

Ex Libris by **Joaquin M. Ayala de Cédoz, PhD**

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for July 2026! I hope everyone had a fun and safe celebration of the American Independence Day in honoring 250 years of America!

At the end of the last newsletter, I gave a hint of sorts to the content/theme of our topic for this article, "...one might say you could *bet* on it..." This month we are looking at *Notes on Fast and Loose* by **School for Scoundrels/Whit "Pop" Haydn & Chef Anton**. This is a 44-page, spiral-bound softcover in 11.5"x8" format, originally published in 2000 and illustrated with very clear B&W photographs. You can still find the physical books on the secondhand market, but it is also available from the School for Scoundrels website as a PDF or PDF/Video instruction combo, for a VERY reasonable \$10-\$15/USD.

Many if not most of you will be familiar with Pop Haydn, who is one of the greatest magicians of our time. He and Chef Anton founded the School for Scoundrels and hosted eight-hour long courses at the famous Hollywood Magic Castle for many years. The whole point of the school was to teach anything and everything related to cons, scams, swindles, and hustling, especially the Three Shell Game, Three Card Monte, and in the case of our focus here, Fast & Loose.

IF you are not familiar with this actual con game, it is incredibly old. It involves the use of a loop of chain (and in times historic, loops of leather, rolled up belts, etc.) and it is lain down in such a way that it forms a figure 8. The victim places one finger in one of the two "holes" in the 8 and the operator pulls the loop away.

If it 'holds fast,' that is, catches on the finger of the victim, the victim wins. If it 'pulls loose,' that is, the finger fails to trap the chain, the operator wins. That is the basic gist of the swindle, and it is exactly that – *a swindle!* The operator can lay the chain to force the outcome in any way they choose, in favor of themselves or the victim, no matter which loop is chosen.

This booklet discusses the history of the game, its variations and other contributors/magicians who have published their ideas for it. It also discusses the ideal type of chain(s) (more on that later), the various patterns that can be thrown (the term used for laying the chain down), the how, the why and why-nots, three different routines, one each by **Jules Lenier**, **Pop**, and **Chef Anton**.

This booklet covers everything you need to know for the rank beginner, taking you all the way through the advanced work on the con, including advanced moves and displays, hooks and come-ons. That all being said, this is literally an education on how to use this as an actual con game to be played in the streets at your own perilous discretion, but as an honest person and a magician, you would never do something so underhanded and dishonest...*right?!* That all being said, this is an *excellent* addition to the repertoire of any magician, and you can have a lot of fun with your spectators using this as a game, or a genuine demonstration.

As for the proper chain(s) mentioned above, there are countless things that can be used, but some things will be better than others for many reasons. A lot of people use a loop of ball chain (like the pull chain on your ceiling fans) and that works okay, but part of this con/game is to mislead

your audience visually – to prevent them from using their eyes to follow the pattern to discern the outcome, something that can actually be done. Pop Haydn sells a very nice chain that is woven and meant to confuse the eye, which prevents this from happening at all. As a bonus, it is quite weighty and will stay put once it is laid upon the table.

At the time of this writing, the handmade chains are still being sold on the School for Scoundrels website, and the two color options are nickel or brass. Now, these chains are not cheap, but they are absolutely worth every single penny and more. They range from \$95-\$125/USD, and let me tell you, I would willingly pay more for them. You can also opt for the magical “twist” ending of producing a knot, made of the same chain, for an extra \$20-\$25 dollars, completely optional and not related to the swindle itself.

I would wrap this article up now, but I just must wax nostalgic for a moment here because this game means so much to me for one reason. Long story short, I used to visit family in the U.S. back when the Toledo Ring 68 was hosting the Glass City Conjuror’s Conclave (what a GLORIOUS time those were!) and I was allowed to attend them as a young man, all on my own but under the watchful eye of a friend I had made in the area. His name was **Manny Hall** (who sadly passed away on Thanksgiving Day 2025).

One year, Manny showed up on the first day wearing a bunch of Mardi Gras beads around his neck, and one night after we got back to the hotel from dinner, I asked him what the heck he was doing with them. Well, he conned me. My 12-year old self. He removed a necklace, and we played Fast & Loose right outside the dealer room, it was about 21h00 (9 p.m.). I was hooked (literally and figuratively!) at once, and he graciously taught me the basics of it two days later. Manny Hall was one of the most amazing humans you would ever have met, and I miss him dearly. Thank you, Manny.

Well, thank you for staying with me on this everyone – join me again next month where I will continue the theme of gambling/scam/con related content. Stay cool!

- *J.M.A.*