

## *Ex Libris* by Joaquin Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for May 2017! I hope everyone had a great Easter holiday and that you have been able to get out and enjoy the lovely spring weather when we have had it! This month I have been working on some new sets (or rather, tweaking some old sets) and getting them ready. There are two books that I am constantly going back and rereading no matter what I am working on, but it is even more true when I am constructing or fine-tuning effects. One of the books that I am talking about is ***Strong Magic*** by **Darwin Ortiz**.

This book was published in 1994 by Kaufman & Greenberg in hardcover format. It has 379 pages total and is comprised of 4 sections, each broken down into chapters for a total of twenty-two chapters, plus two appendices. The aim of this book was to give the reader insights and tips on showmanship as a close-up performer, among many other things. After all, the subtitle of the book is *Creative Showmanship for the Close-up Magician*. This book was very controversial when it was first released; many amateurs and pros alike praised the book, but almost every review across the board completely lambasted it. Why? That is a good question...

In my analysis of this book the opening pages set a tone for the rest of the book that comes across (rather, *can* come across) as being haughty and “my analysis and solutions are always correct”. It is my firm belief that many of the reviewers that panned this book did so because they either read the book with the wrong ideas in mind, the wrong filters on or perhaps, no filters at all. Indeed, much of this book is based on the experience of the author, who performs for lay audiences for a living, and what he perceives to be the best way to navigate through the rocky terrain of audience experience, show structure, magical effect, etc.

There are some very harsh critiques and criticisms in the book that poke at some well-known magicians pretty hard (some of which probably could have been left out), but by far and large, it does not make them right. However, Darwin even tells you that you *will not agree with everything in this book*, nor should you. Sometimes for a person to progress in anything they do in life, it takes a good thumping of the ego to kickstart it. This book certainly can do that. Some of the material presented is also common sense to many, however, he goes into even more detail on even those subjects. This book talks about how one should go about structuring an act, how to elicit certain emotions/responses, how to test the material, what to do and what not to do and much, much more.

When giving examples of each point he touches on, Darwin often cites some of his own work as the reference (and why not?), but he also uses the work of others and it is not always a nice comparison. But what if, instead of taking it as an insult and a “fact”, you read this as if it were his opinion and that his intention is to make you *think*? This book *should* be read by not just close-up performers but also stand-up and stage performers. A lot of the subject matter will give you plenty to think about, regardless of how harsh, ridiculous, opinionated or unwarranted that it may come across to you. There are also references abound in this book, not all of them

being magic books. The reader would do well to remember that even the author says that one will not necessarily agree with everything in the book and more importantly, *that is okay*.

Even if you dismiss the book, the author and his opinions/statements and do not apply anything from this book to your own work (which in my humble opinion would be a foolhardy thing to do), you will at the very least be forced to think outside the box on *all* aspects of your show. Everybody that is serious about performing will find that this book forces you to think about things you have missed before, and this book in all its controversy and glory belongs in the library of every serious performer. Earlier I mentioned there is another book very similar to this one. What is the title? Tune in again next month to find out!

That is all for this month folks and until next time remember: Keep the magic alive! **-JMA**