

## Easy Ways To Avoid Damaging Covers: I

Any collector who's been at it for even a little while knows the aggravation and frustration of accidentally damaging good covers. Unfortunately, damaging covers is all too easy to do, especially when they're brittle with age to begin with. There are a number of easy procedures, though, which, if they become automatic routines for you, will greatly cut down on such attrition.

For example, in many cases, it's the materials you're working with that cause such problems. Probably the most frequent and most frustrating cause of cover damage is slotted pages. Even with the advent of plastic pages with individual pockets to hold covers, most collectors still use the standard slotted pages. They're cheaper! But, when collectors fit the covers into the slots, many a cover gets its corners nicked or its striker torn. It's not the collector—it's the slots. Examine such pages, and you'll be able to determine which is the front side and which is the back [the front side is where the blades went in to make the slots; the back side is where the blades came out]. Your natural inclination will be to start filling the front side of the page first because it's the cleanest looking [the back side is somewhat more ragged in appearance]. That's when your covers get ripped up! More so on new pages, where the paper is still stiff.

When the pages were initially cut, the cutting process produces a sharp edge to the slot on one side of the page and a smooth edge to the slot on the other side. When you slide in covers on the front side of the page, you're going against the sharp side of the cut. If you're putting in nice crisp, newer covers, there's rarely a problem because the newer covers are literally slicker.

But, if the cover is older—and softer—the sharp edge on the slot will often cut right through the cover. So, what you want to do is simply fill the reverse side of the page *first*. Then, you're going against the smooth edge of the slot, and your covers will rarely be damaged. When you're ready to fill in the front side of the page, you'll already have the covers on the reverse side to act as "guides" for the covers you're about to put in....It's simple, and it works! *[Of course, you may also choose to just use one side of your slotted pages, but, if you're dealing with significant numbers of covers, I can't see wasting half your page space].*

And, as long as we're on slotted pages, always have something like an X-acto knife within reach when mounting covers *[an X-acto knife looks like a razor blade with a handle—I still use the one from a college dissection class I took some 40+ years ago]*. Not all slots are cut to exactly the same size; some are incompletely cut due to the pages being on the bottom of the pile when the blades were making the cuts, and not all 20-strikes are exactly the same size, etc. *[30-strike Canadian covers are notorious for this]*. Hence, there will be times when you will have to do some 'surgery' and widen the slots to fit particular covers. In some cases, especially with various Foreign covers, you'll have to lengthen the slots. The point here is that you don't want to end up having to 'jam', or unduly force, a cover into a slot that is too small. Invariably, that also leads to damaged covers.

Also, although I have no proof of this, I've always been wary of using slotted pages for covers which have the dreaded 'green strikers'....they almost look like mold is growing on them. They're different from the brittle, corroded strikers. These have gone 'mushy'. My concern is that, since that particular cover will be pressed against another cover in the same spot on the opposing page (striker to striker), the green blight might eventually transfer to the 'healthy' cover. I don't think that that's actually ever happened, but perhaps the time necessary for such a process to take place simply hasn't been long enough...yet.

*[More on saving your covers in Part II in our next issue]*