

Working the line



Welp, I'm about two weeks into the Great Comic Book Grading, Bagging, Boxing and Recording in a Database I Create Myself, otherwise known as the GCBGBBRDICM.

Er, well, no, no one knows it as that. If anyone, including myself tried calling it that we'd have to wipe the spittle off of whoever we were trying to call it that to.

So, when someone asks what I'm doing these days, I basically just say, "Working on my comics."

If they want further information, I describe to them what you can read in this previous blog post.

Now, if someone were to ask me how it's going, I would have to ask them if they really wanted to know, because unless you are masochistically polite or a collector yourself (or Hillary Clinton), you might not be interested in the answer as the details could take you pretty far into the weeds.

So, if you're not a personality type described above, skip to the bottom for the punchline (mind you, I haven't thought of one yet, but perhaps by the end of this painfully long post, I'll think of one). For the rest of you, let's soldier on!

One of the first things I realized when I was about a box or so into the process was that I had seriously (as usual) underestimated the scope of the project. And of the amount of supplies I would need to complete it.

Logistics

First, I had removed all the comic boxes stacked in my office closet and moved them all to my workout room...where I proceeded to stack them up again (hey, it was a lot of boxes...read that post linked above...I won't warn you again).

With little forethought. The boxes were stacked willy nilly, where some boxes containing later letters were stacked on top of other boxes I needed to work on first. Oy.

So, I keep having to take boxes down from one stack and then stack them on others while I search for letters at the start of the alphabet. Quite appropriate, then, that all the lifting takes place in the workout room. Charles Atlas eat your heart out.

In lucky cases, a whole box contains a single letter, allowing me to pull the entire thing out to the dining room table and begin the assembly line work.



The assembly line...

Process

I begin by taking each comic, carefully, out of its existing (and old) bag. This is a painstaking and time-consuming process, but it's necessary for two reasons: (1) to properly grade the comics and (2) to place them in beautiful new protective bags.

I record the comics on a ruled pad, noting title, issue, grade

and quantity. When I first started, I then bagged the comics before moving into the office to record them on the computer.

My process has refined since then. I now take the pad and record the books first, highlighting the ones that hit a certain value minimum (\$10 or more). I now take my sheet back to the assembly line to bag them, putting the highlighted issues in bags with backer boards.

Yes? Question from the floor? Why don't I put all the comics in bags with backer boards? An excellent query. Here's your equally excellent answer:

If I was simply going to store the comics forever (until I die and someone has to value them for the will), I would back every comic with a board for added protection and support.

But...I plan on living for at least a good few years more and that means more Halloween bags filled with comics. Rather than pulling out every box and searching, I now know that any comics in a box without a backer board is fodder for goodie bags. Easy peasy!

Back to the line. So, now the comics, secured in their new bags, get magic invisible taped shut and placed into those long comic boxes I love and hate.

Once that letter is done, move to the next. Rinse, repeat. I started building a nice rhythm about a week in (somewhere in the "C's", I think).



The supply line...

Supplies

It became immediately clear that my initial supply order for bags, boxes and boards was woefully inadequate. I was also negatively impressed by how easily some of those initial bags split near the flap as I was working them. Gorgeous clarity, but seemed flimsier than I remembered from my old bagging days.

Thus, my next order was split between two suppliers. One (the current vendor) I used for backer boards and boxes; the other I used for a heavier weight bag (3 mil vs. 2 mil). The clarity on the thicker bags is not quite the same, but still fine.

I felt bad for the UPS man, who had to lug those heavy boxes in our sweltering August air, but he was cool about it, mostly because I tended to be his last stop of the day. My final boxes, received Friday of last week, he told me he had hit a personal record 190 stops that day. T.G.I.F. indeed!

Intangibles

There were some interesting and unexpected offshoots to the GCBCG...er...working on my comics:

– Lighting.

I determined I needed better lighting at the dining room table to accurately grade the comics, so I went out to Wal-Mart and picked up some LED lights (\$9 @ (gulp) for my 5-light chandelier).

They were worth it...for about 3 days. Then one stopped working. And two more. And another. Oy.

I returned all of them and stopped off at Lowe's and picked up different ones – only \$7 @ (still gulp) – these are still functioning, so there's that. The bulbs are "daylight", a

clean white light perfect for my needs.

– Database.

I've created my own database/workbook for recording and, ultimately, reporting on my collection.

Using Microsoft Excel, something that I...er...excelled with during my working life, I have built a simple spreadsheet holding all the pertinent data (Publisher, Title, Issue, Quantity, Grade) and then built formulas for Price, Value and Net Value.

I then enter the price guide data (price by grade) for each issue and employ Excel formulas to read the grade and select the appropriate price value.

When I finish the entire listing, I'll build some reporting tools, probably using the standard Excel functions but also possibly a few home-built macros. Then, anytime I wish to update my collection in the future, I need only enter in the new price guide data.

Believe it or not, I find that sort of stuff fun. (yeah, yeah, nerd boy)

– Lost letters.

Ugh. The worst.

As I finish boxes of comics, I begin to re-stack them in my office closet. Heavy as they were before, the long boxes are now even heavier with the inclusion of so many backer boards.

So it's no surprise that when I find a lost letter, say, "Adventure Comics", when I'm currently working on "Daredevil", a loud groan escapes my lips (and possibly some other words not found in any of my books or blogs).

I then have to unstack all those boxes to place the offending

comic in its appropriate box. This is much worse than it sounds since, when I finished the first 5-box stack, I used the available space up top for some of my precious hardcover books (such as my Donald Grant editions of Stephen King's Dark Tower series).

The first time I had to do this, I was annoyed. The second time, I was irritated. The third time, I was irate. The last time, I just gave up and refused to restack those hardcovers. Not until I'm a good 10 or 15 boxes in. Arggh!



The finish line...

I'm into the "F's" now. I know, I know, it doesn't sound that far for two weeks of work, but it's roughly 10 boxes of my expected 28, so it's farther than it seems. There are a few letters that don't have a lot of comic characters associated with them (like "O" and "Q") and others that take up serious space ("A" was nearly 4 boxes alone).

Eventually, I'll reach the finish line, though it seems an overly long and tiring effort.

Much like reading this blog post.