

Ex Libris by Joaquin Ayala, Ph.D.

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for October 2020! I had previously alluded to a special guest columnist who has written an article before, so without further ado I turn this over to A.A.M.C. member **Kevin Peshick**, who will be discussing *Scripting Magic Volumes 1 & 2* by **Pete McCabe**.

Being a devotee of scripting, I decided to review these two books. While I realize that many magicians are not as excited about scripting as I am, I think there is a lot to be learned from these books even for the non-scripters in the crowd. My original plan was to just review the first one and save the second one for another review, except I do not think they stand apart very well and are better reviewed as one work. The author, **Peter McCabe**, has worked as a screenwriter, editor, and script consultant on such well-known shows as Miami Vice and The West Wing. He is also an accomplished magician, the combination of which makes these compelling books for improving a magician's performances. That said, my thoughts on the books are a bit conflicted, but I will save that until the end. First, I wanted to give a rundown of what are in the books.

Scripting Magic (2017 Vanishing Magic Inc. \$50 at your favorite magic dealer) is a 462-page hardbound book. The book has 43 scripts, 13 essays, 7 interviews, 191 illustrations, and one flowchart thrown in for good measure. The contributors to both books are comprised of the best and the brightest in the field of magic. Some of the contributors in this first volume are **Michael Ammar, Eugene Burger, Michael Close, Bob Farmer, Guy Hollingworth, Max Maven, David Regal, and Jim Steinmeyer**. Even the always silent **Teller** of *Penn & Teller* has something to say about scripting in this book.

One of the gems of both these books is the number of classic effects included. A sample of the effects in this first volume include: *Coins Across, Torn and Restored Card, Invisible Deck, Gypsy Thread, Add-a-Number Prediction, Triumph, Gemini Twins, Hot Rod, Chop Cup, \$100 Bill Switch, Out of this World, and Wild Card*. There is even a routine in here for the *Self-Cutting Banana*! You can see that these are all classic effects that you have heard of, and maybe even performed before.

The beauty of these effects is that after the handling by the creator is explained, such as *The Cassandra Quandary* by **Guy Hollingworth**, McCabe then gives his handling designed for mere mortals like me. In Hollingworth's handling he palms half the deck in and out of play twice, does a barehanded switch and two Tenkai Palms! While I do not advocate simplifying technique if it weakens an effect, I find McCabe's adaptations of the effects in the book to be very practical in most cases. McCabe spreads out his instructions on scriptwriting throughout both books. In this first volume he tackles such topics as: Scriptwriting 101, Developing Your Character, No-Script Scripting, the Backstory, and Adaptation.

Scripting Magic Volume Two (2017 Vanishing Magic Inc. \$50 at your favorite magic dealer) is a 445-page hardbound book that contains 33 scripts, 9 exercises, 3 interviews, 93 illustrations, and one flowchart. The contributors to this volume include **Michael Weber, Juan Tamariz, Chris Philpott, Robert Neale, Harry Houdini** (no séance required), **Joshua Jay, Roberto Giobbi, Paul Gertner, and Christian Cagigal**. Among the scripted effects are *The Magic Coloring Book, The Dancing Cane, The Water Torture Cell, the PATEO Force, the Cut Deeper Force, The Einstein Card Trick, and The Book Test*. As in Volume One, not only do you get a script as created by a seasoned professional, but you also get a practical handling for most of the effects.

This volume has a lot more time devoted to scripting techniques: Plotting, Effect, and Scripting Magic for non-actors, First Lines, and Dramatic Structure. This volume also gives you access to PDF downloads with worksheets and exercises to work on developing your scripting writing abilities.

How to use these books

I am a bit conflicted on these books. The two volumes cover a lot of territory in scripting; however, in my opinion, they do not do it in a neat orderly fashion that allows the reader to build upon the basics first and then develop from there. If the lessons in scripting and the given routines were in a step-by-step order, I think it would be a more effective course in scripting.

Conclusion:

While I think that some of the material in Volume 2 should have been included in Volume 1, if you are just going to buy one volume, get Volume 1. If you want to work deeper into scripting, then definitely get Volume 2. I have been trying to find other good sources on scripting, but what I know of tends to be scattered around here and there. One book I do not have but I have heard provides a lot of great information on the topic is *Maximum Entertainment* by **Ken Webber**. If you think of scripting as the entire presentation, then the best book in my opinion is *Strong Magic* by **Darwin Ortiz**.

One thing to consider is whether you should use the scripts as they are or not. McCabe gives permission to use his presentations; however, McCabe is not a professional magician. I believe some of the scripts from professionals give permission, but it is probably better to be inspired by the scripts instead of directly using a professional's material. While these scripts are published in a book that you are paying for, which to me may imply permission, there is also the issue of whether the script will play for you and your performing style.

As a supplement to this article, I decided to highlight sections of the books that I think are most useful to the average non-professional magician like myself that wants help with scripting. This was made into a separate document to help keep the length of the article shorter while also providing you further insights to my interpretations of the material in these books. That being said, my choices of what is important are influenced by my own taste in magic, so

you may find other effects or essays more relevant to you. With that I leave you with a quote which sums it up nicely:

*"Always be a first-rate version of yourself,
instead of a second-rate version of someone else."*
- Judy Garland

Yours in Magic,

Kevin Peshick