

Ex Libris by Joaquin M. Ayala de Cédoz, PhD

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for August 2026! I hope all of you have been staying cool because we have had a handful of scorching days up here, with a side of the air-you-wear...

This month as previously mentioned will see a continuation of the gambling/con game theme, and this one is something with which every magician is familiar, and some may even have seen it demonstrated. This month we will be looking at *Notes on Three Card Monte* by **School for Scoundrels/Whit “Pop” Haydn & Chef Anton**. This is a 154-page, 8.5” x 11” spiral-bound softcover book originally published in 2001 and illustrated with clear B&W photographs. The physical printed book is still available from the Scoundrels Store website for \$55.00/USD, or as a PDF file for \$19.95/USD. Physical copies can also still be found on the second-hand market.

As with the *Fast & Loose* booklet from last month, this is a full treatise on the Three Card Monte, not as a “magic trick” but as a genuine con game, in all its historic glory. If you have ever wondered how the actual game is played and operated, this will show you the way. As magicians, most of us are familiar with the packet effects played as a monte game, but almost none of them use any of the mechanics used in the genuine con.

You need not know anything at all about this con game because this book will teach you everything you need to know, everything like the difference between an open monte and a closed monte, the ideal types of cards to use and how to prepare them, the ways and means of the mechanics, including The Hype (the term for the actual sleight that does the work), the patterns and routing your layouts and your game.

You will find ideas and inputs from a few contributors like **Gazzo** and **Ron Wohl**, **Bob Kohler** and even the legendary **John Scarne** (who, himself, wrote a veritable masterclass book on this con game – see *A Treatise on the Sucker Effects of Three Card Monte* by **John Scarne & Audley Walsh** from 1933). In fact, the Scarne book is likely responsible for more people learning about the genuine version of this con game than any other book out there, until the School for Scoundrels came along.

Other things you will find in the book are interviews with police officers from various cities in regards to the legal side of this con, how it is played on the streets, the hooks and come-ons, the ways in which real grifters get away with it, busting up a monte game, developing a con game character/persona, and even a bit on how to photograph a real monte or shell game on the streets and not get caught!

Again, I bring this to your attention as magicians because it is an adjacent art (the art of the con), real or implied, but in any case, it is something that really draws an audience in (that *is* the whole purpose to begin with!) and you can get a lot of entertainment value out of a genuine demonstration of a real con game. Audiences always delight in seeing it because to them, it absolutely looks like real magic.

I always carry three Bee back cards in my wallet, ready at any time to launch into an actual demo of the con, and it is something I can easily get a solid 10-15 minutes out of, no gaffs necessary. If you ever run into my friend **Michael Vincent**, ask him to do the monte for you because he also always carries the necessary cards and if it is good enough for Mike, it is good enough for all of us!

As an aside, I will point out that this booklet also has a companion video available for purchase, and I highly recommend purchasing that as well. On the Scoundrels Store site, the physical DVD is sold, as of this writing, for \$55.00/USD and comes with a free downloadable version of the full disc. The download sells for \$35.00/USD. You might think that both of those prices are a little high for the product, but rightly so – just think of the kind of information being shared on them. People have and will, doubtlessly, continue to buy the School for Scoundrels products as genuine educational materials for their own nefarious intentions...

I highly recommend BOTH the book and the DVD/download because it is a lot of fun to demonstrate, it gets your audience involved and entertains them in many different ways. Well, that is all for this one and please join me again next month when we will conclude our exploration of scam/con game related materials. Ciao for now!

---J. M. A.