"How do I keep track of all these things?!"
[overheard from novice collector at 2002 Sierra Swapfest]

Editorial

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[overheard from seasoned collector at 2002 AMCAL convention]

-Part III-

"How do I keep track of all these things?!"
[overheard from veteran collector at 2003 RMS convention]

The big question, though, is always about handling all those covers—thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands! There may be a few collectors who actually log every cover they have into a data base, but for anyone with a sizeable amount of covers that would seem impractical to me, especially considering that a person's collections are somewhat fluid. Thus, missing covers are always being added, better covers are replacing covers in poor condition, etc.

A few years ago, there were at least a couple of programs designed for cataloging covers (or other collectibles) with a scan of each, but I never heard from other collectors on whether or not they really used them. I would suspect that the graphics feature alone would make the size of these files unreasonable.

So, although I love covers and computers, I've never made a database of my individual covers per se, although I do maintain quite a few categorical lists, but I count those as something else. You certainly can use your computer to keep track of your covers in other ways, though. Our own late Warren Marshall comes readily to mind here. He was a celebrated Towns collectors: he bought Towns, traded Towns, always looked for Towns first and foremost. He had thousands and thousands...and he kept track of them with his computer. But he kept track of the Towns rather than the actual covers. Every time he added a cover to his Towns collection, he entered that Town into his database with a notation of which of his numbered albums that cover could be found in.

And, keeping track of your covers once they're *in* your albums, is another necessity. Most collectors are constantly having to match those 'new' covers they find with the covers they already have to see if the former are really 'new', variations, or dupes...so it behooves the collector to be able to find those covers when he or she needs to...and that's not necessarily always easy when you're dealing with tens of thousands of covers and more, which gets us into how covers are organized into albums. In my own collections, alphabetizing is the basic method, and then that is modified according to the specific needs of the category. For example, I have about 47,000 Banks. To subdivided those into a mere 26 categories would be pointless; those 26 divisions would simply be too big and unusable. So, I modify that by dividing everything into states first, and then alphabetizing the covers within each state subdivision. That gives me 1,300 subdivisions instead of the original 26.

So, wrapping up this three-part series, organization is a must. It doesn't matter what type of organization you decide upon. You could arrange your covers by color and size of the font! As long as *you* can find what you want, when you want it. That type of logic also needs to be extended to your other hobby activities: keeping track of your correspondence, your traders and their wants, your various club responsibilities (dues, meetings, and so on), etc. This is a great hobby, but it can *literally* bury you if you're not careful!