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## Why Lybrary.com? Why Ebooks?

by Dustin Stinett

It's been several years now since Chris Wasshuber and his venture, Lybrary.com, became a part of the landscape of the magic community. To be perfectly frank (and Chris can confirm this), when he and I first started having discussions about ebooks on the various magic message boards I wasn't just against the concept, I was *vehemently* against the concept. Not that our arguments were mean spirited (though Chris had - and in fact still has - to put up with some mean spirited comments): they were just *spirited*. We both argued passionately for our respective sides.

However, I argued as if Chris and his venture were a direct attack on my personal library: as if he was about to punch a hole in the cosmic wall that separates the future from *the now* and some kind of time/space/matter vortex would suck my beloved books forever into the ether just so he could replace them all with little silver disks.

Chris just wanted to provide an alternative medium for the dissemination of classic magical material.

Of course, I'm being over simplistic in describing Chris's ultimate goal, but I'm not exaggerating the divide between his and my beliefs at the time. In the ensuing years I have slowly begun to understand the goals of Chris Wasshuber and Lybrary.com (besides the obvious capitalistic reasons, with which I never had an argument). I also realized that the advent of ebooks is not an attack on the tactile pleasures proffered by "real" books (if anything, ebooks *enhance* that pleasure - but I'll get to that later). As you all should be aware by now, the motto of Lybrary.com is "Preserving magic one book at a time." I have never read a better mission statement (and I have been forced to read many).

"Magic" (the art, hobby, activity - however you want to categorize it) is a relatively small community but yet boasts more printed material than many so-called "mainstream" diversions. I mean, really, how many books have been written on fly fishing? How many *could* be? Magic, quite literally, has several centuries' worth of literature. Much of that, particularly the texts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, makes up the very foundation of the art. Quite a bit of that original material resides only in private collections and libraries and when sold (especially in these auction-site inflated days) fetch exorbitant prices. Many have

been reproduced by book publishers of varying quality (from trade paper to higher quality paperbacks), but there are but a relative handful of those when one looks at the list of out of print titles that belong in the libraries of anyone who takes their study and personal growth in magic seriously. And let's face it: a quality that seems to be lacking among many magicians (or so many pundits believe) is a solid educational foundation that can only be garnered through the study of classic texts. Ebooks make that education readily available at an affordable price. And ultimately that is what we are talking about here; the dissemination of information to those who need and want it, *not the collecting of the medium which carries it.*

When I look through the list of titles available through Lybrary.com I see many that I believe qualify as required reading. Some are certainly available in paperback form from national publishers and if you are as passionate about books as I am, you might want to consider that source (but if you were *really* as passionate as I am, you'd pay the extra cost for an original edition - but I digress). However, if it's the information you need at a price you can afford - its form being unimportant - ebooks may very well be your answer. And here is something else to consider: While companies like Dover sell magic related books, they are not a part of the magic community: Lybrary.com is.

There are other benefits afforded by ebooks, even for purists like myself. The advent of digitized text makes research amazingly fast and easy, especially in these "hurry up with that" times in which we live. Researching still is, for the most part, a "hurry up and wait" pursuit. Granted, most of us who do this kind of thing also relish the hunt: leafing through musty pages of old magic books and periodicals is as good as a trip in Mr. Peabody's WABAC machine. But there are two things that all good researchers will always put above the physical pleasure of the search: accuracy and completeness. The search capability of digitized text is not just a step in the right direction; it's a giant leap. And as more and more of magic's literary works make it into formats that are searchable, a vast database of magical knowledge will become available online. Answers to historical questions and particularly those of the provenance of effects and technique will be able to be answered quickly. This will not only help clarify the printed record, but it will allow future authors to do the right thing and properly credit those who came before him. The excuse that such research is too time consuming will be made invalid and "Magic" will be a better place as a result.

So you may have been scratching your head wondering how an ebook actually enhance the tactile joy of acquiring the "real thing." Well, I first read Harry Houdini's [\*Miracle Mongers and their Methods\*](#) as an ebook, believing it unlikely that I would ever find an affordable, quality edition. When that opportunity did indeed come about, my pleasure was enhanced twofold: I knew the material in the book was well worth the price I paid and I now had an edition I could enjoy from a corporeal sense. The ebook had made my decision to buy the real deal an easy one.

Ebooks cannot replace the tactile joy experienced when holding and reading a book, but they were never meant to. Ebooks are what they are, an alternative medium for the distribution of text. Sometimes what matters most is the information. Sure, it might be nice to have 51 years of bound original magic periodicals on your bookshelf, but in some cases that is a tall and unrealistic goal. But having the complete text available with a push of a few buttons can be a dream come true.