

How To...Strip Covers

Not necessarily as easy of the novice might expect. But, first things first...When to strip...and When *Not* to strip!

As is always true in this hobby, the answer to that particular question is “It’s entirely up to you.” They’re your full-books; you can whatever you want with them. But, assuming that you’re going to be like almost all collectors in the hobby and not save full-books, you’ll need to decide which ones you *don’t* want to strip, and there *are* probably at least two types you’ll want to keep intact: Features and full-books that are too fragile to mess with.

To my way of thinking, Features are just too unique, attractive, and sought-after, to convert to ‘mere’ covers. Also (hardly worth mentioning, I know), but they’re also more valuable as full-books, so stripping them strips you of that value. There are some old covers, usually from the 1930s, with brittle strikers that you may want to keep as full-books, as well. Depending on how much you want those covers, you may well decide *not* to try and remove the staple, as the whole striker may end of disintegrating in the process.

Well, on to the actual details of the procedure. If you’ve ever seen a ‘shucking’ contest at one of the conventions, you already know how *not* to strip a cover. No, what you need is not speed...what *you* need is precision! + the hands of a surgeon, the delicacy of the bomb squad, and the determination of a Navy Seal. No problem!

You need something like a small pen-knife to lift the prongs of the staple on one side of the cover and then pull it out from the other side. I use a letter, myself, but the main point here is that whatever you use, it’s best that it be rather dull than sharp. That’s safer for the cover...*and* your fingers!

The easiest, and the fastest, covers to strip are the newer ones. The surface of the covers are slicker, allowing your pen knife to hopefully slide right under the staple prongs. And, on the newer covers, those prongs tend to lay right on the surface of the cover, whereas...

The toughest, and the most frustrating, covers to strip are some of the older covers whose strikers have become brittle, and perhaps even have been applied *over* the staple. As indicated in previous discussions, unless you’re willing to accept the loss of the cover and take your chances on the striker crumbling, I’d just leave it alone and keep it as a full-book. On such covers, the staple, itself, is often a rusted mess, and...oddly enough...that can actually be the solution to the problem. The staple may break in pieces, or even disintegrate, and thus more-or less remove itself!

Hmmmm, let’s see...What else can we remove? How about wooden matches that are *glued* in? On this one, you might want to try a *sharp* blade to hopefully slice cleanly through the glued area, separating matches from cover. Honestly, though, I usually just break apart the two match combs to first separate them, then just ‘pull’ each comb away from the cover. That usually leaves a pretty thin area on the inside of the cover, but the cover’s still perfectly intact.

That just leaves us with boxes. And, how does one remove the matches from boxes?...Just open the box and pour them out! (ha ha).

Actually, opening boxes can be a real headache, so Les Good is going to handle that one in our next issue.