

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

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for February 2020! In the past few years, I have started to go back and rediscover some great magic in the relatively modern books in magic. In the last few months, going back to about September 2019, **Kevin Peshick** has been working on an effect which comes from the set of books we will be discussing this month. Subsequently, he has also been delving into other works by their author.

We are focusing on *The Workers Volumes 1-5* by **Michael Close**. These are large format, softcover, comb-bound books self-published by Mike Close between 1990 and 1996. The first three volumes were illustrated by **Chris Kenner** and/or **Homer Liwag**, both of whom worked with Mike early in their careers and both of whom currently work for **David Copperfield**. The fourth and fifth volumes were illustrated by **Robert D. Michaels** and **Susan Kern**, respectively.

I have decided to lump these five books together for a few reasons. They largely represented the working repertoire of Michael Close, the physical books are no longer available* and because some of the books have more material in them than others. That does not mean that any one volume is "better" than the others – they all have very strong material within. Some are more elaborate, relatively speaking, than others.

The first four volumes focus on a variety of magic effects and the fifth volume focuses on some mixed magic with a large portion dedicated to magic with a memorized stack. Since there is so much to cover, I will pick out a few highlights from each tome instead of focusing on the entirety of their contents.

Volume 1 – *Routines from the Professional Repertoire of Michael Close* brings, among other things, one of the greatest Moving Hole plot effects in magic, *The Pothole Trick*. This requires some easy arts & crafts to make up, but you can use your own business cards, and, on the back, you draw a rough map of a street, some houses a pothole in the road. As the title implies, the hole moves around, even jumping from one card to another signed card, which can be given away at the end. Very visual and very strong effect!

Volume 2 – *More Routines from the Professional Repertoire of Michael Close* brings us *The Frog Prince* in which a playing card is folded into an origami frog and changes places with a selected card. This is a very good effect and

it is the one that our own Mr. Peshick has been working on for a while now. This volume also gives us a devious method for a double lift from the center of the deck, the *M.C. Spread Double Lift*.

Volume 3 – *Further Routines from the Professional Repertoire of Michael Close* gives us a rather heady combination of *Card on Forehead/Card Under Salt Shaker/Deck Under Salt Shaker/51 Cards to Pocket* in one neatly packaged little routine he calls *The Card, The Forehead and the Salt Shaker*. It is an exercise in routining and audience management!

Volume 4 – *Yet Still More Routines from the Professional Repertoire of Michael Close* brings us *Ruthless Peephole*, the hilarious combination of the **Karrell Fox** *Cigarette Through Quarter* and the **Dan Harlan** *Card-Toon*, along with my favourite version of *Cards Across, Butte Ox? Two Butte Ox!* (think of 'butte ox' as a funny pronunciation of 'buttocks'), the inspiration of which was the **Tom Mullica**-style *Cards Across*.

Volume 5 – *At Long Last the Concluding Final Ultimate Installment of Even Still Yet More Additional Extra Further Bottom of the Barrel Routines from the Constantly Dwindling Professional Repertoire of Michael Close (!)* (Heckuva subtitle, innit?) *Stupid Travelers* is a multiple-cards to pocket, spectator-as-magician type comedy effect where a spectator wears your jacket and removes the cards from four different pockets.

Two of the cleanest Sandwich-plot effects, *Smiling Mule* by **Roy Walton** and *Monkey in the Middle* by **Bill Goldman** are given handlings using the memorized stack. One of the most commercial effects ever created, *Red See Passover* by **Simon Aronson**, where a merely named red-backed card travels to a blue-backed deck, is made a bit easier in the Mike Close version called *Full Deck Passover*.

Whew! That was a bit of a long one so if you made it this far, thank you for your kind attention! I certainly hope that this article has piqued your interest in these books and if it has, I refer you back to the beginning where I said the physical books are no longer available. *This is true where brand new copies are concerned, but you can still find second-hand copies from various dealers from time to time. You can also buy them as a PDF bundle directly from Michael Close himself, at a greatly reduced price for the full set of five.

Join me again next month for a decidedly shorter column (I know what you are thinking already!) – until then stay magical, my friends!

J. M. A.