

# INTRODUCTION

The book you're holding in your hands, or perhaps reading on a holographic Kindle twenty years from now, is the result of hundreds of hours of tinkering, brainstorming, performing, sessioning<sup>1</sup>, and writing. Since I have three school-age children and a full-time job as a math professor at Georgia Tech, this project can only be characterized as a labor of love. And I've loved (nearly) every minute of it.

## **ABOUT THIS BOOK:**

Inside, you'll find a rather eclectic assortment of magic<sup>2</sup>. I love memorized deck work, and the entire first part of the book is devoted to exploring new possibilities for this tool.<sup>3</sup> The effects in Part One are all stack-independent and do not require the use of any gimmicked cards. The second part of the book explores non-card magic, or at least magic which does not exclusively use cards. There are two mentalism routines as well as some easy-to-perform routines with coins. Part Three is devoted to card magic which does not require a memorized deck. There are mind-reading effects, gambling effects, math-based miracles, and more.

Some authors of magic books focus on fresh presentations, others on new methods, and still others on original plots. I'm interested in all of these things, and in this book you'll find my explorations of all three.

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<sup>1</sup> My spell-checker suggests that I should also try seasoning.

<sup>2</sup> See the Quick Reference Guide for a detailed summary of the effects in this book.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the routines in the first part of the book can also be done **without** a memorized deck, so even if you don't use a memorized deck you might enjoy perusing this material.

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## THE BUENA VISTA SHUFFLE CLUB

Let me be up front about what this book is **not**. If you're mainly looking for impromptu card effects, this book is probably not for you. All but one of the card routines in this book require either a setup, gaffed cards, or a memorized stack. My overarching goal is to create strong effects, and I'm willing to go the extra mile in terms of advance preparation in order to achieve this. Despite not being impromptu, I do think that most of the effects in this book are **practical**. They're designed for real-world audiences in real performing situations, and not for specially lit theaters or magic clubs.

If you're looking for highly visual magic, this book is also probably not for you. My magic tends to appeal more to the mind than to the eyes. It's primarily card magic, frequently with some kind of mathematical principle happening in the background. But I try not to limit myself by viewing these general characteristics as constraints; on the contrary, I'm constantly testing boundaries<sup>4</sup> to see if I can challenge myself with something unfamiliar. If you're willing to come along for the journey, I hope you'll enjoy the diversity of effects and methods which you'll find in these pages.

This book is also not for readers whose primary interest is in quick-change acts or thimble magic.

The skill level required to perform the effects in this book varies quite a bit. I'm not a sophisticated sleight-of-hand artist myself — I tend to rely on subtleties and mental agility more than physical prowess. So nothing in the book would be considered a “knuckle buster” by the guys at Fechter's Finger Flicking Frolic. (I know, because technically I'm one of those guys.) However, a few of these routines might be considered brain busters — so if Omega-3 fatty acids aren't already a regular part of your diet, I recommend starting on supplements right now.

Truth be told, it will also be helpful if you can do an under-the-spread cull, as I use that sleight in a lot of routines. A good false shuffle or two will also come in handy. And to perform “Say Anything”, you'll need a decent top palm.

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<sup>4</sup> Just like my two-year-old.

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In addition to filling the book with what I believe is strong magic, I've tried to make the book fun to read. I love reading magic books with a *personality*, and I don't seem to have much patience these days for books that are straightforward compendia of tricks. I've always believed that you should write the kind of book that you yourself would like to read, so here you are: a book written *by me and for me*. I hope it entertains and stimulates enough of you that it's not just an exercise in self-absorption. I've received many gifts from the magic community over the years, and I look at this book as one way to pay it forward.

Most of the effects in this book begin with a full script written from the perspective of the audience. My hope is that by reading through these scripts you will see right away not only how each effect should look, but also how it should *feel*.

### **FIVE THINGS YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MATT BAKER:**

1. Everything.
2. I was once a contestant on the TV show Jeopardy! I didn't win, but I came in second place and got a deluxe backyard barbecue smoker out of the deal.
3. I studied poetry with the Poet Laureate of the U. S. and once won a national writing contest.
4. Like the Unabomber, I have a Ph.D. in Mathematics. (Unlike the Unabomber, I try to keep my beard reasonably well-trimmed.)
5. For some reason that I can't fully explain, I'm passionate about magic and have been since I was a little kid. As proof I submit the following photo of me watching a magician perform at my fourth birthday party (I'm the kid with his mouth agape):



## THE BUENA VISTA SHUFFLE CLUB

It's not always clear to me how magic fits in, or should fit in, to my already frenetic life. Even with the demands of family and a busy professional life, magic is where my mind always wants to go out to play. I'm unable to shake it, even when I try. And I did try — my first wife was not a huge fan of my passion for magic, so I used to hide the fact that I was spending so much time on it. I would do whatever I could to free up an hour or two per week to secretly read magazines and watch DVDs. I remember confessing all of this one day to a trusted confidante — I think he was expecting me to say I was having an affair or was addicted to porn. He assured me that there were worse things than having a hobby I really loved.

In the decade or so since I decided to embrace magic rather than shaking it off, it has brought tremendous satisfaction and joy to my life. I've made new friends, learned the inner secrets (and further inner secrets!) of card magic, and found endless stimulation wrestling with the challenges of designing strong effects.

In the last several years, I've embarked on a journey to replace the majority of my performing repertoire — which used to consist mainly of other people's material — with my own original effects and routines. It's been both challenging and rewarding, and the effects in this book are a result of those efforts. Aside from the irresistible challenge of creating something beautiful which has never before existed, part of what has compelled me to work on original effects is the sentiment which Ascanio expresses in the following passage from *The Magic of Ascanio, Volume 1*:

*“When you're a beginner... you do what your mentors do, what your idols do. And that's not only logical, but also totally commendable, as long as you regard it as a transitory phase. You must stop copying and do it your own way.... You want to reach a height that your idols, or your models, have reached. Clearly you can't travel the same path, nor do it the same way.”*

This book was mostly written during an academic sabbatical in the spring of 2018. Aside from the ambient geopolitical chaos, 2018 has been an absolute roller coaster of a year for me personally — in ways both good and bad. My father spent much of the year in and out of the hospital, undergoing radiation treatment,

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chemotherapy, and multiple surgeries. I was appointed Associate Dean for Faculty Development in the Georgia Tech College of Sciences. I got my 'Master's Degree' at FFFF in Batavia, NY and attended Magi-Fest and Pebblepalooza, in addition to math conferences in Paris and Rio de Janeiro. In September 2018, I performed a Penguin Live Act in Columbus, OH, and two days after I returned from Columbus my father passed away. The morning of his funeral, I got an email from Juan Tamariz offering me a spot in a master class at his home near Cadiz. Four other magicians and I spent four days in Spain in early November learning from the *maestro*. What a crazy, wonderful, and heartbreaking thing it is to be human.



And now — without further ado — let me introduce you to The Buena Vista Shuffle Club, a fictional group of magicians whose ideas and commentary will be sprinkled throughout the book.