

I've Met My Match



To the endless litany of headline-grabbing crises like the Ozone Layer and Killer Bees, we must now add the sad decline of the once-noble kitchen match. If all the world's lighters suddenly fail, we will find ourselves at the mercy of today's substandard and unsatisfactory kitchen match.

Joyce, or the Cassandra of Combustibles as she is known in match circles, has lamented the decline for some years. I always thought of her as an alarmist, a sulphur-tipped Chicken Little. Recent events make it clear that she was right all along,

While I'm not a collector of match box expert per se, I have had a long association with them. It's possible that I

have bought more kitchen matches than anyone not currently serving time for arson.

My affinity for the kitchen match began young. Heedless and unknowing, I early placed myself in the clutches of the Diamond Match Company.

It took only a couple of experimental Pall Malls to convince the 12-year-old me that I didn't

want to copy my parents' two-pack-a-day habits. This had many favorable consequences, not the least of which is that it didn't stunt my growth. On the other hand, it left me technologically challenged with regard to fire-starting apparatus.

So I grew up a partial Luddite, which is very much like being a Moderate Liberal. I explored the mysteries of computers and embraced the Internet, but I shunned the arcane mechanisms known as



Star Wars matchboxes, made by Studio Match Co., Hollywood, CA, are basically a collector's item. The matches in the boxes are an afterthought; the carton is what counts.



lighters. Instead I chose the organic, natural way. I learned to use matches to ignite the pipe.

“Then I found the kitchen match.”

I tried book matches, fireplace matches and even those fancy little packets they hand out at



Current matchboxes are made of cardboard that seems to get thinner and flimsier every year. The 48 vintage matchboxes shown here have wooden outside sleeves with inner boxes of blue-paper-covered cardboard.

Frank Gifford is believed to be the inspiration for this 1950s Ohio Blue Tip carton. After a brilliant gridiron career, Gifford went on to make the Football Hall of Fame and then a rather zoftig stewardess who videotaped the encounter and used it as a springboard to becoming a brief novelty in the porn business.

weddings. You know, the ones that say “Shawn and Rosalie Forever.” I’ve gotten a few of those matchboxes that outlasted the couple.

Then I found the kitchen match, the mini-van of the combustibles market. It works but is not truly loved. It performs its function, but it doesn’t excite. Supermarkets don’t build towering special matchbox displays or promotional end caps. Kitchen matches usually sit on a top shelf, well out of reach of shorter shoppers.

Right from the invention of the sulphur-tipped match in 1920, manufacturers knew they faced a marketing problem. One match is pretty much like another to the average consumer. Even the Ohio Match Company’s attempt to bring style to the product, the Ohio Blue-Tipped Match, failed to endow kitchen matches with an aura of glamour.

When you’ve got a dull product, put it in a fancy box. That’s marketing 101 – and that’s exactly what kitchen matchmakers did. The improvement in mass printing methods let manufacturers adorn their boxes with all manner of fanciful pictures.

The popularity of electric ranges, gas ranges with self-igniting pilot lights and microwaves have turned the kitchen match from a household staple to an offbeat item. And as sales declined, so did the incentive and enthusiasm for going to the extra trouble of putting pictures on the cartons.

Several companies still used

drawings, usually coloring-book simple drawings, when Joyce and I began buying kitchen matches in the early 1970s. Fire Chief had likenesses of Indian Chiefs and Diamond presented a transportation series of boats, planes and trains. One outfit, overcome by holiday spirit, even produced boxes with Currier & Ives winter scenes.

As Diamond Match Company absorbed many of its competitors and bankruptcy claimed many others, the need to compete for the waning kitchen match business decreased. Soon even the simple drawings disappeared, replaced by type-heavy box designs. Some specialty companies, like Studio Match Company, have tried to serve the collecting market with limited-run illustrated matchboxes, but the ones on sale at Smith's Food King are devoid of ornamentation and charm.

Another thing that has changed since 1970 is the price. My first box of kitchen matches cost less than a quarter for a 250-count package. Now they are a buck a box. You'd think, given that 400% price increase and the progress of science and technology, that today's matches would be the greatest of all-time.

Sadly, that is not true. The once sturdy and dependable sulphur-tipped match has fallen very far from its twin ideals of safety and reliability.

Safety matches now actually represent a safety hazard! The new Diamond Match Company box says that "Diamond is the perfect match for all your fire starting needs," but users are as likely to burn themselves, their clothes and surrounding furniture as whatever they intended to burn.

The latest manufacturing techniques have created a match with a stick that breaks easily and a head that flies off like a napalm rocket to singe the unwary. About 10% of the matches arrive twisted like a bonsai or clustered into unusable tangles melted together at the head like conjoined twins or triplets.

Theoretically, Diamond makes both Safety and Strike Anywhere matches. In practice, the supermarket usually stocks whatever the supplier sends. Since the current Strike Anywhere version doesn't even light consistently with the striker,

the distinction is probably moot, anyway.

A closet full of clothes peppered with tiny burn holes testifies to the dangerously unpredictable nature of contemporary kitchen matches. Joyce has despaired and has threatened to buy me a lighter for Chanukah. If it turns out to have fuel enough for only one day but keeps lighting the pipe for eight, I'll file a report next issue.



Diamond Match Co. used to decorate its packages with charming illustrations rather than empty pledges for better quality in the future.

Snow Business of Mine

Joyce looked me straight in my one working eye. “You could fight crime with that,” she intoned with a great deal of emotive intensity.

We both laughed. That’s what we always say to each other when one of us claims some intriguingly trivial talent or ability.

I had just said that I have a knack for fast-forwarding a video tape right to the fade-out of the “Huggies” disposable diaper commercial. Since I’d just performed this feat while we were watching TV during dinner, I felt justified in claiming this talent.

Her inference, in saying “You could fight crime with that,” is that I should design a costume and go on the warpath against miscreants armed only with the power to fast-forward a VCR.

Sometimes, when a supposed power has a certain perverse *panache*, we concoct a comic book scenario around this hypothetical super-doer. Even DC’s Legion of Substitute Heroes would have trouble making use of Mr. Fast Forward. What if he ran into a super-baddie whose touch can break any video cas-

sette recorder? Well, that’s still not too riveting. Mr. Fast Forward isn’t even going to rate a back-of-the-book six-pager in one of those black-and-white indie comics.

My ability to precisely tune a radio to something interesting has more possibilities. Super Tuner (known to friends and admirers as “the twiddling terror”) foils a bank robbery by turning his portable radio to a station that distracts the would-be robbers until the police arrive.. Joyce and I never bother to do a second scenario; stories like this guarantee there won’t be a second issue.

Although Joyce claims to have had the ability to fly as a young girl, most of her boasts are more modest. Her best crime-fighting power, I think, is her ability to rip off her clothes very very fast. Personally, I think this character has definite commercial possibilities, at least until the censors knock it off the newsstand.

Naturally, we also say “You could fight crime with that” to our friends when they brag. The only exception was a friend with the power to



Seemingly innocuous snow globes such as this classic are, in reality, pernicious subliminal propaganda. It is all part of a conspiracy to convince the gullible that snow is normal, perhaps even preferable, state of affairs. The Sensational Snow-beater uses his power only in the service of Good.

screw up any computer or other electronic device within a five-foot radius. After a short conference, Joyce and I agreed that he would make a better criminal than a crime fighter.

For some reason, this made him angry. He left in a huff with our TV set.

As a man of few talents, I don't have as many options as Joyce. Among her numerous powers, the Blonde Crime-stopper can Empathize with Rocks and Avoid Dangerous Places.

Lacking her varied weapons to combat Evil, I've concentrated on one special talent: the ability to divert snow.

I know what you're thinking: "He's in Las Vegas, so that's not much of a power." It snows about once a decade here in Glitter City, so the diversion of snow isn't much of a strain, even to my erratic mental faculties. I usually say that Snow Beater is in happy semi-retirement, though the Awesome Anti-precipitator is still rumored to visit his Burrow of Dryness located somewhere beneath the sands of Death Valley.

Like the Shadow, I acquired my power in a land far, far away. I experienced my epiphany in New York City, which is not exactly the Himalayas. Of course, the Ancient Wise Ones only taught me to divert snowstorms, not cloud men's minds.

I first deflected snowstorms while living in the New York City area. Snow is beautiful on untrodden country meadows and Currier & Ives Christmas cards, but it loses its aesthetic appeal after a day or two on city streets and sidewalks.



This snow globe symbolically represents the Snow Beater's effect on New York City. Note the complete absence of flakes interfering with the 1939 World's Fair.

"Can't you do something about the snow?" Joyce would plead. "I hate to walk from the subway in my silk shoes."

Is there a husband who doesn't want to be a hero in his wife's eyes? What about a husband whose wife was sometimes mistaken for porn queen Lisa de Leuw?

So I spent a lot of time working on her problem. Finally, after much deep reflection and mental training, I gained the power to shunt aside the snow storms that roared down on New York from the *terra incognita* hell known to us urbanites only as "Upstate."

Some overly sensible people might attribute the decrease in snowfall in New York City in the 1980s to global warming or long-term shifts in

high-altitude air currents. They're entitled to such notions, however misguided. That's the American way.

I prefer to take credit for it. The first time a

"...I acquired my power in a land far, far away."

predicted storm failed to hit our Brooklyn Heights neighborhood, we put so much mileage on our bed that we had to buy a new one. And unlike toothy Christian hustler Pat Robertson, who took credit for turning aside a hurricane when he lurched for President, I found many subsequent opportunities to accept Joyce's gratitude for deflecting snow storms from her door.

Hey, no one ever went broke betting against TV weathercasters.

Richard Brandt

I'm in Las Vegas and I have a cold. Gee, I bet I feel just like Frank Sinatra. Many thanks for *Jackpot! #3*, a fanzine which, I agree, can and should be cleft in twain.

An enjoyable afternoon's read if not too rich with comment hooks for me in my present debilitated state (and Michelle is at work so she can't provide the creatively altered clichés at the moment).

I would add however that I have seen a mention in the computer trade press of free software that will create files in the Adobe .PDF format...I will have to investigate this and see if it would remove the last cost barrier in the way of those who would like to distribute their zines, old or new, as .PDF files.

(([Arnie](#): I don't think there's much of a cost barrier. The maximum expense for *Acrobat and Microsoft Publisher* is about \$300, That's not bad for what amounts to a copy machine that never needs ink or paper.))

Lenny Bailes

Jackpot! arrived safely at my regular e-mail address. So far I've only had a chance to take a quick look at it, but I'm in awe of the way you're adapting to the PDF medium. If you could go back in time and send one of these to Dave Hulan, back in the '60s when he was the OE of SFPA, he'd probably faint.

I have a color laser printer that does good copy on cheap paper and will print it out, soon, to see how it comes out.

(([Arnie](#): My memory is that you and I placed about the same in the annual SFPA Egoboo Polls of that period, so let's not sling too many arrows at my youthful productions.

And for those of you who don't already know... Yes, this is the Very Same Lenny Bailes who pounded through rain puddles with me in search of those elusive baseball cards as described in my article in *Jackpot! #3*.

The only problem with having such an old and valued friend is that if I start to shade the truth in childhood anecdotes, Lenny will be right there to set the record straight.))

Marty Cantor

You lead, I follow. Well, it seems that way. *Jackpot #3* has given me some ideas for what I can do with *No Award* as I move into the PDF world. It is not that I intend to slavishly copy

what you have done with your zine; however, I think that some of the things which you have done with colour are very worthwhile (like putting your loc comments in a different colour than the colour of the text of the locs themselves) and are worth emulating. Other things – well, starting with your zines as a baseline, those of us producing our own zines can now move off, following our own muse. We shall see where we all go.

Obviously, no two faneds are going to be producing the same kinds of zines – just like we have done in paper.

In *No Award #8* I decided, early on, to experiment with a graphic cohesion throughout the zine, placing brick walls on the opposing sides of the opening columns of each article. I then used hanging signs at the beginning of each article, with said signs containing things like the article title, author, etc. On page two I introduced the various thematic material by sectioning the various components (ToC, legal notice, zine name, etc.) as hanging signs attached to side brick walls.

Somewhere into the process of creating my zine, I received the first of your PDF zines. The thought occurred to me that I could use colour in my zine if I went the PDF route, I started to modify what I had created, and I soon got hooked. We shall see if what I have created will work.

(([Arnie](#): The transition to electronic publishing has its bumps, such as Joyce's troubles with *Smokin' Rockets #2*, but many good things have happened, too. One is an apparent increase in the cooperative spirit within the online fan publishing community.

This should be a hobby not a competition. No one could love their fanzine any more than I adore *Jackpot!*, but I don't see it in some kind of crazy race against other fanzines. The more the merrier, I say, because it is the diversity and interactivity of our hobby that is its ultimate strength.))

Now, **Jeff Boser** writes something that does bear taking seriously. Zines are for reading/ If one is as committed to communication as I know you are (as am I), there does seem to be a bit of a problem with current technology. A PDF zine can be saved to disc (and maybe printed later) or printed immediately without saving (which is what I have been doing with your zines). Well, I am more comfortable reading a zine in the hand rather than reading a zine on my computer