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WHERE MAGIC AND TECHNOLOGY MEET



How I Spent My Summer

by Michael Close

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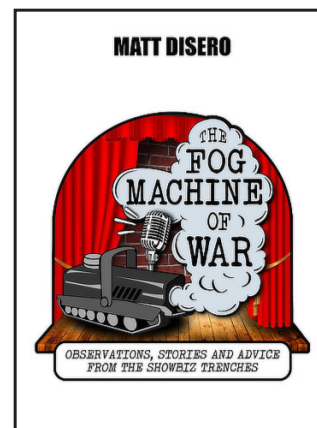
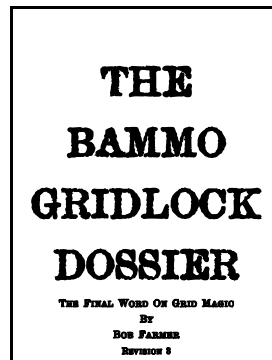
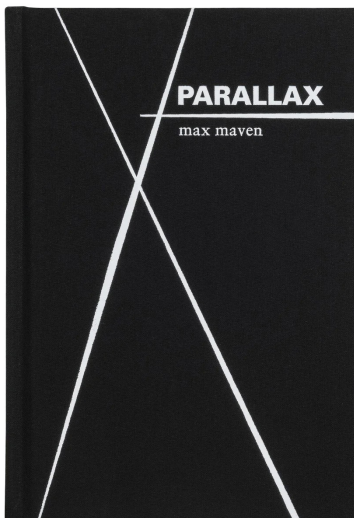
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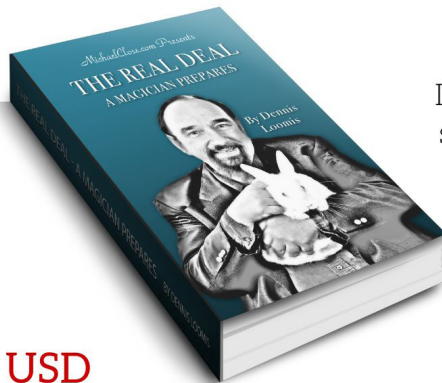
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HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER (AND THE SIX MONTHS BEFORE) – FOOL US SEASON TEN

By Michael Close

This past August I was in Las Vegas for the taping of season ten of *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*. It was the first time I had been outside of Canada in three years. I always expect the unexpected during the time we record the show, but what happened during those three weeks came as a big surprise. Here's the story

Every season of *Fool Us* presents its own challenges. In 2020, I was in Las Vegas for the taping of season 7a. Although no official Covid policies had been announced, everyone on the production team knew something bad was on the horizon; we took precautions. I flew home on Friday, March 13, 2020; the next day, most of the world shut down.

For the next three seasons (7a, 8, and 9), I did my job from my basement in The Great White North. I was provided with a console and headset (exactly like those I used in the production truck), and with some video and audio wizardry (which, each season, took some big brain jiggery-pokery to get working properly), I was able to watch rehearsals and performances, listen to P&T discuss methodology during the “bust,” and talk to Executive Producer Andrew Golder during the process. If I needed to speak to a performer after the camera rehearsal, I did so through Andrew’s phone. It wasn’t ideal, but the system worked.



Working at Home

An important change to the preproduction schedule happened during the Covid years: working with performers via Zoom. In the early seasons of *Fool Us*, almost all of the adjustments we needed to make to performer’s act happened during a forty-five minute rehearsal in the Belize Room, a conference room adjacent to the hallway that leads to the P&T Theater. In attendance would be the executive producers, the director and associate director, the property master, several production assistants, Johnny Thompson, and me. The performer would run through the act and then receive notes from the production team. Sometimes these were brief; sometimes they were extensive. Regardless of how many notes there were, the performer had to somehow incorporate them before the camera rehearsal (twenty-four to forty-eight hours later).

As you can imagine, incorporating adjustments at this late stage of the game put a lot of pressure on the performer. Many times, when the performer hit the stage in front of 750 people, nine cameras, lots of lights, and P&T, muscle memory kicked in and our suggestions went out the window.

Zoom has changed all of that. Now we can work with performers months before we shoot. Changes in the script and the handling/method can be internalized and mastered. This has resulted in performers who are confident and comfortable with their routines and has substantially raised the level of the performances.

Normally, for a thirteen-episode season, we recorded sixty-two magicians and thirteen P&T

routines during eight or nine shooting days. During some seasons we recorded even more than that (a Christmas and an April Fool's Day special). Although we would only use fifty-two magicians (four per episode), we recorded ten extra in case there were performances that simply weren't as effective as they could have been. (However, since the instigation of preproduction Zoom calls, we've been able to hire fewer extra acts; everyone is better prepared.)

ARE WE DOING SEASON TEN, OR NOT?

So, what made season ten so challenging? In prior years, *Fool Us* was recorded in the early spring and aired as a summer show. Usually, about seven or eight episodes into a season, the network decides if *Fool Us* is going to be renewed. This didn't happen during season nine; the entire season aired, but we heard nothing about renewal. The assumption was we were going to be renewed, but the process was slowed down because the Nexstar Media Group had purchased a seventy-five-percent ownership stake in the CW network. A new group of executives would be making the renewal decision.

Normally, the producers wouldn't open auditions until we had a firm commitment from the network. However, as we moved into the early months of 2023, it was decided to solicit videos; if we waited too much longer, we wouldn't have enough preproduction time (especially if we needed to tape in the early spring).

So, Executive Producers Andrew Golder, Lincoln Hiatt, and I began looking at videos. (I'll explain what that's all about in a moment.) The network finally officially renewed the show, but with a new challenge: they wanted a twenty-episode season. I don't know why they wanted seven extra episodes, but I have a theory. By this time, a writers strike was becoming a real possibility. *Fool Us* falls into the category of Reality/Game Show, so a writer's strike wouldn't affect us. If the strike happened (and it did), the network would need all the new programming they could get. *Fool Us* was a way to provide that.

PREPRODUCTION STEP ONE

A twenty-episode season meant hiring a minimum of eighty magicians. The first step in the process was to watch audition videos. Lincoln and Andrew do the initial screening; those they find promising they send to me for an evaluation. I watched a lot of videos and offered my analysis/opinion.

What do I look for in this initial assessment? Here are the key aspects:

What is the effect? (Is it similar to things we've already had on the show?)

What's the method? (Did it fool me?)

How strong are the performer's presentational and technical skills?

Are there things that will need to be fixed to make the act TV-ready?

Those are the major points, but I'm also checking whether there will be problems presenting the act on the P&T stage, which is huge and doesn't have easy ways to get props on and off. I also look for moments that will be difficult to get away with on TV, which is tough on misdirection. I may also make some notes about language for the "bust."

how i spent my summer cont'd

Step one actually continues throughout preproduction as the producers fill the available slots. For season ten, I watched a ton of videos.

THREE-MAN ZOOMS

Once the producers and the network execs hone in on potential performers, we start the three-man Zoom calls. Andrew, Lincoln, and I meet with each performer, and we watch a live run-through of the routine. Andrew and Lincoln focus on the script; I work on polishing the magic. Anyone who talks during their act submits a script, which may be revised several times. The producers are looking for clarity and concision. (By the way, don't let anyone tell you it's not important to write a script as you work out a routine. If you want to be on *FU*, you'll be writing down the words you say.)

As far as the magic goes, I'm looking for moves that flash, changes that improve the method, or, sometimes, complete overhauls to the method. My goal is to eliminate as many clues to the method as possible – to increase the odds of fooling P&T and to make life more difficult for the bottom-feeders who tear apart the methods of *FU* acts on their YouTube channels. Because of the number of performers this season, I found myself devoting most of my time to problem solving; the accompanying mental fatigue reduced my ability to focus on other projects (like this newsletter.) It was an order of magnitude more difficult than previous seasons.

We started three-man Zooms at the beginning of February and continued them right up until I left for Las Vegas. In addition to the three-man Zooms, I had hours of one-on-one consultations with performers as we worked out the “bugs.” One challenge was the number of performers who auditioned with their FISM acts, which ran between eight and nine minutes long. *Fool Us* requires (and I'm not particularly thrilled about this, but it is what it is) a five-minute-long act. The performers put a lot of effort into editing down their acts, and I applaud them for their hard work.

FULL-TEAM ZOOMS

During the preproduction months, the performers also work with Samantha Harris (who handles travel arrangements in addition to myriad other duties), Property Master Ben Ferenc, and Producers Ray Greene and Larry Herbst (who create the sixty-second videos that introduce each act). When a performer's script and technical handling have been finalized, we have a Zoom meeting with Director Dennis Rosenblatt and Associate Director Robin Chessor, who make notes about the “beats” of the act and offer blocking suggestions. Again, this Zoom call saves time and money when we get to Vegas and begin the camera rehearsals.

OFF TO VEGAS

On July 31, I flew to Las Vegas. As I had suspected, I was one of the very few people who chose to be masked. I like to arrive a couple of days before we begin shooting; this gives me the opportunity to adjust to the time change while easing into the flow of the production. By arriving early, I also can observe the transformation of the P&T Theater into the *FU* stage. For me, this is the greatest magic trick of the show.



how i spent my summer cont'd

The *Fool Us* production office is located in the backstage corridor, where the dressing rooms and the P&T green room (AKA the Monkey Room) are. I stopped by to check in and pick up my credentials. I was happy to see the photo (taken a few years ago) of Andrew, Lincoln, Executive Producer Peter Golden, Johnny Thompson, and me on the door. It was a sweet reminder of my friend who was such an important part of the show.



Building the stage.



On the production office door.

IT BEGINS

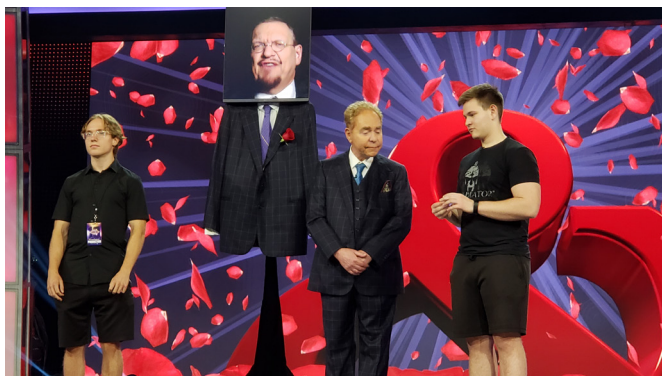
We started things by rehearsing and recording a couple of P&T bits. This season required twenty new routines (they actually came up with twenty-one). We have a new host this season, Brooke Burke (whose name is remarkably difficult to pronounce five times quickly). She approached the gig with energy and enthusiasm. She was receptive to any notes she was given, and was a pleasure to work with.



P&T First Rehearsal



Penn, Brooke, and Teller



Penn Works Remotely

how i spent my summer cont'd

During the camera rehearsals, I sit in the theater, usually in one of the front-row seats next to where P&T sit. Sometimes I move into one of their chairs in order to check for any angle problems. If a performer doesn't require any onstage helpers (for example, a manipulation act), we often record the camera rehearsal. This provides the editors alternative shots. In addition to making sure the magic looks perfect, I also wear one more hat; I function as a coach. Performing on *FU* can be stressful; I use whatever encouraging and calming words I can to keep the performers focused and "in the moment." Below are a few photos I took during the camera rehearsals.



Penn & Jonesy



Teller



The Producers

When we record the show, I'm in the production truck, a technological marvel that is parked outside the theater loading dock. While Brooke is interviewing the performers, Andrew and I listen to P&T discuss the routine; after their discussion is when the decision is made whether or not the performer was a "fooler."

WELL, I DIDN'T EXPECT THIS

The first week of taping went smoothly. We were dark Sunday and Monday (for the union "weekend"). There's no rest for the production team, however; I had rehearsals scheduled on Monday. When we ended at four o'clock, I was moving slowly and not quite feeling a hundred percent. I went back to my room, collapsed on my bed, and slept until three o'clock the next afternoon. My balance was lousy and I didn't feel so great.

Fortunately, Danny Harris, another of our producers, noticed I wasn't looking good on Monday and checked in with me. He sent up the production medic, telling me, "Whatever he says to do, do it." The medic said, "You need to go to the hospital."

how i spent my summer cont'd

One expensive ambulance ride later, I checked into UMC Hospital. I had a fever of 103 degrees, and a urinary tract infection which had progressed into sepsis. For five days they pumped me full of fluids and antibiotics. Fortunately, I could still participate in the week's taping from my hospital bed using Zoom technology and a cell phone. Not ideal, obviously, but we got through the week without any other major problems. I returned to the Rio for the final week of taping. The producers had provided me with a lovely walker, which helped during the four-mile walk from my hotel room to the theater. I only needed it for a couple of days as my strength returned. We wrapped on Thursday, August 17, having recorded everything we needed for a twenty-episode season. The show airs sometime in late October, so keep an eye out for the exact date. There's some excellent magic coming your way.



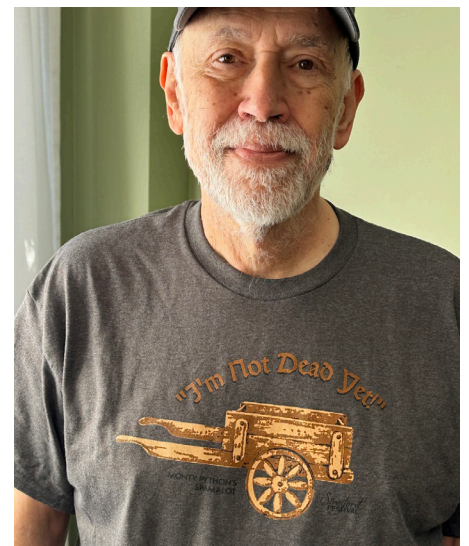
My Office for a Week

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

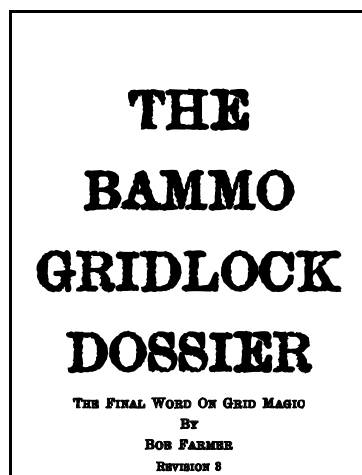
I flew home on Friday, August 18, a little worse for wear and tear, but not feeling too bad. That evening, Lisa gave me a Covid test. Despite all my mask-wearing and avoidance of crowds, I tested positive. I went on Paxlovid right away. Luckily, it was a mild case; after six days I tested negative.

So, that's how I spent the first eight months of 2023. I have some mental and physical fatigue from Covid, but this improves every day. I have no travel planned for the rest of the year, so I hope to get back on schedule with the newsletter and other upcoming projects.

While I was in Vegas, my daughter Ava attended a musical theater camp in Stratford, Ontario. She saw *Spamalot* and bought me a souvenir t-shirt. I think it's particularly appropriate. ♦



PRODUCT REVIEWS



The Bammo Gridlock Dossier
By Bob Farmer
Available from: www.library.com
Price: \$35 USD

REVIEW BY MICHAEL CLOSE

Canadian wild man Bob Farmer continues to produce high quality manuscripts on a variety of card-magic topics. Bob explains what motivates him: “My enjoyment of magic is found in research and invention. Sometimes this results in going doing a rabbit hole. Eventually I emerge and manuscripts like this one come with me.”

One of his most recent offerings is *The Bammo Gridlock Dossier – The Final Word on Grid Magic*. What’s it about? I’ll let Bob tell you:

“This manuscript examines the most popular grids used in magic. Each of these grids allows for a force or some other secret advantage, so the fix is in, and you have a lock on the result – thus gridlock.”

Bob covers four main types of grids. I’ll discuss each, refresh your memory as to the basic effect each grid accomplishes, and mention some of the routines that caught my eye.

The first grid is based on Karl Fulves’s trick Hex Squared. In this trick, the spectator is shown a four-by-four layout of objects. He chooses one object as the starting point and follows a series of instructions on a piece of paper. He apparently has a great deal of freedom as to how he moves along the grid. After the final move, a prediction is read, proving the magician knew where the spectator was going to end up.

You’ll probably recall seeing Max Maven do a routine like this as an interactive TV trick.

Bob has created seven routines using the Hex Squared procedure. Each of these has an interesting “hook” and uses intriguing props. (Most of the routines in the book require you obtain the necessary props. Bob provides you with links to vendors; he also provides any necessary images.) You’ll find routines with runes, Tarot cards, ESP cards, poker dice, and bingo cards.

The second chapter explores the 3-by-3 Matrix. My first exposure to this type of routine was Animal Safari, a trick that used a pre-recorded cassette tape that gave instructions on how to move around the grid. Although there appeared to be a great deal of free choice involved, the cassette correctly predicted where the spectator eventually landed. (My version of this effect, Close’s Dungeon, was included as a bonus effect with *The Complete Workers Ebook*.)

Bob’s first version, Tarot Matrix Prediction (which, as the title would suggest, uses Tarot cards), offers a new wrinkle. Previous versions of the 3-by-3 Matrix offer only a single prediction. In Bob’s trick you can predict *two* Tarot cards. Match Miracle also uses Tarot cards, but, instead of the 3-by-3 Matrix, its procedure has the cards laid out in a row. Other effects in this chapter utilize coins, poker chips, cards with images of the planets on them, and playing cards.

In chapter three, Bob discusses the Matrix Force. This is the standard four-by-four matrix in which a number is circled and the numbers in that row and column are crossed off. This is repeated until four numbers have been circled. These numbers are added together; the total has been predicted. Bob's effects involve numerology, ESP testing, Tarot cards, bingo cards, and colored markers and a dry-erase board (there are several variations and they are all really clever).

Several of the effects in this chapter use a ternary sorting procedure from Bob's manuscript *The Bammo Tarodiction Toolbox*. I think this method of secretly sorting cards as they are dealt face down into piles is a powerful tool that is underappreciated.

The final chapter discusses Intersecting Matrices. A matrix of intersecting sets is used to secretly identify the position of a spectator's card, which is then forced using equivoque. This principle was extensively examined by Peter Tappan in his book, *The Impostress Princess* (1986), where the history of the principle and many effects are described.

Only one effect is offered, a routine using Tarot cards.

The manuscript concludes with a brief Appendix that offers some useful false cuts and shuffles.

Here are few things to keep in mind. As with all of Bob's products, you'll find clear, understandable instructions, offbeat presentations, and plenty of supplemental material to increase your knowledge base. Because these routines are based on underlying mathematical principles, little or no digital dexterity is involved. Yes, you will have to gather and/or construct the necessary props (relatively simply arts-and-crafts projects), but once you do, you'll have routines few other magicians are performing.

If the subject matter appeals to you, you won't go wrong with *The Bammo Gridlock Dossier*.



Topping the Deck: The Perfect Move
By Jamy Ian Swiss
Available from: www.vanishingincmagic.com
Price: \$24.95 USD

REVIEW BY MICHAEL CLOSE

"Details make perfection, and perfection is not a detail."

This quote is attributed to Leonardo da Vinci; it was one of Dai Vernon's favorite quotes. I do wonder, however, about the use of the conjunction "and." I would think "but" makes more sense. Details do combine to bring a creation as close to perfection as possible, but any single detail is not enough to accomplish that task – "but" rather than "and."

Magicians have spent hundreds of years searching for the "perfect" method for executing any particular sleight. Most of the time that endeavor falls short of the mark. As Jamy Ian Swiss writes in the first chapter of his new book, *Topping the Deck: The Perfect Move*, "Of the canon of core

product reviews cont'd

card sleights – the pass, the side steal, the double lift, the multiple top palm and multiple bottom palm – no single technique offers a perfect solution to the problem it is designed to solve, namely how to accomplish the desired outcome naturally and undetectably. It is impossible to say that any single sleight is unarguably best among all the available techniques, given variance in conditions, performers, needs, and requirements.

“With, I would propose, one exception. Of all the available methods for palming a single card from the top of a full pack, I believe Dai Vernon’s Topping the Deck is superior to all other alternatives. If it is not perfect, it is the closest thing we have, and the closest Vernon ever came to achieving it.”

In his manuscript, *Select Secrets* (published in 1941), Vernon explained (in five terse paragraphs and one illustration) his method for palming a single card from the top of the deck. I purchased *Select Secrets* when I was a teenager and I studied Vernon’s method. But it wasn’t until I spent time with Harry Riser that I appreciated how beautiful and deceptive a move it is, and how many small details are responsible for its deceptiveness.

Jamy Ian Swiss was fortunate to study this move with Riser, Johnny Thompson, and Howie Schwarzman, who all learned it from Vernon. Jamy has been teaching the move in lectures and workshops for decades. In *Topping the Deck*, he presents a step-by-step method for understanding and mastering this most useful sleight.

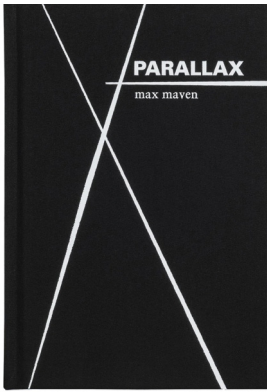
Each of the ten chapters focuses on one important aspect (each of the details) of the overall action. These include: the correct way to hold a card in classic palm position, the genuine action of squaring the deck (important because the sleight occurs under the cover of squaring the deck), the mechanical action that levers the card up into the palm, how to conclude the action in a natural way (including strategies for implying an empty hand), an excellent finesse from Howie Schwarzman, and a list of flaws and fixes for them. All this information is spot on. The book concludes with a short bibliography.

The reader/student who desires to learn this move need not worry about the accuracy of the information or the efficacy of the teaching method. The problem (as I have discovered in teaching the move to students over the years) is in managing the details. There is much to keep track of. Not only must you remember why each detail is there; you have to make sure you are performing each aspect of the move correctly. This can be difficult with only one set of eyes (your own) observing the process.

Here’s my suggestion: Don’t be in a rush to get through this book; take it one chapter at a time. I also suggest you make a copy of each chapter so you can highlight the important points. You should memorize these points, so you can check to make sure you haven’t omitted any details.

Being able to palm cards adroitly opens up a world of visual and deceptive card effects. It will require time and concerted, intelligent practice. As Jamy writes, “Some learn it in two months, some learn it in ten months, but I don’t care about the time, I care about the details. Better to take the time and learn one superior move than to limit oneself to inferior techniques.”

If you’ve ever wanted to learn a top palm that deceives both magicians and laymen, this little book will put you on the right path. All the information is here; what happens next is up to you.



Parallax

By Max Maven

Available from: www.squashpublishing.com

Price: \$55 USD

REVIEW BY MICHAEL CLOSE

I have mentioned on other occasions that one of the toughest things about life is watching old friends turn into books. I can still visit with Stewart James, Allan Slaight, Tommy Wonder, Eugene Burger, Simon Aronson, Harry Riser, and, sadly, many others, but to do so I have to take them off the shelf. Not every book affords this opportunity, but since, in the case of those magicians just mentioned, they wrote their books, as I read I hear their voices, which does temper some of the sadness.

My friend Max Maven created and published myriad magic tricks (mostly published under his given name, Phil Goldstein); two hardcover books, Prism and Focus, contain some of his best effects. However, these are books of tricks; the writing is technical and to the point. His scholarship and ingenuity are on display, but I don't hear Max's voice as I read through them.

Fortunately, a new publication allows me to hear my friend's voice and simultaneously relive an interesting time in my magical life. The book is Parallax, a collection of columns Max wrote for Stan Allan's MAGIC magazine from September 1991 through August 1996.

In his Introduction to the book ("Sweet Bitterness"), Stephen Minch writes, "A drawback in writing for magazines is that the effort, no matter how worthy, goes immediately overlooked by the many and is eventually forgotten by all. Occasionally, some gem gleams sufficiently to be mined from the sluice of monthly pages and given a sturdier set of covers. Such is the case with Parallax, a series of essays, insights, jousts, provocations, and examinations of magic's microcosm, usually within the context of the world surrounding it..."

"Stan Allen has said more than once that 'Parallax' generated more letters to the editor than any other column in the history of MAGIC. While I haven't run the statistics, I submit that record pertains to the inboxes of all other magic magazines as well – because 'Parallax' did not shy from controversy, a practice that, while not entirely unique, was seldom seen in columns run in the larger-circulation periodicals for the craft. In fact, 'Parallax' courted controversy..."

"The 'Parallax' column was the first in conjuring literature to air issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia still passively and thoughtlessly accepted within the magic community in the early 1990s; and although light fingers that lifted intellectual property from creators' pockets was a practice long decried, Maven addressed it with a candor that threw open the shutters more widely..."

"In 'Parallax,' the author's overarching objective is to deliver an ethic and esthetic for conjuring... Maven thrusts his points on rapier wit, dipped in a corrosive of social commentary distilled by Aristophanes, Swift, and Voltaire. In this tradition, wit depends alternately on wisdom and the outrageous to achieve its effect, one that is deadly serious. Listen and you can clearly hear a simultaneous plea and demand that magicians do their best for their craft, in a shared effort to elevate its expression to the level of art."

product reviews cont'd

Stephen's summation of the context and stylistic approach of Parallax gives you an excellent idea of what to expect in the book, but I want to clarify two important points. First, the essays in the book are not the equivalent of an old man yelling at kids to keep off his lawn (although the final sentence of the book on page 189 slightly undermines this statement). The issues addressed are those that have kept the art and craft of magic stagnating for decades. More important, Max doesn't just point out the problems; he offers solutions.

The second point is this: the acerbic tone used in the essays did not define Max's personality. It was a part of it, yes. He had a towering intellect and an overwhelming desire to acquire information on a wide variety of subjects. He read voraciously and he believed passionately in importance of magic performance in contemporary society. He did not suffer fools gladly. However, he was also kind, helpful, sympathetic, and funny, aspects that came to the fore and which were more widely recognized by the magic world in the last three decades of his life.

Max and I met and became friends way back in 1976. I was one of the initial subscribers to MAGIC, so I got in at the very beginning and was a part of the history of that magazine. (I was the product reviewer for ten years.) Since most of you will not have that historical or personal context, how should you approach this collection of thirty-year-old essays? Here are four suggestions.

First: take the time to appreciate the column titles. These contain some of the cleverest wordplay ever published anywhere: The Shadow of your Simile, Thereby Angst a Tale, Scrooge et Noir, July Detector. Some of the titles reflect the month the column was published, some relate to the main topic of the essay, others are just for fun. If you don't understand the wordplay, try typing the column name into Google; it will probably suggest what Max's starting point was. (For example, I typed in "thereby angst a tale" and Google came back with, "returning results for thereby hangs a tale.") By the way, keep Google nearby; it will be a useful tool.

Second: You can simply enjoy the zingers, and there are plenty of them. For example:

"Frankly, I think Robert-Houdin got it wrong when he said, 'A magician is an actor playing the part of a magician.' Judging from most of what I see, a magician is an actor playing the part of a schmuck playing the part of a magician."

"Perusing the monthly Ring Reports in The Linking Ring is not something to which I admit without a certain degree of embarrassment. However, on occasion the practice does yield interesting information. In the most recent issue at hand, I came upon a write-up of a lecture delivered by a name with which I was not familiar. The described contents of that lecture struck me as rather startling, consisting of a range of material devised by someone other than the lecturer. How, I wondered, could the officers of that club sanction a lecturer with such a policy? The answer was provided when I looked at the top of the column and discovered that the man who did the lecture was the president of the club."

"There were so many typographical errors in the July issue of this magazine, I thought I was reading Genii. (If the preceding comment offends you, at least give me credit for efficiency in insulting two editors with a single sentence.)"

My favorites involve a particular card-magic plot:

"In a recent issue of New York magazine, a young woman was quoted on the topic of how

painful it is to get a tattoo: 'I didn't cry, but I no longer fear childbirth.' Yeah, but did you ever sit through a five-phase Oil & Water routine?"

"Actual sign posted in front of a local church:

This Week's Sermon

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

All Are Welcome

Yeah, but did you ever sit through a five-phase Oil & Water routine?"

"According to a report in Science News magazine, tribesmen of the Achuar Jivaro culture in the South American Amazon have a daily ritual in which they drink a potentially toxic brew of intensely caffeinated herbs, then self-induce vomiting. Yeah, but did you ever sit through a five-phase Oil & Water routine?"

You get the idea.

Third, savor the essays that discuss some of the big problems in the magic world. For example, here's a brief excerpt from the essay on the lack of diversity of cover-story subjects:

"I urge the decision-makers at this (and other) magic magazines to develop a deliberate mindset; to be willfully aware of the diversity that already exists in magic, and to strive emphatically to foster still more heterogeneity. The strategic choice of magazine cover subjects is not going to accomplish this goal, but it is an overt beginning." (Happily, thirty years after that essay was written, magic publications have embraced that diversity.)

Here are four essays I found particularly insightful: "Ichi, Ni..." (page 30), "Duphin" (page 45), "Extinguish Fulfillment" (page 57), "Snow Koan" (page 86). Read, ponder, repeat.

Four, use this book to expand your knowledge base. You are going to discover (at least I did) references to people, places, books, and magazines you've probably never heard of. Don't just blow through these. Use our pal Google Search to learn more. Magicians should be able to converse intelligently on a variety of subjects. Max offers you a plethora of fascinating rabbit holes to dive down. Please do so.

The book concludes with the text of "Cynicalculator," a talk Max gave at the MAGIC Live! convention in August 2016. The text is prefaced with a somber quote from Orson Welles:

"If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story."

Max writes: "There's a saying, often attributed to Winston Churchill but actually from the philosopher George Santayana: 'Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' Clearly, this is true of magicians, who repeat it and repeat it and repeat it.

"I think we're repeating the wrong things. We should be aware of our history. But that means so much more than forming an excuse to rehash the same narrow range of effects and presentations.

"Creativity does not come in a limited edition. Therefore, it does not require recycling.

"I'm not suggesting that we ignore the past; quite the opposite. But let's choose to remember the

product reviews cont'd

right things, and the right people, and build upon that work...

“Magic is built on sleights and principles and gimmicks. But those are tools for a process, not the end result...great magic does not come from the distribution of tricks, any more than great painting comes from the distribution of brushes. Tricks are about objects. Magic is about life.

“Whenever I see a performer (magic or otherwise, but especially magic), I always ask the same three questions:

Who is this person?

What story are they trying to tell me?

Why should I care?

Of course, most of the time the answer to the third question is that it’s not worth my time or attention, because the person hasn’t begun to answer the first two questions.

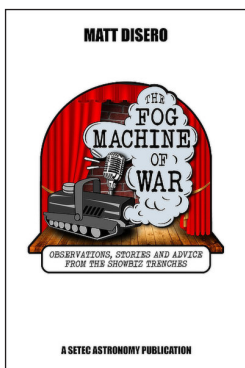
Now the second question might sound confusing, because there is a type of magic known as ‘Story Magic,’ and most magicians aren’t working in that style. But I’m not talking about just that style; I’m talking about all types of magic. Because at the core, there is always a story of some sort.

In the words of Picasso, ‘There is no abstract art. You must always start with something.’ So, there is always a story.

And perhaps the least interesting story of all is, ‘Hey, look what I can do.’”

So, here’s the bottom line. If you’re looking for a book of tricks, this isn’t the book for you. However, if you’re looking for intellectually stimulating material that will make you think and make you laugh, Parallax is perfect. As has been suggested by others, don’t plow through the book; take it in small helpings – that’s how the material was originally presented. You will be enriched for the experience.

For me, it was a reminder of how fortunate I was to have had such an extraordinary human being as a friend, and how much poorer we all are for no longer having him on the planet.



The Fog Machine of War

By Matt DiSero

Ordering info: <https://tinyurl.com/bdzfud5z>

Price: \$20

REVIEW BY MICHAEL CLOSE

Matt DiSero is a full-time comedy magician specializing in corporate entertainment. He has had a long and successful career, performing in comedy clubs, cruise ships, armed forces tours, and in

venues around the world. He's a veteran performer and has the stories to prove it.

For the past few years, Matt, under the pseudonym "Jane Doe," has shared his knowledge in essays posted on a variety of online sites. He has gathered these into a new book, *The Fog Machine of War: Observations, Stories, and Advice from the Showbiz Trenches*.

The forty-seven essays touch on a wide variety of subjects including: agents, show-business regrets, the importance of a keeping notebook, advice for performing on *Fool Us* (Matt appeared on season three, so some of this information is out of date), tech for corporate events, standing ovations, taking risks, working comedy festivals, the importance of brick-and-mortar magic shops, establishing your fee, stepping out of your comfort zone, and the writing process. To give you an idea of Matt's writing style, here are some snippets.

On the importance of generating a fan base:

"'You follow them out of the clubs, or they follow you out of the clubs.' I've heard that since I was sixteen or seventeen years old when I was starting out in comedy clubs. I totally ignored it. To this day my greatest regret in my show business career is that I never built a fan base. Chasing them out of the clubs was a mistake. I should have been figuring out a way to get them to follow me... Keep reaching out to audiences...Keep building that email list and be genuine with your audience. They'll come to see you. When that happens, you're never beholden to anyone, and your work life is truly your own."

On keeping a notebook:

"Point is, no matter what line or bit of business pops into your head, you better write it down; you never know where it'll lead. Write it down, because it'll never come back if you don't. If it ain't on the paper, it's in the vapor."

Sizing up a corporate audience:

"Corporate events, from an entertainment perspective, work like this: they'll be a good crowd if there's table chatter. Lots of talking and laughing during the meal indicates a nice, happy crowd. Quiet with no talking means it'll be a tougher crowd, one you need to work harder to win. Knowing this helps you plan your attack. It's all about the first two minutes. That's what makes you sink or swim. It's part of the physics of how this job works."

On corporate fees:

"I'm often asked why we charge such ungodly amounts of money for corporate events. Why celebrity comics and performers loathe corporate. In part, we charge for experience, the show's profile, and knowing how to kill for that demographic with consistency. Mostly though, we charge a lot because of the bullshit factor that's always at play."

On the importance of outside eyes:

"It's hard to stand back and look objectively at your act. So, do one of two things. Hire a director, coach, or comedy writer to help with those things. Or have industry friends you trust watch your videos and see your shows and have them make suggestions. I've taken both approaches and both are useful. If you're going the friend route, make sure it's someone you trust and someone

product reviews cont'd

who's better than you. If they're at the same level or not doing as well, why get the advice?"

Matt writes in a casual, conversational style; his book is a fun, easy read. You'll hear some great stories, and learn some valuable pro-level tips. If your goal is to pursue a career as a professional magician, Matt's advice will save you time, money, and heartache.

But I've saved the best for last. All the money raised from the sale of this book goes to Academia Boliviana de Magia e Ilusionismo, a magic school for children in Bolivia. You can read more about this school at the link given at the beginning of this review. Good on you, Matt, for paying it forward.

As I've often said, when a pro talks, I listen, because their insights can only be obtained by walking those miles through the trenches. I enjoyed *The Fog Machine of War*, and I think you will, too. And, it's for a good cause. It's win-win all the way. ♦



Something Old – Something New

By Gary Plants

Price: \$25 USD

Ordering information at the end of the review

REVIEW BY MICHAEL CLOSE

Gary Plants is an excellent magician (with world-class chops), a creator, a collector, a photographer, and a skilled craftsman (as anyone who owns one of his various gaffed cards will attest). During his many years in magic, Gary has become a friend and confidant to some of magic's legendary performers, who have shared secrets that to this day remain "underground."

Gary's lecture notes, *Something Old – Something New*, prepared for the 2023 Pebblepalooza convention, contains some of Gary's original card creations plus routines, tips, and suggestions from a few of the aforementioned legendary performers.

The first two items, Miracle Dealer and No Way Out, are card locations that will seriously fry the brains of magicians and laymen. Next are four useful touches from Francis Carlyle and Jay Ose that will elevate whatever method you use for Paul Curry's Out of this World.

Using an approach from Gabi Pereras, Gary has created an excellent handling for Charlie Miller's Dunsbury Delusion. Many card magicians avoid this trick because its original method requires a competent second deal. Gary's routine eliminates the second deal, thus putting this wonderful effect within the skill set of the average magician.

One of my favorite effects is Bruce Cervon's Perfect Lie Speller, which I incorporated into my The Lie Detector routine (*Workers 5*). I was unaware that Cervon was inspired by a routine of Dai Vernon's (the secret of which Vernon kept from Cervon and Larry Jennings for two years). Gary has

created a handling for this effect based on Vernon's original concept. Gary also offers a handling of Vernon's Why am I Here (*Vernon Chronicles Volume 2*). Although Gary's handling makes the trick a bit simpler, I think it behooves you to track down and study the Vernon method; there are some strategies in that routine worth learning. The next item, Culling the Aces, is based on a Frank Garcia idea. It is a pseudo-demonstration of controlling cards to the bottom of the deck during a series of riffle shuffles.

I found the next two items to be extremely interesting and worthy of further exploration. The first is a method for culling a four-of-a-kind taught to Gary by Brother John Hamman back in 1995. In one quick run-through of the deck, you are able to bring the required four cards (or more, for example a royal flush) to the top of the deck. I have altered the handling slightly to make it more comfortable and secure in my hands; I now use this in many different applications. The second item is Michael Skinner's handling of the venerable Cross Cut force. Gary offers two methods based on Skinner's finesse; both are worth studying and incorporating into your toolbox.

The manuscript ends with two ideas, one using the Down-and-Under Deal and the other for using Tilt in an unorthodox way.

Just a reminder: These are lecture notes. The explanations are clear, but there are no illustrations. However, anyone with intermediate (or above) card handling skills will have no problem learning the routines. If you enjoy cleverly constructed card magic, you'll get a lot out of *Something Old – Something New*.

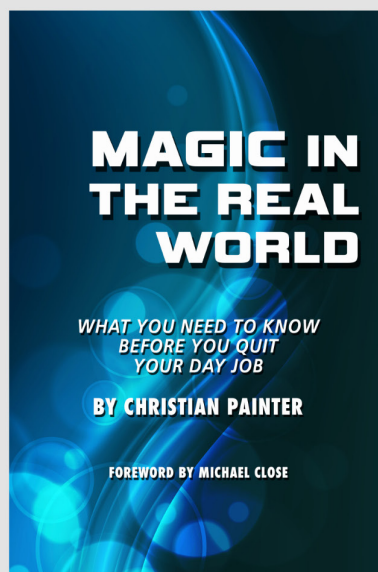
This is an ebook (PDF). You can order via PayPal to gplants@gmail.com or by check sent to Gary Plants, 552 Houston Loop, Liberty Hill, TX 78642. ♦

MAGIC IN THE REAL WORLD EBOOK by Christian Painter

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MAGIC NEWS

EDINBURGH'S SUPERSTAR MAGICIANS ON SECRETS AND SURPRISES: 'YOU HAVE TO BE VERY GOOD AT LYING'

Kate Wyver - Mon 14 Aug 2023

Magic and mentalism abounds at this year's festival. But how are the tricks done? Some of the best performers remain tightlipped – while others reveal all

"That feeling you have right now," says Colin Cloud, putting his cards down, "it's wonderful, right?" He has just performed a baffling trick that somehow allowed me to read his mind, and he leans back, pleased at my stunned reaction. "That is the feeling we don't get any more, so remember what it feels like." Then he tells me how he did it.



Indian Magician, Suhani Shah

The Scottish mentalist, often called the real-life Sherlock Holmes, is about to take a break from his nightly performances in Las Vegas to premiere his new show at the Edinburgh fringe. He will be performing alongside more than 50 other magicians who are artfully rolling up their sleeves for this year's festival. With magic shows traversing cabaret, comedy, horror and myth, each is hoping to dazzle audiences with an impossible feat of mentalism, like Cloud, or spectacular sleight-of-hand and illusion, like magician and magic designer Ben Hart, who, eyebrow cocked, gazes firmly at a little ball of scrunched-up tinfoil that he is holding up.

Read the full article [here](#).

STRIP MAGICIAN'S 'LIMITLESS' EXTENDS TO 2024 ON STRIP

By John Katsilometes Las Vegas Review-Journal - September 6, 2023

Winning "America's Got Talent" twice is impressive. Winning over Las Vegas audiences night after night is an entirely different challenge.

But Shin Lim is up for it. The 31-year-old Strip headliner is riding a hot hand (an apt playing-card reference) into 2024 at the Mirage Theater. Lim's "Limitless" show is running through April 1, with tickets on sale 10 a.m. Friday (Pacific time) at Ticketmaster.com. "Limitless" will continue its 7:30 p.m. Thursdays-through-Mondays schedule.

Lim returned Aug. 30 to "AGT," where he won Season 13 in 2018 and also prevailed in the "Masters" edition in 2019. He opened at Mirage Theater on May 31, 2019.

"This has been an incredible ride," Lim says. "It's been a dream to be on the Strip, and I'm really happy with the extension and where the show is right now."

Lim will be joined by his featured guest, mentalist Colin Cloud, at least through the first set of dates. Cloud is just coming off a successful premier of his "After Dark" solo show at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Read the full article [here](#).

DAVID BLAINE ANNOUNCES NEW RESIDENCY AT THE WYNN

by Jarah Wright

LAS VEGAS (KTNV) — Magician and illusionist David Blaine is bringing a new show to the Wynn.

It's called "Impossible" and is scheduled to open on New Years Eve weekend.

"I've spent my life building my magic by traveling around the globe discovering some of the world's most carefully guarded secrets, being inspired by great magicians who came before me and building on their legacy to show that even the impossible is possible," Blaine said. "I am thrilled to be unveiling my new residency 'Impossible' at the premiere venue in Las Vegas, the Encore Theater at Wynn Las Vegas."

Tickets go on sale September 15, 2023 and you can get them [here](#).



MAGIC, WONDER, ILLUSION ON TAP FOR FIRST-EVER MAGIC CASTLE™ CONJURER'S CRUISE IN EXCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH WORLD-FAMOUS MAGIC CASTLE™ ON DISCOVERY PRINCESS OCTOBER 7-14, 2023

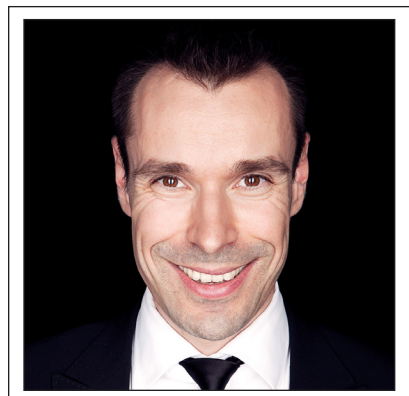
Aug. 14, 2023

Magic Castle™ Conjuror's Cruise brings together two California icons – Princess Cruises, which made cruising a household name as the ocean-going co-star of the iconic Love Boat TV series, and Hollywood's world-famous Magic Castle™, known for 60 years as the mecca of magic and the legendary home to the Academy of Magical Arts.

The Magic Castle™ has championed the art of magic™ and cultivated the careers of magicians and illusionists worldwide for over six decades. The exclusive Magic Castle™ Victorian mansion in the Hollywood hills is a private clubhouse, accessible only by members and their guests. A typical evening – if there even is such a thing – features an array of magic from close-up performances to full stage illusion shows in its many showrooms. Attendees are surrounded by rare memorabilia, magnificent posters, unique bars - each with its own personality and a gorgeous multi-room dining area.

Now, for the first time ever, Princess Cruises is partnering with The Magic Castle™ to lift the veil of this iconic establishment by bringing the Magic Castle™ mission to the sea and expanding the audience of this unique experience. This specially themed, seven-day cruise sails roundtrip from Los Angeles, with day-long stops at three popular coastal California destinations, including San Francisco and San Diego, as well as Ensenada, Mexico. Get more details [here](#).

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MAGIC THROUGH PRACTICAL THEORY



Today, we will see how we can make our tricks more amazing. How to make them miracles. Any kind of tricks you do. Mentalism (my own specialty), close-up, cards, stage illusions, anything.

Do you know what a good, amazing trick is? Many great magical thinkers have already expressed their opinions about this. Juan Tamariz, for example, points out that a trick has to be both impossible and fascinating. Impossibility makes sense immediately, because, as a magician, you obviously want to fool your audience. But clearly there is more to artistic success; you need something elusive – something fascinating. In line with that, Fu Manchu and Dai Vernon have argued that every good trick needs to have an emotional hook. But what exactly

do fascination and an emotional hook mean?

The diamonds of performance help us in addressing these questions in a sophisticated manner. For the trick diamond, I propose four major factors that determine the quality of a trick: Yes, there is impossibility, but there are also relevance, esthetics, and dramaturgy. Every factor addresses a different question from the perspective of the audience. Each pursues different goals and satisfies different needs in the audience.

Impossibility addresses the question, “Is it incredible?” If a trick creates a marvelous wonder, it stimulates the intellect of the audience. Most people want to wonder and be encouraged to think. As magicians we can satisfy this need with effects that seem to defy the laws of nature and appear to be impossible.

Relevance addresses the question, “Is it meaningful?” Good tricks are far from trivial. They are deeply meaningful and go straight to the spectator’s heart. The spectators will feel the trick has something to do with them personally and they will see a connection to their own lives.

Esthetics addresses the question, “Is it beautiful?” Every one of us has the need for sensory enjoyment. Because of this, the fine arts came about, such as music and painting, but also wine culture, fashion, and interior design. Magic can be beautiful as well and pamper our eyes and ears.

Dramaturgy addresses the question, “Is it suspenseful or surprising?” A magic trick is a dramatic piece of art just like a film or a play. It tells a story. This story basically condenses life and gives us the opportunity to experience something exciting or surprising in a protected space. It feeds our souls.

Those are the four corners of the trick diamond. According to the diamonds of performance, they are the most important elements of every trick: impossibility, relevance, esthetics, and dramaturgy. Let’s take a closer look now at impossibility.

So, you want your trick to be impossible? You want it to be a stunning miracle? You want people to lose sleep over it? Then start with a clever construction. According to Ascanio, an impossible magic effect results from the contrast between the initial situation and the final situation. Take the classic Bill Switch in which you transform a ten-dollar bill into a hundred-dollar bill. A ten-dollar bill compared to a hundred-dollar bill? To most people, this is a contrast! This contrast becomes a magic effect when the audience cannot find a natural explanation for the difference. Although the magician folded and unfolded the bill and made a magic gesture, he did not do anything suspicious. The actions the

audience saw between the initial situation and the final situation – folding, essentially – would normally not suffice to transform the bill. Ergo, the transformation must have occurred because of some wonderful magic.

This simple example shows that impossibility is not a dichotomous factor. An effect is not either impossible or possible like two opposites, as in black and white or hot and cold. Just like there are gradations and nuances when it comes to colors or temperatures, the same goes for the level of impossibility. Some tricks are half-way convincing and others are downright inexplicable miracles. It all depends on how convinced the audience is about the initial and the final situations and the interim interval. To discuss this, Darwin Ortiz brought up the useful terms “conviction” and “critical interval” in his book *Designing Miracles*.

Amazement stems from a strong contrast between initial situation and final situation.

The impossibility of the bill switch will be strongest if the audience is one-hundred percent convinced you started with a real ten-dollar bill, that you positively ended with a real hundred-dollar bill, and that there was absolutely nothing suspicious going on in between. Ideally, you would hand out the ten-dollar bill for examination, you wouldn't do any perceptible move for the bill change, and you would finally hand out the one-hundred-dollar bill. People would bet their lives on these conditions. If you have that kind of utter conviction, you have a first-rate miracle.

You see, for high impossibility, we need a good construction. But not only that. We also need the necessary technical execution when performing our effect. There's much to be learned about good technique – naturalness in our handling, for example, which is part of your physical technique. Then there's the material side to technique, including our gimmicks and gizmos (e.g., the thumb tip). All of this would merit our in-depth study. But that's for another column. Instead, let's look at the psychological side of technique. I think it is a fascinating subject and it is often overlooked by amateur magicians. They are too busy practicing the physical sleights, which is great, but it's not enough. Psychological technique means you can deceive the audience using your mind and your manner of communication.

First and foremost, it is necessary that you can lie. You need to learn how to deal with the fact that you are using secret methods to deceive your audience. On the one hand, you might be afraid your deception will be discovered. This would be embarrassing, because it would reveal your incompetence, like a juggler who drops his balls. But when you do magic, there is also an immoral component to it, which is deeply embedded in us because of social pressures that dictate that intentional deception is wrong. But if you are afraid to fail and you feel guilty, you are communicating to the audience you are, in fact, deceiving them, which makes the deception all the more difficult. Your calmness and self-assurance have to overwrite this. You have to be completely comfortable while you are deceiving the audience and executing the secret technique. Generally speaking, the more experience you have in performing, the more at ease you will become, because you will have learned your deception does in fact work, and you can have faith in it. And it's all in a good cause, for the entertainment pleasure of your audience. However, you can see subtle differences among seasoned magicians when it comes to their ability to lie. My friend Christoph Borer is one of those performers who can lie without blinking an eye. I remember one performance when he performed Card to Wallet. I knew his routine well and anticipated the moment when he would palm the card. And Christoph knew I was looking forward to this. I was surprised he actually found the time and calmness to shoot me a secret wink while he palmed and loaded the card. Like Christoph, you should try to stay at ease while you perform a secret move.

diamonds of performance cont'd

Learn to lie confidently.

Disarming openness is a proactive lying ability. This means the performer tries his best not to keep anything a secret; instead, he shows everything openly and tries to be as fair as possible. Gary Kurtz, in *Misdirection and Direction*, coined the term “openness” and emphasized body language as a major factor. For example, the deck should be held away from your body when you perform to allow the audience to see the cards from all sides.

Fortunately, there are performers who are role models in disarming openness, like Juan Tamariz; he often even verbalizes it. That may sound something like this, “Watch, not in my hands, not in my sleeves...I don’t cheat...very slowly, I take one card after the other, very slowly...and something happens...”. Or remember David Copperfield who is about to teleport himself to Hawaii on a platform over the audience’s heads and even attaches a mirror to the back of the platform so the audience can see the disappearance from all sides. Or picture Derren Brown who is about to walk across shards of glass and asks a spectator to carefully put his hand into the shards to judge if the glass is real. All of these examples show that openness helps increase the audience’s conviction when it comes to the conditions of the effect. The performer’s openness has a psychologically disarming effect on the audience. People get the feeling they were fully informed about the initial situation and the final situation, that they can trust this information, and eventually, that the magical transition from the initial to the final situation was free of deception. This openness enhances the contrast and the effect comes across as even more impossible.

That’s it for today’s lesson in impossibility. And here’s your homework to improve your own magic: First, take your favorite effect and clearly state what the initial situation and the final situation are. Picture this clearly. Even tell me in your mind. As a mentalist, I can receive your thoughts. Now go work toward clarifying this in your spectator’s mind.

Second, when you rehearse your secret move, try it with very open body language. Relax, be open, you have nothing to hide. Smile! Don’t worry if you flash during this rehearsal. Record a video of your disarming openness and I think you will be amazed just how much more deceptive your magic looks. ♦

Christian Bischof’s book *Diamonds of Performance* is available at www.christianbischof.ch/shop

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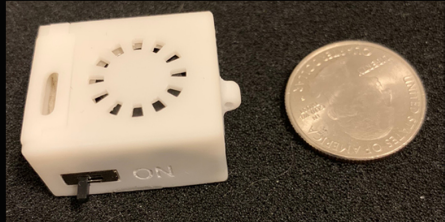
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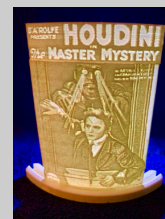
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MAGICAL LITOPHANES



The word "lithophane" derives from Greek "litho", which is from "lithos" which means stone or rock, and "phainein" meaning "to cause to appear." Originally, lithopanes were made from carved porcelain but with modern 3d printing, the world of lithopanes are more affordable. Our unique pieces are 3D printed in plastic and take 5-7 hours to create.

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COOL CLIPS

DAVID BLAINE BLOWS GRAHAM'S MIND WITH AMAZING MAGIC TRICK | SO GRAHAM NORTON - 1998



5 TIMES FOOLER? JANDRO'S LUCKY COIN ON PENN & TELLER FOOL US SEASON 9



THE MAGIC OF SCIENCE

Why do we include science articles in our magic newsletter? Because we believe that learning about the latest scientific discoveries can be a great source of inspiration for your magic performances. By exploring topics like perception, psychology, and physics, you might just come up with your next mind-blowing trick.

CELLS WITH AN EAR FOR MUSIC RELEASE INSULIN

Diabetes is a condition in which the body produces too little or no insulin. Diabetics thus depend on an external supply of this hormone via injection or pump. Researchers led by Martin Fussenegger from the Department of Biosystems Science and Engineering at ETH Zurich in Basel want to make the lives of these people easier and are looking for solutions to produce and administer insulin directly in the body.

One such solution the scientists are pursuing is enclosing insulin-producing designer cells in capsules that can be implanted in the body. To be able to control from the outside when and how much insulin the cells release into the blood, researchers have studied and applied different triggers in recent years: light, temperature and electric fields.

Fussenegger and his colleagues have now developed another, novel stimulation method: they use music to trigger the cells to release insulin within minutes. This works especially well with "We Will Rock You," a global hit by British rock band, Queen.

Equipping cells to receive sound waves

To make the insulin-producing cells receptive to sound waves, the researchers used a protein from the bacterium *E. coli*. Such proteins respond to mechanical stimuli and are common in animals and bacteria. The protein is located in the membrane of the bacterium and regulates the influx of calcium ions into the cell interior. The researchers have incorporated the blueprint of this bacterial ion channel into human insulin-producing cells. This lets these cells create the ion channel themselves and embed it in their membrane.

As the scientists have been able to show, the channel in these cells opens in response to sound, allowing positively charged calcium ions to flow into the cell. This leads to a charge reversal in the cell membrane, which in turn causes the tiny insulin-filled vesicles inside the cell to fuse with the cell membrane and release the insulin to the outside.

Booming bass boosts insulin secretion

In cell cultures, the researchers first determined which frequencies and volume levels activated the ion channels most strongly. They found that volume levels around 60 decibels (dB) and bass frequencies of 50 hertz were the most effective in triggering the ion channels. To trigger maximum insulin release, the sound or the music had to continue for a minimum of three seconds and pause for a maximum of five seconds. If the intervals were too far apart, substantially less insulin was released.

Read more [here](#). ♦

MIND OVER MATTERS

BY MICHAEL BREGGAR

Michael Breggar has authored five books (focusing on card magic and mentalism) and is a columnist for The Linking Ring ("Auto-Magic"). Michael's latest book is called Take Five. It is available as a download everywhere and as a physical book through Amazon.com or directly from Michael at (mbreggarmagic@gmail.com).



CUBE ROUTES

The moment the mentalist pulls out a set of dice many laymen know some kind of effect will soon follow that involves the number seven. These days, more and more people are aware that opposite sides of a die add to seven. That hasn't stopped mentalism and magic creators from using that fact; goodness knows, it hasn't stopped me! I have learned there are ways to disguise this mathematical truism. One way I came upon quite accidentally was using dice with numbers on the faces instead of the usual spots. I cannot explain why, but people do not come to the same conclusion that 5 is on the other side of a cube showing a 2. Similarly, if the die is big enough, spelling out the numbers seems to totally hide the fact that opposite sides total seven.

Another opportunity arises if you change the numbers but maintain the opposite sides matching formula. This idea has been used by Nick Trost and others, creating "dice" that start at number seven. I likely took it to an extreme with my idea detailed below. In Cube Routes you'll see the use of four "dice" with different sets of numbers but leveraging the opposite-side-matches formula.

The performer opens a cardboard box and tosses its contents to the table. They are four two-inch cubes. *"Images are a very good thing to try to transmit telepathically. Numbers, however, are quite difficult to transmit and receive. However, if one perceives numbers as abstract type images, the telepathy process is made a bit easier. On these four large blocks, I have written all different numbers. I will turn my head away for a moment. When I do, please roll the blocks to your heart's content, and then set any one block aside."* You give Marilyn a few moments to perform this action. *"Now take the remaining three blocks and reroll them. Then stack them one on top of the other. The highest number should be on the bottom block and the lowest should be on top."* Again, give your helper a few moments to comply.

"With the number blocks stacked into a little tower, there are five faces...five sides...hidden from view. You can't see them and I certainly can't see them either. Take this calculator..." you turn around for a moment to hand Marilyn a pocket calculator, and then turn back around averting your eyes. *"... and add up the hidden numbers. That would be the number on the side directly on top of the table and the top side of that lowest block, the top and bottom numbers of the middle block, and the number on the lower side of the top block. Let me know when you are done."*

You now go into mind-reader mode, asking her to concentrate on the total and think about the number or numbers. You can ask if she thinks there is any significance to the numbers she rolled or the total, or does she think it is purely random? You know the drill. Meanwhile, you have written something in big, bold print on your notepad. And you then turn around asking Marilyn to hold up the calculator showing and announcing her random number to the audience. After which you state, "You did great, Marilyn: rolling the blocks, adding the numbers, and even telepathically transmitting the number to me!" With that, you turn your pad around showing your total is an exact match of Marilyn's calculated total.

PLAYING WITH BLOCKS

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I have found an interesting phenomenon when dealing with the “opposite sides total to seven” situation: if you use something that doesn’t look like a standard die, there is no expectation the tops and bottoms add to seven. You could, for example, write out the numbers (ONE, TWO...) keeping the total of seven in the correct positions (that is, ONE is opposite SIX). Even using an oversized cube with the digits printed on it (instead of the usual dots) makes a difference. But, we are going to now take the concept nineteen steps further!

Take a look at Photo 1. I have four two-inch square wooden blocks. I spray painted them with blackboard paint, which easily accepts chalk markings. You could use any design (or size) you like. The key remains the same as with standard spotted dice: opposite sides will equal a certain number. On one of the four blocks, you will write the numbers one through six, keeping the opposite sides equal to seven. On a second block, continue the numbering going from seven to twelve. Here, the opposite sides will total nineteen. Block three shows numbers thirteen through eighteen; the opposite sides total thirty-one. The fourth block has numbers nineteen through twenty-four; the opposite sides total forty-three.



Photo 1

Photo 2 summarizes this.

BLOCK #1	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6	7
BLOCK #2	7 – 8 – 9 – 10 – 11 – 12	19
BLOCK #3	13 – 14 – 15 – 16 – 17 – 18	31
BLOCK #4	19 – 20 – 21 – 22 – 23 – 24	43

Photo 2

With the opposite sides always totaling constant numbers (as seen in the rightmost column of the table above) you still have control of the game. Yes, only Block One has numbers and opposite sides similar to a die, but Block Two’s opposite sides total nineteen, Block Three totals thirty-one, and Block Four totals forty-three – always. So, in

the effect described above, you only need to know which block is first eliminated and you are well on the way to knowing the total of the hidden sides of the remaining three. With the described presentation, the eliminated block is set aside in full view. When you turn around to hand your helper the calculator, catch a glimpse of the topmost number.

There are only four possible configurations that we care about (because you have asked the blocks to be stacked with the highest numbers on the bottom to the lowest numbers on top). In three of the four cases, Block One is on top. In one out of four cases, Block Two is on top. A glance at Photo 3 will make this clear.

If Block Two is on top, then the total of the five hidden sides is seventy-four, plus nineteen minus the number on top. If Block One is on top, you’ll need to refer to the discarded block. As you’ll see here, if the discard is Block Two, the hidden side total is seventy-four, plus seven minus the number on top. See the simple formulas if Blocks Three or Four are discarded. You can make this even

mind over matters cont'd

easier for yourself by having the spectator total the six sides (tops and bottoms of each block). In this case, you merely need to note the discarded block: Block One totals ninety-three; Block Two totals eighty-one; Block Three totals sixty-nine; and Block Four totals fifty-seven.

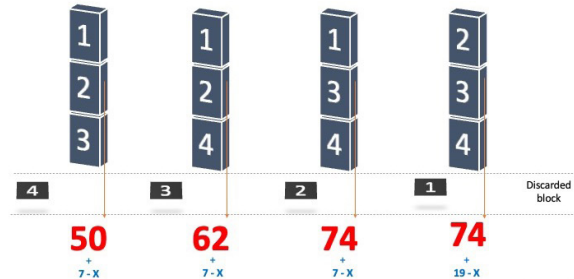


Photo 3

I very much prefer the first method because it makes this effect totally indecipherable. With a strong, comfortable presentational air, however, method two is perfectly satisfactory. You need to decide which best fits your style.

Think about these props. There are many effects in the literature that rely on the faces of multiple dice totaling seven. Using dice numbered in this fashion, the game is changed, yet the methods can remain the same. Check out Another Day in Para-Dice, which appeared in the May 2021 issue of this newsletter. ♦

NEW!!!

Mastering False Shuffles & Cuts Ebook

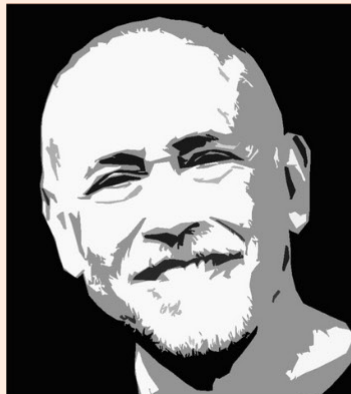
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THE ART AND CRAFT OF CONJURING BY MICK AYRES

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CONJURING TENSION

It is July 7, 1912; despite the heat of summer, a large crowd has gathered on the shore of New York's East River. On a nearby tugboat, Harry Houdini has been handcuffed at the wrists; his ankles are being chained in leg irons. He does not struggle; rather, he smiles and welcomes the attention as newspaper photographers use their cameras.

Curiosity is already making people tense. Why would this man attempt this? This is crazy, right? Does it hurt to be handcuffed like that? The mood becomes dark as several men grab Houdini and lift him from the deck. There is nothing gentle about it as they manhandle him into a packing crate and nail the lid shut. Several people jump a little because the banging of the hammers is louder than expected.

The crate is lifted and thrown into the water with only a rope connecting it to the tugboat. The tension becomes palpable. How can he possibly get free from those chains? What if something goes wrong? As the box sinks below the surface, hundreds of witnesses fill their lungs with air in a vain attempt to match Houdini. What if he doesn't survive? Am I about to watch this man die?

The average person is able to hold his or her breath about forty seconds. So, before a minute has passed many spectators are gasping for air and believe that, this time, Houdini isn't going to make it. It feels like an eternity as another minute creeps by, and then another. Some people openly weep as they come to understand this event has changed from a fun diversion to a body recovery. Houdini's packing crate has become his coffin.

Suddenly, a shout is heard. People point at a splashing on the water. A fist is rising triumphantly from the East River. Cheers erupt and complete strangers hug each other in relief as they see Houdini is alive and clinging to the rope. Once again, the master magician has defied death and proved that nothing can hold him back.

In the world of conjuring, there is some debate about whether Harry Houdini was a better showman than he was a magician. No matter what side of that fence you are on, know this: Houdini was an incredible manipulator of tension. Houdini became America's first celebrity superstar because he created theatrical tension and inflated it to the point at which the audience could barely hold it in.

The element of tension in theatre is the key to making any performance memorable; without it, the audience has been lost. No matter what talents you offer – acting, dance, magic, music, comedy, or any of the variety arts – if you present your craft on a stage, at some point tension is critical. However, conjurers have an advantage because we are in the business of “anything can happen.” By itself, that little spark of tension is often appealing enough to make a guest buy a ticket. Once the seats are filled, the magician's task is to maintain and build that tension.

Fortunately, the whole point of being a magician involves demonstrations of the unexpected, so

a degree of dramatic tension exists in everything we do. Mysteries – and, by default, tension – are the theatrical focus of our profession. The moment a magician takes the stage, the guests are already asking themselves: What is about to happen? Will I be able to figure it out? Will this be funny or frightening? The conjurer's task is to develop characters, write scripts, and create acts that enhance the existing tension within our tricks.

To be blunt, an audience's wants and assumptions are there to be manipulated and pitted against each other. If those two things are correctly managed, the conjurer can inflate and release tension effectively. Grand illusionists do this with carefully selected music and lighting or by performing danger-themed effects using fire, sharp blades, industrial saws, or controlled explosions. Parlor and nightclub magicians present Russian roulette-type effects with such frequency the tricks have now become bellybuttons in magic (meaning, everybody has one). Mentalists drive cars while blindfolded or allow guests to believe personal and intimate knowledge is about to be made public when the information is accurate but harmless. Jugglers toss knives, torches, or raw eggs to build suspense. Storytellers spin yarns designed to lead their listeners down a garden path just to have the hose turned on them, so to speak. In every case, tension is there and growing. In all of these examples, the result is surprise and delight expressing itself through laughter and applause.

Since conjurers must script, rehearse, and perform, they can obviously learn much about the use of tension from writers and actors. To sell books, a writer needs the story to maintain interest; to fill seats an actor must deliver memorable performances. Both goals are achieved through the nurturing of tension. It is a wise conjurer who studies their methods and those of other performing artists.

Silence is a tool used in theatre performances to create and build tension. When Orson Welles broadcast his famous *War of the Worlds* dramatization on the radio, frightened listeners later confessed their moment of belief came when Welles made the show go abruptly silent in the middle of the on-scene reporter's sentence. The unnerving quiet was absolute and lasted only seconds but the suspense made it feel like an eternity. Without realizing it at the time, Welles turned tension into nationwide panic.

The pianist Alfred Brendel is well known for playing compositions by Beethoven. In an interview, Brendel talked about tension. He said, "Just before the last note of the sonata, I lift my hands and pause. I silently ask the audience how long they will let me wait before I play the final note." In this moment of heightened tension, Brendel remains motionless until he feels the audience has given him permission to conclude the performance. Imagine being able to connect with an audience and create that level of emotional tension during your conjuring performance.

When writing a script and constructing an act to build tension, it is necessary to consider how to release it. Orson Welles released the tension by announcing his show was merely a dramatization of a classic novel (though by that time few were listening). Alfred Brendel releases it when he strikes the last chord. A writer builds tension by giving hints about where the story is going and releases it with an unexpected, yet satisfying twist, which spurs the reader to turn the page. Stand-up comedians deal with tension on a smaller, more rapid-fire scale. They build it through the setup of a joke and then release it via the punch line. That moment of release has a lot to do with why an audience laughs. The comedian Michael Jr. describes it this way: "The setup is when the performer

the art and craft of conjuring cont'd

uses his talent and resources to seize any opportunity to get the audience moving in the same direction. The punch line happens when the performer changes that direction in a way that was not anticipated by the audience. When people catch on to the change, the results are revelation, fulfillment, and joy expressed through laughter.”

Believe it or not, theatrical tension even applies to card tricks. Consider Jim Temple’s packet trick Color Monte. Three cards are displayed; two are identical and one is different. Using the cards, the magician describes how he tried to win money from a con artist. This is the set-up. The money-card is never where it is supposed to be and the guest becomes more frustrated with every turn of a card. This is the tension. The story comes to an end with an unexpected revelation – and the guests laugh and snatch up the cards to inspect them. This is the release. The cards, the story, and the handling create a solid moment of good theatre. This is the magic.

Steve Beam’s Multiple Impact is another example of how an effect can be structured to create, hold, and release tension. The deck of cards is placed on the table. One at a time, several guests come up, select a card, and bury it in the pack. However, the last fellow misinterprets the instructions and gives the pack a legitimate shuffle. The audience groans in sympathy. (Uh oh...this guy is in serious trouble. I bet he has to start over.) The desperate magician attempts to salvage the situation. He scans the pack and removes several cards but the audience is doubtful. (Nice try, buddy, but those cards are gone.) Despite the odds, several cards are accurately revealed until only three remain. The audience’s confidence in the performer has returned. (All right, you’re on a roll – you got this!) Then a lady is asked, “Miss, what card are you thinking about?” The audience groans again because the cards were all chosen by men. (Oh man...and you were doing so well until now.) The magician realizes his mistake and sheepishly asks, “So, you are thinking of nothing at all?” She affirms this is true. The magician declares, “That’s what I thought,” and reveals her card to be completely blank. This unexpected twist releases the tension and the audience laughs. (Dude, you aren’t just ahead of me; you’re way ahead of me.) The last two cards are now revealed simultaneously and with confidence. Often, this final moment results in a standing ovation.

How important is the release of tension? In 1956, the magician Sorcar performed the Buzz Saw illusion during a live television broadcast in India. As Sorcar displayed both halves of the woman, the station’s on-air time ran out and the host abruptly signed off. To those watching the incomplete illusion at home, it seemed the woman had just been killed; the network was flooded with calls from horrified viewers.

It pays to time your rehearsals.

THE CHASED TWIST

This adaptation of a simple card mystery has tension and humor woven into the recipe. You need a deck of cards arranged in a cyclical stack and something big enough to cover it; a handkerchief or large paper napkin will do. The plot of this effect goes back to the nineteenth century, so my contributions lay only within the presentation itself and in the way the deck is arranged.

The Si Stebbins method is a widely used stack among magicians. The stack is achieved by simply adding three to every card value; the suits repeat in Club, Heart, Spade, Diamond order. Once assembled, each card becomes a key-card that tells you the identity of the next card. However, this leaves the Si Stebbins stack with a repeating red-black-red-black pattern that can be

a “tell” for an observant guest.

To avoid this, I add a simple twist: if the key-card is an even value (Two, Four, Six, Eight, Ten, or Queen) then the next card is the same color but the opposite suit. However, if the key-card has an odd value (Ace, Three, Five, Seven, Nine, Jack, or King) then the next card follows the CHSD order as usual. That’s it. The Ace of Clubs is followed by the Four of Hearts, the Seven of Diamonds, the Ten of Clubs, the King of Spades, the Three of Diamonds, and so on. This not only gives the pack a mixed appearance so it can be handled more casually, but it works with any thirteen-value arrangement that repeats four times in the deck.

Spread the pack openly and say, *“A deck of cards can be mixed in so many ways the number is hard to fathom. I’m serious about the word ‘fathom.’ No matter how you cut it, there are more ways to mix a deck than there are fish in all the seas. I’m serious about the word ‘cut,’ too. Do you know how to cut a deck?”* Demonstrate a simple in-the-hands cut. Hand the deck to your guest and let them cut the deck once. Say, *“That’s perfect! Every time you cut the deck the top and the bottom card change. Now, can you cut the deck while blind? I’m serious about the word ‘blind,’ too...sort of.”*

Open up the handkerchief and drape it over his hands. Say, *“No one can see those cards now. Please cut the deck as many times as you choose.”* When he stops, say, *“I’m serious about the word ‘choose,’ too. Please choose the top or the bottom card of the deck and remove it. Keep that card under the handkerchief but bring the rest of the deck out.”* Take the deck and without looking at it, place it aside face up. Pause, take a deep breath, and let the tension build.

Say, *“You and I know just one thing about your card: it isn’t **that one**.”* Glance at the deck. The key-card reveals which one is under the cloth. Say, *“I feel confident, but I don’t want to be wrong. I’m serious about the words ‘wrong’ and ‘confident,’ because I am confident it would be wrong if I failed to name...the Jack of Diamonds.”*

Gently pull the cloth away to reveal the card held by the guest. ♦

The Chased Twist copyright 2006 by Mick Ayres. Mick is a trickster, tunesmith, and tale-swapper. You can reach him at mick@mickayreswares.com or via Facebook.

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING BY BRUCE KALVER

Bruce Kalver is a professional magician and tech guru. Bruce is a past president of the S.A.M. and a frequent performer at The Magic Castle in Hollywood.



SOUND BUTTON

Throughout the years we have found various gadgets to control your music. Many magicians have their music either on their Smart Phone or iPad, but they need a way to start and stop the tunes or move to the next or previous song. Say hello to the **YuYue Electronic Wireless Bluetooth Media Button**.

Originally made for motorcyclists as a way to control their music while driving, this ring-shaped Bluetooth button connects wirelessly to your phone or tablet, allowing you to control the music. It has a round clip that originally was meant for handlebars, but I found it clips perfectly on a mic stand. If you don't want to use the clip, simply take it off and just use the button; attach it with the included 3M tape to your table or close-up case.



Play, pause, previous track, next track, and volume up or down are all there. It's smaller than a silver dollar and runs on a CR2032 disc battery (which has a life of about two years).

For the price, I think it is worth a try. The **YuYue Electronic Wireless Bluetooth Media Button** is available on Amazon.com and sells for \$16.

CHEAT SHEET



When I am performing, all of my concentration is on the performance. I am always forgetting names, even when I've just asked for them a moment before. A cheat sheet would be helpful. Magician Ron Jaxon mentioned an app he uses, and I think it is a winner. The app is aptly named **Cheatsheet**.

Cheatsheet is an iPhone app for the little things you never remember: hotel rooms, license plate numbers, luggage combinations, or ID numbers. Write them down in **Cheatsheet** and then refer to them anytime in a widget or paste them anywhere with the custom keyboard. No more fumbling to unlock your phone and find your Notes app.

The great thing about this app is it contains an Apple Watch extension, so the notes appear on your watch. What can you use this for? When I do a show and want to remember the family names (wife, husband, kids, guest of honor), I put the names on my watch and can refer to them when I need to. Ron uses the app to make a show set list so he knows what to do next. If you are a psychic who does pre-show billets, you can log them into **Cheatsheet** to refer to them later. I'm sure you will find lots of uses for this app.

In order to use multiple lists and have the ability to put it on your watch, you will have to pay the in-app purchase fee. Do it. It is worth it. **Cheatsheet** is available on the iPhone App Store. It is a free download; you pay a one-time fee of \$6 to access everything.

MAKING YOUR IPAD MAGICAL



I recently purchased a new iPad Pro; I wanted a nice, durable, protective, and *magical* case to carry it in. I found it: the **Book Book Case for iPad**.

Designed and manufactured by Twelve South, this hard-back, leather case looks like an antique book. It has a zipper resembling a bookmark and a nice pocket inside that holds a mini keyboard. I use the Keys to Go keyboard, which fits perfectly. The iPad pops up and slants to make it easy to type and pops out the other way to turn the whole thing into a display holder for your iPad.

I get lot of compliments when people see it, and it looks great on stage. The **Twelve South Book Book for iPad** sells for \$69 - \$99, depending on which iPad you own. It is available on their website www.twelvesouth.com or on amazon.com, sometimes for a cheaper price.

On the subject of making things look magical, my plain white Apple Pencil needed a magic touch. At first, I was going to put black electrical tape on it to look like a magic wand with white tips. While visiting the All Things Magic group and telling them about my pencil idea, guest Michael Dokken suggested I just stretch a black 260 balloon over the pencil and trim the ends to show the white tips. Brilliant! It looks like a magic wand. It also has a nice grip to it because of the rubber. It is thin enough to be magnetized to the side of the iPad and charge properly. The cost for the balloon: three cents.

A STIFFER SURFACE



There are times when magicians need a surface to work from, not a foamy, soft surface, but rather a hard surface that defines a space. Take a look at the **Artistic Antimicrobial Black Desk Pad (12" x 17")**.

This ultra-smooth desk pad is a nice, rich, black surface that is ideal for mentalists who need people to write on papers and need a solid surface. This was originally made as a desk pad, but I'm sure you will find times where it will be very useful. It is available at your local Staples store, or you can also find it on amazon.com. ♦



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