retain their original color. Which, in turn, means that this type of damage is normally easy to spot. In isolated

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## Damaged Covers

cases, where a flattened cover has been similarly exposed, the fading is uniform, and then it's very difficult for the collector to tell the difference between that and a legitimate color variation. There have even been some instances in the past where certain collectors have done this *on purpose* so as to produce a greater variety of covers in their collections. In any event, faded covers are ones I automatically discard.

**Otherwise discolored covers** are pretty much goners, as well, since there's no effective way to fix them. These would include covers that have been stained by various fluids, covers that have begun to decay because of oxidation of the striker or their proximity to active chemicals, mold and other moisture damage, and so forth.

### Miscellaneous—but just as frustrating—problems:

**Gluing** is a commonly seen problem on the inside of covers—all the more painful because this practice was almost exclusively done decades ago on older covers. *But*, here at least, there is some hope for successful 'salvaging operations'. In fact, there is probably more than one way of cleaning off the backs of such covers. I think in most cases it would boil down to deciding whether or not you actually want to spend the considerable time and effort required to do so....and, since this involves a lengthy procedure, I'm not going to go into a description of such here, but various collectors have their own workable routines.

**Crushed covers** have been permanently creased, bent, wrinkled...Total loss (under my standards). I'd toss 'em!

**Chipped, cut, or frayed edges** have usually been caused by taking covers in and out of the old hand-sewn pages, if we're talking about damage to the side edges of the covers. The pre-slit pages are normally the culprit responsible for the frayed corners of covers. A frayed corner can normally be straightened and fixed by simple pressing. Small rips and tears along the side of the cover can't, though. Depending on how bad the damage is, the cover may or may not still be usable.

**Peeling surfaces**, almost always seen in covers that have a plastic coating (such as Mirro-Gloss). Here, the laminating surface has either begun to bubble or peel away from the edges. In either event, the cover becomes very unsightly. And one reason for such is that the cover has a different color for those surfaces still covered—so the cover is pretty much a mess. I've never attempted to 'fix' this type of damage. You'd have to apply some type of adhesive to the underside of the plastic coating, and that would probably leave some type of visible residue.

**'Embossed' covers!** *Accidentally* embossed. I'm thinking of those covers that, as matchbooks, have had the matches pressed into the cover, thereby creating an unintentional embossing. There's nothing you can do about this; the cover is ruined.

**Rubber band damage** (which is why a number of collectors denounce the use of rubber bands in bundling covers). In many cases, rubber bands used around stacks of covers will fuse with age to the surface of the top and bottom covers. In some cases, the brittle remains can simply be picked off with no damage to the cover, but in other cases, when the rubber band comes off, so does part of the cover. In the latter case, the cover's a loss. This type of damage can be avoided by using paper wrappers held together with a piece of tape, instead of rubber bands. Although the latter, admittedly, are much more

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convenient, they will break with age, and then you have to deal with the spilled covers.

**Holed covers** are a write-off. Some people used to tack their covers on walls, etc., and, once that hole is put in the cover, that's all she wrote! An exception, here, would be the hole sometimes seen in older covers just under the striker, usually smack dab in the middle of the manumark. This was part of the manufacturing process, and does not constitute a damaged cover.

**Covers that have been written on** vary as to whether they can be salvaged or not. And, 'writing', here, also includes the various symbols and stamps that collectors have used in the past to mark (and keep track of) their own covers. If the writing is in pencil, it can normally be erased—although, if the writing is on the outside, it's often difficult to erase pencil without erasing part of the cover's colored surface along with it. If the pencil is on the inside, it should be easily erased. If the writing has been done in ink, you're sunk! Although, again, the location makes a huge difference. If it's on the inside, most collectors would normally just ignore it, I imagine.

**Dirty covers** can often be simply wiped clean without otherwise affecting the surface at all. In other cases, the dirt and grime have been worked *into* the cover, and in such cases it's a lost cause. Depending on your own standards, the latter may either be a keeper or a throw-away.

**Overprinted, miscut, no-striker covers, and the like** are manufacturing errors and not damaged covers. They're in a collectable category, themselves.