

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

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for November, 2016! This year is coming to a close and the holiday season is upon us. It is a time of year when we are reminded to be thankful for what we have (which should be all year, really) and to share with others what we do have. The book we are focusing on for this month will challenge you in various ways and teach you to look at things from more than one perspective. The book is called *The Magic Mirror* by Dr. Robert E. Neale, co-authored by David Parr.

The name Bob Neale may be familiar to many of you as he was born in Mount Clemens, Michigan on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1929. He is a magician, mentalist, origami expert, puzzler and master topologist. He holds degrees from Amherst College as well as a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary in New York. He was also a Professor of Psychiatry and Religion for 24 years. His interest is broad and includes the occult, fortunetelling, hypnosis, eyeless vision and even the practice of self-hypnosis.

*The Magic Mirror* is another one of those books that is very deep and very complex, but by no means are its context out of reach for anyone willing to put the time into reading it and absorbing the material. This book is mainly theoretical but it also focuses on things that lend themselves to the world of storytelling. It takes a look at the various types of magic in other contexts, including theatrical, social and historical. He uses these to further distill their origin from psychological roots and teach the reader how to classify their magic into different categories – emotional, thrilling, playful, and serious, etc. It also teaches you how to understand what each effect is about and how it can be used to help construct a better, more powerful presentation.

When this book was originally written, the content was so very intense and complex that most people would have had a hard time understanding it; it was better suited to academics (much like his earlier work, *An Essay on Magic*) than it was to laypersons. Enter, David Parr. David had to basically re-write the book in a way that non-academics could understand. Thanks to his efforts, we have this final tome (though I would love to see the original myself).

The effects in the book are not necessarily “magical” in the ordinary sense of the term, the one in which we magicians would think of it. There are a few, but many of them are topological pieces that can play just like a magic effect, and their very nature allow for various ways to present them. Take for example what is probably my very favorite effect in the book, *The Last Dream*. It is a storytelling effect using tombstone-shaped cards that takes your audience on a weird, strange and nightmarish journey through mortality. The story can be played with both serious and comical overtones, all at the same time, or it can be scary.

Another fantastic piece is the Baffling Borromean Rings. If you are not familiar with the term, look them up sometime – Borromean rings are three (or more) rings that are permanently interlocked together but no one ring is linked to any other...using a set of these rings that you

make yourself, you proceed to change the arrangement of the rings under increasingly impossible conditions. This is a most excellent way to illustrate the point that what we *see* is not always the truth, but neither is what we *think*. The *impossible can be done*.

There is a great piece called *Walking Through a Wall* where a card cut into two sections forms a solid wall, but when the two pieces are turned over and put back together, a whole appears in the middle. Turn the pieces over again, and the wall is whole again. There is a slight bit of jiggery pokery combined with topology for that one, but it is certainly a head-scratcher. Another such piece is *Whatsabox*; A simple box of cardboard turns out to be anything but simple – First it has an open top and closed bottom, then two tops, then two bottoms; a ball placed inside the box finds itself trapped inside, then just as mysteriously is released. What you just read for *Whatsabox* is the description given in the dust jacket, which is the best description. Just trying to wrap your head around the description is baffling in and of itself!

Well, that is all for this month folks! Please remember to share your time and your magic with others and be thankful that you have those kinds of gifts to share. Join me again next month for the final article of the year of 2016!