

## *Ex Libris* by Joaquin Ayala, PhD.

Hello folks and welcome to the *Ex Libris* article for May of 2016! I hope everyone is enjoying the nicer weather when it comes about – it is pretty hit-and-miss so far! I also hope you are getting out there and sharing your magic as people start getting out of the house and enjoying the weather!

This month we are going to focus on a book that is not only controversial in some aspects but at the same time, a standard tome for magicians and a bible for card workers which is all wrapped up in a nice, mysterious package as to the background and identity of its author. If you know anything about card magic books you have probably already guessed that I am talking about **'Expert at the Card Table'** by S.W. Erdnase. It was originally published under the title **'Artifice, Ruse and Subterfuge at the Card Table: A Treatise on the Science and Art of Manipulating Cards'**. It was first published in 1902 by the author as a hardbound book covered in green cloth and was illustrated by Marshall Dennison Smith.

The book focuses on supposed methods of cheating or “advantage play” at the card table as used by card cheats, covering false shuffling, dealing and cutting, palming and culling techniques, shifts, it covers an array of mechanical cheating devices such as bugs, holdouts and sleeving methods and more. More surprisingly to some people, the author delves into a bit of theory/philosophy on the right time and place to use certain techniques and devices and what to watch out for when playing with others. The last section of the book is a selection of card effects using a combination of the techniques and sleights covered in the book. The most well-known is called *The Exclusive Coterie* which was performed by Ricky Jay on national television, and he performed it “*straight outta Erdnase*” as they say, the given script and all.

Of course the subject of the author is one of the deepest and longest-enduring mysteries in the magic community. There have been many theories and guesses as to the real identity of S.W. Erdnase and as to whether that was a pseudonym or simply an anagram. One of the most popular theories is that the real name of the author was E.S. Andrews (S.W. Erdnase written/read backwards), which was proposed by Martin Gardner (who thought the real name was really Milton Franklin Andrews) and has since been disproven. I will cover this topic a bit more in a separate, special article. Keep an eye on your emails and the club website for this article.

This book has been in continuous publication since 1902 with many different versions put out over the years, including annotated versions by some of the leading card men such as Darwin Ortiz. It has been translated into 5 other languages including Japanese, German, French, Italian and Spanish. Check the club website for an up-to-date list of all the published editions of this book – there are many of them!

That is all for this month folks and I hope you have a great week. Get out there and share the magic and spread the joy and wonderment that it can bring to all those in need of it! - **J.M.A.**