

Ex Libris by Joaquin M. Ayala de Cédoz, PhD

Hello folks and welcome to the Ex Libris article for September 2026! As I used to do in the past for the articles in September, I shall continue here. Namely, as September is the beginning of the school year, the article will focus on a book that is aligned with the new beginning of an education, relative to our continuing topic from the previous two articles.

This month I will be focusing on two separate editions of the same book and that book is *Hello Sucker! The 3 Shell Game – Exposed Completely for the First Time*, an 8-page, 5.5” x 8.5” saddle-stitched softcover book written by **Jack Chanin**, originally published in 1934 and illustrated with line drawings by **Bill Hanna**.

This edition, as far as I am aware, was the earliest booklet on record that was solely dedicated to the Three Shell Game. With only eight (8) pages, this is a no-frills, no-thrills basic education on the absolute basics of the moves, the grips, transfers, and steals. In reality, this covers only six of the eight total pages. If you really pay attention and give it some thought, this booklet contains more than enough information to put your own routine together. As I said, no-frills, no-thrills.

Fast-forward to 1948/49 when Jack re-published an updated version, entitled *Hello Sucker! Encyclopedia of the 3 Shell Game – Completely Exposed, Revised and Enlarged*. The format was the same: 5.5” x 8.5,” saddle-stitched softcover and illustrated by Bill Hanna, only now it contains seventy-two more pages for a total of eighty pages!

This edition expands the education of the reader as it discusses the proper performing surfaces, the correct material for, and, how to make the proper pea, a discussion on the shells themselves, etc. Furthermore, it discusses further come-ons and gags, different sleights, and ways to involve/influence your audience participants, sucker gags and more. It also talks about the use of gimmicks, which, ordinarily, are not necessary in the execution of this con game, but they can make it even more deceptive, and, dare I say, magical...

This version also includes the famous (to those familiar with the history and mechanics of this con) Chanin Master Move, as well as how to deal with Mr./Ms. Smart Alec, dodges for when they pick the correct shell, and even how to compose and present the con as either a genuine demonstration or a magical feat.

Because of the depth, scope and nature of this con game, especially given its extended association with the School for Scoundrels, I offer two further addendums for this article. The first is a link for all readers interested in seeing the total sum of the cons/swindles discussed in this and the previous two articles, demonstrated by Whit “Pop” Haydn, Chef Anton (Riniti) and Bob Sheets. It is a 30 minute video from previous School for Scoundrels classes held at the famous **Hollywood Magic Castle**. You can watch that video at this link: [Highlights of School for Scoundrels 2014](#)

The second is something that I did for an article that was written over ten (10!!!) years ago in the May 2016 article on the Erdnase book: There was an addendum which was published but not included in the body of that monthly article. I will do the same with this article on the Three Shell

Game, owing to the literal thousands of articles, ideas, publications, and iterations related to the Three Shell Game since the Chanin booklet has become known. This addendum will be a list of resources for your own research and further education/information, and it will be focused on more prominent sources of said information. By absolutely no means will it be complete or exhaustive. The link to the addendum will accompany this article and you can click on the following link to read the addendum:

As for the Chanin book and the con game itself: I HIGHLY recommend the expanded booklet by Chanin, and if you have never performed the shell game as it was originally performed (NOT as a Cup & Ball(s) routine), if you have ever been interested in the true origins of that iteration, PLEASE, consider this an invitation to begin! As with the *Fast & Loose* and the *Three Card Monte*, the Three Shell Game is yet another effective way to both demonstrate a genuine con to an audience *and* create an engaging, if not magical performance piece for your show.

That is 'almost' all for this month, unless you read and follow up on the addendum! Please join me again in October as we delve into an appropriately spooky tome fit for my favourite holiday of Halloween!

---J. M. A.