

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, PhD.

Hello folks and welcome to the *Ex Libris* article for September, 2015! It is that time of year again when kids return to school and the time when cider mills, apple orchards and haunted houses start opening to the public. The air starts to chill, the leaves change color – a time of transformation!

Even though this is September, it leads into October which for magicians is usually a very busy month, so I thought I would focus on a book that will lend itself well to Halloween-themed shows. This is the adult stuff, not really for kids, but with some thought and effort, the material from the book for this month can be toned down and the presentations changed to suit shows geared toward children. The book we are focusing on this month is **'The Book of Forgotten Secrets'** by Stephen Minch.

If that name looks familiar to you, it should. Stephen Minch is the man behind the publishing house, Hermetic Press. He has also authored many different books over the years by Martin Nash, Tom Stone, Ernest Earick, Larry Jennings, Bruce Cervon, John Carney, Tommy Wonder and Alex Elmsley, to name but a few. He was also the editor of the *Gibeciere* magazine. Stephen has authored a number of books that focus on mentalism, ESP magic and bizarre magic, all having received great accolades over the years. In 1979 he wrote a book called *'Lovecraftian Ceremonies'* which was inspired by the worlds and characters of H.P. Lovecraft. It was a book full of bizarre magic, along with the stories and tales in the style of H.P. Lovecraft.

After having been long out of print, that book was reprinted in 2009 and expanded to include other material that was not in the 1979 book. This book was published under the title **'The Book of Forgotten Secrets'** and was limited to 500 numbered and 26 lettered presentation copies, each also signed by the author. They are hardcover books with a nice look to them – it looks like a book that holds some great secrets between its covers, and it does. It is just under 5 x 7 in size, has a built-in ribbon bookmark and the illustrations that are inside suit the tone of the book very well – the only thing that could have made it more realistic is if all the pages were aged and the book was bound in aged leather.

Like many bizarre magic effects out there, some of them are a “stock” magic effect redecorated and presented in a different way. What I mean by that is something as simple as the old Foo Can or the Drumhead Production Tube, both of which many magicians are familiar with, especially those that do kid shows. Here, the props are given a much darker look in order to suit the effects in which they are used.

The book also talks about how to set the stage for each piece, as well as for the entire show – something that is very important in bizarre magic if it is to succeed. The basis of a good bizarre magic effect is the ability to tell a good story, and that is addressed at length in this book. In fact, each effect comes with the story that Stephen uses for it himself; the stories and the

characters in them are all very much akin to the style of H.P. Lovecraft, and some of them are delightfully darker than others.

An interesting thing about the material in the book is that it is broken up into sections which are theme-based, and which happen to correspond to the phases in the evolving career of the author. The methods may be disappointingly simple to some, but the effects themselves are quite novel. There is quite a bit of history on the bizarre magick movement but it comes in the form of the history of bizarre journals throughout the years. Unlike most magic books, there are no photographs but a few illustrations, which in my opinion add to the flavor of the book but are not necessary to understand the very thorough descriptions given throughout the book.

To close the book, there is quite a tale or rather, a parable of sorts, which may or may not suit your liking. Personally I greatly enjoyed it and it was a great way to finish a great book.

Alhazred's Eye

Effect: The performer and the audience call upon the help of the mad Arab mystic, Abdul Alhazred, the author of the dreaded *Necronomicon*. They are to try an experiment to test the power of an old relic – the eye of Alhazred himself. A piece of parchment with a pentagram or star is introduced and five spectators are invited to write their initials at the points.

A packet of symbols are shown and then turned face down and shuffled, then dealt onto the table. A spectator chooses one, sight unseen, and the rest are put away. The relic is placed onto the face down card. After a few moments of concentration, a spark is seen to ignite on the parchment with the star, and it slowly crawls around the paper, leaving behind a trail of ash in the shape of a symbol. When the chosen card is turned over, it is seen to match the symbol burned into the paper.

Requirements: Some of you may recognize this if you enjoyed (or remember anything from) chemistry class in high school or maybe even college. The back side of the parchment is treated with a chemical – a saturated solution of potassium nitrate, applied in reverse or as a mirror image of the final outcome. A pencil dot shows you where to start the ignition and at the moment the spark is to be introduced to the chemical, the parchment is picked up at the pencil dot is touched to the end of a lit incense stick, which will start the process.

Since certain chemicals like potassium nitrate can be hard to come by in some areas, we will instead focus on an alternative method that uses no chemicals. In this case, you will paint the symbol in with a reddish-brown color of some sort, heavy enough to be seen but light enough that a piece of flash paper can conceal it. The flash paper must be of the heavier sort, not the thin tissue-type that comes in the small pads. If you cannot find the heavier flash paper, you can layer 2 or 3 sheets until the symbol cannot be seen through it. To attach the flash paper to the parchment, use four tiny beads of magician's wax at the corners.

In some conspicuous spot on the front of the parchment, make a small hole so that when you touch the incense stick to the parchment, the heat will ignite the flash paper through

the hole. Of course, you will need to force the card with the symbol that matches the one to be revealed by the fire.

The cards with the symbols can be blank faced playing cards, pieces of thin cardboard, poster board or card stock cut to the same size as playing cards, pieces of thin wood with the symbols burned or carved into them, or whatever you want. If you are presenting this in a bizarre nature, age the cards and the pentagram parchment by soaking them in strong tea or coffee solution and dry them out thoroughly.

The relic is completely optional, but in the case of the book, the author recommends finding a real eye and keeping it in a rather peculiar glass container filled with murky liquid to suit the mood. The eye need not be human because most folk are stubborn about parting with them, but if you like this sort of effect, you can find them in dissection and scientific supply houses rather easily. It can also be a fake eye if you are too squeamish to deal with the real ones.

Presentation: Once you have set the mood and begun the ritual, you shuffle the cards and have one selected and simply force the necessary card any way you like. You can use the Australian Shuffle (the Down Under Shuffle), you can use the Classic Force, Riffle Force or whatever you like. The card is never looked at and is instead placed face down on the table. When you wish to conclude the effect, you ignite the flash paper to reveal the symbol, and then turn over the card to show that they match.

If you are in the right venue, you can also have an identical number of cards, all with the force symbol on the face, and switch them in after having the cards shuffled. Now, you can place them all on the table face down and give the spectator an absolutely free choice of which card they choose. This is not necessary, but is a very nice option. Since the cards were displayed before they were shuffled and all were seen to be different, if you just put the unchosen cards away after they make the selection, nobody will question it.

Also, you can use this same method to reveal over things like ESP symbols, names, playing cards or whatever else you can fit into the theme of the effect. As with the rest of the effects in this book, this effect is quite deep and dark if you present it as written, but it can be changed to suit your liking if you are not into the bizarre aspect of it.

*If you would like more detail on the chemical formulae for making smolder paper, let me know and I will divulge more to you apart from this article. There are a lot of possibilities with these solutions!

Enjoy the fall season folks and happy haunting!