

Ex Libris by Joaquin M. Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for May 2019! As many of you know I write an article each month on a different book and I really try to give the readers a variety of topics to choose from and read about (not all card magic books, etc.). I was struggling a little bit for this month, then I remembered that the meeting theme is to be comedy magic and almost immediately I thought of **Don Alan**. Yes, this month we will be looking at a book called *In a Class by Himself: The Legacy of Don Alan* by **Jon Racherbaumer**.

This is a 269-page hardcover book published in 1996 by *L&L Publishing*. This book is rather unique in the way it was written because Jon Racherbaumer spent a lot of time in the home of **Earl Christenberry** along with Don Alan and he recorded hours and hours of audio tapes from which he eventually transcribed this book. While the book does contain photographs for illustrations, they are not actual photographs. Instead, captured video screen images taken from the *Greater Magic Video Library Volume 28* and the *Magic Ranch* videos produced by **William McIlhany** were used. The reason for using them is even discussed in the book.

Don Alan was another of the prolific "Chicago guys" and influenced many of the great magicians of our time, including the late **Eugene Burger**. He was known for being a very funny man, and some of his marketed effects are still staples in comedy magic today, such as the *Egg Can*, as just one example.

The descriptions of the effects in the book are mostly move for move exactly the way Don Alan performed them, but with good reason. Take for example his legendary Chop Cup handling – Jon Racherbaumer once pointed out that Don squeezes out the maximum amount of magic in his routine. It is clear, short and to the point. It is also funny and so well-constructed that the loads are all very well covered naturally. Also described are his other famous handlings of various effects, including his *Benson Bowl* with the final load of a large ball bearing, *The Devilish Devano Rise* and *Ranch Bird Deluxe*, where a mechanical bird is used to find a selected card. Included are his in-between bits of business, the lines, the jokes and the reasons for all of them.

There are two essays in the book, including one on the topic of theft in magic. Very interesting reads. Sprinkled throughout the second section of the book are tweaks and updates of other famous effects with the added Don Alan touch of comedy or devious handling. Things like the *Cap & Pence*, *Coins Across* (with 9 coins), *Invisible Card to Wallet* which uses the old *Magician's Insurance Policy* gag and much, much more. In the third section

there are several funny sight gags and jokes, such as the jar of rubber thumbs, a time card gag and even a very comedic approach to the classic *Rice Bowls* which he called *Cereal Bowls*.

In the beginning and near the end, Don also gives lots of advice and tips about important aspects of magic, especially comedy magic, including environment, timing, control, etc. There is also a very interesting little bit at the end of the book called 'Fun Scales,' which explores ways to practice the various bits.

Well that is all for this month everyone – join me again next month when we will explore another classic tome of magic, and I already know what it will be! – **J. M. A.**