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TOP HAT

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This month we've the usual selection of articles from different performers around the World. If you're a member of a magic club or would like to join one, Nigel Shelton discusses how MagicBunny can help with the free feature of Regional Magic Clubs offered by MagicBunny.

For those looking for magic effects, Peter Marucci presents a full comedy-card routine with moves, patter suggestions and alternate handling suggestions. The basic idea can also be adapted to other uses: check this routine out right *now*.

Bizarre magic lovers can find out from Craig Browning more about presentational and psychological techniques in the third part of his latest series, "Spirits Amongst Us."

Over in the Argentinean corner, Daniel de Urquiza reveals more of his wisdom with a full routine using a packet of cards. While combining effects to create his "Miracle Routine," Daniel also gives patter and move descriptions. This is a routine that many of you will be able to do and will use. I may be putting my head on the line here, and I know it's been said many times before but this routine is, in my opinion marketable. My advice, read it, love it, learn it.

Michael's ready, camera-in-hand to give advice on how video cameras can aid your practice. He has plenty of tips for examining your angles, technique performance over in "Let's Build Magic."

With all that in this month's issue, I hope there's something here for you, whatever your interest.

All the best,

~Jon Snoops~

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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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The Latest From MagicBunny

The Latest From MagicBunny

Website News

By Nigel Shelton



Newer members to the Magic Bunny forums will be unaware of the fact that there are many more forums hidden from view; the "Regional Magic Clubs." It was decided to make these additional forums hidden for no other reason than to avoid clutter to those members to whom these additional forums do not apply. At present there are six "Regional Magic Club" forums and some of these are particularly active and well appreciated by those who visit these boards.

The "Regional Magic Club" forums were implemented to allow members (who meet with one another off-line) to have a vehicle for discussing issues that relate to them directly. These forums are used for members to remind each other of forthcoming meetings and social functions, to discuss and evaluate how these meetings have progressed, to provide feedback or encouragement of a private nature, to discuss issues that are unique to a particular locality and for any other topics of interest that are regional in nature.

As far as I am aware, Magic Bunny is unique in offering this service and, for many members; it is an ideal channel for discussing and arranging many issues of a regional nature.

The six "Regional Magic Club" forums that are already in existence are as follows:

THE CAPITAL ASSOCIATION OF MAGICIANS

This club is made up of a group of members who meet in *London* every month outside International Magic. They also attend lectures and events in the London area.

THE ETON COLLEGE MAGIC CLUB

This group was set for those who attend Eton College.

THE THAMES VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF MAGICIANS

This is a group of members who meet every month in the Garibaldi pub in *Burnham*.

THE SOUTH-EASTERN MICHIGAN CLUB

This is a group of members based in and around *Michigan, USA*. There is no regular meeting date but meetings and events are set up occasionally.

THE WAVENEY VALLEY MAGIC CLUB

This is for the group of members from the Norfolk/Suffolk area who meet each month in The White Hart Freehouse, *Hopton on Sea, Norfolk*.

THE ULSTER SOCIETY OF MAGICIANS

This is the forum for the group based in *Ulster, Ireland* who meet each month. Their official site is <http://www.online-usm.com>

You will find more details and associated links for these groups at the following hyperlink:

<http://magicbunny.co.uk/regional.php>

If you meet with other board members off line then this reminder may interest you in one of two different ways.

Firstly, if you live close to any of the above six clubs, you are free to simply email the usergroup moderator of the relevant groups and ask to be added to the relevant group. Details may be found at the following

The Latest From MagicBunny (cont.)

hyperlink:

<http://magicbunny.co.uk/phpBB2/groupcp.php>

(There is no additional entry requirement, other than your physical distance to the meeting place.)

Secondly, if you already meet in your locality with other magicians, please feel free to contact me at admin@magicbunny.co.uk and request that a private forum is built for you. If there is a need for this, then I shall be only too happy to comply with your wishes and construct your own private "Regional Magic Club" forum for the use of you and your colleagues. Of course, in keeping with all the facilities of these boards, there is NO charge for this feature.

Consider this carefully, you may find that this feature will greatly enhance your use and enjoyment of these forums.

By Nigel Shelton

Bugaboo!

Bugaboo!

A comedy/mystery routine

By Peter Marucci

"The simpler, the better" is a saying that should be applied to almost everything we do in magic. Why spend endless hours learning 10 different sleights that do the same thing, when just one will do? The following routine combines comedy and mystery, using just one simple move and one simple gimmick. And it's something that has never ceased to amaze me with the reaction it gets from lay audiences.

Sounds too good to be true? Well, decide for yourself with:

BUGABOO!

By Peter Marucci

EFFECT:

You have a card freely selected and returned to the deck. As you talk about the "miracle" you are about to perform, you are apparently bothered by a fly circling your head. You swat at it a couple of times and then watch the (invisible) fly land on the deck in your hand. You smack it, apparently killing it, and then wonder aloud where it went, as you spread the deck from hand to hand. One of the cards has a big, red "splotch" on its back -- apparently the remains of the fly.

"Wouldn't it be amazing if the fly found your card?" you ask. The spectator tells you the name of her card, you turn over the "splotch" card, and it is the named card.

"Of course," you say, "it wouldn't do to have that big gory mess on the back of one of the cards, so I'll clean it up." You wipe the back of the card on your sleeve and turn it over to show that the mess has vanished and the back of the card has returned to normal.

WORKING:

You'll need a deck of cards (surprise!) and one double-backed card that matches the deck. On one side of the double-backer, put a big, red splotch with a felt-tip marker or red nail polish. When dry, put this card, marked side up, on the bottom of the deck and you're ready to go.

Bugaboo! (cont.)

Presentation: Offer to show your audience "one of the world's great card tricks." If they're still around after you say the words "card tricks," go on with the rest of the routine.

Take the deck out of its case, taking care not to flash the double-backer on the bottom, fan it face down and ask a spectator to select and remember one of the cards. As she is doing this, square the deck and take the top half off in your left hand. Ask her to replace the chosen card, offering her the section on your left hand. Don't try to be clever about this; simply say: "Put the card back there," indicating the top of the half-deck in your left hand.

When she does, replace the rest of the cards on top. This puts the chosen card directly below the "splotch" card, with the "splotch" facing up.

In your best "snake-oil salesman" voice, tell your audience that you are about to show them "the most amazing, the most spectacular, the most baffling card trick of all time." As you say this, let your eyes wander as if you are following the flight of a fly around your head.

Wave your hands at the fly a couple of time, as if to brush it away, while muttering about "pesky flies." Finally, let your eyes follow the fly down to where it lands on the back of the deck in your left hand. Do this slowly, as if you really were following a fly, and the audience's eyes will follow yours, right to the back of the deck.

Smack the back of the deck with your right hand, saying: "There, that should get rid of him," and then look puzzled as you examine the top of the deck for a trace of the fly's remains.

"I hope he didn't get inside the deck," you say, as you spread the deck from hand to hand. When you come the red "splotch," take all the cards above it and put them on the bottom of the deck and square the pack.

"Gee, you say, he certainly left a mess. But wouldn't it be amazing if he landed on your card? And what was the name of your card?"

When the spectator tells you, do a double lift and turn the two cards over, square on top of the deck, revealing the face of the selected card.

"What an amazing fly," you say, as you take the (single) chosen card off the deck with your right hand. Keeping it face up, you say: "Of course, it wouldn't do to have one card with a messy back, so I'll just clean that up," and wipe the back of the card on your sleeve. Turn it over, back up, to show the back has returned to normal and slip it into the deck, to the applause (we hope) of the audience.

SECOND THOUGHTS:

If you have trouble doing a double lift, thumb the "splotch" card off into the right hand. As you are showing the back around, the left thumb pushes the top (chosen) card over about a half an inch. As you put the "splotch" card back on the deck, it's a simple job to square it with the chosen card and then just flip both cards over, revealing the selection.

For the purists, who want to finish clean, you are left with the double-back on top of the deck with the normal back showing and the "splotch" side down. You can then palm the gimmicked card off the top, leaving you with a normal deck.

For reset, simply slide the double-backer around the deck, to the bottom. This will turn the "splotch" side up and put it on the bottom of the deck, ready for a repeat.

This plays a lot more strongly than it reads (I am almost reluctant to part with it) and, if you go to the trouble of making it up -- and rehearsing it -- I suspect you will be more than pleased with the audience reaction.

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Spirits Amongst Us Part 3

Spirits Amongst Us

Part III of Series

P. Craig Browning

In my previous article I lent a great deal of focus on the idea of improvisational presentation and how this mode of performance lends to us added psychological potency. The whole, of which I refer to as being, "Conversational Magick" e.g. magic that is presented as part of an existing conversation theme or topic. An idea that is far from new discussed many times by the likes of Vernon, Annemann and others, including our good friend Corinda. His ZARKAMORTA routine on pages 201-206 (13 Steps) being one of the most chilling demonstrations of early Bizarre Magick, a mode of thinking many of us could learn from.

Years ago I use to sell a very expensive vacuum cleaner. My favorite technique involved a casual meal with clients, supposedly running out of time and not being able to demonstrate the system. I'd then extend myself by offering the patrons my demonstrator machine, telling them that they could take it home over night and try it, and I'd pick it up the next morning. Nine times out of ten I picked up a check, not the machine.

The reason this technique works is because of a thing known as "take away psychology". This same mode of action proving to be a powerful ally to us, as mystery entertainers. Our conversation alluding to this or that issue but we take it away. We show a hesitation or reluctance when it comes to the patron's demand to see it... to experience it. This kind of action when put forth by the client, lending to us that investment of belief/support that's required for effective mental/bizarre work. This is a concept used quite effectively in the aforementioned routine; a technique that I've learned to manipulate into situations, so that I could take greater advantage of my audience and their curiosity.

My original handling of the ZARKAMORTA routine added several side-bits that helped build suspense as well as feelings of hesitation in the hearts of those participating; typically a group already gathered in a home for a PSI Party experience (see Marc Striving's videos on Home PSI Parties – Steven's Magic). Drawing on my knowledge of New Age practice I introduced the idea of Clearing the Circle before moving into the ritual outlined by Corinda. There are a number of routines applicable to this concept, my preference being The Dark Crystal (Kemystical Magic), an unexpected manifestation that quite literally puts chills down people's spine.

In my handling I ask the host of the party if she has a large Brandy Snifter type glass we could use, along with some purified water. Reading from a diary (credited my estranged grandfather) I explain the Rites of Purification and Unification. The glass of now sanctified water is passed about the group for all to sip from. When it returns to me I begin the act of "Balancing" the sympathetic energies we all share. In other words, I employ the suggested tuning fork handling of the Dark Crystal effect outlined in the original manuscript. This action builds a great deal of suspense as well as curiosity, but you must be careful to not take too long or bore your guests.

The power in this routine is how the Dark Crystal becomes manifested within the goblet. It appears slowly, with wisps of dark, threadlike swirls moving about in the water, which slowly come together and solidify into a fair sized purplish-black crystal sitting at the bottom of the glass.

Obviously this is a very startling as well as unique occurrence. The fact that you were reluctant to perform the rituals associated with the ZARKAMORTA act compounds the impact of this simple demonstration. In short, you've created the illusion of doing these things at an improvisational level. Especially when you're borrowing all sorts of innocent items to make the ritual happen e.g. the glass, water, and of course, the magazine, etc. used in other parts of the main routine.

Like Ed Solomon (a.k.a. DeNomolos) I like using old boxes and books as a way to open the door to conversation. The other reason I enjoy this form of "audience baiting" is that each item I have on display opens the door for key, self-contained, routines. Learning to use the public's curiosity to your advantage does take some time to learn. In my experience however, you can easily incite intrigue by casually laying something out on a table, making a very nonchalant comment about it, and moving on with other actions.

Spirits Amongst Us Part 3 (cont.)

In the case of this particular routine, I would simply leave an old diary lying on the table, making mention that it belonged to my grandfather and perhaps, mention of his correspondence with occultist Alester Crowley. It never failed to capture the curiosity of one or two members of the gathered group and thus, open the door to the follow-up "Séance-like" sequence.

Granted, The Dark Crystal routine is some very clever chemical magic. The fact that you can remove the materialized crystal and pass it around (it's quite hard) adds to the fact that folks just witnessed something "other worldly". So much so that I've had group members freak out and beg me to not go any further.

Why?

You have to understand the realities of the shut-eye world. Though these people "believe" in such phenomena, they rarely ever experience anything outside of subtle, questionable manifestations. We're talking about folks that are impressed when a child's toy car rolls an inch or two via PK demonstrations; it's all they expect. When you have placed material of this kind as a bonus or follow-up to your normal demonstration, especially when that follow-up action seems very impromptu, you are putting your patrons into a potential sense of psychological overload e.g. less is more!

With these things in mind I leave it in your good hands to cuss and discuss the potential and advantages you will have when working your magic in this manner.

Until next time...

By P. Craig Browning

Argentinean Miracle Routine

Argentinean Miracle Routine

An impossible packet trick routine

By Daniel de Urquiza

The routine you are about to learn is an absolute audience killer.

You will certainly recognize three major influences on the plot: Three card monte, Jumping Gemini, from Darwin Ortiz, and Everywhere and Nowhere, of Hofzinsner.

But, if you know those effect, also you will agree that the handling, methods, and the new plot are completely new.

So, enjoy.

EFFECT:

The magician shows three cards. The only one showed by it face is the Ace of Spades. The Ace of Spades is placed at different positions, and it always manages to be where it is not supposed to be. Magician apparently explains this mystery by showing that the three cards are Aces of Spades. Immediately, he shows that the three cards are Kings. Then, he remembers that there are four kings, not three, at the deck. So he shows that he has the four kings. Where is the Ace of Spades? At the magicians pocket. Performer ends up with the Ace of Spades and the four kings on the table, and there are no duplicates at all. The Ace of Spades can be signed.

A) METHOD: THE BAREBONES.

FIRST PART: MONTE

1) Start by having on top of the deck 3 kings, the Ace, 1 king, rest of the deck.

Argentinean Miracle Routine (cont.)

Spread 3 cards, face down. While showing them, take a one handed break of the top card. Say: "Now, an experiment with...3 cards. 1, 2, 3. The only card in which we are interested right now is this, the Ace of Spades". When you are saying this, square the three cards counted over the deck, add the Ace of Spades, and turn face up the four cards, outjogged a little.

2) Take the four cards, turn them face down. Very obviously take the Ace, show it, and put it 2nd from the top. Say "I take the Ace of Spades, and I place it in the middle. But it goes to the top". Of course, double turnover the top two cards.

3) Turn the double face down again, and place the top card, apparently the Ace, to the bottom. Say: "Now I place it at the bottom. But it goes again to the top". Show it in a similar way to the first face, but subtly remark the singularity of the Ace with your handling.

4) Turn the Ace face down and again put it 2nd from the top. Say: "So I put it in the middle, AND YOU CAN SEE THAT IT IS IN THE MIDDLE," and simply lift the top card, face down, and use it to turnover the middle card, while maintaining a double as one as bottom card. Turn over the Ace again, but with a little injog, and put the top card back above the Ace. When squaring, take your break, and show that it is again at the top.

5) Go on saying "And I put it to the bottom, which is MUCH MORE DIFFICULT, because is below of all the cards, but it goes again to the top". Of course, you have put an indifferent card at the bottom, and showed the Ace on top.

SECOND PART: TRANSFORMATIONS.

6) Say: "When I do this, people use to think that I have some extra cards, but no. Only three". Show four as three, by reverse counting and counting the last two as one. The Ace is on the bottom.

7) "Other people thinks that I have all Aces. Hmm. That could be..." Do a Flushturation or Optical Count, showing all Aces, and counting, of course, the last two as one.

8) Say: "But they are wrong, because, I don't have three Aces. I have...three kings". Turn face up the packet, showing three kings, hiding the Ace behind the middle king. If you are familiarized with the Ascanio Spread, you shouldn't have any problems with this. Pause.

THIRD PART: THE FINALE.

9) Then, acting as if just remembering: "But there are FOUR kings in the deck, not three. So I blow...and I have 1, 2, 3, 4 Kings". Of course, you were set to do an Elmsley Count. The Ace is now at the bottom. Turn face down the packet, and at the same time palm the Ace.

10) Place the packet with three Kings on top of the deck, while saying: I know you are wandering: if those are the Kings, where is the Ace of Spades? Well, it was never with the Kings, it is where it had been all the time, at my pocket". Thrust your hand inside your trousers pocket, take out the Ace of Spades, and throw it on the table, away from you.

11) Take the deck, deal quickly the four Kings (remember you have left on top of the deck the fourth King) on the table, face up, behind the Ace, and ribbon spread, also face up, the deck. Finish by saying, matching your actions to your words: "The Ace, The Kings, and you can see that there are no other Ace of Spades or Kings in the deck".

B) THE SLEIGHTS I USE.

I think I must explain carefully the particular choice of two sleights: Vernon's top palm, used when the Aces of spades travels to the pocket, and my own "Argentinean Double Lift", used when doing the "Monte" phase.

1) To understand the foundations of the Argentinean Double Lift, first you will need to learn another sleight, the "Argentinean False Display".

This later move shows three cards as two. To do it, have the three cards face up, squared, in a somewhat modified dealer's grip. The cards are held on the tip of the extended fingers, clipped between the thumb and

Argentinean Miracle Routine (cont.)

those fingers. The other hand takes hold of the three cards in Biddle grip. By the mere adherence of the face card to the tip of the thumb, you will be able to withdraw the two bottom cards as one with the hand in the modified biddle grip. It's kinda the opposite to the last action of the Gemini Count. As you take the double, the hand changes the biddle position a little bit, like this: the cards should be held by the middle finger on the outer short edge of the cards, and the thumb at the inner/lower short end. Notice that the index finger is free. Let it lay semiextended touching the outer long side of the cards. Well, there is when you get to do the "false display".

Right now, you should have in one hand a face up card, holded in a modified dealer's grip. In your other hand, you are holding two cards as one, face up. Remember the index finger position, it's fundamental. So, curl the index finger, "closing" it. This will cause the double to pivot. At the same time, also curl the index finger beneath the card holded at the modified dealer's grip, and stretch it, freeing it from the thumb, so the cards get pinched between the middle and the index finger.

You must coordinate these actions with the lifting of both hands to the spectators eye level. What the spectators see, are two cards pivoting and showing it face at the same time.

I know I'm not supposed to say this, but this move is great: it has a gazillion applications (from sandwich type of effects to cards across, cannibal cards, etc), it has "built in" misdirection (the showing of two cards at the same time), and it's at the same time flourishy, but quite natural.

Ok. You've learned the "Argentinean False Display". Now you are set to learn the "Argentinean Double Lift". Actually, the sleight is used to do a double lift from a small packet of cards, modifying a little the "Argentinean False Display".

In the routine, you are always showing four cards as three. Also, you are performing doubles all the time. To do it, hold the four cards squared in biddle grip. Do a "half Ascanio's Spread," i.e.: the other hand comes from beneath, the fingers extends the bottom card to one side, then the second from the bottom also is extended to the side.

You end up with something like a "ladder" of cards, holding a double at the top. Let the two sidejogged cards rest on the tip of the extended fingers of the lower hand, and modify your biddle grip to do the false display move. Turn over the double, show it, and turn it again face down.

I've developed this sleight because I think that in the context of the monte phase I needed a very clean double, repeatable, and similar in aesthetics with other movements involved in the routine.

2) About the Vernon Palm: I use to do the Ace to pocket travel this palming, because is the more easy to do with a small packet of cards. Also is clean, fast, and undetectable. The main reason is that this palm gets the top card to palming as soon as the hand touches the cards. You see, other palms need what I call "two times": a sort of get ready, and then the palming. Vernon's top card palming doesn't; it has only one time, one move. Also, this palming fits inside the plot perfectly, as a squaring action before putting the kings on top of the deck of cards.

C) THE SCRIPT

"I'm going to do a little trick with three cards. One, two, three cards. But the only card you have to care about is this card, the Ace of Spade. See, I put this card in the middle...But now is on the top. I put it on the bottom, but again is on the top. And I put it again in the middle, AND YOU CAN SEE IT IN THE MIDDLE. But again is on the top. And I put it in the bottom, AND THIS IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT, BECAUSE IT'S ON THE BOTTOM, AND IT HAS TWO CARDS ON TOP, but again is on the top.

So I know what you are thinking: that I have more than three cards. But see, you are wrong, I have only one, two, three cards. Or you can think that all the three cards are aces: one, two, three aces. In that way, you think, it's easy: I can show that I put it in the middle, AN SHOW THAT IT'S IN THE MIDDLE, because the middle card is an ace, and the TOP card is an ace, because all are aces. And I can put the ace to the bottom, and show that it's on top again, because all cards are aces. So, it doesn't matter if I put it in the middle, because all are aces. Well, you are wrong, because the THREE CARDS ARE KINGS. There are no aces. Hey, I'm remembering that there are FOUR kings at the deck, so, I blow, and we have one, two, three, four kings. And if these are the kings, you may rightly ask yourself were the ace is gone...it's in my pocket.

Argentinean Miracle Routine (cont.)

So, here you have, the ace, the four kings, and there are no other aces of spades or kings in the deck.

You must match your words, of course, with the actions described at the method explanation. As you see, I like to emphasize the effect rather than telling some kind of story or tale. The pace must be quick, but not confusing. There should be moments when the rhythm is reduced, to let the different climaxes sink. Those moments are when finishing the first part of the monte, when showing all aces, when showing three kings, when showing four, after the travel of the ace, and when finishing.

NOTES:

So, if you think a little bit about this routine, you'll see that, like a Borges story (or maybe a Chandler's, in English language) it is the finish that gives the entire routine its sense. The idea is: I have had the Ace of Spades all the time in my pocket. So you could never have seen it. There is where the impossibility of this routine dwells.

The monte part should be done at an increasing pace, and a pause must be made when the three cards turn to Kings.

KR

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Let's Build Magic!

Thoughts From Mid-West America

Let's Build Magic!

By Michael Saint Louis

VIDEO PRACTICE RIG

Whew! Tax time here in the States. Almost forgot to get this done I have been so busy making sure the city, state and nation all get their fair share of my money. It's the city income tax that gets me... anyway, that's neither here nor there. What I wonder is how many of my fellow Stateside magicians are making accounting magic tonight! I wonder what the annual depreciation allowance on a Zig-Zag Lady is anyway?

Last time I argued that one should not make their own promotional video. Still stand by that, but I do believe that there is room for a little bit of video magic in your practice sessions. I do not think that you should always practice in front of a camera (or even a mirror for that matter), but I can't deny the advantages of checking your blocking and angles every now and then with a video tape. Luckily, this can be done on the cheap!

First of, you'll need a camera. About any video camera will do. I am not a fan of webcams in general and think they are not at all suitable for an accurate review of your technique. Sure, there are a few really high quality teleconferencing webcams out there but 98% of what any of you has access to is junk. Fine for the video chats, I suppose, if you are into the video chats but useless for about everything else. Why? Several reasons. First, most are extremely low resolution. They are also typically designed to use a small pop-up as a viewer. A low quality small picture is not a satisfactory way to search for flaws in your sleights. Most sport cheap lens that distort images (usually a kind of fish-eye look) and are meant to be used from a distance of 12 to 36 inches. This pretty much destroys any chance of getting a decent shot of your full body or even upper torso. So let's put the webcam aside.

Let's Build Magic! (cont.)

As I said, about any video camera will do. There are several formats available... miniDVDR, SVHS, miniDV, DVcam, vhs-c, 8, hi8, betacam, vhs. Doesn't matter. You aren't broadcasting, so don't worry. If you already have a video camera then it is the perfect format. In fact, if you want the camera doesn't even have to record. For the first few years of home video, cameras had to be wired into a VCR which did the actual recording. This kind of format is still available not only in the thrift stores but in the toy stores (at least in the USA). I looked a couple of weeks ago (see, I actually plan my articles in advance) and found that Hot Wheels, Barbie and Fisher Price all had cameras like this for about the price of a new release DVD. It's just for the odd practice session, the guys at the Magic Coven local #13 don't have to know you refined your glide under the harsh eye of "Barbie's First Totally Awesome TV Camera!"

So if you don't have a camcorder run out to the thrift store of toy aisle and grab one (old RCA handhelds that require VCR hook-up seem to go for about half the price of those toys I quoted... at least at my local Goodwill store and on Ebay). Even if you aren't required by your camera to be connected to the VCR you may want to consider it. After all, if you are running into your VCR the shot will be visible on your TV as the camera records which will allow you to make sure you stay in the shot s you perform!

Let's assume you are trying to review some card tricks that you perform tableside. Set up a table in front of your camera and turn on all the lights in the room. Set a lamp on each side of where you will perform if you can. In general, the more light the better! If you need to perform standing, you still want to get all the light you can around you. Don't worry about what kind of light. Sure, halogens and light bulbs and fluorescent lights all have different temperatures but who cares? You aren't shooting "Lord of the Rings" here... geez, Francis Ford Coppola you are using a freaking Barbie camera! Bottom line, you may appear a little blue or green and the stripes of your ugly sweater may "buzz" during playback but it really doesn't matter because you are shooting to check technique not recording for posterity.

Now that your area is set up turn on the camera and set it somewhere that will allow it to pick up the action. If you have a tripod that will make life easier but if you don't (and I'm not sure that our much-discussed Barbie camera even has a mount) then make do. If you are using the VCR then set the camera on top of it or the TV. Use books to adjust the height and angle. Try to get the camera to approximate the position and angle of your audience. If you are performing on a four foot riser in front of a large, flat room set the camera close to the floor and angle it up slightly. If your audience will be close and looking down at your hands, set the camera up so that it is a couple of feet over your hands and pointed down into them! Once you have arranged the camera to catch your action, hit record (or grab the remote) and go perform!

Performing is the easy part. Just remember that after you initially check to TV to make sure you are in frame ignore the TV image! Perform to an imaginary audience not the television. Ever try to clip that one piece of uneven hair about half way back on your skull by staring into the bathroom mirror and trying to guide the scissors to the right spot? It ain't easy, brother, lemme tell you. It feels like your arm is screwed on backwards and that same thing will happen if your brain starts concentrating on the large, reversed image of your meathooks instead of your real hands!

After you get a good take, do it again. I try to do at least three run throughs so I can try to spot trends in my technique. The more repetitions the better! If you watch yourself a hundred times you will learn every detail of that performance. If you watch yourself in a hundred different tapings you'll spot mistakes that you make frequently but not always! Also, every now and then zoom in on your performance to see if you can pass the test of having your actions blown up 10 or 20 times. Now put everything away.

Like I said early on. I don't think you should tape every practice. I learn the basics of a routine, tape, learn, practice and tape again when I think I am done. Then I correct what I find on the tape and repeat the process next time I think I am ready for the public. I don't keep the tapes and suggest you don't either!

That's it from the Midwest this month. Now that I have my taxes in I need to go get my license plate renewed... whew! If anyone is more fun to hang with then the Internal Revenue Service it's the fun-loving pranksters at the Department of Motor Vehicles! I love long lines, don't you? You can be sure I'll fill my pockets with Vernet balls and sponge rabbits!

By Michael Saint Louis

Please send articles to TOPHAT@magicbunny.co.uk for the 10th May for inclusion in next month's edition. Thank you to all contributors this month.

Jon Snoops