



MagicBunny.co.uk

TOP HAT

July 2003 - Edition 16

Hello everybody!

What a great Summer this is shaping up to be! This edition has no fewer than nine highlights contributed from people around the World. Admin gives the latest news and goings-on, and then Michael Saint Louis presents his monthly column that is certainly up to his usual standards. Lady Laura scoops an interview with the first lady to enter the Magic Circle as a member, Alison and Michael Jay gives his ideas on producing smoke from your fingertips using just a matchbox. Writer Alex Kocan tells us about a local magician/cabbie named Jim Bannan and Peter Marucci gives more of his excellent material, a presentation for Needle Through Balloon. New writer Timothy Arends gives advice on what the causes may be if you can't seem to fool your audience and Craig Browning continues his Way of the Neophyte teachings with part 2 of Cultivating a Reputation. Finally, Elliot Watson reveals his Coins Across routine, a real winner.

Over the next few months, you'll probably see a number of small changes made to the format of this ezine in order to make it easier and more enjoyable for you to read. Please email contributors if you liked their offerings to show your thanks and appreciation - it's them that makes this publication possible.

All the Best,

~Jon Snoops~
Editor of MagicBunny.co.uk's TOP HAT Monthly e-zine
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Every issue of the TOP HAT contains original effects and articles written by readers and members of MagicBunny.co.uk. If you have a submission, please email TOPHAT@magicbunny.co.uk

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Message From Admin

July Admin Update

By Admin

There will be no prizes for guessing the content of this Admin update regarding the progress of the boards.

Many of you may be familiar with the temporary closure of the boards earlier this month and may have some inclining regarding why this was necessary, please allow me to provide more details.

When these boards were begun, some one and a half years ago, the purchased account was a value host. This account provided us with the bare essentials of an Internet site at an economical price and it served us very well in our early days. With the rapid growth of the boards, we very quickly outgrew the constraints of the 35mb allocated web space and had to purchase an additional 50mb of space in which to expand. Just two weeks ago, the site had grown to such an extent that we were at the limits of this 85mb of web space. Given a month or more, our account would have been suspended due to the sheer size that we had achieved. It was for this reason another expansion was required.

We had two choices available at the time; either the purchase of some additional web space to allow further growth or an upgrade to our site. The first option of these two would have only been a temporary measure, as the growth of the boards warranted additional web space to be purchased at regular intervals. An upgrade would have only been slightly more expensive but this option would have given us a huge increase in web space, with numerous other additional functions and opportunities for growth. Despite the reluctant choice of board closure during the upgrade, it was decided to venture for the second option and reap the benefits of the change of account.

At the same time, one idea that had been mooted in the Admin forum was the introduction of a "File Sharing" forum and it seemed the ideal opportunity to tackle two issues at the same time and offer our members the opportunity to use the upgrade to permit the uploading and downloading of magical files for sharing with other members. This project has received a huge level of support and within the first two days of the new upgrade, this new forum received more activity than any other on the boards. You need only view the statistics of this forum now to see how many views or downloads each file has received to understand how popular this new project was and still is.

Unfortunately, many of you may understand that, due to the sheer level of interest that this forum received, our monthly quota of bandwidth would have been swallowed up in just a week or so and so we were forced to drastically review the way that this forum operated. I would like to publicly thank Sean, a member of our moderator team, who came up with the excellent solution of using spare web space on his private site to accommodate the huge level of interest and to allow this project to continue. Without Sean's support, there would have been no way that we could have financed the continual bandwidth payments with our current server. Luckily for our members, Sean's private site had a larger level of bandwidth allocation and so, with Sean's goodwill, this solved our problems directly.

If ever you do get an opportunity to view some of the video files and pictures then I would recommend that you do so. This new forum is certainly creating a huge buzz of excitement on our forums and I continually receive excellent feedback from our members about its use.

Enjoy your magic and I hope that you may enjoy to continue using our forums.

Very best wishes, Nigel Shelton

Thoughts From Mid-West America

Let's Build Magic!

The DIY Kit

By Michael Saint Louis

If you are going to be building your own magic, you are going to have to assemble a tool kit. You don't need a big ol' workshop or even a dedicated workspace, but it will be easier and more convenient in the long run if you have a group of tools and weird odds and ends useful only to us magic types in one place ready to go. The best part is that most of the stuff is cheap! And cheap is good.

The first part of your kit should be a sewing set. If you think you are going to do alot of sewing (like costuming and such) then a sewing machine might be in order but you can probably get along without one. Most of us will just need a few odd stitches here and there to attach hook and loop strips or repair that ratty old drawstring bag you keep your Okito box in, so a little sewing kit will do. A few bucks (which converts roughly to a few pounds according to my math) will get you a decent little starting to sew kit with scissors, straight and safety pins, a pin cushion, thimble and so forth. That's a nice start, but if you are cash or space challenged you can pick up a travel sewing kit for about the price of a supersize candy bar that will include tiny and useless scissors, an assortment of thread, a few needles, pins, a needle threader and a plastic thimble. It's probably all most of you will need and if you keep your eyes open you can often find these as giveaways from banks and such (I am one of those overgrown Boy Scouts who lives and breathes by the Be Prepared motto so I keep several such kits in my briefcase, magic stuff, camping gear, the cars, and so forth and most of them have somebody's logo on them).

No matter which sewing kit you opt for you'll want to supplement this base with a package of assorted safety pins, a yard of elastic, hook and loop tape and a few feet of black elastic cord. Don't buy the elastic cord from the magic shop, either, drag yourself to a fabric store if the local department or discount store doesn't have it.... I have seen magic stores sell elastic cord for as much as 15 times the price at the fabric store! Hook and loop tape (which goes under a brand name that rhymes with Smelco) comes in a variety of forms: round, adhesive backed, pre-packaged, by the yard, custom width and so forth. I suggest one half inch wide black without an adhesive backing (it isn't ever strong enough and you'll need to sew it anyway) preferably by the yard because it is the cheapest and most versatile.... start with about a yard. That about covers sewing stuff. If you plan on sewing alot of ball droppers or silks and such and have a few stray bills in the ol' wallet you may want to pick up a handheld stitching machine. These are as seen on TV but there are a few reputable brands out there (Singer makes one) and shouldn't cost more than a couple of movie tickets. I can't say that I have used one lately (I recently dropped a small fortune on a sewing machine), but I have in the past and they can make stitching jobs alot easier.

Next up is glue. Glue is useful stuff for making junk stick to other junk but one glue won't work on all junk, so we will want a few glues for the various junk that needs sticking to in magic. Bottom line, it pays to keep a white household glue, a 'super' glue, rubber cement, silicone and a plastic or model glue. I know that this sounds like a bunch, but you don't need large bottles of any of these glues ('cept maybe rubber cement) and most of them can be picked up for around a buck in the office supply store. Thinking it over, I have at least a dozen different kinds of glue laying around ranging from glue sticks to mix and use industrial epoxy and I don't think I have more than the cost of a magic DVD invested. One thing I really don't think you need is a hot glue gun; sure they are a staple of the craft industry but I really can't think of anything they are really good for except burning your fingers and you can do that much cheaper by playing with matches!

As long as you are haunting the office and school supply aisles looking for glue, pick up a cork-backed metal ruler, a compass, assorted rubber bands, graph paper, some pencils and a decent pen or two. By decent pen I mean something that makes a fine line with good (like Indian) ink. If you are going to mark cards you'll probably want to invest in a technical (or architect's) pen... the smaller the better. I like 000 size although if you want to drop some cash you can get 000000. The technical pen is a bit expensive (you are looking at about the same price as a magic DVD) but if properly taken care of they will last forever and you can load them with any color ink you need. The reason for a cork-backed metal ruler as opposed to a cheap plastic or wood ruler is that

Thoughts From Mid-West America (cont.)

the cork back prevents the ruler from slipping, lifts the ruler edge off the surface (which prevents smudging) and can be used as an edge to cut against.

Speaking of cutting, a must to the magic do-it-yourselfer is a good hobby knife set. If you look around you should be able to score something relatively cheaply that will provide at least two handles (a pencil and a larger one almost like a screwdriver handle), a few blades at various angles including the standard triangle, a chisel and a razor saw. You may have to pick up the razor saw blade separately, but I think this is a super useful item. It is literally a tiny saw. I am also a big fan of the razor saw miter box, too, and suggest that everyone consider picking one up. The razor knife set is going to be a favorite tool (I promise) so take the time to pick out one you like.... you'll be using it on everything from short cards to plastic.

Don't worry! We are almost done with the basic kit! Next, you'll want to pick up an assortment of sandpaper. Luckily, you can usually pick up a pre-packaged set of assorted sandpaper grades that will run from coarse to fine. I use sandpaper for everything from preparing surfaces for painting to putting a smooth edge on cut plastic and you probably will too. Luckily, most of the time you'll only need small bits (I find myself making impromptu tools by wrapping sandpaper around pencils or bits of scrap wood) so this assortment should last a while.

Rounding out the basic kit will be paint. You'll want to head to a good hobby shop and pick up a couple of good paint brushes (I like sable bristle, personally, but the important thing is that your brushes won't lose bristles as you paint) of assorted sizes. Most of the painting you'll do will require fine brushes, but pick up at least one one-incher! You'll probably only need two colors to start with: flat (sometimes called matte) black and flesh (that matches your flesh). Later you might need more to repair chips in equipment and such, but for now black and flesh pretty much cover it and a one ounce bottle will last quite a while. For ease of use I like to use acrylic based model paint because it cleans up with water. As long as you are buying paint, pick up a can up spray primer 'cause it'll make the painting alot easier!

You are done buying stuff for the basic kit. Read the list over and prioritize if you are strapped for cash. Yeah, they'll be more next month but this stuff should get you started! Just two more things for the basic kit, and pay attention, this is the most important stuff!

You need junk. I can't tell you what kind of junk for sure (it depends on you and what you do) but you need all the junk you can lay your hands on. Springs, rubber balls, interesting shaped pens, magnets and match boxes from all over the world are just some of the things that find their way into my junk box. Even though I don't work with cards, all kinds of card-motif items live in my junk box. Another staple of my junk box was (until I ran out) a bag of unembossed fancy coffee stirrers I used to make custom paddles. Anything that strikes you as potentially useful should be grabbed and thrown in the junk box. The junk box should be your resource for inspiration and spare parts! This is the second most important part of your magic kit.

And that leaves the most important part of your tool kit: the journey. Don't worry, this isn't one of my Buddhist riddles left over from teaching gungfu! The journey is the most important part of your kit because in assembling the basic tool kit you will have to go several places and look around quite a bit. I'm guessing a bunch of you out there have never really shopped at a fabric store before and that others have never been to a good hobby shop. Look around! You'll find things that you never knew existed (like a magnetic quilter's thimble), cheap substitutes for favorite items (magician's wax or beeswax.... you decide) or stuff you don't know you need yet (like dental picks). A couple of months down the road, though, when you are sitting frustrated over a new trick and all of a sudden you realize that you saw the perfect thing at that little store you had never been to before... well, then you can e-mail me about it.

Next month, the advanced kit which is made of tools and magic items. Until then, think about what kind of magic you'll want to be DIYing because it will affect what you buy!

By Michael Saint Louis

An Interview With Alison

An Interview

By Lady Laura

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions for 'Top-Hat'. There are very few well-known females in magic, and you are one of them. I know our members will certainly appreciate the input from someone like you.

First off, an, oh so original question, how, why and when did you get into magic?

> I began performing magic almost 17 years ago (wow! I hadn't realized it had been that long). I started working with another magician and gradually developed my own act, whilst at University. After graduating I decided I would love to tour the world doing something I enjoyed and magic was a natural way for me to do this. I began with a summer season in a theatre in Hunstanton, Norfolk, England and a few months later I joined the cruise ships. I have now had the opportunity to travel all over the world at the same time as getting paid for doing something I love!

What keeps you performing magic?

> I enjoy the performance side of magic – the entertainment. I have as much fun up there as I hope my audience has.

What is the most difficult slight you have managed to master?

> This would be a difficult question to answer. I have concentrated mostly on stage magic and the presentation of illusions rather than sleights for most of my career. However in performance of close up magic perhaps one of the things that draws most comments from other magicians is that I am very comfortable using invisible threads. Many magicians are a little afraid of thread work, but I have used this literally hundreds of times and find that the reaction to the miracles you can perform with thread are well worth the extra effort it takes to perfect and become comfortable with it. The main thing with thread work is... always have an "out" and lots of spare thread!

Is there any piece of magic you have not been able to master over time?

> I can't recall anything I have tried and failed at. Perhaps this is because I have a gritty determination once I start a project of any sort! Of course, there will always be new things that I have not yet accomplished, but to say you have not been able to master something is to suggest that you have given up... and that's not in my nature!

What is your biggest magical achievement?

> Probably being invited to perform close up magic for President George Bush's Inaugural Candlelight Dinner in Washington DC. It was quite an honour, especially for a Brit!

How did you feel about being allowed to perform with Daryl in the magic circle, but not, until much later, allowed to join the membership?

> Actually, I was a member of the Magic Circle long before I met Daryl. It was an honour to join this society and I was just happy that they had finally changed the rules. I still enjoy receiving my Magic Circular each month and keeping up to date with the news.

How did it feel to be the first female to enter the membership of the magic circle?

> I was the very first lady to join the British Magical Society first. This was of course a thrill. However, my main reason for wanting to join was to have access to their extensive library. I was writing a university paper on Victorian Illusion and it was only by being a member of the BMS that I could use their resources for my research. Later I was invited to become one of the first group of women to join the Magic Circle – there was no actually "first" lady member of the Magic Circle.

As the first female to be inducted into the Magic Circle, you must have faced some strong reactions from the other members. How do you think you were received at the beginning of your membership?

> Sadly, during my first visit there, for a lecture, I was challenged by one of the male magicians at the bar (this was in the old meeting place). He informed me that this was a "private club for magicians only" and told me that I

An Interview With Alison (cont.)

should not be there. I had to explain that not only was I a magician myself, but that actually, just a month or so before I had been on the cover of the Magic Circular! However, on future visits I have found people to be much more accepting of female magicians. I think it just took some members a while to realize we were serious about our art.

In your opinion, why are there so few female magicians compared with the amount of male magicians out there performing?

> I have no idea about this. It is the eternal question isn't it?! I know that as a travelling performer, it is a much harder life for a single woman than it is for a man. For example, travelling with large illusions as a woman on your own is not easy, neither is getting to and from late night gigs in a city where you must use public transport etc. etc. I also started life working in many "working men's clubs" in the north and Midlands... and believe me that is not an easy venue for a single, young woman! You certainly learn to sink or swim there and I can see why that would not appeal to many women.

You have directed and co-directed some of Daryl's videos. Is it hard working with someone you are so close to?

> No. Actually we are an exceptional team. We work very well together.

What is your biggest magical ambition? And do you think you will achieve it?

> I have already achieved my greatest performance ambitions. I am happy to say that I have performed in more than 25 different countries and had a ball doing it. I am now focusing more on our web site business www.FoolerDoolers.com/store We have new products coming out and continual changes to the site to try to make it better and better.

How does it feel to have your name constantly linked with Daryl's in the magic world?

> It is an honour and a pleasure. Daryl is one of the finest magicians in the world, in addition to being a wonderful person.

You were a magician before you met Daryl, did you find you were recognised more in your own right before or after you were married?

> I found two very separate worlds. In the UK, for example at a Blackpool convention my many friends recognize me in my own right. However, in the US I was completely unknown before I married Daryl – so amongst Daryl's friends and associates here I am obviously thought of as Daryl's wife.... But what a cool thing to be!

Do you enjoy working on cruise ships and what kind of effects do you favour when performing in such venues?

> I love working on cruise ships. I spent several years doing very long contracts (9 months at a time) on each ship and had a wonderful time. The audiences are very receptive – they really want to be entertained and they are fun to hang out with during the day too.

The effects have to be large enough to be seen from the stage, pretty angle proof and easy to reset quickly for the next show! I always liked to include some audience participation and comedy too – the ship audiences love to laugh and be a part of the party.

I saw you very briefly at the Blackpool convention earlier in the year, did you enjoy the convention?

> Blackpool has been my very favourite convention for years. I look forward to many more!

I know you can't have seen that much being in the dealers hall for a lot of the time but what stood out in your mind about this years convention?

> I love the gala shows. I love the big stage, the music, costumes, lights and razzamatazz! And of course Daryl's "Fooler Droolers" lecture was a highlight!!! The lecture notes have a picture of our baby daughter (Laura) on them – hence the name of the lecture.

And finally, what has been the best bit of advice you have received during your career as a magician?

> I think it is the advice my parents always gave me – whatever you decide to do in life is fine – just be the best you can be.

An Interview With Alison (cont.)

Once again I would like to take the time to thank you for answering these questions, and I would personally like to thank you for making the paths of female magicians a lot easier by making the monumental step of being the first female magician to enter the Magic Circle as a member! The world of magic owes you a lot.

Thank you. It has been a pleasure to answer these questions. I look forward to seeing many of you at future conventions. Alison.

By Lady Laura

Smoke From Fingertips

Smoke From Fingertips

A Magic Effect

By Michael Jay

The question has been asked many times and to many different magicians, from pro to novice, young to old and the answer is 99.99% the same. It gets asked when doing an interview, a layman to a magician or even a magician to a magician. Apparently it is the biggest question on everyone's mind. No matter what the background, no matter what kind of magic you specialize in, no matter if you're male or female, the question always pops up. You just can't get away from it.

What made you decide to become a magician?

No, don't answer that, I can answer it for you. You saw a magician when you were young and he impressed you so much, you just had to become one yourself. That is the answer that rolls off every magicians lips, as if it were scripted, every time. I don't believe I've ever heard a different response to that question. Ever.

Some magicians remember who it was, some don't. I really believe that some don't even know why they became a magician, but since that is the industry standard answer, I guess they just have to use it. If it weren't for having seen a magician, there would be no magicians. Which gives us a very interesting paradox - where did the very first magician see the magician that made him want to become a magician?

So I present to you, here for the first time, a magician who is a magician for reasons other than having seen a magician - Me! That's right, my desire to become a magician was not hinged on the fact that I had seen a magician. Really, though, what other reason could there possibly be to become a magician if not for having seen a magician? And, no, it's not because I got a magic set as a kid, although I'm sure that played a part in introducing me to the world of magic. I'm also positive that I'd seen magicians perform prior to becoming one myself, but, still, that is not my reason.

I was always an inquisitive child. My knowledge of completely useless information is second to none. I can make balloons from paper, frogs from cards, shirts and pants from bills. I can make a small rocket with a needle, a match and a tiny square of tin foil. I can also make smoke bombs. With a sheet of newspaper, some rubber cement and a bit of talc, I can make a strip of paper that you can cut in half and it will restore itself (that's right, self working, no practice at all!). I can make a paper football, play hockey with three pennies, am a master at 7-5-3 and can make a bomb with household items (well, at least with items in my house).

I have always craved knowledge of useless things. Well, maybe not useless, but trivial and bearing no obvious worth in the general scheme of things. Perfume from rose pedals (easy) and a ship in a bottle (difficult, but

Smoke From Fingertips (cont.)

doable). When I was about 12, I carried around a home made survival kit that fit in the barrel of a pen (and it would have come in right handy had I ever gotten lost in the woods of Toledo).

So, magic for me was only a logical pursuit. Now don't go getting all out of joint and saying that magic ain't useless. Really, it is. To quote the late, great Eugene Poinc, "Society needs educators, physicians, garbage collectors - it does not need magicians." No, on its own, magic is a completely useless thing. Argue that you can bring the smile to a child's face, or that you can take the weight of the world off of someone's shoulders for a brief moment, the fact doesn't change. Besides, those things can be done by a movie or a good song. So, in fact, magic in and of itself is useless.

So, it wasn't a magician or magic set that got me started - it was my desire to do weird stuff for no apparent reason.

Which brings me to the crux of this article. Have you ever seen the "Smoke from Fingers" tubes? You know, the stuff that you can buy in a joke shop. All sticky and gummy and when you tap your fingers together these spider web things float up off of your fingers, which gives the appearance of smoke. I know some magicians who swear by the stuff. My own personal experience with it is that it is garbage and a waste of money. I've also found that when the stuff finally finds a place to settle, it makes that spot all gummy and nasty (don't use it around your computer, kiddies).

I have my own way of making a paste that will give you the same results, only it is real smoke and not some sticky, gooey stuff. You'll need a new pack of matches for this, a plate that is of china or glass, a lighter (or another pack of matches) and a pair of tweezers.

Rip the striking surface off of the pack of matches. This should be the black or dark brown kind that's solid. I've seen some that are more akin to sand paper - you don't want that kind. You want the solid, smooth, dark colored striking paper for this. Once you have it ripped off, try to peel the layer down so that the striking paper itself is all that's left. You are trying to get as much of the regular paper off of the striking stuff as you can, so peel as much of the bottom layers away as you can.

Now, take that strip of striking paper, which is a chemical, and light it on fire. Use the tweezers to hold the strip, so that you don't burn your fingers. As it burns, you will note that the very base of the fire on the strip is an eerie green color (kinda cool, huh?). Using the tweezers, hold the strip, as it burns, against the plate. Don't push it flat onto the plate or you'll extinguish the flame. You want to keep the strip, as it burns, about 1 millimeter off of the plate itself. Once you've got it all burned up (you may have to relight it several times, no big deal) you'll see a brown paste on the plate, left behind from the burning process. Experiment with this to get the right distance from the plate for the biggest amount of brown paste possible. Use two or three ignition strips from the packs of matches to get this technique down (it's cheap, folks, they're only matches).

Now, dab your first finger into the paste and get an ample amount on your finger. Rub your finger and thumb together and you'll be amazed to see the smoke that will come off of your fingers. Yes, real smoke, not some spiderwebby stuff. You'll find that some brands of matches will give you more smoke than others. Also, always use a fresh pack. Don't use a pack that has been mostly ignited from the strip. A used up strip does not have as much chemical on it anymore and you'll get very little smoke from your brown paste.

Now, for all you folks who really enjoy useless stuff, here's the bonus. Do this late at night. Make your smoke paste, get it on your finger and turn off all of the lights. It has to be really dark, so make sure that there is no light at all in the room. Now, rub your finger and thumb together to make the smoke. Of course, you'll not be able to see the smoke with all the lights off, but still, look at your finger and thumb while you do this (make sure that you are looking right into the spot where your finger and thumb meet and not at the back of your thumb itself, or you'll miss out on a really eerie and cool effect). Now that's really cool, eh?

No, I'm not going to tell you what you'll see. If you want to find out, just do it!

Until next month gang, keep 'em guessing!

Mike.

About Jim Bannan

About Jim Bannan

"They're nothing special" - a local taxi driver's magic U-turn on celebrities.

By Alex Kocan

London cabbie / magician Jim Bannan is no stranger to the world of celebrity.

Like many taxi drivers operating in and around the capital he has a tale or two to tell about whom he has had in the back of his cab.

"I have had all sorts in here", Jim says.

"Alex Ferguson and George Best [on separate occasions] are the two that stand out in my mind the most.

"I have had a few boy band members in here, but they don't really mean anything to me.

Bannan, 47, from Luton, is not your stereotypical driver, professional or otherwise, as he is not annoyed about congestion charges; nor is he, by his own admittance, a sufferer of road rage.

"After a while you become blasé", Jim continues. "They are just people after all. I know that for a fact.

"Nothing special!"

Mr. Bannan began performing as a magician five years ago, but has been a fan since childhood.

"David Nixon was a favourite magician of mine. A true gentleman performer!

"I also have a great respect for Ali Bongo. I once sent him a letter asking to use a trick of his in my act. He phoned me personally and told me how to do it.

Ali Bongo is the gentleman who, it is rumoured, inspired One Foot in the Grave writer David Renwick to create the crime solver Jonathan Creek.

He became a member of The Magic Circle in September 2002 and is fascinated with magic as entertainment: -

"I've performed at various schools through the years. I enjoy the reaction on the children's faces, as they believe in magic. They don't spoil things by thinking, "how did he do that?" unlike the adults.

"People of all ages come up to me and say how they enjoyed my performance."

Jim, who regularly performs for, amongst others, The Parkinson's Disease Society, wished to give a word of thanks to several fellow performers: -

"I'm very grateful to the members of the Mystic Ring [magic society] in Luton for being welcoming and friendly.

Jim Bannan has worked for 20 years as a licensed cab driver and continues to do so. He also continues to learn the trade he has passion for; magic.

By Alex Kocan

Needle Through Balloon

Needle Through Balloon

A Magic Effect

By Peter Marucci

While watching television the other day, I saw a magician doing the Needle Through Balloon effect. Unfortunately for him, the balloon popped as he began to put the needle in. So, I thought, let's see how well he can recover.

Not very well. In fact, he didn't at all. Our magi stammered a bit, as he looked at his expectant young audience, and said something like, "No, I think I'll do something else."

I'm sure he did -- but I stopped watching, mainly out of embarrassment for him (even though it was a TV show). Then I got to thinking about the number of times I had seen the needled balloon and the number of times I had seen it well done. The second list was a whole lot shorter than the first!

And that's a pity, because I have been doing the trick -- in children's and adults' shows -- for years now and it never fails to get a solid reaction.

So what's the problem? It's probably one of the easiest -- and yet most startling -- tricks in magic. But most magicians just show the balloon, show the needle, stick the needle through the balloon, take it out, pop the balloon and go on to something else (assuming they manage to get that far).
B-o-r-i-n-g!

There's a whole range of theatre here in this one trick: Drama, conflict, surprise, victory, denouement, climax. Here's what I mean:

NEEDLE THROUGH BALLOON

Presentation: "When I was just a little, tiny magician, there was one thing I really liked and one thing I really hated. The thing I really liked was balloons."

You bring out a clear, 11-inch balloon and inflate it.
"The thing I really hated was getting a needle."

Bring out the needle from the basic routine, but this is attached to a large, plastic hypodermic syringe. These can be found in most gag and joke shops: It looks like a real hypodermic needle but the needle part is on a spring so that it only appears that it's going into your arm.

Pull out the needle point and enlarge the hole with a drill until the blunt end of the needle from the balloon trick fits snugly in it. Remove the needle again and squirt glue down the hole in the hypo; then shove the blunt end of the needle in again and wait for the glue to harden. When it does, you have what looks like a hypodermic needle with a point on it almost two feet long.

So, you stand there with the balloon in one hand and the giant needle in the other: "I figured if I didn't like needles, then balloons must really, really hate them. Remember -- I was very little at the time. So I thought that, if I said a magic word when a balloon had to get a needle, then maybe it would hurt -- or even go 'pop'." In children's shows, I get all the kids to shout the magic word at this point. And, occasionally, I do this at adult shows -- although you have to read the audience carefully.

After they shout the magic word, insert the needle into the balloon -- and do it slowly; this is a terrific effect and

Needle Through Balloon (cont.)

you should let your audience savor it. After all, there's no trickery or gimmick to hide from them!

At this point the needle is through both sides of the balloon; let the audience members closest to you get a good look at the whole thing. I've had kids say it was done with a patch of Scotch tape where the needle goes in and, when they actually get to see the ungimmicked balloon, they are even more amazed.

Once the punctured but still inflated balloon has been show around, removed the needle -- again, slowly. As you stand there with the balloon in one hand and the needle in the other, you say: "Of course, I knew that if I (we) didn't say the magic words, then terrible things would happen.

At this point, shove the needle into the balloon, popping it. Take your applause and drop the remainder of the punctured balloon on the floor, or hand it to one of the youngsters in the front row. Believe me, they desperately want to examine it and, after all, there's nothing to find.

SECOND THOUGHTS:

Before I made up the hypodermic needle, I use a giant safety pin (again from most joke or gag shops) and filed down the end to a point. This does not work as smoothly as the real needle from the trick but it served its purpose well.

The routine then was about being a tiny magician and only having one thing to play with -- a balloon. "Well, two, actually; I also had a diaper pin." Show the giant pin and wait for the chuckles. "Well, that's how big it looked to me at the time."

You can dress this up as much as you want -- draw a face on the balloon for kids' shows -- or some other part of the anatomy for adult shows, if you're into that kind of thing.

If you are going to do this -- or any other version of the needle through balloon -- then definitely get the lubricating, carrying wand that's available from most dealers. It protects the point of the needle and keeps it ready for use at any time.

Finally, back to the beginning: The young magi I referred probably made one of two mistakes -- the needle point had been blunted (thus the need of a protective carrying case) or the balloon was over-inflated. This is a common mistake in the trick; most magicians feel it is more spectacular if the balloon is blown up to its maximum. It isn't, and your chance of failure skyrockets.

If it's an 11-inch balloon, blow it up to about nine inches. This makes it easier to hold and reduces the chance of premature popping to almost zero.

Lastly, if -- after all those precautions -- the balloon still pops too soon, look around the audience as if you were trying to find a particular person and say: "Someone didn't say the magic word!"

Get out another balloon (and always carry back-ups; some magicians have so much faith that they only pack one balloon), inflate it and say: "We'll try again -- and this time I'll be watching to see that everyone says the magic word."

If it fails again, you may want to take the easy way out; after all, you are standing there with two feet of sharpened steel in your hand!

Peter Marucci
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People Always Guess How my Tricks are Done!

People always guess how my tricks are done!

By Timothy Arends

It has happened to you. It has happened to me. You've performed what you think is a brilliant effect for someone and they call out the solution. And (gulp!) it turns out to be the correct solution!

This kind of thing probably happens to even the best magicians occasionally. Well-known magic author Henry Hay once wrote: "Of course you'll be afraid they may catch you, and sometimes they will catch you.... The fear of detection is just something that goes with being a magician."

On the other hand, if you get found out too often, you should give some serious consideration to what you may be doing wrong.

There could be several possible explanations:

1. You haven't practiced enough.

You should practice a trick well beyond the point where you can do it flawlessly. The first few times you perform a trick for an audience, you will naturally be a little nervous or unsteady, so you may flub a trick that went fine during rehearsals. Therefore, a bit of "overkill" in practicing is a good thing. Someone once said, "The amateur practices until he can do it right; the professional practices until it can no longer do it wrong."

2. The tricks you are performing are not very deceptive.

Just as you shouldn't believe everything you read, you shouldn't bother to perform every trick you see written up in a book or magazine. A trick that looks good on paper but not in practice is called a "pipe dream". How do you separate pipe dreams from the solid workable effects? Through experience performing in front of real people.

3. You haven't had enough experience in performing a particular trick before an audience.

When you first start performing an effect, you naturally have to concentrate a bit more on every move than when you become more familiar with it. The slight hesitation you make before a secret move can be a tip-off that you are doing something "sneaky". This can transmit itself to your spectator without your even being aware of it. In addition, no matter how much you've practiced, you will always be susceptible at first to the distractions posed by performing a trick for a real person. As you get more and more experience in performing a trick, you will get more and more skillful at it and you will usually find its deceptiveness increasing steadily. Unfortunately, this is the point where most amateur magicians get tired of a trick and move on to something else!

4. The effects you are performing are too difficult.

No matter how long you have been a student of magic, there is no substitute for performing in front of real people. Therefore, you shouldn't plunge into difficult sleight-of-hand right away; rather, you should gain experience and confidence in performing simpler effects repeatedly in front of real people.

5. You are performing for the wrong people.

Some people see it as a blow to their ego to be fooled by a magician. They think to be fooled means to be "made a fool of", which is not true, but is a widespread misconception. This means that they will stubbornly "fight" the magician to keep from being deceived. They may grab at the props or try to view what the magician is doing from an inconvenient angle. You can try to get on the good side of these people by doing your magic in a friendly, non-confrontational manner (something you should always do, anyway). But no matter how you handle

People Always Guess How my Tricks are Done! (cont.)

it, some people will still see your magic as a challenge to their ego. Fortunately, as an amateur magician, you have the luxury of choosing your audiences. If a spectator proves confrontational, simply move on to somebody else. There are plenty of people in the world, and no shortage of those who will make appreciative spectators.

6. You are performing the wrong effects for the wrong people.

An effect that will fool one type of person may be transparent to another, and vice-versa. For example, young children are usually not taken in by misdirection. When you pretend to place a ball in one hand and really keep it in the other, a child is often not fooled by this because they did not really see the ball go into the other hand. An adult has learned by experience that certain actions follow other actions, and so if they see a gesture of a ball being transferred from one hand to the other, they will naturally assume that is what happened. On the other hand, a child may be fooled by a trick that would be transparent to an adult. How do you learn which tricks should be performed for which types of audiences? Only by experience performing in front of real people.

7. You are repeating an effect that should not be repeated.

Some effects can be performed more than once for the same person (and indeed, actually become stronger with each repetition. But most effects should only be performed once. After the first viewing, the spectator knows what to look for, and is no longer interested in being entertained, but is trying to figure it out. If the instructions that you learned the trick from do not say the trick can be repeated, do not repeat it! If the spectator asks you to do so, show them another trick instead.

8. You are performing an effect under the wrong conditions.

Some tricks cannot effectively be done if audience members are standing behind you. Others cannot be done if people are at your side. For example, some tricks require you to be seated so that you can drop something in your lap. But if someone is standing behind you and at an angle, they may see this secret move. Other tricks, however, can be done surrounded, with spectators at all sides. If you choose the wrong effect for the wrong conditions, people may see through it.

How do you know which of these explanations may be the cause of your problem? Through the process of elimination. If you find that a trick is regularly being figured out, start by ruling out the most obvious explanation and then working your way through the list. Perform for enough people and soon you will have a repertoire of effects you know are stunners.

Follow these steps and you will have an advantage over most other amateur magicians. You will develop a reputation as a magician who performs truly stunning illusions.

By Timothy Arends

Timothy Arends, who lives in the Chicago area, has been a student of magic for over 30 years. He posts on the Magic Bunny forums under the handle of Cybernetter. You may send responses to this article to timarends@aol.com.

Way of the Neophyte - Cultivating a Reputation Part 2

Way of the Neophyte

"Cultivating A Reputation – Part II"

By Craig Browning

Previously I offered some ideas as to how to begin cultivating a local reputation as a "surrealist" e.g. someone that specializes in bizarre styled amusement. This month I want to transgress just a bit, possibly repeating myself some, in address to the art of Reading and why this is such an important skill for any psychic based entertainer (mentalist & storyteller alike) to learn and perfect. Needless to say I've heard nearly every argument against doing readings that has ever been given and had many attempt to compress their position into suppository form, if you get my drift. Nonetheless I remain a believer that certain aspects of the art hold validity or, to be more exact, a "purpose" in our world. This is a position many clinical professionals in the mental health and even clerical trades agree with e.g. the *Reader* is a non-entity and thus, a "sounding board" that folks can visit casually and without the stigma of feeling "less than". This syndrome being quite common when it comes to people facing life crisis and major decision making issues who break down and go to the local Psychologist/ Psychiatrist or their minister. Having to go to a "Professional" in many people's minds (especially males) is a weakness and has even been translated by some (most those guided by their machismo levels) as admitting "Failure in life".

Now I do stress (yet again) that I'm all for lynching most people that use the role of the Reader in less than honorable ways. At the same time I know from the quarter century I've been involved with the growing shut-eye market that the majority of those doing Readings are in fact honest, humble, well intentioned individuals who, in many instances, are dealing with delusions of their own. Being able to share with others aids them in dealing with their own humanity and limitations. Kind of goes with the old Kahuna wisdom that "*we teach best that which we are learning...*"

As an entertainer the art of Reading takes on a new dimension, lending to us a potent vehicle via which to express the more rye side of our personality and get away with it. Possibly one of the best examples of this was Liz & Tommy Tucker's old comedy Horoscope Act and possibly some of the seriously delectable tongue-n-cheek retorts offered by comedy mentalists like John Riggs, Kevin Burke or Brandon Thomas' infamous radio show character *Bubba, the Red Neck Psychic*. In other words a "Reading" don't have to be some kind of mystic psychobabble that takes on all the frivolity of an Orthodox Church Mass.

Some time back I was working in the Nashville area and had the chance to spend a few weekends in Murphresboro, home of the Tennessee State Renaissance Festival. It was there that I first encountered a most amazing lady I've mentioned before; a drunkard who delivered some of the most fun casual Readings for folks I've ever seen. She did everything as if she were legit (and trust me, she was far from it, though she was a most excellent judge of character!) Instead of a one-on-one experience she spread out several blankets and pillows and invited anyone who would wish to, to gather and be part of the fun; each tossing in their \$5.00 or \$10.00 along with a written question or two.

Now this lady pulled in well over \$1,000.00 a day during her stay at the fair. All that attended her gatherings loved her and never once suspected her to be a cheat at any level. She was in fact the toast of Nashville e.g. the city's most renown and respected psychic. Her success stemming not from her words as much as her style – she delivered fun along side memories. She shared with those that were willing to open their eyes, exactly how to become successful in this business. Though it encourages a hint of eccentricity the biggest lesson was and still is, help people learn to laugh at life and themselves!

Corrinda, Dunninger and others of the past knew the power of being a Reader. The legendary Robert Nelson built a small empire via mail order Readings, selling "Lucky Numbers" and other such hustles while likewise pandering to the magic world, making available to us his secrets of success e.g. the tools that kept the money flowing – Readings being a primary key.

The tightrope trod by the mentalists of the past has become thicker in today's world, and far more defined. Elements of magic's *status quo* pushing forth an agenda based philosophy that would rob the psychic entertainer of his/her many money-making assets – tools we've used for generations to further our business and careers. More and more the "*power mongers*" of magic want to negate our ties to things metaphysical and mysterious...

Way of the Neophyte - Cultivating a Reputation Part 2 (cont.)

even aspects of the spiritual or religious; discouraging belief (let alone faith) in anything including the Divine, or "God" as you may understand such. Compounding these issues are the mental health professionals who, like the magicians society, have forgotten where their so-called "science" came from and not all that long ago e.g. the art of the Gypsy Reader being the foundation to what is now modern psychology & the psychiatric profession. With this in mind one could suppose that it's o.k. to hustle and take people's money so long as you have that college certificate hanging on the wall that makes it all "official" and "legal" as well as "ethical".

GIVE ME A FREAK'N BREAK!

If you stand on the side of argument that people like John Edward cause more harm than good by "communicating with the dead" and allowing their patrons to have closer in someone's passing, you obviously haven't looked at how much cash these certified, pedigreed and legitimized con artists bilk people for in after-care... and yes, I know I just stepped on a lot of toes; many magicians (especially mentalist) held a psych major or minor in college and many are practitioners in real life. However, this background does not give them the right nor the qualifications to demand exclusivity e.g. a Monopoly of sorts, when it comes to mental health and very human needs pertaining to "understanding and healing." BTW... I've seen far more "slight of hand" going on in the offices of "shrinks" than I've ever seen in the shut-eye Reader's world. So let's start applying the same rule of judgement onto everyone involved with the counseling game, shall we? (That includes the "clergy" of all faiths!)

Why do I stress the ideas of legitimacy, belief, faith, etc. when it comes to this issue? You ask.

Respect. If you cannot respect your patrons and their "need to believe" as well as their skepticism, you will never accomplish a high level of accuracy in your Reading work. Too, more people are prone to see you as the charlatan you are and thus, you gain less support and advantage from within the very markets most mentalists have made their living off of for generations – the Spiritualists/New Age believer's sect.

Another reason why I encourage such points of view stems from a more human position e.g. if you want people to respect you and your opinion YOU MUST have an opened enough mind to allow them their pov. A prime example is how noted skeptics like Rick Maue and Banachek, both card carrying Randi Foundation supporters, lend to me acknowledgment and respect for my position. They realize that I'm using the "honey" approach in my Consumer Awareness message vs. the ball bat used by certain others when it comes to both, exposure and the skeptical point of view. My methods being more prone to encourage direct participation and investigation by members of the shuteye community. All going well, they will discover the frauds themselves and deal with it (and trust me, that's not a pretty picture!) Via this approach far less "hard feelings" come into being and fewer people are made to feel like fools, because they were getting duped by a pro.

I've addressed this position in this stage of the development game so that you, as a performer, can weigh some very important things for yourself. Namely, the way you will handle the "Psychic Question" within your market area?

Being fickle ain't healthy! There have been several from the world of Mentalism who have either straddled the fence or deliberately jumped back and forth over it. In the case of one Mr. Kreskin (a few years back) he was nearly tarred & feathered by a group of New Age types because what he promised isn't what they got e.g. he promised a spiritual experience, they got a "Magic Show" for lack of a better term. Others, like Mark Edward have "followed the pay day" for decades, trying to appeal to both, the magician and the shut-eye in a positive way whilst placing daggers into the backs of both simultaneously.

I do not say these things to be crass or, to spread malicious gossip, nor to slander those named in any way. Rather, I'm attempting to offer you examples of what happens when you place yourself into a position of indecision e.g. your actions become self-defeating. You might get away with changing your views and "testimony" as it were, once in the course of your career. To move back and forth based on how the wind (or your mood) moves you however, is a dangerous, highly non-productive course.

The happy medium (and I don't me Sylvia Brown) is to admit to the shut-eye world that you're a magician and you draw a hard line between your amusements and what you do as a Reader. That is, if you choose to take on the role that's worked for so many over the years and use Readings as a mode of income as well as reputation

Way of the Neophyte - Cultivating a Reputation Part 2 (cont.)

building. I for one can assure you that being a good, dependable Reader will get you more positive word-of-mouth PR than any trick you may want to do. Given that there are dozens of techniques available for divination type counseling (including Kenton Knepper & J. Tank's S.A.R. system @ WonderWizards.com) even religious belief can't be a distraction. As I've told many a shut-eye student "There's more to it than Palm Reading & Tarot..."

To bring this issue full circle I'd like to challenge you to give the role of being a Reader and doing Readings some serious thought. I know there are many in magic that negate this route but too, I know of countless routines that are intentionally designed as a mini-Reading that you are missing out on. Effects that can be used in a Café or New Age store as part of a Reading experience, so long as you stress to folks that you offer what you do as an amusement or *curio* "I do not claim any special powers or gifts, I do these things because people think it's fun..." From there I explain that there is a difference between divination and prophecy (something few in the skeptic's societies want to acknowledge; looking at the explanations as a cop out... ignoring how often they use "coincidence" as their explanatory "out" – how much more scientific can you get?)

The idea is to improve your own people skills and doing Readings will deliver that result which in turn, assists you in cultivating your character and reputation. If you're just starting out, you need all the positive word-of-mouth PR you can garner. By delivering fun-filled, memorable and "accurate" Readings that have some sense of legitimacy attached to them (in other words, you really do use a known system and the literal meanings of the symbols/cards or whatever you're using).

Experiment with it. Have the guts to get bold with it. Most importantly, have fun in creating fun for those you do it for and with.

Until next time...

Craig Browning

[Surrealist Entertainer](#)

Now Serving Northampton, MA.

Follow the Leader Coins Across

A Magic Effect

By Elliot Watson (Elwood)

Editor's Note: Elliot Watson (MagicBunny.co.uk membername: Elwood) is a master of close up magic. He performs at weddings, restaurants, banquets, corporate gatherings, functions and at other events. His Mystery Show is an original, full show that "presents Magic as it should be presented - a series of logic defying mysterious events, that will twist your perception of reality, and make you think twice about the world around you." For more information, visit <http://www.elwoodmagic.co.uk/>

EFFECT:

Four identical coins are shown. The Magician places them in his left hand, and shows the right hand clearly to be empty. Explaining that the coins work in pairs that follow each other around, he places the first coin in the right hand. After briefly clenching his fists, he opens his left hand to show only two coins, and then shows two coins in the right. Once again, a coin is placed into the right hand, and three coins are clearly seen. The fists are clenched, and instantly, without the hands even coming near each other the left hand is shown empty, and the right hand is opened to reveal that the last coin has followed its leader to the right hand.

Follow the Leader Coins Across (cont.)

SLEIGHTS:

Only two sleights are used in this effect, the Goshman Pinch, and the Pointing Transfer.

The Goshman Pinch (actually the Tenkai Pinch, but its use was pioneered by Albert Goshman) is a variation on the Back Clip, or Back Palm. In a nutshell, the coin is pushed from the index and second fingertips of the right hand with the thumb around the backs of the fingers as the hand clenches into a fist. The pinkie traps the coin between it and the third finger, at an angle of around 45 degrees (towards the thumb). As the hand is opened outwards and away from the body, the coin remains out of view from most angles. A more detailed explanation of this sleight can be found on Jay Sankey's "Sankey-tized vol.2" or in a slightly different (but just as effective) form on Paul Cummins' "Up In Smoke" video. This is an intermediate to advanced move, but is well worth the practice, as it will allow you to show your hand empty while concealing a coin.

The Pointing Transfer is a move also taught on "Sankey-tized vol. 2", as well as on Gregory Wilson's excellent "On the Spot" tapes. The move is very simple, yet does require a certain amount of timing to be foolproof. Although in this routine you will use the move to show two coins in each hand, it is best to learn with just one. Take a coin in your left hand. Clench both fists. As you open your left hand to show the coin, immediately point to it (actually making contact with the coin) with your right index finger. Briefly clench the fists, balancing the coin on your left index fingertip, and then open the right fist at exactly the same time as you point to the palm of the right hand with the left index finger. The coin will end up on the centre of the palm, and when executed correctly, it looks to the spectator as though you only pointed at a coin that was already there, a belief reinforced by the fact that they saw you do the same thing with the other hand a second before. This repetition and the subsequent "false sense of belief/security is an important part of Magic, and one that you should study carefully. If you cleanly perform a motion, be it pointing, transferring a coin from one hand to the other, or placing something into a pocket, then you later use that same action to cover a sleight or load, the spectators have been conditioned to believe that the movement is nothing more than what it seems. A subtle, but important point.

THE SECRET:

You are always at least one step ahead of the audience here, although they are never aware of it, thanks to the Goshman Pinch.

Take the four coins into your left hand. I use 10 pence pieces normally (same size as quarters in the States) although you can perform with half dollars, or whatever coins you normally use. Count them into the right hand, then transfer them back to the left, secretly holding one back. To cover this unnecessary moving of coins, I keep loose change in my left pocket. I remove the change, and pick out four identical coins with my right fingers, counting them as I do so. I place the change back in my pocket, and as I announce that the coins travel from my left hand to the right, I do the transfer. This eliminates (in the spectators eyes) one movement of the coins necessary for the count and secret removal of one. Again, a subtle point, but an important one.

As you jingle the (three) coins in the left clenched fist, holding the hand almost at eye level, the right fingers move the coin into the Goshman Pinch, under cover of making a fist. As you say the coins travel from left to right, you can show the right hand empty. Explain that the coins only travel in pairs, however, and thumb off the first "leader" coin onto the right palm. Clench the fists and then open the left hand to show that only two coins remain. Do not retrieve the first coin from the Goshman Pinch yet! Briefly close the fists, and perform the Pointing Transfer, and show two coins in the right hand. This is the most difficult part of the routine, as you need to keep the hidden coin in the Goshman Pinch while you open the hand twice, and perform another sleight. However, when you get comfortable with the Goshman Pinch, you will find that this is easily achieved. I find that it is easier to keep the coin concealed and secure if I slightly bend my pinkie as I show the palm of my hand, but you will need to experiment until you find what works best for you.

Thumb the next "leader" coin onto the right palm, clearly showing three coins. Since only a second ago two coins were definitely in the left hand, then one must still be there. Actually, you are now finished, it's only a matter of presentation. As you clench the right fist, retrieve the coin from the Goshman Pinch. This is achieved by contacting the coin with the thumb as the hand is turned over. Basically, if you do the move in reverse, you

Follow the Leader Coins Across (cont.)

will get out of it. To cover the movement, shake the left hand at eye level, as you announce that the last coin will "follow its leader." Keep the hands apart, and make it obvious that they never touch, or indeed even come close together. You can now reveal, in suitably dramatic fashion that the coin has indeed travelled from the left hand to the right.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

I find that by asking a spectator to place their hands on top and below my left hand, the vanish and subsequent reappearance of the final coin is made much stronger, due to the impossible circumstances.

You might find that by using the gag of "making the third coin travel visibly" as you place it into the hand will work for you. You can explain that the first coin is the leader, and the rest follow that one. Personally, I prefer to "play it straight" with this effect, and make the most of the impossible events unfolding before the spectators eyes.

The inspiration for this effect came from Jay Sankey's "Tenkai Pennies", Gregory Wilson's "3/4 across" and the "Gadabout Coins", in Bobo's, but more recently published by Ron Bauer as part of his "Private Studies" series. I wanted to develop non-gimmicked coins across routine that used four coins instead of three, so that I could routine it with a Matrix effect, as a transition from cards to coins in my close-up act. As always, necessity was the mother of invention, and I came up with this.

By Elliot Watson

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Thanks to the contributors who helped get together this bumper edition to kick off the Summer.

I hope to see you on the forums which are currently being improved drastically upon - look forward to new features coming soon, some of which we've already seen.

Best Wishes,

Jon Snoops