

Ex Libris by Joaquin M. Ayala, Ph. D

Hello folks and welcome to the 'Ex Libris' article for September 2025! This month we will be focusing on ***Sleights & Insights*** by **John Carney**. This is a 315-page hardcover book originally published in 2020 by CarneyMagic, and as of this writing, it is still available from most retailers, and www.carneymagic.com, for \$80/USD. Pre-emptively speaking, worth every penny, according to the author of this article!

Yes, this month we will be focusing on the same author, but there is something you must first understand: this article is about a brand-new publication, not some wild pipedream...

Last month we looked at '*The Book of Magic*' by John Carney, a VERY worthy book of your attention. The book we are focusing on this month is an extension of that book, and its predecessor, '*Carneycopia*.'

This book is not unlike the previous two books written by/on the work of John Carney. That is to say that this book is based on history, personal, professional and performance philosophy, and all of it has been road-tested in every conceivable way by John himself.

In this tome, you will discover some older effects done in a new way, such as the opening effect, '*I Love a Parade*,' which is reminiscent of the old '*Chinese Laundry Ticket*,' but with more than an upgrade and a clever, modern presentation.

Another of my all-time favourite effects in magic is the classic "Gypsy Thread." That is represented in this book under a very clever presentational angle that many of us will remember/be familiar with. How many of you remember (especially if you did make them) making the old "rustic telephones" by poking a small hole in two cans and tying a long string between them? When the whole unit is held taught, one person spoke into their can/cup and the other listened to theirs, and by miracles of science, you could *hear* exactly what the other person was saying! Using this rig, John has lent a certain creativity and relativity to the classic 'Gypsy Thread' plot – brilliant!

There are some classic effects brought up to date in this book, such as the wonderful and seldom-seen '*Silent Mora (3) Ball Routine*', '*The Homing Card*', and '*The Magnetized Wand*'.

In 1868, **Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin** published his classic tome, '*Les Secrets de la Prestidigitation et de la Magie*' ('*The Secrets of Conjuring and Magic*') In this book you will find a most glorious card effect called '*The Ladies' Looking Glass*'. This effect also appeared in the '*Royal Road to Card Magic*' (see the review article from February 2016), and besides myself, I have only ever seen two other people perform this effect: my friend **Michael Vincent** and **John Carney**. John presents a few wonderful solutions to the final two selections in that effect, the two cards being plucked from a shower of cards!

Many of my readers grew up in Michigan and close to Colon, the Magic Capitol. Many of them may have seen live, or on television, the famous **Harry Blackstone, Jr.** '*Vanishing Birdcage*,' which he closed his shows with. In this book, you will find a mini dissertation on that effect which covers several types of cages, ways and means of vanishing them, and numerous ways of cleaning up after, depending on your previous choices. If you have ever seen Blackstone or even Lance Burton perform this effect, you know how strong it really is!

One of my favorite coin effects comes from the Scottish magician, **John Ramsay** and later, his only student, **Andrew Galloway**. It is called '*Three Coins in the Hat*,' and John Carney offers his '*Ramsay Redux*,' adding to the effect a new ending, his own expert handling tips, and philosophy, as well as some refinement on the necessary sleights.

There are some interesting comments on the '*Card Sword*,' catching a crumpled bill from a shower of crumpled paper, and even an effect where a hand puppet catches a selected card from a shower or fountain of cards!

There is a lot of material to unpack from this book, and since it is still in print, it is rather easily obtained – if any of the words in this review have sparked your interest, I hope it inspires you to pick up your copy if you already own it, and if not, seek it out from your favorite magic dealer.

That is all for this month – until next month, keep the magic alive and happy reading!

- *J.M.A.*