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A Passionate Collector

By Jennifer Slawson

Collector: Kevin Cook

Passion: Dice



IN THESE strange, surreal days of twisted entertainment—"Fear Factor," "Survivor," and "Who Wants to Marry My Transsexual Plastic Surgeon" (okay I made that last one up), going for a record in the *Guinness Book of World Records* seems downright quaint. When compared to eating grub worms on toast in a leech-infested pond, or exposing your family, your fetishes and your flesh, to bazillions of fascinated TV viewers, trying to break a record for collecting seems like a pretty lightweight challenge. That is, until you hear what it takes.

Like everyone featured in this space, Kevin Cook is a collector. But when I spoke to him, he was a collector with a vengeance, a

man on fire. His goal? To earn the *Guinness* record for owning the largest dice collection in the world. The quest began almost 30 years ago in 1977, when Cook first played *Dungeons and Dragons*.



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"As any gamer knows," he said, "you have to have at least one set of dice, but many like myself had several sets. In 1981, I was visiting pawn shops in search of dice when I came across an old shoe box full of dice. It contained many crystallized dice which disintegrated on examination, as well as some bone dice. My collection didn't increase much because most of the dice that fell apart...but it got me into the mindset for collecting."

Once Cook began collecting in earnest, he joined a club for other dice lovers. He decided to pursue his official world record status at the suggestion of his collecting colleague, Dr. Alexander Simkin, the founder of The Dice



Maniacs Club, who pointed out that Cook had more dice than anyone else either or them knew. That led Cook, a self-described "obsessive/compulsive" collector, to begin the search for anyone with a more expansive or comprehensive collection. "After two years of extensive Internet and library searching, I only turned up two 'rumors' of larger collections," he said. "One was destroyed in the October 17, 1989 San Francisco earthquake...the other I have yet to find information on. Through my research, I heard that the largest number to date [at that time] was somewhere around 5,000 pairs of casino dice; I felt that this was an attainable goal. I have since found it was much harder than I thought it would be."

The process of becoming officially named world record holder is daunting enough to scare off a less passionate collector, for sure. But Cook, an engineer and technical writer, had enough pa-

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tience and organizational ability to rise to the challenge. "Guinness has very stringent rules for collectors," Cook revealed, "so I had to cull many duplicates. It took almost five years for me to photograph, catalogue and submit my collection." This involved meticulously recording each individual die with a photograph. He also asked three people to come by and sign affidavits stating that they had seen the dice and that his collection was authentic. Then he had to settle in and wait. Again, his patience paid off. Thirty-one weeks passed between Kevin's first submission to Guinness and their response. On Labor Day of this year, he was notified that he was in. He is the Guinness world record holder for

largest collection of dice, with the official number listed as 11,097! Though his collection might never be in the book (only 4,000 out of 65,000 records are included), Cook's record can be verified on the Guinness world record web site at www.guinnessworldrecords.com.

It was a long and grueling process that spanned three decades, but today, Cook has secured his place in collecting history...and he didn't even have to eat bugs to do it!•

Are you a passionate collector? Send your story to: A Passionate Collector, c/o Antiques & Collecting Magazine, 1006 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605.

Author's note: Since September 2004, Cook's collection has grown to 13,586.

