

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

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for April 2020! I just want to point out that due to a number of things happening, there was no newsletter for the month of March 2020, which means there is no Ex Libris article for that month either – we will pick up again with this one!

Since we all have an abundance of time on our hands while self-isolating at home for the greater good of mankind, it has made many people realize they now have time to do things they have always wanted to do and never had or made time for doing. Many magicians are using the time to hone their craft, and I thought it would be a good time to revisit some of my favorite magic books.

One of the books that I chose to revisit is **The Art of Astonishment, Volumes I, II & III** by *Paul Harris & Eric Mead*. This month I will be focusing solely on the first book because there is just so much in each one. Both the set and the individual volumes are commonly abbreviated to 'AoA' and the first volume is 310-page hardcover book published 1996 by *A1-MultiMedia*.

This volume alone covers a lot of magic with many different objects, but in a rather unique way – quite a few of them require you to do some arts and crafts to make the necessary gimmicks and/or props to do the effect. None of them are particularly difficult, but some will take care and time to do well.

There are effects using coins, cards, paper money, shoes, rocks, needles and much more. Some of the effects were also marketed separately over the years, some as a separate manuscript on its own (such as the classic P.H. effect, *Solid Deception*) but all of the material in this volume (and indeed, in all three volumes) were previously published in books, manuscripts and lecture notes. Just about everything was updated for publishing in AoA.

Some now-classic effects appeared in this volume, including *Color Stunner*, which is a Triumph combined with a color-changing back kicker, *Earth Shoes* which sees a big rock produced from your shoe and the aforementioned *Solid Deception*, which is a straightforward handling of *Ambitious Card* and at the end, the cards all fuse together in a solid block!

P.H. became well known for his *Bizarre Twist* where you place one card perpendicular to and between two others, and it visually turns face-up. Some other bits of strange include *Cheap Juggler* where you balance three pennies edge to edge, but later reveal that they are stapled together, and *Orange* is a piece of visual art where you carve a real orange so that it is cut

into two distinct halves, but they are not separated as the peel from one half is still intertwined and linked with the other half, no glue or any secret stuff required – just a sharp knife and some patience!

Gregory Wilson also appears with eight of his own fantastic effects, including *Vanish 5000*, a gimmick-less vanish of sugar grains, and *ReCap*, an impromptu stunner with a pen and its cap. Finally, I will mention that one of my all-time favorite card effects was published in this book, and over the years it has spawned many variations in handling. *Re-Set* is a stunning and very magical transposition between four Aces and four Jacks, which transpose not just once but twice!

There are plenty of other effects in this book to whet your appetite for not-so-run-of-the-mill magic, a style that Paul Harris has become known for. Join me again next month as we take a closer look at Volume II of this set and until then, stay safe, stay healthy and keep the magic alive! – **J. M. A.**