

Magic Bummy Presents Top Hat



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A Letter from the Editor

by Michael Jay



And here we are at issue #10. Along with the recent addition of the Bizarre Bursary, we are pleased to announce that Top Hat now has its own page on FaceBook. You can find it here:

Top Hat Magazine

Go ahead, click on it, and please invite your friends and family in magic to join up. It's a handy-dandy place to keep all of our magazines available for ease of download. You can already get issues 1 through 9 and there are even a couple of bonus files for your perusal. A library of magic at your fingertips, as it were.

If you are unfamiliar with the filing system on our FaceBook page, then look near the top, just below the artwork, and the fifth link over is "Files". You can quickly access the entire library from there without needing to scroll down to find each of the previous posts announcing the issue upload.

Easy-peasy, lemon squeezy, as they say.

Also new for this issue is the addition of a 'Letters to the Editor' section. Naturally, it will follow this column. We welcome all comments and if you find something that hasn't been properly credited in our magazine we certainly want you to tell us. These credits will be featured in the 'Letters to the Editor' section, along with any thoughts, questions, or even criticisms.

This magazine is as much yours (the reader) as it is ours (the writers). We want this periodical to be a valuable use of your time and we want you to know how much we appreciate the fact that you've decided to spend your time with us. So, please, drop us a line and let us know how we're doing or express your concerns

with anything that you think we are doing wrong. You'll find our e-mail address on the end page of each issue.

Of course, if you'd like to contribute an article for publication in this magazine, please send it as an attachment in a Word file to the same e-mail address. Any article for consideration should be at least one page long and have something to do with magic or any of the related arts (it can be a trick, a routine, fictional prose, juggling techniques - quite literally anything to do with magic or the related arts).

In this issue, Mark Williams starts us off with a look at our fallen heroes from days past. New contributor Barry Cooper gives us a compilation of handkerchief forces and where to find them. Dave Wyton does a little thinking out loud about the procedural processes of magicians and is followed with two more opinion pieces from Gary Scott and Denny Haney. Jon A. Hand reviews a stage show and Craig Chadwick is back with a trick and a special offer. Bringing the first section to a close, I give you Chapter 1 of a novel.

Delving into the Bizarre Bursary you'll find a charming piece from our resident ghoul, Weepin' Willie. The Very Reverend S. Ulysses Wainwright returns with a spine chilling story, which is followed by our new contributor the Nyama Possessor. Last, but certainly not least, Stefan Alexxis offers thoughts on how to author your own bizarre masterpiece.

Enjoy!



Letters to the Editor

- Do I owe you money? I would be happy to send you payment as it was that good. *Rick Harkness*

Thank you for your kind comments, Rick. There is no charge associated with Top Hat. Our magazine is a commercial free endeavor and we plan to continue this tradition indefinitely. (On a side note: Rick received a copy of Top Hat accidentally and this was his immediate response.)

- Why are there no women writing for your magazine? *Ellen Faye*

The only answer that I have for that, Ellen, is that no women have actually submitted any articles in regard to our magazine. If you'd like to contribute, I look forward to reading and publishing your article.

- I have read our latest issue, it is a great read and I enjoyed the articles. But I have a bit of a concern, one that may tarnish others' perception of the magazine - one of the effects is already published by the creator (John Bannon).

The presentation is completely different, but the whole method and set-up of the gimmick belongs to Bannon.

The method, gimmick and gimmick construction is published in John Bannon's *Impossibilia* under the name "Shriek of the Mutilated", page 128 (Special FX chapter).

I have re-read the magazine article and at the start of the effect description it is mentioned that the author doesn't know where the effect came from. But as this starts with exclamation marks its unclear if this is part of the script, or the author actually telling the reader he's forgotten where he learned it.

If it's the latter then it could be a problem - the wider readership you're hoping for will simply assume the author didn't do his research, and subsequently published someone else's effect. *Jim Ferguson*

Here at Top Hat, we do not condone the theft of intellectual property. I wasn't aware of Bannon's contribution to this and his book, *Impossibilia*, was published in 1990.

It is of worthy note, though, that Eugene Burger published almost the same trick in his L&L Publishing video series *Magical Voyages* (specifically *Volume 2: A Voyage to the Unreal World* [1999]) where Burger states that all he did was put together several techniques and methods already long available to the magic community for the trick he called, "Spirit Message". At no point does Burger credit Bannon for original method or technique.

I appreciate your concern, Jim, but I think that it's safe to say that the methods and techniques given in Weepin' Willie's article "Smokin' Hot Body" are, as Burger states, already long available to the magic community. It is good to have this history, though, and I thank you for your message in regard to this matter.

And that brings me to an important notice to all of our readers:

If you see something that is improperly credited, or not credited at all, please let us know and we'll address your concerns in the very next issue of Top Hat.

Fallen Heroes

by Mark Williams



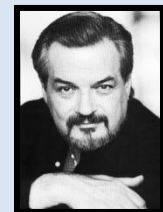
Often times it is hard for us to think about magic without first thinking about all of the greatest magicians who paved the way for our own magical journeys. We gather inspiration from many of these giants who gave us such wonderful tools to hone our craft and, at times, we pay homage to these forefathers of our Magical Arts.

Erik Weisz (later Ehrich Weiss or Harry Weiss), who is known to us as Harry Houdini, is probably thought by most to be one of the greatest escape artists of all time. While probably not the greatest of magicians, Harry knew just how to manipulate the press and keep his name in the headlines. We owe it to ourselves, as magicians, to honor such a prestigious figurehead of magic and escape. When people are asked to name the greatest magician who ever lived quite often Houdini comes to mind.



Doug Henning, who is, most notably, remembered for his several television specials needs our recognition, as well. Mr. Henning brought magic to a larger audience through television broadcasts and directly into the living rooms and, in essence, the lives of millions of people. What better way to showcase magic than on TV? Doug's flamboyant style captured the hearts of his audiences and showed us all it was okay to perform magic wearing something other than a tuxedo.

Harry Blackstone Jr. is another giant worth remembering. He brought some of his father's famed illusions into the modern era. The Dancing Handkerchief and Floating Light Bulb effects are two such examples. These two artistic pieces defied explanation in the minds of many and are standout classics which absolutely define

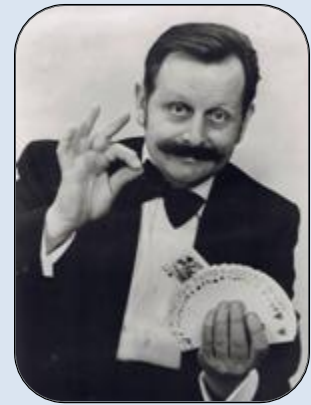


what magic should look like. Blackstone Jr. captured the childlike wonder of his audiences and made them believe anything was possible.



David Verner, who later adopted the name Dai Vernon, was also lovingly referred to as 'The Professor'. Dai was instrumental in bringing Close-Up Magic into the public limelight. Mr. Vernon has given so much to this genre of our art that it is hard to deny his strong influence on many close-up performers, even to this very day. Dai Vernon was also canonized as "The Man Who Fooled Houdini". Much of Dai's charm lied within his very soul and he was beloved by all who met him. With just a smile, a twinkle in his eye and a clean double turnover . . . Dai Vernon could perform miracles.

Albert Goshman billed himself as "The Baker That's A Faker". Yet, in the eyes of many audience members, Albert Goshman was far from being a fake. Al could entertain an entire group of people for hours with only a few coins and a salt shaker. Later, Albert Goshman was credited with manufacturing an entire line of foam rubber products. Spongeballs became an instant favorite for many close-up workers and these little gems have stood the test of time into the present day. Albert Goshman was one of the greatest workers in a close-up venue that ever lived and he would truly 'magish' his way into your heart.



The largest giant of them all is, of course, Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin. Robert Houdin is remembered as the Father of Modern Conjuring. Without the inventions and gadgets, credited to Houdin, our modern day performance art may never exist. We owe so much to this man for creating a mystique about magic and bringing its awareness to public audiences. Jean Eugene was such a huge influence in his own time, Erik Weisz took part of his namesake as his very own. Robert Houdin is often forgotten, yet his knowledge of magic lives on forever.

Magicians owe their very essence to these giants and others like them. Consider where your own influences lay and remember to harness their inspiration into your performances. Paved roads often have twists and turns, make sure that

when you travel them to stop and see what is around the bend. Standing on the shoulders of giants is no easy task. Honor the forebears of our Arcane Arts and think about what they brought to the Magic Community. Take to heart that they gave all of themselves to bring you the magic you now perform. Immerse yourself into the knowledge they have imparted. Keep an upmost respect, in your hearts, for our fallen heroes.

Did You Know?

C.A. Alexander (1880-1954) became a rich man by answering the questions that were merely thought of by his audience members. He billed himself as *Alexander, The Man Who Knows* and he published the book, "The Life And Mysteries Of The Celebrated Dr. Q" in 1921 wherein he detailed and explained many of his mental feats.

While this, in and of itself, is nothing of worthy note, the fact is that Alexander performed conventional magic tricks in the first half of his popular show. All too often mentalists of the 21st century believe that mixing magic with mentalism is a recipe for disaster, but history tells us a very different story. Alexander is just one of the many success stories that prove such misguided beliefs to be stuff of fantasy and, more than likely, a sense of territorial contestation over logic and fact.



Handkerchief Force Variations

by Barry Cooper



The under-the-handkerchief card force is, for me, the perfect force for mentalism. The pack is held by the performer under a handkerchief and the participant cuts to a card through the cloth. It's completely impossible for either of them to see the front or even the back of the card, which can be revealed while the cloth is still covering the card. This is especially useful if you want to use a 'clairvoyance' presentation in which the performer picks up an impression directly from the card rather than from someone's mind (i.e. 'telepathy').

I first learnt this force from Karl Fulves's book *Self Working Mental Magic*, but I have since found six other versions; there are probably more out there. The seven versions that I have found are briefly described below, along with full references if you need more details. I'll leave uses for the force and presentation up to you, although several of the references below do include routines.

Karl Fulves (Self Working Mental Magic p.3)

This is the simplest and easiest version, but your cloth must be completely opaque.

The force card is face down on top of the pack. While covering the pack, turn it face up - the force card is now at the bottom. Ask the participant to cut off a portion of the pack through the cloth, holding it in place above the lower portion, which is still under the cloth. Turn the lower portion over, so that the force card is now face down on top of the cards in your hand. Use your other hand to take the portion that the participant is holding, still under the cloth, and discard it. The force card is on top of the remaining cards.

Jean Hugard (Expert Card Technique p.204; Greater Magic p.195)

The force card is on top of the pack. Reverse the bottom card (by your "favourite method!"). Otherwise this is the same as the Fulves method above, but

more clean-up is needed at the end because one of the cards remaining in the cloth is facing the wrong way. Hugard suggests turning your portion back and reassembling the pack under the cloth, but the bottom card is still reversed. This variation may be useful if the cloth is not completely opaque.

Nate Leipzig (Tarbell 7 p.259)

The force card is on top of the pack. During a squaring motion, with the hand covering the pack with the cloth, the thumb of the hand holding the cards pulls off the top (force) card to the side, holding it vertically against the side of the pack. After the participant cuts off his portion, the thumb replaces the force card on the lower half.

L. Vosburgh Lyons (Hugard's More Card Manipulations, p.3)

This is probably the most complex of the variations, but it has a built-in peek so the pack can first be shuffled by the participant.

The pack is shuffled by the participant and handed to you behind your back. Reverse the bottom card before bringing the pack to the front in your left hand. Cover the pack with the cloth, then slide the reversed bottom card to the left, press on the cloth while smoothing it and peek the card through the cloth. Slide the card to the right with your fingers, then bend it round the pack into a similar position as described in the Leipzig technique above. Finish off in the same way.

Ted Annemann (202 Methods of Forcing p.19)

Reverse the bottom five cards; the force card is face up on the bottom. The participant cuts off half, you reverse the remainder, and the participant takes the top card from the portion left in your hand. You are left with four cards facing the wrong way, of course.

Barry Murray (Paul Daniels Adult Magic p.47)

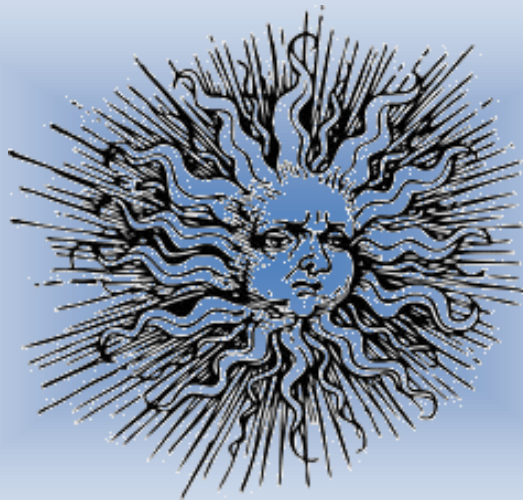
This is another one in which the participant can shuffle. Peek the bottom card. Demonstrate cutting through the cloth, using your fingers to separate the bottom card and leave it behind; it's then easy to reverse it. The participant cuts off a portion, you turn the lower half and he reaches under the handkerchief to

take the next card. You then turn your portion back, and the whole pack can be reassembled face down as at the start.

(Source Unknown)

This one has an interesting history. David Weeks gave a talk at The Magic Circle demonstrating a method involving the Charlier Pass, apparently from a book by Will Dexter, but he couldn't remember which one. When I later tried to reproduce the effect, I came up with something which was different to David's version; maybe I invented it?

The force card on is on the bottom of the pack. As you cover and square it, get a thumb break above the bottom card. The participant cuts off his portion and you use the Charlier Pass to transfer the force card to the top of the bottom portion.



Improper Procedure

by Dave Wyton



Here, There, And Everywhere

Gambling tricks and routines are all over the place running side by side with the myth that has been dubbed “accepted card table technique.” Myth? What myth?

The myth that insists that if whatever the magician is presenting for entertainment purposes doesn't look like, or at least resemble “accepted card table procedure,” the magician is an idiot.

Now then. Why, I wonder, is it okay for a magician to pretend to be a magician without actually being able to back up his claims? That is never addressed. But gambling? Brown horse of a different flavour. Oh yes. Unless our pretend gambling expert has had years and years and years and years in 'real world' situations and lived the life 'in the trenches', he must not offer himself as a gambling expert. Rubbish.

If you're not bellowing the odds about being some sort of gambling consultant, card detective, or worldwide authority, what's the problem? If all you're doing is offering an entertainment with overtones of what can and what might happen in card games, who, other than habitual and professional whingers, of which there are more than plenty, will complain?

The myth of “accepted card table technique,” extolled by gambling 'experts' the length and breadth of the card tables is just that; a myth. Yet so many magic gambling experts preach that it actually exists, that it is a set-in-stone truth that must be universally acknowledged and accepted. Pontificating for all they're worth, these arbiters and arbitrators chastise rank and file because their magic-based gambling demonstrations are nothing like the 'real thing'. They aren't (yawn alert) the *real work*. Well, of course not. But then, how many magicians do the *real work*: that is, **Magic**?

There's no doubt, of course that if a card player does not behave in a particular way, he is in danger of being called to task—though what form the calling takes will depend on circumstances. There is a whole range of censures, from simply being told by friends to behave yourself or, in less amiable surroundings, to leave town by sundown.

Incidentally Erdnase, whoever he was, for all his shortcomings, had this thing down pat. Whether you are plying your nefarious trade on a paddle steamer up and down the Mississippi, from Natchez to New Orleans, a pedalo on the pond, or a ferry 'cross the Mersey, you need to be nifty, alert and perhaps quick on the draw. If not, censure is certain. As Erdnase says: *"The slightest action that appears irregular, the least effort to distract attention, or the first unnatural movement will create suspicion."* Erdnase also refers to *"the usual procedure of the game"* and this is on the nutshell button—*"the usual procedure of the game"*

In the 'real world' (yawn) every card game is different. Clearly there are strictly formulated 'house rules' in casinos, number one being that the customer shall not prosper. But even they vary. And away from these clinically well-ordered money machines, things are always different.

I tip my hat high, loud and long, to professional experts when they say they know their business and what constitutes proper card table behaviour. I would only say that most of them have never played Shoot Pontoon or Three/Four Card Brag with some of the faster company that inhabits the pubs of Northern England. And the South, East and West. And Scotland, Wales and Ireland and, well anywhere people like to gamble. They, rough and ready folk one and all, are generally honest and good company, but can break fingers as effectively as any high flying, low life mobster. So blather of universal definitive *accepted* procedures is not really on.

There is no such thing as accepted card table technique in the general sense. Rules of all sports and games vary from place to place, which is as it should be. In my home village, the rules vary from pub to pub. Roughly the same, but there are differences. If the crook finds himself in a card school unsuited to his particular cheating skills, all he has to do is play honestly, bide his time, then go and look for a different game with rules that do match his cheating skills.

It's worth bearing in mind that virtually any well practised sleight of hand manoeuvre can be conscripted as long as it blends with the occasion and the moment. Okay, maybe not the Elmsley Count, or the Glide, but you never know; the action of the glide looks similar to what Erdnase calls skinning the hand, an open and innocent-looking procedure. It's also worth bearing in mind that virtually any strange looking procedure can be offered as a gambling procedure in the context of a card magic show. For the card entertainer, that's the *real* real work.

The song remains the same and the chorus is delivered as loud and raucous and know-all as ever by the real-work experts. But what do they really know of the *real* real world?

I am reminded of John Scarne, he of the mythical *Scarne Aces*, and a few other myths besides. Throughout his "According To Scarne" phase with the US Forces during World War II, he was asked for his judgement on a finer point of the card game, *Sift Smoke*.

It took him a while to track down the game and learn to play. This done, he wrote to whoever asked the question and answered it. Scarne's rather smug closing comment was that the game had been obsolete since 1870.

If someone, somewhere is playing the game, it ain't obsolete. Is it? Expert? Dear me.

So, if we want to pretend, let's pretend. Scarne did it all the time. And he wasn't alone. The *Real Work* legacy continues. In the meanwhile the rest of us can have some fun performing gambling-type tricks. And having a chuckle or two at comments such as "*I wouldn't like to play cards with you.*"



Chavracadabra: The Decline of the Magician

by Gary Scott



Part 2 *Genesis*

Hopefully you've read my previous article in the last issue of Top Hat, otherwise my opening question won't make much sense. For those that did read my article and found it thought-provoking and not antagonistic then please continue on your journey through my essays.

If you have already disregarded Opprobrious as nothing more than 'tosh', please still give this second essay a chance. You might learn something.

Here's my question.

What is a magician? There have been so many wonderful explanations over the years and my own personal philosophy is shared with Robert Houdin (1805-1871). Although his infamous quote has often been distorted, most commonly as "A magician is an actor portraying the role of a magician!", the exact quote reads as: "A conjuror is not a juggler; he is an actor playing the part of a magician; an artist whose fingers have more need to move with deftness than with speed. I may even add that where sleight-of-hand is involved, the quieter the movement of the performer, the more readily will the spectators be deceived."

If you peruse page 43 of the Routledge edition of *Secrets of Conjuring and Magic*, in a chapter entitled "Escamotage, Prestidigitation", you will find said quote.

But if we focus on the extracted words, they really do make sense. The misquote is one of the biggest philosophies we could ever impart on ourselves as magicians. It's the beginning and end of all we should believe in.

Imagine this, "A magician is an actor portraying the role of a magician!".

This is what's missing in the current role of the magician. The ability to sell the effects. (And I don't mean via the DVD medium). The ability to perform is lost. Magicians need to learn stagecraft. That word may frighten a few of you as it encompasses the word 'stage'. Learning stagecraft is not about being on stage, it's about all the details that make up a performance. This being an essay and not a complete treatise on stagecraft, I think I can break this down into the following basic steps that you will be able to expand upon. Stagecraft is a never-ending learning cycle and the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. What I'm giving you is the real barebones of research that will ultimately make you a better magician and help put the magic back into magic.

Learn your craft - Easier said than done, but work your sleight-of-hand constantly.

Your handling of gimmicks, flourishes and props need to be at the point of second-nature. Sloppy handling is the easiest way for your audience not to take you seriously. Everything you do should be flawlessly executed.

Learn your outs - Things can and will go wrong so what will you do? Design outs for all plausible outcomes and learn to improv for all those moments you never planned for. Here's a technique you may wish to try for those unpredictable moments. Take a random playing card out from a deck and talk about it. Give it life. A history. Make it funny. Make it serious. Ultimately try and be clear in your convictions just as if everything had gone your way.

Learn to sell - You need to "get over". "Get over" is a phrase used in the world of professional wrestling which means to win over the crowd through personality, skill, technique and all the things that encompass you as a performer. Try and sell what you've just done as the greatest piece of magic your audience has ever seen. If you believe that, then so will your spectators. Which leads me to...

Learn to act - No! You don't have to be Bryan Cranston or Hugh Laurie, but taking drama or acting lessons will help you project your magic, especially if you wish the stage to be your home. For close-up workers, even the most basic of acting study will put you leaps and bounds above the rest. You can also study the great magicians of our present such as Ricky Jay and Max Maven, whose stage-work is a facet of learning that we should all aspire to learn from.

Learn how to stand and project as a basic formula and work from there.

Learn to research - With so many magic tomes out there, it can be a bit daunting to find what suits. Regrettably, this is the long stretch of the magic process that can only come through trial and error. Research should really be mixed in with the history of magic. You won't believe how much is out there. Studying the history of your favourite magician or learning the history behind your favourite illusions will give you a much clearer indicator on why these tricks are effective. Go grab some magic books. A mixture of old and new recommendations. You'll be amazed at how you progress and how many variations on the same theme you will find.

Learn to dress - The image of the current crop of magicians, in 2015, is that of a thug or gangsta. Look at TV. It is swamped with 17 year olds covered in tattoos and wearing rags in combination with designer trainers and hoodies. If this is the image of a 'magician', then this is what's being fed to the public and it's an image we can all really do without. Take a look at the classic masters of magic. Not one of them is adorned in welfare vesture. Smart and classy was the only way they dressed and it is one of the main reasons why they were the premier entertainers of their time. They projected class right from the outset. Dress like you're going somewhere better, later!

Learn to write - Unless you already have staff, you will certainly need to write your own scripts. It's another skill that makes this magic thing a whole lot easier. Learn to write magic scripts as though you were speaking. Put in breaks, pauses and exclamations. Inject a little humour if that's your thing, but always write as you. The best thing you can do is get hold of Ron Bauer's Private Study series. If you wish to learn how to write a magic script, Ron is the absolute best resource.

So I've given you seven points of reference that will make your performing journey far superior to the DVD cookie cutter conjurors out there. You will end up researching more about magic performance in a few months than most magicians will ever end up knowing in their whole lifetimes. Magic's downhill slide will continue unless we pick up the slack and put forth great performance. Not good, but great. Notice how famous magicians are only famous within the magic community. That's because we are the only ones that care. Only

magicians care about magicians. Whether that be positive or negative, we prestidigitators are the only ones that know our own.

Let's rekindle the fire. Let's get magic back to the forefront of entertainment. A rebirth if you will. Let's knock the 'Releasers' and the 'Quoters' back to the bottom drawer where they belong. Hopefully the above has given you plenty to think about and maybe change the way you see magic or perhaps change the way you want to perform.

So how do we put all this into action? What can we do?

All will be revealed in part three.

Siya on the boards.

Did You Know?

The Erdnase Color Change, written up in *Expert at the Card Table*, is often attributed to Erdnase due to his full explanation and description in that book.

However, it is actually the invention of Harry Houdini.

Scholars today have taken to calling it The Houdini Color Change, which is the proper title of the sleight.



Stop Drinking the Magic Kool-Aid

by Denny Harey



“Drinking the Kool-Aid” is a figure of speech commonly used in the United States that refers to a person or group holding an unquestioned belief, argument, or philosophy without critical examination. It could also refer to knowingly going along with a doomed or dangerous idea because of peer pressure. The phrase typically carries a negative connotation when applied to an individual or group. The phrase derives from the November 1978 Jonestown deaths, where members of the Peoples Temple, who were followers of the Reverend Jim Jones committed suicide by drinking a mixture of a powdered soft drink flavoring agent laced with cyanide. Although the powder used in the incident included Flavor Aid, it was commonly referred to as Kool-Aid due to its status as a generalized trademark.

PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME TO READ THE ABOVE STATEMENT AGAIN!

“THE MAGIC KOOL-AID”

Are you drinking it? Are you falling for it? Most of us are drinking the Magic Kool-Aid and can't seem to control ourselves. It's all because of technology and our belief that if it's a “new technology,” then it **MUST** be better.

I love Andy Rooney's statements from the show 60 Minutes. Here are three statements that are funny but so true:

1-As an old reporter, we have a few secrets, and the first thing is we try the phone book.

2-Computers make it easier to do a lot of things, but most of the things they make it easier to do don't need to be done.

3-Computers may save time but they sure waste a lot of paper. About 98 percent of everything printed out by a computer is garbage that no one ever reads.

Yes, I am approaching seventy years of age. I've been doing magic for sixty years and 35 years of that were spent on the road touring the world with my own show. Before you call me an "old fart" who doesn't like change, you should take my history into consideration.

TRUST ME . . . I KNOW MAGIC. I KNOW HOW TO LEARN IT AND ALSO HOW TO PERFORM IT.

When I retired from full time performing, I opened a magic shop with a definite goal in mind. I wanted to pass on my experiences, my knowledge, and my service to magicians who really want to learn to perform magic the correct way. Aware of the knowledge that owning a magic shop is NOT a lucrative business, a client once asked me . . . "Then what is your goal?" My answer was simple.

I told him "When I die, I want to leave behind a large number of accomplished performers who will continue this performing art. When magicians in the future talk about the Denny and Lee Magic Studio, I want them to talk about it with the same respect as we older magicians now talk about the Ken Brooke Magic Place in London."



That was the legacy I wanted to leave behind. Has it worked? It has worked for many who are now out there actually performing magic for a living and doing quite well. That makes me feel worthwhile.

Do I like change? I embrace change as long as it makes things BETTER. The Denny and Lee Magic Studio was one of the FIRST to make use of the internet and a website to introduce magicians to our services. I had very little competition at the time.

As the years have progressed, I have seen the internet grow. There are "virtual reality" internet magic shops everywhere. Anyone can sell magic tricks.

I have talked to many savvy internet marketers and they have all told me the little secrets of selling on the internet.

I soon realized that “marketing” is many times just another word for “trickery.” Therefore, the subject of this commentary, “Drinking the Magic Kool-Aid.”

As new technology is invented, the “marketing (or trickery)” has grown. It has reached a point where newly interested magic fans are being led down the path of confusion. They are being led by internet shops operated by other inexperienced magic fans. The magic consumer is now constantly searching for “The Holy Grail” in magic. Through discounts and the selling of pirated magic from China, the consumer thinks they are really getting a deal.

I have a saying about the Holy Grail:

“EVERYTIME I THOUGHT I WAS BUYING THE HOLY GRAIL, I SEEM TO HAVE ENDED UP WITH NOTHING BUT A PLASTIC CUP.”

Technology is advancing at a rapid rate. Just think about this scenario:

Somewhere out there is a very knowledgeable computer person who is inventing a new thing for your computers to do. It may be a new app or something that your smartphone can do. Once this is invented, it goes to the marketing department. Here is the job of the marketing department:

“THEY MUST NOW CONVINCING THE GENERAL PUBLIC THAT THEY NEED THIS.”

Yes, that is marketing BUT remember Andy Rooney’s statement:

“Computers make it easier to do a lot of things, but most of the things they make it easier to do don’t need to be done.”

THE WORLD OF “TEMPORARY” INFORMATION.

The onslaught of instant downloads, e-books, instant messages, FaceBook and Twitter are all TEMPORARY. One day in the not so distant future, you will try to locate that file that you paid for and you will find it no longer exists. We have become complacent with the material that we are paying for. We place it somewhere saying “I’ll get to that when I have time.” Think of all the downloads and e-books that you have bought. Can you remember them? Can you find

them? Can you play them? Have you learned them or did you really read that e-book that you downloaded? Remember, as technology marches on and changes, so does the ability to play them back as well as store them. Want proof? How much info do you have on floppy disc? How about VHS videos, 8 track music, reel to reel tapes or cassettes, Laser Disc, etc. The list goes on and on.

One day, all of this will go away. You will lose it, misplace it, or not have the ability to see it or read it anymore. Files will get corrupted. You will lose your Smartphone on the bus or leave it in some hotel somewhere. The ones who will retain the knowledge and always have it at their fingertips will be those who have a library of BOOKS.

As I said, "I embrace change as long as it makes thing BETTER." With all of this new technology, I still have found NOTHING that is better than a real printed book.

Magicians buy all sorts of things. Props, books, DVDs, videos, etc. Although they don't mean to be "collectors," they end up one day having a large amount of magic that in many cases have increased in value over the years. In their declining years, most of them will begin to sell off their items or perhaps give them to some young beginner to help them progress.

Guess what? E-books, instant downloads, and other electronic media are not sold or transferred. What physical object do you now have to sell or give away? NOTHING. Sure, you have spent a lot of money BUT you really have nothing physical to show for it.

Personally, I am very proud of my library, memorabilia, and magic props that I have collected over the years. I am proud of my magazine collections and the fact that many of them are complete files. I can always find them, touch them, read them, and enjoy them at any time I wish. I don't have to turn on electronic equipment, upload items, or sit in front of a computer screen just to learn a card trick! I don't have to "upgrade" my books to 2.0 or 8.9 or whatever. The only thing I have had to do in my later years was to upgrade my eyes so I can read my books. It's called GLASSES!"

THE NEWEST THING!

Now comes the onslaught of the “Live Lecture on the Internet.” Everyone is jumping on this one!

Now you can watch your favorite magician give a lecture by staring into your computer screen. Some are actually even watching these live lectures on their smartphones! We had to actually cancel a recent workshop where a lecturer was giving away \$200 worth of free products at the workshop. We had to cancel due to “lack of interest.” I guess they all figured they could see his lecture on the internet or will see it in the near future. All those who are doing these online lectures will soon see a drop in attendance when they lecture live. It could eventually destroy their ability to draw a crowd. They are no longer “special.”



It's strange that magic is a personally interactive form of entertainment and yet everything is leading us to become “non-social.” We are being locked away in our rooms and interacting ONLY to a screen. Magicians are performing ONLY for the camera. YouTube is the perfect example of this. You can do a trick for a camera but have trouble performing the trick live for real people.

Performing for the single camera lens allows us to control our angles and not even have to patter as we present the trick. Just put some hip-hop music behind it and perform it silently. This way our magic can look great on YouTube but sucks in real life. Again, the trickery of marketing.

Along with the ability to sit at home and create DVDs or instant downloads comes the ability for “Those who cannot perform to sell magic to others who cannot perform.”

THE “CUP STACKERS”

Do you remember the “cup stackers?” This was all the rage years ago on YouTube. Young people would record themselves stacking and unstacking plastic cups in a burst of speed.

I now call some of these YouTube magicians the “magic cup stackers.” Their hands are moving a mile a minute flinging and flipping cards with the attitude of “Hey, look at me!”

We had a young magician come into the shop a week or so ago. He had never been here before and was totally lost as he looked around. He said he had been into magic for a few years now but the only thing he really liked was cards. One of the guys sitting at the table asked if he would do a card trick for him.

He said "sure." He then came over and said here's my pass, here's my false shuffle, here's my false cut, etc, etc. He actually did the "moves" fairly well BUT he could not actually do a "trick." He really didn't understand the difference. He really didn't grasp the fact that what he was showing were secret moves that are NOT supposed to be seen by an audience. There are supposed to be the secret hidden techniques that create a magical effect. Again it was the "Hey, look at me" mentality created by the YouTube generation.

Some of the greatest card tricks ever are done without even touching the deck. Just take a look at "Stop" or "Lazy Man's Card Trick." Both of these effects can be found in Harry Lorayne's Close Up Card Magic book. This was Harry's first book and I still consider it to be the best one he ever wrote. Then again, that's an "old" book so the younger magicians ignore it for the most part.

SO IF THE TECHNOLOGY IS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE, WHY IS IT AVAILABLE AND WHO DOES IT BENEFIT?

It only takes a simple, logical thought to figure this one out. Instant downloads, e-books, and streaming videos allow dealers to make money without having to invest in stock or keep anything on their shelves. It's the ideal profit making product. No investment and 100% profit. Naturally they are going to promote this as "the new and best way to learn magic." They are taking advantage of the constant desire to push buttons and get something instantly.

Today's society has become totally impatient. That's why TV ads are constantly jumping from one image to another. Our attention spans are so short and our patience is so limited, we can't even wait for three days to receive the next Holy Grail in magic. We have to have it NOW!

I remember one customer calling me years ago and asking for a tracking number for something that I sent to him. I told him, he would receive it by tomorrow. He still wanted the tracking number and he said "he likes to track it as it comes up his sidewalk."

Surely, there must be better things on which to spend his time.

ARE VIDEO DEMOS THE WAY TO BUY MAGIC?

Many times I send out a newsletter and if there is not a video demo of the effect, it becomes totally ignored. Please remember that, although a video demo may show you the effect, the "READING OF THE DESCRIPTION" is always the best way to decide. Also, you should buy depending on "author" rather than video demo. That's always the way I bought books. If I had two or three books by a certain author that I really liked, I would just buy whatever book he released. I never met an author who decided to write two good books, then two bad ones, then two more good ones, then three more bad ones, etc. It's the same with buying magic props or tricks. If a certain company is known for good quality magic, you should be pretty safe in buying from that company. I wrote an entire article in M-U-M a while back on "How to Buy Magic." It was mostly ignored because most magicians just go on the internet to find the cheapest one that they can buy. They usually end up with the "plastic cup" rather than the "Holy Grail."

One important thing to remember about video demos is this . . . You are only going to see the video demo that looks good. If a certain effect is not reliable or practical in real life, you are NOT going to see the demos that didn't work. You are ONLY going to see the demo that made it look like a miracle. Stop drinking the Kool-Aid!

I'M A VISUAL LEARNER!

This is a phrase that many have picked up over the years and use very freely. They use it as if it is something special or different from everyone else. Remember, CAVEMEN were also visual learners. We are ALL visual learners. Of course we are visual learners but that doesn't mean that we should therefore ignore the written words.

I had one customer in my shop about a year ago and instead of saying "I'm a visual learner," he said "I'm too lazy to read a book." I couldn't argue with him there. At least he was honest.

Don't tell me you can't learn from a book. You can use all of the acronyms available to explain what sort of deficiency you have that prevents you from reading a book.

Just remember, all of these deficiencies were in existence throughout history, they just didn't have an abbreviated term for it. Since it didn't have a term, humans learned to read in their own way. Some found it easy and others found it more difficult. Either way, they LEARNED TO READ and didn't have an excuse to fall back on.

There is really a lot more I can say about what is happening to magic today. It's really all part of our society for, as you know, that is also changing. People say they can't read, they can't do math, they know nothing about history, and the "dumbing down of society" is really a movement to keep the public uninformed. It shows up in all forms of businesses and hobbies. It is not getting any better.

If you go on my website (which no one seems to do anymore) you will see that I do not carry instant downloads or e-books nor do I participate in online lectures. My newsletters are rarely even read because no one has time to read lengthy emails. Even if they try, it's on their smartphones where it is so small, it has become a chore to read. Many don't even have computers with large screens anymore. Technology – it doesn't always make things better. But we become conditioned to it and hooked on it. We Facebook and Twitter to others so we can keep track of them and what they are doing when it really doesn't matter where they are or what they are doing. What are we accomplishing other than wasting time? Cellphones are here to stay for a while and we are now getting used to dropped calls and garbled words. We have come to accept it and have actually forgotten how clear a landline telephone is.

Could I make easy money with no investment if I were to participate in this "scam?" Yes, I could. I just KNOW that it is NOT the way to learn magic. I may leave this earth with nothing but that's the way I came into it.

YOU HAVE A CHOICE

You are the consumer. If you continue to buy the unethical knock-offs or get caught up in this new electronic media thinking that you are really learning magic, then you are perpetuating the problem and it will continue to get worse.

The worse it gets, the less you will actually learn and the less you will have in the future to show for it.. There are many virtual reality internet shops who are just waiting for you to “take that next sip of the Magic Kool-Aid.” They want you to . . . ”stay thirsty my friend.”

ALL OF THE ABOVE IS ONLY MY PERSONAL OPINION. THIS IS NOT MEANT TO START A DEBATE SO PLEASE DON'T. I CAN ONLY OFFER WHAT I KNOW FROM MY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE. YOU ARE FREE TO DISAGREE. YOU WILL MAKE THE CHOICE.

PLEASE FORWARD THIS TO AS MANY MAGICIANS AS YOU CAN. ALTHOUGH I DON'T CARE TO SPEND TIME DEBATING, I DO WANT TO CREATE SOME TALK AND CONTROVERSY AND PERHAPS GET THE YOUNGER MAGICIANS TO START THINKING ALONG A BETTER PATH.

Stop drinking the magic Kool-Aid.



Denny Haney and his wife, Lee, own and operate the Denny & Lee Magic Studio in Rosedale, Maryland, where they have been a fixture of the magic community for decades. They also have a Denny & Lee Magic Studio in Las Vegas, Nevada.

You can peruse his shop and sign up for his newsletter at:

[Denny & Lee Magic Studio \(online\)](#)

Darren Romeo - A Review

by Jon A. Hand



Magician Darren Romeo at Smoky Mountain Opry

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, USA, on June 18, 2015

Darren Romeo, young magician and protégé of Siegfried & Roy, opened a three-year residency on March 4, 2015, at the Smoky Mountain Opry Theater in Pigeon Forge, TN, in the USA. The full two-hour show begins at 3:00 p.m. daily, except Wednesdays. A full 15-20 minute intermission means that the show ends between 5:15-5:20 p.m. The show in this review was viewed on a Thursday afternoon.

The Smoky Mountain Opry is easily the most professional and well equipped theater in the resort area of Pigeon Forge. The auditorium seats 1200, including a balcony and two small side loges. Lighting and sound reinforcement are excellent, much of it computer-controlled and programmed. The stage features a wide traditional proscenium arch, boasting large off-stage wings and storage areas, and much on-stage depth for a variety of productions. In fact, three completely different types of shows are performed daily: gospel singing at 10:00 a.m., magic show at 3:00 p.m., and musical/variety at 7:00 p.m. The stage has multiple curtain layers when needed with the ability to drop in/fly out sets as needed. There are at least three observed stage traps, all hydraulic: one opens upward to form a wall and can lift a grand piano or large set piece, one opens downward to make a similar lift or drop without the background wall, and one enables the rise or descent of a single human. There is a live-in zookeeper and a large feline habitat zoo; both Darren's show and the night musical variety show feature big cats; a white tiger and a white lion. In short, this is a first class theater for any purpose, but especially for magic.





Darren's show is called *Magic Beyond Belief*, a copyrighted title that is held by the parent company of the Smoky Mountain Opry Theater. Other sponsored magic shows in Pigeon Forge over the years have used that title in other venues, including the long-time resident magician Terry Evanswood (who still has a fine show, retitled *Wonders of Magic*, in the Wonderworks building next-door to the Smoky Mountain Theater).

Darren does a combination of music and magic, and has become known as the *Voice of Magic*. He has a lifetime of magic study, with over a decade in residency as *Siegfried & Roy Present: Darren Romeo* in Las Vegas, and a world tour as a magician. He also has a solid Broadway/pop tenor voice with a well-controlled high falsetto, which he used to play a major role in the revival of the Broadway show, *The Fantastiks*.

The magic show itself boasts contrasts of large illusions, intimate magic with audience members onstage (which is projected on side screens), and in-audience magic (also projected on side screens). The musical accompaniment is pre-recorded, forcing Darren into a fully-scripted show some 85% of the time. There are a few places where the music stops, and Darren works, with great aplomb, with individual audience members, easily creating the most effective magic moments of the show (more about that in a few moments).

Darren has two female assistants (read: "box jumpers"), one of whom is his long-time romantic interest, who appears briefly in the show. The other, Emily, is in most illusions, but Darren chooses to be as much a "box jumper" as she, often staging her as the magician and himself as the assistant. This reversal of roles adds interest to the magic. There are also two dancers, probably cast members from the night musical/variety show, who dance with Darren for a couple of music-only numbers.

Not only are nearly all of the illusions set to music, but also sung by Darren| throughout the show! This means that he must focus on the magic, the lyrics, the pitch, and the rhythm, all at once! He is quite good at this multi-tasking, which is undoubtedly why Siegfried &



Roy took him on as a protégé.

At times the singing illusion idea is very, very effective. For example, early in the show, he builds a small Plexiglas box, one panel at a time, as he sings Bobby Darrin's *Dreamlover*. As the song reaches its conclusion, he drapes the box for about one second, whips the cloth away to produce his assistant, Emily, and helps her from the box, whisking her as his *Dreamlover* into his arms while his stage crew rolls the illusion away.

After a few illusions, though, the novelty of singing while performing magic wore thin. It was apparent that the audience was confused, (never a good thing in a magic show, as confusion is not entertainment, nor is it effective magic). The problem seemed to be two-fold:

1. The audience could not decide whether they were supposed to applaud the singing or the magic.
2. Many of the illusions climaxed their magical moment well before the climax of the song, diluting both the magic and song.

It was obvious that Darren felt the first problem constantly, as he was always trying to get the audience to open up and applaud at major moments. The audience confusion was augmented by the second problem of miss-matched music/magic climaxes, and so Darren fought throughout the show to get the crowd response that the quality performances, both musical and magical, deserved. Since the show is tightly scripted (a good thing) and pre-recorded (which dictates no changes during this year's run of the show), Darren is stuck with this confusion for the foreseeable future, which must be frustrating for him.



There were some very effective illusions. Houdini's Metamorphosis was performed with 30+ children standing at the rear of the stage (with no singing). Things that Go Bump in the Night (also not sung) had Darren vanish from one of the 'bumps' to re-appear, not from the back of the theater, but in the air by sliding down a one-wrist zip-line from the balcony area

to the stage. A cannon launch of Darren's love interest into a huge goldfish bowl (also with no singing) while carrying an audience member's driver's license got a huge crowd response. Finally, an illusion (with singing) featured a unique combination of Thru the Looking Glass, with the levitation of "collapsed & unconscious" Emily (from the floor to Darren's knee height and back to floor), and Darren lifting her bodily onto a couch for an Asrah vanish.

However, like many shows using much illusion, there was a creeping sameness that Darren tried to overcome with song. The audience saw three instant transpositions: Metamorphosis, Things that Go Bump, and a multi-belted 'torture ladder' (my words) with circular curtain. Likewise, there were three levitations: Darren floated straight up from standing position into the upper stage curtains, plus the aforementioned floor levitation, and Asrah.

An effective break from magic allowed Darren to sing and do voice impressions of famous singers with very distinctive voices, such as Louis Armstrong and Willie Nelson. The contrast from magic was striking, and the audience responded well to his voice and his impressions.

Equally effective was the in-audience magic and magic with audience participation onstage. Darren sat on the stage apron and "snorted" a young boy's drinking straw (the theater allows food from the snack bar into the performance area!). Onstage, a woman from the audience received a love song while Darren folded a napkin rose, which burst into flame, becoming a real rose). In the aisle, Darren performed Losander's Floating Table with a female audience participant.

Ultimately, the show was unsatisfying. I was with a crowd of five laypeople, and all expressed in their own words the same music/magic confusion that I felt. The show was 60% music and 40% magic due to each song's required musical build-up and the magical climaxes often preceding the musical climaxes. However, Darren Romeo is a multi-talented singer and magician, and he has a first-class venue in which to ply his trade. He has a unique spin on a magic show. With some reworking, he could have a hit on his hands. I wish him great success in Pigeon Forge (the Great Smoky Mountains area of east Tennessee), and I hope to see him again in a year or more to see how his show has developed.

Royal Revelation

by Craig Chadwick



Effect Explanation

The routine starts with a selected card changing places with the magician's lucky card (The King of Hearts) which is being held by the spectator and ends with the KH holding their selected card, and what's more it is actually part of the printed card!

Set Up

Start by placing your preferred gaff (KH/3S) face down on top of the deck followed by the regular king of hearts and finally the matching force card (3S).

Method

Force the 3S on your spectator, have it returned and controlled back to the top of the deck.

Any force and control will do as long as it keeps the top 3 cards in place, so just use your favourite. I use the riffle force to force the card and a double undercut to control the card back to the top of the deck but there are a plethora of other methods out there that meet the above requirements.

Tell your spectator that you are going to let them keep hold of your lucky card until you find theirs. As you say this perform a double lift to show the King of Hearts, turn the double face down and place the top card (the selection) face down on your spectator's hand.

Immediately top palm the King of Hearts (which is now on top) and produce it from your pocket as you explain that you usually keep your lucky card in your pocket.

Don't show the face straight away, hold it with the back showing for a couple of beats to let the moment build before you finally reveal that you are holding the KH.

Your spectator will believe that was the card they were holding in their hand just seconds before and will immediately want to look at the card they are holding. This is a strong effect on its own, so milk it for all it's worth.

Immediately hand the KH to the spectator so that they are now holding both cards. I think it is important that they get to handle the KH before the change without bringing too much attention to it.

Explain that the reason the KH is your lucky card is because it can locate any card in the deck in an instant.

Ask your spectator to return their selected card back into the pack, this time the card doesn't need to be controlled so have fun with it.

Get a break under top card (the Gaff) and place the regular KH face up on top so that they are both back to back.

Perform the Twirl Change for a nice visual finale where your spectator can literally see their selection jump into the hands of the KH and what is more, it is actually part of the printed card.

Pause for a beat and place the back to back double back on the face down deck then immediately peel off the single face up gaff and hand it out for examination.



SPECIAL DEAL

For the next month we are offering these gaffed cards, free of charge, to all of our readers. Through the 15th August, you can e-mail us and have one of these gaffed cards delivered to your home address at no cost to you. Please send your request to our Top Hat e-mail (address can be found on the End Page). You **MUST** use the subject heading, "Royal Revelation", with your name and address included in the e-mail and we'll get one of these cards out to you (while supplies last).

However, you can pick up one of these cards commercially through [Cards For Magic](#) at a reasonable price.

The Magician - A Novel

by Michael Jay



Chapter 1

Danny walked into his house. He knew something was wrong, but that sinking feeling started when he put the key in the door and turned it. The door was not locked. Sheri, his wife, always kept the door locked, it was an obsession that she'd had ever since he knew her.

Tanni greeted him at the door. His Irish Setter came up to him with her hips low, as if to say that she was sorry for being a bad girl. She immediately laid on floor, looking up, her eyes swimming, and she was whining uncontrollably. This wasn't like Tanni. Her flews and cheeks were twisted up, showing her teeth in some kind of grisly smile, and she immediately rolled onto her side, still whining. The hair around her nose, eyes and ears was stained red, a darker red than her coat.

Fear gripped Danny's heart. "What is it, girl?" he managed to squeak out. Tanni immediately responded to his voice, feeling the same despair that she heard in her master's voice, her whines growing louder. Danny did not bend to pet her due to an immediate sense of urgency, the bile rising in his throat (he could see where she came from - the floor was emblazoned with her dark, red foot prints, like macabre pips on a seven of clubs).

As Danny followed the tracks that led from the foyer into the dining room, Tanni stayed where she was, still lying on her side, panting heavily as if she had run ten miles non-stop, her whines barely audible in Danny's now ringing ears. He went through the archway that led into the dining room where his body locked up in reaction to the horror, now in full view.

Sheri lay on the floor. A pool of blood encircled her slight frame, her eyes wide open on her contorted death mask. Danny sank to his knees, the frozen fear now melting away, being replaced by a soul-sucking anguish. He could no more

hear himself screaming than he could hear the constant whines coming from the other room.

He felt his head swimming and he fought the darkness that began swirling in front of his eyes. Danny had to stay conscious; he had to call the police; he had to go to his beloved; he had to do a thousand things; but he could not pass out. He had to be strong and, deep, down inside, he knew it.

Suddenly a rush of adrenaline had him back on his feet. He ran to Sheri's body, his feet slipping in the lubricous blood that surrounded her body in a puddle shaped like a heart (Danny would later recall this shape in his many nightmares to follow). He was on his knees again, embracing the lifeless the rag doll that was Sheri's remains, tears streaming down his cheeks, his body wracked in sobs.

A lifetime passed.

Danny's mind was returning. The police - he had to call the police. As he rose the viscous wading pool caused him to lose his footing. This time his knee slammed to the floor, but his body barely registered the pain. Again that dark swirling started in front of his eyes, but he had to fight it off, he had to be strong for Sheri. Danny couldn't afford any weakness now and the anger was rising, blotting out the despair.

Summoning up everything deep inside, Danny carefully rose to his feet. Slowly, deliberately, he mucked out of that morbid pool that looked more black than red and, like his dog before him, he left his tracks leading to the phone. He dialed 9-1-1; a good puppet doing his job. He was horrified at the sight of his now bloodied fingers leaving marks on the phone's number pad (it wasn't until he hung the phone up that he would realize that he was covered in Sheri's life giving liquid).

"Hello, 9-1-1, what's your emergency," came the voice on the other end.

"My wife is dead, she's been killed..."

"Where are you, sir?"

"I'm at home..."

"What's the address?"

"1411 Sycamore drive. Please hurry, I can't..."

(Sobs of pain, heartache, and loss.)

Tanni crawled across the floor, inching her way to Danny as quickly as she could muster. Her front feet scuttled up to Danny, who was now in a little heap in a corner. She was looking for comfort and her master didn't disappoint. He grabbed her by the cheek, pulling in the soft flesh around her jowls as he fisted up, bringing her face in close to his.

"Aw, Tanni, what are we going to do?" he quietly lamented while he wept, kissing her and cuddling her. The two of them lay on the floor, giving condolence and balm to each other's soul.

"Hello? Sir? Are you there? Sir? Sir?" the voice continued, but Danny didn't hear. The receiver lay on the floor while Danny's face lied buried into Tanni's neck, her soft fur soaking up his tears which mixed and mingled with Sheri's blood.

Shortly, the police would arrive.

Chapter 2 of The Magician will be available on September 1st, included with issue #11 of Top Hat Magazine. Please watch our FaceBook page for details.



Bizarre Bursary

Hello again, kiddies. I trust that your nightmares have subsided since last we talked. Well, hold onto your hats because we've got another horrific line up for you...



Our good friend, Weepin' Willie, starts us off with sound instructions on how not to bury the living and then we see the return of The Very Reverend S Ulysses Wainwright who entreats you to avoid that old Hoodoo Voodoo. From there we welcome our newest regular columnist, the Nyama Possessor, but don't worry — he won't hurt you. And to finish it off, Stefan Alexxis shares with you the keys to succeeding in bizarre story writing.

Sweet dreams, kiddies.



A Sure Thing

by Weepin' Willie



Everyone wants a sure thing! You know, something that is a guaranteed win.

Sally and I were childhood friends. Many people think I could have done better than her; but what attracted me to Sally was that, while all the other girls wanted to play post office, she was content to play funeral. For me, that was a sure thing! We would walk for hours, find dead bugs, dig little holes, and bury them under a small stick cross that she fashioned from some twigs she broke from the bushes. Most of the kids in the neighborhood would attend the funerals and some would participate. Arthur was always the preacher and went on to become a multi-million dollar televangelist. The kid that played the part of the grave digger worked for me later in life. But Mikey was the youngest kid in the neighborhood and none of us wanted him to play with us because we were big kids. Whenever we would get together he would always show up and we would tell him, "Go home and tell your mother she wants you." He would take off running home to ask her, "Momma, you want me?" It was a sure thing to get him out of the way for a while so we could play without his intervention. He would come back a half hour later with, "My momma says she don't want me!" We would tell him again, "Yes she does," and away he would go. However, 'sure things' sometimes have a way of coming home to haunt you. Little three year old, thirty-pound Mikey grew into a 350 pound, six-foot-three man and killed his poor momma in her sleep one night. When they asked why, he told them, "When I was a little kid she never wanted me."

Some people play the Education Lottery, which is named such because after a few years you should learn not to play it; you get educated. Sure, someone will occasionally win it, but it will always be someone else. It is not a sure thing; however, there is a lottery that you will surely win: The Death Lottery! Plus, it does not cost you anything to play, if you play it right. "What is it and how do you play," you ask? You play it with your credit card. Stop using debit cards, checks, or cash because the money comes out of your bank account immediately, but with the credit card, your payment is not due for thirty days. And, since credit card debt is unsecured debt, if you die before the payment date, it is free! If you pay it entirely when due there is not any interest, so you play free. Play daily and someday you are guaranteed to win; the more you spend the more you win. I put everything on my credit card because it cannot get any surer than that.

However, while Death is a sure thing, it is not a guarantee you are dead when you are processed for burial.

Premature burial, or assumed death as I like to call it, has been a concern for the living from ancient times and most people think in our modern scientific days that such is not a problem. However, I beg to differ with you because, like having sex with the dead, it happens more frequently than we admit or disclose. How do we define actual death? Most people say Death is when life ends, but defining when life ends is the problem. Is it when the heart stops beating? When the lungs stop breathing? When there is no brain activity? When your favorite sports team loses every game in a season? There is documentation that people in all of these conditions have come back to life after being pronounced dead, especially the last one.

In the undertaking world we use the mortis test but even the three mortis tests are not 100% reliable. When the heart stops pumping, the blood gravitates to the lowest point in the body and the skin in that region takes on a pinkish and eventually purplish hue. This is known as Livor Mortis and can indicate what position the body was laying in after death. Rigor Mortis is when the calcium builds up in the muscles and causes the body to stiffen. I have used such bodies to stand on during magic performances with only two chairs supporting the foot and head; however, within 24-48 hours this will disappear and the tissue will be pliable again. It is important to know your performance time and plan accordingly if using a rigored body as a magic prop. Algor Mortis is a reduction of body temperature, but is dependent upon the environment. The body can maintain temperature for fourteen hours after death and who wants to wait fourteen hours with a thermometer stuck up a cadaver's butt? Not me! If premature burial is an issue today, you can imagine what it was like when testing consisted solely of mirrors and stethoscope. In those days the Wake was held for an extended time to make sure the body was not coming back from a 40 wink nap. Even today, decomposition is still the only reliable test and you can remember it with a little children's rhyme that every child should be taught in the first grade: "If you ain't stinkin' you may only be winkin'."

Premature burial is more common during times when the body must be buried rapidly. The fear of being buried alive was especially high during the cholera epidemic of the 1800's when disease and contamination were the issue and many mistakes caused the living to join the Dead in the grave. Authors, like Edger Allan Poe, capitalized on this fear and wrote stories about premature burial and fear gave inventive people license to develop elaborate means for 'safe' burial. These methods ranged from cords tied to the

body to ring bells, were the body to move, to feeding tubes, windows to view the deceased, and even one design that opened a trap door below the body allowing it to fall into the grave once the decomposition was visually verified. All of these methods were expensive and, even today, embalming is an expensive endeavor. The funeral industry promotes embalming for sanitary reasons, but the truth is it is to assure you do not wake up inside a container six feet under the ground.

So, as you can understand, premature burial is a concern for me and my colleagues and for that reason we share ideas to test for 'actual death.' Recently, I received a letter from a colleague of mine on this subject and would like to share with you his testing methods:

My Dear Willie,

In my town, and I suppose yours as well, there is a unspoken malaise going around that poses as death but is actually a deep sleep where no pulse or breath is observable. The medical profession does not know yet what is causing this illness but I suspect it may be transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks or maybe cooking meat over charcoal briquettes or drinking diet sodas. Regular methods of testing are not reliable diagnostic tools for this malaise and, like you, I have had more than one of my burials to come back to haunt me. I have devised these reliable, scientific methods that I wish to share with you. I tested them on the living first and always got a favorable indication that they were not dead. Out of all the testing of the living I have had no false positives.

Test 1: Place a few drops of a salty or pungent liquid on the tongue of the cadaver. If no source is available I would suggest using urine, as it is always available. If no reaction is observed, go to test 2.

Test 2: The fingernails are a sensitive area. Push a few splinters under the nails of the cadaver and carefully watch the eyes for any reaction. If no reaction is observed, or only a slight twitch, move to test 3.

Test 3: Take a warm poker and insert it into one of the nasal cavities, just short of reaching the brain. The nerves are tender and bunched up in this area so it should bring a death faker into a state to provide a winch or some other strong reaction. If this fails to get a response go to the final test 4.

Test 4: Reheat the poker, hotter than in step 3 but not red hot, as this may cauterize the nerves and destroy them, thereby altering the test results. Insert the poker into the anus as deep as you feel necessary. Caution: Do not puncture the stomach! If the person has been dead long enough the gas built up in the intestinal tract may ignite and burn off your eyelashes. (Experience tells me they

grow back in a month or two.) If no reaction is visible you may assume the person is actually dead.

Sincerely, Your colleague in Death,

Dr. (I have removed his name for privacy concerns)

From these concerns, I created my own solution and introduced my "Bring 'em Back Alive Policy". For an extra small fee, I will guarantee that your loved one is actually dead. If you discover they are not actually dead, just bring them back alive and I will refund all of the funeral cost. However, once the seal on the coffin is broken, the warranty is null and void. I also created my own living and dead test, which I will share with you.

The Living and Dead test

The Performance:

(Choose a spectator as your assistant.)

"In times of war, disaster, or epidemic, premature burial is a real possibility as bodies are hurriedly diagnosed and buried out of necessity. Authors such as Edger Allan Poe wrote horror stories on the subject of premature burial and the dead coming back to life. The Cholera epidemic of 1832 only served to fuel the fear as bodies were exhumed to be reburied elsewhere and discovery of the coffin interior torn or the body lying in a different position than originally placed. Clearly, in the funeral profession, such a mistake is a huge liability. Bury someone alive, just once, and the community will never forgive you because nothing creates anger like counting those inheritance dollars and finding out you have to give them back. Therefore, it is important for funeral establishments to hire people with intuition that can tell the living from the dead, which is not easy because, when sleeping, they all look alike."

(Bring out six identical matchboxes and lay them on the table, or coffin lid if closed. You may also hold three in each hand, if you prefer and cannot afford a table or it is an open coffin funeral.)

"As you can see, I have six potentially dead clients, one in each coffin. Or perhaps, they are only sleeping clients. They look alike so it is hard to tell whether sleeping or dead. However, it would be a grave mistake to bury a living one or to not bury a dead one. I want you to use your intuition to help me figure out which box, if any, does not

contains a dead prospect. Don't think about it or try to figure it out, just listen to your intuition. Can you do that for me?"

(Spectator will indicate 'yes'. Separate the matchboxes into two sections of three each.)

"Good, now which group of three do you feel your intuition telling you to choose?"

(Spectator chooses either the left or the right group. Take the ones not chosen and put them away to the side, leaving the three to consider.)

"I have three left. Please choose two."

(Lay the other one aside and continue.)

"Now to determine how accurate your intuition is let's check the containers."

(Open all the boxes to show they contain burned matches. Then open the chosen box and show a not burned match. Comment on the spectator's intuition.)

The Secret:

This effect uses a modified version of the magician's choice, (you may use your favorite equivoque) which traditionally uses only three choices. It can be done with as few as two or as many as you want; however, the more you use the better chance of the method being detected and if you use only two it becomes a 50/50 proposition, so I chose six as a reasonable number. It is important for you to understand this principle and practice it. It will serve you well in life as well as death.

Preparation:

You will need a number of identical matchboxes and a matching number of matches, only one is not burned. These matchboxes will represent coffins and the matches people. You will need to mark one container so it is unnoticeable to the spectator but you will be able to readily identify it. It is easy to do, as anyone who has dealt with marked cards knows. You place the un-burned match in this matchbox coffin and all the others in the remaining ones.

Method:

Separate the boxes into two group. I like to place the un-burned match on the spectator's dominant side and in the middle of the group. (You can tell which this is by asking them to sign or write something before the presentation or by handing them

something and see which hand they receive it in). A spectator will generally choose the group on their dominant side. If they choose the group with the un-burned match, push the other group to the side to indicate you will be using the chosen group. There is no need to say anything, as this will cause suspicion. If they choose the group that does not contain the un-burned match, just push the chosen group aside saying, "Then we will use this group." (Which is the one with the unburned match.) Either way, the spectator thinks they have had a free choice and has either chosen to use a group or to discard it. While this may seem obvious to you the spectator will not notice it if you play it right.

Have the assistant choose two of the remaining three. They will normally choose the middle one as one of the choices, which contains the un-burned match. If so, have them hand you one and keep one. Using the same method as above, you have forced the box with the un-burned match. Because you had placed this box in the middle it will be easy to track without looking at the marking. If they leave the box with the un-burned match and have chosen the two others, just have them place them with the others and proceed with the one on the table. Either way, you have the un-burned matchbox coffin chosen.

Pause a moment to increase the tension and then reveal the matches.



My version: I like to go a little out of my way, since I may get more business from the audience, so I personally create matchbox coffins. I have included a picture for you to see. When I do the trick with these, I have five coffins with skeletons in them and one empty. The object is to have the spectator choose the empty coffin.

Variation:

While using two is a 50/50, I like it best when everything must be handled in the hands. Let spectator choose one and hold it in hand. You hold the other one. Ask if they want to change their mind and let them switch if they wish. After the decision is made open the boxes to reveal who has the skeleton and who has the empty one. If they have the skeleton say, "And you have chosen the dead, very good intuition." If you have the skeleton say, "And you have chosen to give me the dead and rescued the living from premature burial."

Note: You can also do this with matchbooks or even build miniature coffins and use dolls. The variations are limited only by your imagination and you know what your story telling abilities are and what you can get away with so be creative. Just remember: the story telling is the real performance so practice it well.



Until we meet again, among the living or dead,
farewell my friend!

Weepin' Willie

House of Discount Funerals and Birthing
Center

"Serving you from the womb to the tomb!"

My First Dollar

by The Very Reverend S Ulysses Wainwright



I've heard it said that one traumatic experience in boyhood can literally change your life and influence you in unthinkable ways as you grow into adulthood. It defines what you believe in, the things you are scared of and how often you look over your shoulder with a nervous glance. It can also challenge your perception of reality.

I had such an experience one particular afternoon, a long, long time ago when I was ten years old. Something strange and frightening happened to me that day which I will never ever forget as long as God spares me for this good earth.

In the early spring of 1937, one month short of my tenth birthday, my family, that is to say my mother, father and I, moved lock, stock and barrel from Kilmarnock, Scotland to Harwoodsville in West Virginia, USA.

Uncle Archie, my father's brother, had moved to Harwoodsville two years before and had built up a profitable and reputable grocery business. He had written many letters to my father over the previous two years and had finally convinced him that America was the Promised Land with opportunities around every corner and pots of dollars at the end of the rainbow.

Although I remember being excited at the time about going, a big part of me was heartbroken at leaving behind my friends, Billy Stuart, Alistair Menzies and Robbie Gibson. We were the four musketeers of Kilmarnock and we lived by the musketeer's code of honor. I knew I would miss them but we agreed to write to each other and not to lose touch. (We never did.)

I was also saying goodbye to my first ever girlfriend and first love, Caroline Shuttlesworth, a small red haired girl with a multitude of freckles on her pretty face, who gave me a humdinger of a farewell kiss that day at Greenock port just before we set sail for America.

Aunts, uncles, cousins and friends came to see us off from Greenock that day, waving like mad and blowing us kisses as the ship set sail from the port. As we sailed off, I was suddenly an ancient explorer, a traveler on the high seas destined for adventure and fortune!

We very quickly settled into Harwoodsville.

It was a blazing hot summer that year and the sun cut clean like a sickle into the afternoon that particular day in early July. The 10th it was, a Friday.



The whole town had been buzzing all week. Big 3 x 2 Bill posters, pasted on almost every fence, telegraph pole and shop window declared in big bold letters that the Carnival Sinistra was coming to town this Friday!

I had sat on the front porch all of that morning trying to keep still and praying for the carnival to arrive. Praying in that intense way you do every Sunday morning in church.

Suddenly, from a while away in the distance in the direction of the old suspension bridge at the start of town, I heard the faint sounds of what sounded like a band playing.

My heart started thumping like crazy on the inside of my chest as if it wanted to burst out and have a nose at what was happening. I jumped off the front porch, sprinted round the corner of our house, past Dan Millers ice cream parlor and twelve large strides took me past the butchers, the bakers and the cabinet makers.

I whizzed past old stinky man O'Hara's house, holding my breath tightly for the regulation eight yards, about the length of his house. They said that he was a hoodoo voodoo, whatever that was, but if you got even a whiff of his foul breath, you'd be stricken down with the bubonic plague and turned into a zombie overnight. I took no chances.

Out of breath now, but on my second wind, I turned the corner into Main street, my excited cries of 'It's here! it's here!' drowning out my mother's shouts a long, long way behind me of, "Take your time William!, take your time!"

And there, right in front of me on Main Street was the Carnival procession, rolling into town led by a brass band. Ah, the Carnival Sinistra with its mad butt kicking universe myriad of magical colors and people of all shapes and sizes. The Carnies, that's what Uncle Archie said the Carnival people liked to be known as, were amazing and mystical to behold. Tall, short, fat, thin, smiling, scowling, laughing. Bearded ladies, pygmy Siamese twins, and a strong man who must have been eight feet tall.

Caravans with big bold splashes of bright blues, golds, yellows, reds and purples.

Trailers laden with bits and pieces of what would later become the wondrous Midway with the promise of mystery and amazement.

Mostly everyone from the town marched alongside, proud to be seen with the carnival and soaking up the fantastic experience.

The band blasted out a fanfare and the chief Carney man led the procession in red tails and a black top hat, speaking into a loud hailer, which was about five times bigger than his head.

"All you good people of Harwoodsville. Come and see the Wonders of the World!

"Meet Tanya the tattooed lady! Covered from head to toe with a tattooed map of *EVERY* country in the world!

"The Inside Out man! Each vein in his body bulging like a purple and blue rope. Veins which *should* be on the *inside* of his body, not the out!

"Madame Lucchese, Queen of the Gypsies! She will consult her tarot cards and reveal your future!

"The fun begins at 7:00pm sharp! Be there or you'll be nowhere!"

The procession finally arrived at the Open Space. That was our name for a massive dirt field which lay about a quarter of a mile outside town. Eventually, most of the townsfolk started to drift away heading back to town to let the Carnival folks set up for that evening.

I sat on a fence and watched the Carney folks setting up. Then my father and uncle arrived. They had closed the store early that day.

Just then, a tall dark haired woman came towards us.

"It's great to see you Isabella", said my uncle. They both hugged each other tightly.

"Well now Archie", said the woman, "who are these two fine gentlemen?"

"This is my brother James and his son Billy. Men, this is Madam Isabella Lucchese, fortune teller extraordinaire," said my uncle.

She shook my father's hand, then mine, and looked straight into my eyes smiling. That smile. It made me feel real happy inside. I think I fell in love for the second time that year. She was beautiful and mysterious at the same time with those big smoky brown eyes. She had the longest hair I had ever seen. It was down to beyond her waist and she wore a long gold embroidered burgundy gown which added to her mystique.



The day got even better when my uncle said we were going to help Madam Isabella set up her fortune telling tent.

It turns out that my uncle knew Madam Isabella very well. The first year that he had arrived in America, she had read his cards and had seen success in the cards for him and everything that she had seen that day had come true.

There I was that afternoon, pounding in tent pegs with a mallet so large and heavy I could hardly raise it beyond my waist, dripping with sweat, exhausted, head to toe in soil and sand, dirty, but totally and divinely happy to have helped.

After we finished, Madam Isabella handed me a crisp, new one dollar bill. She said it was a just reward for all the hard work I had put in. I looked at my father then and he nodded, smiling and giving his approval for me to take it. She also gave me a tiny bronze coin with a faerie on one side and a tree on the other.

"A good luck charm," she said, "lest something wicked comes your way."

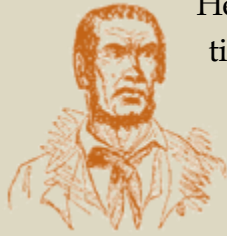
I was so pleased. I felt really proud. My first dollar. My first real paid job. Of course mother and father had given me pocket money for doing chores about the house but that's not real work or an actual job as such is it? Not a proper job like helping out at the carnival.

My father and the others went into the beer tent. I wasn't allowed in so I lay on the grass outside, hands clasped behind my head, feeling like a man finally. Every so often, I would take my dollar out of my jeans pocket, unfold it and smooth it out on my hand nodding proudly at it, believing I had truly earned it.

And just as the sting of the July heat started to go out of that boiling hot late afternoon, a horrible stench wafted into my nostrils.

I looked around trying to find out where the smell was coming from, and I saw him. Walking out of the Kings woods about fifty feet away. A man. A very tall man, he must

have been about six feet six, but as thin as a stick insect. I noticed a slight swagger in his walk. He was waving at me and coming towards me.



He wore a dirty two piece black suit, a grubby white shirt and maverick tie. The jacket was really long. He reminded me of those lay preachers, clutching their big worn, sad old bibles under their arms, who chapped your door every now and then promising to save your soul or bring you the light and salvation or something like that. And then there's my mother shouting that the only thing that needed saving in this house was money.

Suddenly, the man from the woods was standing before me and I felt scared. Whatever he was, I knew at that moment, he was not of this earth, not God's earth.

Then he smiled at me. A cruel, mocking smile. Too many long, yellow and brown stained teeth for one mouth.

His eyes were a dark black but even at ten years old I saw rage, anger and hatred deeply imbedded into those eyes.

Then he spoke.

"Are we well met young man? Are we?"

"Good afternoon sir," I said.

My voice quivered. His nostrils twitched. It was as if he smelled my fear.

The skin on his face was almost translucent. A mucky yellow, and behind his forehead, thick veins pulsated a bruised black and blue.

He smelt of.....burning, but underneath that lay a much deeper and more pungent stench.

I remembered last month my father and I had found a dead stoat in the basement. Father reckoned it had been there for a week and my goodness it smelt horrible. Waste, pestilence, death - the worst smell ever. I ran out of that basement as fast as my shaking ten year old legs could carry me and puked up over the garden.

The man spoke again.

"What you got there boy? Pray tell young man".

“Why sir, it’s my first dollar”, I said, “My first pay, for helping out at the carnival.”

“My, aren’t you the lucky young worker boy,” said the man.

“Sir, I sweated long and hard to earn this dollar.”

“Oh I’m sure you did boy, what’s your name boy, your naaaammme?” he asked.

“It’s Billy,” I said.

“Oh what a pretty name,” he said,

“Oh Billy, you’re a Carney boy

Who helps out for a buck

So listen for two minutes

And I will bring you luck”.

Then he laughed like a demented hyena and the hairs at the back of my neck stood up.

He reached into his inside jacket pocket and took out a black battered looking wallet.

He opened it and removed a dollar bill.

He snapped his fingers and a small flame appeared on the end of his thumb. I was mesmerized.

“Billy boy. I can make all the dollars you will ever want or need. Watch,” he said.

He took the dollar, pulled it sharply, and passed it over the flame.

“Look! two dollars, whoa another! What was one dollar, is now three and I didn’t have to swing no mallet, sweat like a hog in heat or how-tow to no Carney people,” he said.

He had magicked up an extra two dollars from one single dollar!

“This power can be *yours* boy,” he said, his long bony finger pointing accusingly at me.

He leaned towards me looking all over my face as if he was trying to look inside my head to see what was in there.

“You give me your dollar for a moment and I’ll make it special too.

"I may call on you one day to do a little extra chore or two, but it won't put you out a bit. If that day comes my boy, you gotta' do it. I might never ask, but then again I may!

"Are you with me boy? Are you?" he said.

Part of me was terrified and wanted to run back to the safety of the others in the beer tent, but a big part of me wanted those dollars, that power, those dreams of untold wealth.

"Dollars dollars everywhere

Ole Billy says their mine

And all we need's his signature

Right there on the dotted line," he said.

He held out a pen and a tattered piece of paper with the word contract in red bold capital letters at the top and offered them to me.

"Sign here Billy boy and our business will be concluuuuded," he said.

At that moment I truly believed I could be rich beyond my wildest dreams. My head was telling me that this was so very wrong and that he was lying to me, but my heart pumped my veins with high powered rocket fuelled expectations of untold wealth and for what? Some little service I might never be asked to do?

I handed him my dollar bill, took the contract and started to sign my name. My hand was shaking so much I couldn't write properly. I felt nauseous and faint.

"I've changed my mind," I blurted out, sobbing now, "I want my dollar back, please."

"Too late boy, much much too late," he said smiling.

Then I realized that I had been clutching the faerie coin tightly in my left hand the whole time since he had appeared. I opened my hand slowly and showed him the coin.

"What is this trickery boy?" he screamed.

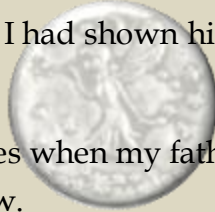
He looked at me then and his eyes bulged with hatred, contempt and evil. He leaned towards me and at that moment, I feared for my life.

I fell to my knees and from behind me I heard Madam Isabella shouting,

"Be gone, demon of the other side! You are not wanted here. Be gone."

Then he suddenly dropped my dollar bill as if it was burning his hand, pointed at me accusingly, shrugged his shoulders, tutted, turned, and walked back into the woods where he had come from. Whispering, cursing and spitting.

I knew at that moment that, when I had shown him the faerie coin, it had somehow broken a spell. His spell.



I was still shaking and on my knees when my father lifted me and hugged me tightly telling me everything was fine now.

Madam Isabella said, "You were a strong young man today Billy. All it needed was your signature, your consent and it would have owned you."

"It was drawn to you because it sensed your desires, felt your wants and it knew it could tempt you with promises of untold wealth. It was not your soul as such it wanted Billy, it was you, a young body and mind. You would have been its loyal servant, against your will. God alone knows the desolate roads you would have walked as its slave. Walking the earth for eternity as a boy, but in a man's body. I am well acquainted with such demons. There are many who walk the earth, in many guises, cast out of hell to spread evil and suffering."

Something wicked was truly with me that day ready to lure me into unthinkable lands.

Madam Isabella was to feature strongly in my life from that day forward but that's for another story, or stories.

I'm now 88 years old. My great granddaughter Isabella fondly calls me a "new age" pensioner. That makes me smile.

That day in 1937 is so clear to me now though. It's memory so painful and powerful that it could have happened to me yesterday.

From that day, I never spent long in the full rays of the sun. I used to believe that it was the dark-side versus the light-side, but no, for me that's an ancient old wives tale. I know now that the sun is neither good nor evil, for there is no distinction. At the nucleus of the sun is pure darkness itself. It merely serves whoever is there.

I've never seen that 'man-demon' since that day and I hope I never will, but sometimes I lie awake at night, nearing sleep but with my imagination kicking on all cylinders and

I fashion that he is in the room with me. Leaning over me, cursing and hissing in the dead of night plotting to take my dollar and me.

I still have that first dollar and faerie coin. I keep them in a compartment in my wallet.

That wallet goes everywhere with me. Even at night, I place it under my pillow.

Who can say when the cast out demons of hell will want to do a 'deal' with you and lure you, like a lost innocent child into a walking hell on earth. I was lucky that day but there must be others out there who were taken in by him, or 'it'.

So I say to everyone. Trust your instincts, live a happy, content and fulfilled life, but, if a tall stranger should appear, offering untold riches, keep your dollars in your pocket and look not upon his personage or pay heed to his trickeries and black magick for he is not of this earth. Not God's good earth.



Visionary Reflections from the Secret Laboratory of the Nyama Possessor



Greetings brothers and sisters, having been exiled from the land of the mainstream you have left the metropolis, traveled long the rolling foothills and courageously traversed the steep and deadly mountain sides to arrive right where you find yourself, in this space called *here* and this time called *now*. Here and now, standing before the ominous entrance gates to my Temple, the *Temple of the Turquoise Ankh* home to my Secret Laboratory!

I am *Nyama Possessor*, *possessor of Nyama*: a mysterious and vital force, occult power, energy of action, essence, a spiritual and mental power which is divisible, transmissible and accumulative. This mysterious force and essence is in my possession, as well as in yours! And you have journeyed here from afar so that I may share some of mine with you... *Nyama* is THE POWER OF THE WORD!!!

Aside from being an accomplished Bizarrist of 18 years, I have been educated by the scientists and healers, the mystics and shamans, the jelilu and sangomas, the ngangas and high priests and priestesses of *Dya Malela* (what you know as the continent of Afrika). In the original and traditional spiritual systems of Afrika, it is understood that the science of the Word (and "*spelling*") is the ability to use the alphabet in such a way as to activate and use universal forces that are ever-present, always within reach and available to us at all time, so that we may cast *spells*... *Spells* of good fortune, *spells* of protection, *spells* of prosperity and health, *spells* of love and even *spells* of ill intention... This is the primary purpose of the alphabet. SPELL-CASTING!

Words are nothing more than symbols (letters), which when arranged properly and in a certain order ("*spelled*" correctly) create meaning, vibration, energy, action and power. When letters are formed into Words by being "*spelled*" correctly, they cast *spells*! For example, if I say "*I love you!*" that's a good *spell* I've cast. If I say "*I hate you!*" that's a curse, a bad *spell* I've cast (a wise person once told me, "one can be made or ruined by their mouth", it's true!). You *spell* it your way, I *spell* it mine. You see, the alphabet is literally our *spell* book, our B.O.S., Book of *Spells*. We had better learn to use the Word well, understand its power, and use it to our advantage. For, a Bizarrist without the proper *spells* (or understanding of the Word) is like a vase without flowers... Useless!

"It's a very dull mind that can only find one way to spell a word!"
– Tony Andruzzi (Masklyn ye Mage)

From the dawn of time itself, there has always been a profound connection between magik and spirituality. The ancient masters, sages, adepts and mages knew this, and those who are wise, still do. Take for instance the old magik word, "*Abrakadabra!*" Its use was first recorded as far back as the 2nd century. And later, toward the end of the 1600s it was recorded as being used as a magik and mystical word when engraved and used as a charm to ward off sickness and disease. Simplifying and breaking down the word we find Ab is a spiritual name, Ra is a spiritual name, Ka is a spiritual name...and so on, and so on. You get the point. Magik, real magik, is rooted in spiritual understanding, the power of the Word, because the right Words have *Nyama*.

The jelilu (griots and magikians) of Mali and Senegal teach that rare and extraordinary people and objects have more *Nyama* than average ones (and Bizzarrists are far from average). The jelilu teach that the Word has *Nyama*, and that the Word can pierce deeper than a sword, for "*Nyama be kuma la*" (the Word contains occult power)!

"Be skilled in speech so that you will succeed. The tongue of a man is his sword and effective speech is stronger than all fighting. None can overcome the studied and the skillful."
– **Kheti III** (ancient Afrikan king, ethicist and author of the sebayt "*The Book of Kheti*")

So then, that's a small part of the science behind my moniker, *Nyama Possessor*, a tribute to the occult power, energy and magik of wise Words, manifested through the art of "*spelling*". Now that I have shared a little about myself and shed some light on a little of my magik powers, let us push forward now, through the halls of the Temple and into the sub-floors and chambers of my underground lair and Secret Laboratory.

... But first!

Before you be allowed to pass through the gates and on to the outer Temple, you must recite and take the ancient "*Oath of the Mystic Order of Illuminated Secret Bearers*":

I will not speaketh of secret methods n'r matt'rs to the uninitiated. The initiate who hides their inn'rmost thoughts is one who creates an eyeless buckler, and thus protects themselves, as well as their fellow brethren and sistren in the Craft. Mine w'rd is mine bond, and I shall giveth mine v'ry life, 'ere mine w'rd shall fail. May the fleas of 1,000 camels infest the genitals of those who breaketh this hither Holidam! May they be curs'd and caus'd to endlessly heave the gorge, and defecate constantly, especially amongst loveth int'rests. May they be mark'd f'rev'r in the pages of hist'ry as treasonous trait'rs of the arcane magikal arts and sciences. Lo! May the names of

*those who upholdeth this v'ry Holidam and sacr'd Tradition liveth on f'r ten-thousand
gen'rations. I solemnly gage to hon'r this code of secrecy. May death by unginmick'd guillotine
at the hands of the ghost of DeNomolos be the penalty f'r mine betrayal.*

So mote it be!

Obin

Nylksam

Noremac-Wodahs-Cniop

Droflih-KcalbNamreh-Namlehc-Hcimot

Sugam-Inidoov-Trah-Sleih-Naver-Hatok-Etihw

You may now enter... Go forth and search for the treasures
that await you in my sacred domain.

From the Secret Laboratory inside the *Temple of the Turquoise Ankh...*

Shem Hotep!

Ankh-Ujaa-Seneb!

~ Nyama Possessor ~

~ The Aims, objectives and Purpose of this Column ~

The aim, objective, duty, mission and purpose of this column is basically threefold:

1. **Inspiration** - To provide Bizarrists and Mystery Art performers with a diverse and artistic palette of inspirational ideas, in-sights and information, with the intention of stirring the inner creative juices so that Magikians can spawn and create their own original effects, props, and presentations, or at the least personalize the routines they already perform. By offering specific tools and keys to the Bizarre performer it is hoped that they can develop their own original and unique magic creations. This column aims to act as a creative wellspring, flowing with a fountain of ideas to be used, utilized and

incorporated into new, original or existing effects and presentations. *Inspiration* is to activate your *In-dwelling spiritual* creative forces for the betterment of a Bizarre *nation*.

2. **Knowledge** - To provide sound ideas and unique information, which seasoned Bizarre elders AND neophytes alike, can reap the benefits of. To promote know-how, creativity, originality and uniqueness among Bizarre Magikians and Mystery Artists by offering specific knowledge and information that can be utilized within the many aspects and dimensions of Bizarre Magik. *Knowledge* is to *Know* the *ledge*. Those that don't, fall off it and into the forsaken valley of bad performers and performances. To the true Bizarrist, Knowledge is power, for Knowledge is the foundation of all things in existence. To look, listen, study, observe, learn and respect.

3. **Advancement** - To promote the continued evolution, upliftment and advancement of Bizarre Magik by creating a sacred space where theoretical essays and rare, little known pieces of information and ideas can reach the Bizarre masses. The evolution and advancement of Bizarre Magik is only furthered by genuine and sincere contributions including in-sights and creative ideas, one-on-one and exclusive interviews, brainstorm sessions, prop-making tutorials, aging/ distressing techniques, references, as well a digital sarcophagus filled with tips, tricks, hints, advice, suggestions and resources for regular Mystery Artists and Bizarre and Storytelling Magi, which this column seeks to offer. *Advancement* is meant to *Advance women* and men who are looking to better *themselves* and the craft of magik.

Special and specific regular features of this column will include:

The Village Bonfire - The main idea and focal point of each issue's *Nyama* column. For example in this issue the main topic of the *Nyama* column is *Flash Paper*.

Frankenstein Magik (Alchemical Transmutation of Standard Tricks) - Examples provided of standard and classic magic tricks that can be changed in order to fit a Bizarre theme and/or presentation style. The importance of being able to "*Bizarre-ize*" standard magic tricks is a critical one for any creator and performer of the Bizarre. Bizarrists have always been known for their out-of-the-box thinking and highly creative Bizarre-themed spins on "regular" and "standard" magic tricks. Keeping this longstanding tradition alive, I'll be conjuring ways to turn everyday mundane magic

tricks into Bizarre masterpieces, with the hopes of sparking ideas for you to do the same... Transmuting the standard into the strange, and the ordinary into the unusual.

Nyama Files (Porn for Bizarrists) - Links to *ideas, prop-making tutorials, interesting biographies, strange artifacts, props, weird articles, intriguing stories, supplies, mysterious resources and other relevant material*. All of which are offered to aid the reader/performer in their own effect and story creation processes. Moreover, this section will also serve as a resource for products, ephemera, props and information that can be incorporated into existing specifically themed effects and routines (i.e. *Jack the Ripper, Vodun, Séance, Ceremonial Magik, Ghost Hunting, Telekinesis, etc.*)

Mummified Appendix - Extra content such as lists of effects, resources, references and other information relevant to the main idea in *The Village Bonfire* section of every *Nyama* column.

With that having been loosely outlined, I would like to remind the reader that the chosen few are the few who chosen. It is a choice to be chosen, or remain mentally frozen at 32 degrees as just-ice, which is justice!: *the penalty or reward based on ones deeds and actions*. So, come join us each and every issue, as a *Top Hat Chosen One*, and reap the reward by partaking in the knowledge, wisdom and understanding offered in this FREE digital magic publication, and also by submitting your feedback thoughts, comments, criticisms, and ideas. We would love to hear from you!

On a quick side note, in this column I may at times reference, suggest, offer and use non-Bizarre centered items and ideas. For the Bizarre diehards and purists out there, keep in mind that good Bizarrists pull and cull ideas, methods, stories, techniques, presentations, props and effects from everything they come across, from fictional stories to religious ceremonies, from historical events to personal encounters (of many kinds). It is up to us as Bizarre creators and performers to MAKE the ordinary Bizarre! Just because something is a mainstream idea, doesn't mean it can't be made your and my own. Keep in mind the purpose of this column is to make you think, inspire and fuel your creativity, and motivate you to create your own effects and personalize the existing ones.

We must remain flexible and open-minded enough to allow inspiration to seep into our consciousness, instead of rigidly holding onto things that are only scary and macabre. More often than not, Bizarre Magik effects are simply standard and regular magic effects or props which have been properly "*Bizarre-ized*". Don't allow yourself to be limited, pigeon-holed or typecast by only being able to derive inspiration from horror

movies and Lovecraftian literature, there is so much more out there than just the classic Bizarre-themed stuff. The Bizarre path is way more than just demons and death. It is more than frightening the pants off sitters, and using antique props and “dark” - centered themes and theatrics.

Bizarre Magik is acting, scripting, producing, directing, storytelling, magnetism, meaning, enchantment, entertainment, and the ability to emotionally move your participants! In short, good Bizarre Magik is theatre with purpose and meaning. In fact some of the top Bizarrists have some very light-hearted, warm and uplifting magik effects and presentations, which are the complete opposite of the grim and morbid themes Bizarre Magik is stereotypically known for. Bizarrists such as Brother Shadow, Ed Solomon, Chris Gould, Bob Neale, David Parr, Eugene Burger, Jeff McBride, Mary Tomich, Larry Hass, TC Tahoe, Kenton Knepper, Bruce Barnett, Walt Anthony and Aaron Alexander are just a few master Bizarrists that immediately come to mind, who have created empowering and cheerful Bizarre Magik, instead of relegating and dooming it to a grungy dungeon. Grim and morbid topics and themes are NOT prerequisites to performing Bizarre Magik!

I have said it over and over, yet it is worth repeating here... Cameron, Andruzzi, Shiels and Raven may have been the beginning of Bizarre Magik yet they were NOT the end! Nor were they the beginning of the end, rather, they represent the end of the beginning of Bizarre Magik... And thus, it is up to US to further evolve the Bizarre art form, just as those wise, esteemed and giant Bizarre Godfathers and Elders did. They allowed us to stand on their shoulders so that we may further develop and elevate the Bizarre. My fellow Bizarrists, ask not what Bizarre Magik can do for you, ask what you can do for Bizarre Magik! Like the smoke from a piece of myrrh burning on a slab of charcoal, Let's Rise!

A very special thank you and shout out to Top Hat's producer and editor Michael Jay, for affording me this wonderful and honorable opportunity as the newest Bizarre columnist of the Top Hat 2 digital magic magazine team!

Do you see the light up ahead? Does it call you towards it? If “yes” then proceed onwards, for the glowing light you see in the distance is...

~ THE VILLAGE BONEFIRE ~

Flash Points: History, Meaning, and Ideas for Incorporating Flash Paper into your Bizarre Magik

A "Flash" From the Past - The Birth of Flash Paper:

Flash Paper is essentially sheets of paper made from nitrocellulose (cellulose treated with nitric acid). In 1846 Christian Friedrich Schönbein, a German chemist living in Switzerland was in his kitchen laboratory, when he accidentally spilled a bottle containing concentrated nitric acid. Grabbing a cloth apron to clean up the mess, the cotton fibers of the apron naturally sopped up the nitric acid. After hanging the apron to dry on the oven door, to Schönbein's complete astonishment the apron exploded, bursting into a giant flash of fire after having fully dried out by the heat of the stove. Later, Schönbein enlisted the scientific partnership of one Rudolf Christian Böttger, who ironically had also discovered the same formula on his own that same exact year. Together they continued to refine and test the process.

If that wasn't enough, another chemist, Professor F. J. Otto hailing from Brunswick, Germany, had apparently discovered the same chemical reaction process that same year (1846) as well! Yet much to the disappointment of Schönbein and Böttger, he was the first to publish the process and thus be credited with its discovery, beating out Schönbein and Böttger, despite their independent and separate discoveries all in that same year. Aside from its magik applications, nitrocellulose actually has many other uses in various industries.

The Meaning of Fire and Flash Paper in Life and Bizarre Magik:

There is perhaps no element on Earth as mystifying, mysterious and magikal as fire! One of the oldest traditions, customs and practices known to human beings on every square inch of land on this planet, is the act of ingathering around the sacred fire which is built by the communal work of many hands. Feeling the warmth of the breathing flames as the cool night sets in. Its magik light allowing for one to see in the dark, long after the Sun has vanished and the Moon is cloaked in darkness by thick opaque clouds. Both wild and controllable, fire is like nature's elemental domesticated animal (instinctual and unpredictable yet trainable and able to dominated). Fire can be used to

build, or it can be used to utterly destroy. It can be used to heal, or it can be used to viciously harm. Neither good nor bad, the element of fire is provided to us unbiased, as a tool for our will and wants, thus making it attractive and dangerous, mystifying and mesmerizing.

Metaphorically, fire is a microcosm of the Sun, it is an Earthly external reminder for us to shine our own inner light on those we love, and to share our magik with the world around us. We make others glow like a billowed burning ember, when we emit the warmth from our very own internal fire. For, inside us all is an inner living fire. The living fire, the light of life, the divine flame inside us all, burning at the constant temperature of 98.6 degrees. Only to be extinguished when we die, which causes the body turn cold. So until then, embrace the element of fire, be radiant like the Sun: spread your warmth, share your magik, give your light selflessly to others. Be like the Hermit of the tarot and hold up your burning and illuminating lantern as a beacon for others in life. If you are not there to shine your inner light, who knows how many travelers will lose their way as they try to pass by your empty place in darkness!

Bizarrists who shine from within don't need to demand the spotlight, because when you're the Sun, you're already at the center of attention, moving, influencing and directing things and people around you with your solar magnetism and mighty gravitational pull. You are a force, yet not forceful. Participants are naturally attracted to your performances, you are the universal law of attraction in motion, action, application and operation. People are emotionally moved by you in performance, your words and actions captivate. You draw them in by just being you, and shining your inner light and letting those around you feel the warmth from your internal fire. Fire is magnetic, alluring, mysterious, haunting, visceral, surreal, sensual, passionate, captivating, commanding mesmerizing and pure. Perhaps this is why insects and people are so drawn towards the light and the life of the flame? As a Bizarrist, *why wouldn't you want to incorporate the element of fire in your magik?*

The Flash Paper that Magikians enjoy and love never ceases to add mysteriousness, surprise and visual satisfaction for participants during a performance. Whether used in a silent act set to music, to produce a ribbon streamer (ala Jay Scott Berry) or during a close up observance of ceremonial Pagan magik to signify that the ritual is completed and something strange has occurred (ala Masklyn ye Mage), one thing is for certain... Flash Paper provides the Magi with ability to appear that he or she is in full command and control of the elements of Earth. After all, what *true* and *real* Magi, (or wizard, or

shaman) doesn't possess the power to harness, manipulate and control these elemental forces of nature (especially to do his or her bidding)?

To many of us, Flash Paper is like "magic (woofle) dust", or a magic wand. It is seen as a mere special effect or theatrical add-in, instead of a devious tool to be surreptitiously used as the main feature and method of an effect. As basic as Flash Paper may seem to most, I personally feel that we as Bizarrists have only scratched the surface of its benefits and its creative uses in and for our Magik. Let us consider some alternative and interesting uses, ideas and possibilities for this spectacular pyrotechnic product, and brainstorm on clever and unique ways it can be utilized as a main prop and effect and method within a Bizarre presentation. Instead of continuing to relegate its use as a mere source of misdirection and/or magikal glamour, which has typically been the case.

First things first, magik that involves pyrotechnics does NOT end at a little white sheet of Flash Paper! There is a profusion of different pyrotechnic elements that can be used and incorporated for magikal purposes, some of them include: *colored flash paper, flash bills, flash flowers, flash string, flash cotton, flash powder, flash pads, flash cards, flash feathers, flash cigarettes, flash candles, flash sugar packets, electric sparkle additive, slow cotton, colored smoke powder, smoke cloth, dragon's breath, flame gel, flame paste, smolder paper, etc., etc., etc.*

I'll leave it up to you to research some of these ignition-based fire effects and items. Yet one thing stands true, there is a plethora of options when it comes to adding pyrotechnics into your original Bizarre creations, presentations and shows. Despite the fact that indoor "fire codes" are much stricter than in times past, when using flash paper inside an establishment for a show, always remember: *it is easier to get forgiveness than gain permission!*

Solar Flares of Amen-Ra (Bizarre Flash Paper Ideas):

Some of the following are complete and well thought out effects, some are mere idea and offered suggestions, while others are only half finished concepts, glimpses of what could be... Again the purpose of this column is to get you to think, expand upon, personalize and experiment. Ultimately, the final purpose is to help and assist you in the creation of your *own* ideas, effects and presentations. The column content acting as kindling for your very own magik fire. Do not fret nor feel frustrated if you read a half finished idea or a simple suggestion.

Instead, challenge yourself to finish it yourself, by bring it to where you want it to go. Part of the fun is the exercise in creative thinking and problem solving. Complete the task at hand and view it as a challenging puzzle for you to solve, give it your own style and presentation and storyline. This is not a column of ready to perform effects and routines per se, rather it is a buffet of ideas and resources and suggestions for you to strive to incorporate and enhance, puzzles for you to ponder on, and more specifically, some examples of how Flash Paper can be taken in other direction and to other dimensions. I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this column, and can benefit from some of the following ideas and possibilities.

Love At First Flash

A bold and bright heart symbol rubber-stamped in blood-red ink on a piece of white Flash Paper (or cut out from a piece of red Flash Paper) ignites from the passionate and feverish feelings of true love, when two lovers hold hands and look into each other's eyes. Perhaps something could appear in your hand after the ***FLASH!***? The justification for the (flash) paper heart could be a love note or a valentine.

Letter From A Believer in the Arch Deceiver

An archaic, hand-written letter supposedly written by the one who "Does-EVIL" (*the DEVIL*) unexpectedly and magically bursts into a flash of fire before everyone's eyes, suspiciously made to burn up and disappear before the contents of the letter were read aloud. I wonder what was so revealing that the letter combusted before its full subject matter was revealed??

Create a typed letter from the devil using an old-looking and magikal-themed font, leave the signature blank. Cut a piece of white or aged Flash Paper to the standard printer paper size (8.5 x 11 inches in the US, A4 or 210 x 297 mm in Europe) and gently affix it to a single piece of regular printer paper so that it can be easily and efficiently printed on. Using an ink-jet printer (DO NOT use a laser printer, it will ignite the Flash Paper), print out the typed letter on the Flash Paper (which has been lightly adhered to the standard piece of printer paper for printing ease). Using a calligraphy pen, signed the printed Flash Paper letter using the name *666, Lucifer, XXX* or whatever you prefer.

Gently separate the Flash Paper letter from the regular printer paper. If going for an ancient and archaic look, age the flash paper using *Fiebing's Buckskin Leather Dye* watered down to the hue of your preference. Be sure to test the your water-diluted dye solution on a scrap piece of Flash Paper first. To complete the aging process apply a

slightly darker mixture of the dye on just the very edges of the Flash Paper letter (the Flash Paper can also be aged first and then printed on, it's up to you). Finally fold the letter in thirds and place in an aged envelope. Be creative with marking up and addressing the envelope. You can include arcane and magik symbols, blood stains, dirt, and/or whatever suits your fancy. Be sure to consider *Who it is from? Who was it sent to?* And don't forget to bless it with a nice strange stamp if you so choose. Be creative! It is limited only to your imagination!

Secretly ignite the Flash Paper letter in performance either while literally reading the letter, or while holding it in your hand and gesturing with it. Or while it is simply laying on the table as you are announcing that you are going to "*read the letter in a just a few moments*". Use your favorite method to ignite the Flash Paper letter, if you don't have one, it is a simple matter of performing near and above a candle flame. Start by reading the letter from up high and slowly, casually and smoothly bring your hand down as you read the letter. You can ignite the flash paper merely from the heat rising of the candle flame (without having to actually touch the paper to the flame).

Perhaps the letter was a pact or a contract with the devil, which bursts into flames because the deal is broken, or it is revealed that the contract benefits you instead of the devil?! Maybe you have tricked the devil so the devil tricks you by burning the contact agreement while you are reading it? Or maybe it was a letter written by Aleister Crowley? Or might it be a page from Abdul Alhazred's Necronomicon, or The Negromicon of Masklyn ye Mage? The possibilities are endless indeed.

For an simple and direct alternative presentation and combustion idea, skip making the Flash Paper letter, and just age a sheet of white Flash Paper, and focus on distressing and decorating the envelope. Then place the aged or regular sheet of Flash Paper that has been folded into thirds (like a real letter), into the envelope. Seal the envelope and then run a serrated knife or letter opener along the top edge of the envelope to open it (since it is an old previously opened envelope containing a letter that you have discovered, or inherited, etc).

All you have to do in performance is secretly ignite the Flash Paper inside of the envelope which will cause very dramatic reactions! After the ignition of the Flash Paper inside the envelope you can then open the envelope to reveal that the letter is gone and the inside of the envelope is singed and burnt (since the combustion of the Flash Paper was confined to the inside of the envelope it will leave a burn mark or two). Make sure to age the inside of the envelope as well, and even give it the appearance of severe

burning it you would like (since the participants will only see the inside of the envelope after the Flash Paper has burned and the effect is essentially over).

The basic inspiration for this idea/effect came from Jim Magus's *"To Conjure A Demon"* from his book Horror Magic.

The Tower and The Sun

I've seen tarot card rubber-stamps for sale online, imagine stamping *"The Tower"* on a piece of Flash Paper? *"...And in a flash of lightning the tower was struck and fell, *FLASH!* casting all memories of the mighty monarchy into oblivion. Nothing lasts forever, everything in the physical realm must come to an end!"* Or how about a piece of decoratively trimmed Flash Paper with the *"The Sun"* card rubber-stamped on it, *"How important it is for us to appreciate the good in our lives, lest we forget that when the good gets taken for granted it is all too often taken away!" *FLASH!**

The scrap of Flash Paper rubber-stamped with the image or main symbol of a tarot card on it can be used as a reveal to a tarot card selection and described as a prophecy ripped from the page of an old book on astrology or from an old "new-age" almanac, etc. Or like mentioned above, get a pair of scrapbook decorative edging scissors and cut around the edges of the tarot card rubber-stamped on the Flash Paper. Either way, both *The Tower* and *The Sun* act as nice, quick, visual effects to enhance a reading or be used in a tarot card effect. I like this idea since the outcome of the effect provides a logical connection and tie-in to the specific chosen tarot card (*The Tower* card has a "flash" of lightning in its image, and *The Sun* card shines brightly and can burn things in just a "flash").

A Logical Quote for Eugene Burger's "Flash Spirit Message"

This is my little theological and philosophical nod to Eugene Burger... In my opinion, perhaps one of the most logical and interesting spirit messages to be written as the reveal for Eugene's *"Flash Spirit Message"* (found on his *Magical Voyages - Part Two* DVD) is a direct quote from the great Sufi mystic and renowned philosopher/poet/scholar of the middle ages, Rumi. In the 19th century translation of his masterwork, and more specifically his story called *"The Harper"* we read a profound thought that suggests we must stay in the present in order to remain happy and at peace:

"Past and future are what veil God from our sight. Burn up both of them with fire."

-- Rumi

I love how this quote by Rumi directly ties itself into the outcome of the effect. After the spirit of Rumi is called forth, the paper is ignited (or ignites itself if you are clever) and the ball of paper is removed to reveal Rumi's quote about burning the past and future up with fire (urging the participant to focus on and remain in the present). As a cool subtlety and an added convincer you could vertically write "PAST" on the left-side edge of the Flash Paper and vertically write "FUTURE" on the right-side edge, leaving the middle completely and obviously blank. On the spirit message "reveal paper" duplicate the words "PAST" and "FUTURE" in the same exact place that you did on the piece of Flash Paper. The Rumi quote is then written in-between "PAST" and "FUTURE" on the reveal message paper, thus creating nice visual metaphor and framing the spirit message for the reveal. If the quote is too spiritual or religious sounding for your character or taste, then the words: "Peace", "Satisfaction", "Love", "Happiness", "Truth", "Creativity", "Righteousness", "Clarity", "Balance", or "Harmony" can easily and effectively be used in place of the word "God". Yet, then that would make it your quote, and no longer Rumi's.

When performing Eugene's effect, I use a porcupine (thorn-pig) quill, instead of a hat-pin or a "Vodun needle". Using the quill is more interesting for me as a prop, and feels more natural and true to my character, plus I like to explain to the participant after the effect is done (and the spirit message is revealed), that by impaling the ball of (flash) paper with the words "PAST" and "FUTURE" onto the porcupine quill, it serves as a symbolic and metaphorical ritual for us to stay in the present instead of worrying about the past and stressing about the future. After all, if one were to literally get stabbed or "stuck" by a porcupine quill it would certainly keep them in the present moment. The pain inflicted by the quill keeps one in the present, because the pain felt by the quill forces you to BE in the present (and address the wound). Ha-ha!

Two more spirit message reveals that I love, and frequently use for this effect because they too advise us to stay in the present are:

"Yesterday is History, Tomorrow is a Mystery, and Today is a Gift, which is why its called the Present!"

– Afrikan Proverb

"Brood not on what has not yet happened, nor rejoice over what has not yet come to pass."

– Khun-Anup (a farmer from ancient Afrika, famously known as the "Eloquent Peasant")

The Pyromancer's Vision (The Lightning Tear)

Try performing a Center Tear with Flash paper, it's an easy way to ditch the evidence and demonstrate the art of Pyromancy, which gives a deeper meaning to a simple Center Tear effect. Do the tear, get the read, crumple up and throw it into an open candle flame or onto a remote-controllable flash tray. ***FLASH!*** It disappears, destroying all the evidence of the center torn piece. In the description of the pyromancy effect called *"Here Comes A Candle"* in the book THIRTEEN!, Tony "Doc" Shiels recommends drawing a "magik circle" on the paper to be used for the center tear and surrounding it with arcane symbols and magikal signs. This clever suggestion both adds a dimension of realism to the effect and cleverly acts as a logical justification for drawing a circle on the paper to be used as a target for the Center Tear. After the torn bits and pieces of Flash Paper including the participant's information (evidence) has been obtained via the tear and cast into the wild flame of the tabled candle, gaze long and deep into the mystic flame, and reveal the participants information (i.e. the name of their recently deceased relative, or a name of someone they have lost contact with).

I highly recommend checking out TC Tahoe's eBook, The Center Tear Papers, which includes some brilliantly clever participant empowering effects and reading ideas. It is a must have in my opinion for all those who are interested in the psychology and subtleties behind making a Center Tear more powerful, meaningful, logical and justified.

Flash Alchemy

Make a set of Mystery ("Buddha") Papers out of Flash Paper. Use black Flash Paper to make a modified and simple 2 layer-deep Mystery Paper set. Load the inner hidden side with an attractive and eye-catching antique gold replica coin. Use a small square of

white Flash Paper from a Flash Pad and age with a light, water-diluted mixture of *Fiebing's Buckskin Leather Dye*. Use the antique gold coin as a template and trace the outline of the coin on top of the dyed Flash Paper square using a metallic gold Sharpie marker or gold paint marker. Flip the piece of aged Flash Paper over and trace the existing circle on the reverse side. Next roughly sketch in the details of both coin sides onto each respective side of the dyed Flash Paper square, and cut out the paper coin with a pair of scissors. It doesn't have to be or look perfect, just a paper representation of the actual antique replica gold coin.

Finally place the paper coin into the inner empty packet of the Mystery Paper set. At this point you should have a Mystery Paper set made from black Flash Paper, inside the Papers you have an antique replica coin loaded in the hidden pocket side of the packet (facing downwards inside the outer paper packet), and a Flash Paper coin, drawn to look like the actual coin, this is loaded inside the revealed pocket side of the packet (facing upwards inside the outer paper packet). Now you are ready to perform.

Simply open the papers up to reveal the paper coin and hand it out to be seen while talking about the metaphysical science of alchemy, the art of turning base metals into gold, and the science of transmutation, the action of changing something into another form. Retrieve the paper coin and replace it into the inner paper packet, and casually flash both sides (as a subtle convincer that nothing is hidden inside the packet of papers). Don't make a big deal out of this, and please do not tell the participants that *"there is nothing else inside the papers, they are completely empty except for the paper coin"*, as this would be overkill, and will only draw unnecessary heat and plant the idea in their minds that something is or could be hidden inside the papers.

Fold the entire packet back up, and set it on an old dark colored dinner plate. Ignite the Mystery Paper packet made from Flash Paper using your favorite method (explaining heat and fire are essential components to making the alchemical transmutation product work). ***FLASH!*** the papers are lit on fire (or heated) and all that will be left is a "real" antique gold coin, in the middle of the plate, the papers have vanished in the alchemical explosion. This is a beautiful and visually stunning occurrence. The thing I like about making Mystery Papers out of Flash Paper is that it eliminates the need to have to do the secret packet turnover, to access the secretly loaded side. Since the whole entire packet is made from Flash Paper and is burned up in a ball of fire, all the evidence of a double-sided inner packet is conveniently destroyed!

The reason I suggest using a dark colored plate is so that the shiny antique gold coin pops out against the dark color of the plate for a perfectly color-contrasted and highly visual ending. If you are unfamiliar with the Mystery (“Buddha”) Papers (aka the “Poor Man’s Wallet”) or just want a spectacular book on the use and psychology of them, then I highly recommend checking out David Tower’s eBook [The Magic of the Mystery Papers](#). It is a great value for the price, for just few dollars you get a wonderful and idea-generating 23 page treatise on the Mystery Papers and even blueprints to make your own set.

The Frugal Bizarrist’s “FISM Flash”

Before *Philosophy of Light*, *Flashburst*, *Flash Pen*, *Cobra Flash*, *Vapr*, *Smoke*, and other devices that can act as a sign that the “magik” has occurred, in 2005 I came up with the following simple little idea called “*Poor Man’s FISM Flash*”, which was praised on the *Shadow Digest*. I’m resurrecting this little gem here and have aptly renamed it “*The Frugal Bizarrist’s FISM Flash*”. Here is my original idea back from ‘05, slightly edited:

Ever since I heard about John Cornelius's *FISM Flash*, I fell in love with the idea of something visual happening to represent that the “magik moment” had taken place during an effect. I borrowed an idea from Larry Becker and tweaked it, to come up with a visual “magik-signaling” occurrence that is more appropriate for a Bizarre setting and presentation.

When performing I tend to always have a large pillar candle boldly making its presence on the performance table. On the side of the pillar candle (facing towards the Mage) I have a 3 inch piece of double-sided tape, running lengthwise, down the center of the candle. Using Flash Paper squares from a Flash Pad I add a sprinkle or two of a small pile of Sparkle Additive (Sparkle Flash) or iron shavings onto the Flash Paper squares. I then fold and crumpled the Flash Paper around the Sparkle Additive and into small little packed ball. I stick 3 or 4 of these Sparkle loaded Flash Paper balls onto the double-sided tape adhered to the pillar candle. You now have several magikal, dazzling “flashes” ready, at your disposal in a moment's notice, and at any given time for when you want to visually communicate to your participants that the magik has occurred.

When presenting a specific effect that requires some visual occurrence of magik happening, just smoothly reach over to the pillar candle and secretly “pluck” off one of the Flash Paper Sparkle balls, while simultaneously bringing your hand up in a pinching motion and through the flame of the candle which ignites the ball at your

finger tips. Strive to send it the Flash ball upwards... ***FLASH!*** The entire action smoothly done takes place right before (or in some case maybe after) the actual magik event occurs in your effect. For instance, if making something disappear, you make the “flash” occur, and then reveal the disappearance of the object or what have you.

To the participants it merely looks as though you simply stroked the candle flame with your fingertips, and caused the flame to sparkle like enchanted glitter and flare up into a miniature fireball. The noise it makes is unbeatable too! Verily, it is the SOUND of real magik taking place, that sound of a *blowtorch* and *sparks* and *sizzle!* The visual and the audible all combines to non-verbally communicate to the participants that the “magik” has worked, and a mysterious change occurred. This is what Bizarre Magik is about, using methods to reinforce the reality of magik, without having to explain every last little line of patter and script in order to communicate to your audience that the magic is taking place.

The Frugal Bizarrist's “FISM Flash” works especially well when presenting a Bizarre effect in a ceremonial/ritualistic magik style of Masklyn ye Mage, Tony “Doc” Shiels, Charles Cameron, and others. It may sound silly and not that big of a deal to some, yet it truly has to be seen to be believed and appreciated. The importance of this “magikal cue” lies in the nonverbal communication had between the Mage and his or her participants, and this point should not be overlooked! As far as ceremonial and ritualistic magik is concerned, the less the Mage has to explain in terms of what he or she is doing, the more powerfully mysterious and suspenseful the outcome and overall effect becomes.

Having the magik occur after an incantation (or compelling story) and seeing a visual ***FLASH!*** and ***SPARKLE!*** helps to greatly enhance the ambiance, environment and magik in your performance. Both are symbolic, clearly understandable and valid reasons to what the *HELL* just took place (pun intended). Simple, clear and direct, all wonderful words to keep in mind when either creating an effect or performing one. Too often complication leads to more complication. In my opinion, less is usually more and Masklyn ye Mage thinks so too. In the biography of Tony Andruzzi, *Unspeakable Acts* by famed Bizarrist Jim Magus, we read Masklyn ye Mage (Tony Andruzzi) explaining his psychological reasoning behind the principle of “less being more”, and leaving participants with an air of unspoken mystery in their mind. On page 202 we read:

“[J]ust hinting at something and just giving you a very minor indication that it happened, and letting your imagination fill from there... that’s what bizarre magick

should be...at a climax not a hell of a lot happens, and the little bit that does happen reinforces what the man is alluding to, so you get the idea that the effect is a hell of a lot more than it really is.”

Too much magik is lost, when a Bizarrist or performer explains every last little detail of an effect. Good ceremonial Bizarre Magik is self explanatory and direct, yet often in a mysterious and nonverbal way. It is simple and straightforward, so that the focus can remain on theatrical presentation and creating an atmosphere of believability, which is greatly enhanced by an interesting ritual, ceremony, incantation, tale or story. I cannot stress enough the sheer importance of simplicity and the notion of being able to interact and non-verbally communicate with your participants. The essence of real ritual and ceremonial Bizarre Magik is mysterious, visual, mercurial and suspenseful, and thus has the power to transcend language, age and culture. In short, Bizarre ceremonial and ritualistic magic speaks for itself, yet doesn't reveal everything.

The inspiration for this idea came from Larry Becker's "Kolossal Killer III" on his Mental Masterpieces Vol. 2 video. Wherein Flash Paper balls act as a visual representation of invisible chosen cards being "eliminated" by being burned with a lighter.

WARNING: As always please exercise safety and caution when using pyrotechnics including flammable/combustible products and material such as Flash Paper. If you think I'm joking, ask Peter Eggink about the dangers that a simple flash product can cause! Accidents can and do happen, flash paper can self-ignite and can cause serious burns. It's dumb to be dumb, so play it smart!

~ NYAMA FILES (PORN FOR BIZARRISTS) ~

1. Book of Imaginary Beings:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Imaginary_Beings

2. Paranormal Terminology:

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3. Boukman Dutty:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutty_Boukman

4. Hand of Glory:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_of_Glory

DIY Hand of Glory:

<http://darkartifacts.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-hand-of-glory-part-one.html>

<http://darkartifacts.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-hand-of-glory-part-2.html>

5. Apothecary:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apothecary>

DIY Apothecary Jars:

<http://davelowe.blogspot.com/2009/08/halloween-09-apothecary-jars-on-budget.html>

~ **Mummified Appendix** ~

**A Brief List of Bizarre Magik Flash Paper Effects
and Other Flash Paper References**

Specific Effects:

A Tale of Two Lovers by Tony Chris - Karnival of Magick (DVD)

Burned Card by Eugene Burger - Secrets & Myst. for the Close-up Entertainer (Book)

Casting the Runes by Tony Shiels - Bizarre (Book)

Flash of Color by Christopher Taylor - Inside Out (Book)

Flash Spirit Message by Eugene Burger - Magical Voyages - Part Two (DVD)

Flauros for the Living by Masklyn ye Mage - The Negromicon (Book)

Murder by Mail by Docc Hilford - Band of the Hand (Book)

Pickman's Model by Stephen Minch - The Book of Forgotten Secrets (Book)

Shriek of the Mutilated by John Bannon - Impossibilia (DVD)

Summoning Rumi by Nyama Possessor - The Tome of Timbuktu (Book)
The Eye of Alhazred by Stephen Minch - The Book of Forgotten Secrets (Book)
The Mirror of Cagliostro by Masklyn ye Mage - The Negromicon (Book)
The Nine Circles by Vic Nadata - Gemini Artifacts (Effect)
To Conjure A Demon by Jim Magus - Horror Magic (Book)
Werewolf! by David Parr - Brain Food (Book)
Voodoo by Liam Montier (Effect)
Witches Do Burn by Paul Prater - Maleficium (Book)
Within A Heart by Mary Tomich - Thaumysta (Effect)

Printed and Digital Books

Magician's DIY Tips and Tricks by Chris Wasshuber (eBook)
Smoulder Paper by Jez Starr (eBook)
Stone Frixion Fire by Jeff Stone (Book)
Tricks of the Trade by George Armstrong (eBook)

DVDs and MP4s

Desert Rose by Chris Randell (MP4)
Spontaneous Combustion by Jay Sankey (DVD)
Stone Frixion Fire by Jeff Stone (DVD)



Anatomy of a Bizarre Magic Story

by Stefan Alexxis



Most magicians learning about bizarre magic quickly conclude that, in this genre, the story seems to take primacy over the magic – a situation that intrigues some and has others fleeing in disgust. We won't worry about the second group because they won't be reading this. But for you willing to look deeper, I'll point out that the observation is approximately half true. The most important thing in a bizarre magic effect is neither the story nor the trick, per se, but rather the audience's emotional connection to the total effect. We are trying to barricade viewers' tendency to see magic as an intellectual challenge and detour them into experiencing a performance the way they would if faced with real magic.

That is not what anyone would call an easily achievable goal. On the contrary, full achievement is probably downright impossible most of the time. No matter. We reach for the stars in the hopes of snagging a communication satellite or two. That's why the stories take center stage. The tricks alone may boggle the mind, stimulate the imagination and generally entertain (and maybe, if we're really *really* lucky, evoke admiration in the heart of some easily-impressed but attractive person of our preferred gender), but they do not stir the emotions. They do not make a connection. They do not evoke the personal investment necessary to create a simulation of belief.

Let's take a f'rinstance. A Magician takes an ace of spades and, zap! It turns into the three of hearts. Wow! Cool! Amazing! Properly presented, it may garner oohs and ahhs, laughter, applause, and other good things. But it also produces a puzzle, begging the question, "How did he do that?" That may be fine as an exhibition of skill and can certainly be an essential part of this nutritious close-up set. It's just not what a Bizarrist would be after.

The Bizarrist, caring more about making a deeper connection, will use the power of storytelling – trying with all the might his tongue can muster to push the effect from the kingdom of "Wow! Cool! Amazing!" at least into the realm of "Holy Sh*t!" Perhaps he'll tell the tale of Luckless Pete, the gambler who cheated a Gypsy. The Gypsy responded with a curse preventing Pete from ever winning more than trivial pots. Pete, compulsive gambler that he was, continued to play in the hopes that the curse would eventually wear off.

And so the Bizarrist builds the story, getting the audience to feel something about Pete. Maybe pity, maybe hating his guts, just as long as his struggles against the curse matter. The Bizarrist will work the audience's emotions as he takes them into Pete's game of a lifetime. The pot grows and Pete is seen to draw to the infamous royal straight flush in spades – again, making sure that the audience feels the game's sheer vital urgency. And when the betting stops with a bulging pot, and the two other remaining players toss out their full house and four of a kind, Pete triumphantly lays down his royal straight flush only to show the ace of spades instantaneously transforming into the three of hearts.

The Bizarrist would say that the story is the magic, as much as the trick is.

I don't do that effect, by the way. It's off the top of my head for this article and I have no method in mind. Feel free to develop one, work out the story details, and make it yours. But before you write that story, finish reading this! Because there are several ways to go, and the story approach I described above may not be the strongest or best for you.

We'll go at this in two parts. In part one, we'll look at a couple of ways to categorize Bizarre stories. The hope is that by thinking about these categories as options, you'll be better able to tailor a presentation to meet your performing conditions and personal goals. By no means is this the only way to dissect a story, or even necessarily the best way, if such a thing even exists. But it involves decisions every magician must make for a bizarre presentation, and it's best to think them through deliberately.

The first set of opposing approaches are what I'll call Theatrical and Anecdotal.

In a theatrical effect, the story is clearly fictional. The magician may even be playing a character. The anecdotal story, on the other hand, presents itself as something that really happened. The greatest advantage of a theatrical approach is that audiences see it, when properly performed, as, well, Theater. Where something perceived as Magic is likely to be treated as a puzzle, audiences are more willing to suspend disbelief for Theater and regard what they'd otherwise consider a "trick" to be solved as a special effect to be enjoyed. This gives you the freedom to create effects as powerful as anything fiction makes possible. If there's a down side, it's that the "magic" ends when the lights go up. Reality pushes everything into those mental nooks and crannies where the experiences of movies and TV shows are stored.

An anecdotal story is entirely the opposite. It's told as if it's something that truly occurred, which means that every detail of the story, right up to the moment of magic,

has to be absolutely believable. This is as difficult to pull off as a particularly stubborn crab shell. But, like a nicely steamed crab, the results are particularly delicious when you succeed, because the magic does not end when the audience walks away. They carry it with them. Even when they consciously know it's a trick, they take away trace of, "but what if?" Providing, that is, that they buy into the story.

It's that essential element of believability that has done in the vast majority (in my admittedly finite experience) of attempts at anecdotal presentations. There's too often some little detail, some minor action by a story character, that doesn't quite ring true. The result may still be cool and entertaining, but it inhibits that sudden shiver when the viewer thinks about it a week later.

This is not to say, I should add, that Theatrical presentations allow for an 'Anything Goes' approach. They must at least follow the rules of good fiction. A premise may require suspension of disbelief, such as, "I am a vampire and can walk through walls," but from that point on, the plot must make sense and the characters must act plausibly.

The second set of opposing approaches I will refer to, with equal pomposity, as Demonstrative and Evidential. The difference is simple but often subtle and certainly significant: a demonstrative effect illustrates what the magic did or does, while an evidential approach proves the magic.

Let's put this all together by returning to the tale of Luckless Pete, the cursed gambler. I could ask you whether you see that presentation as being Theatrical or Anecdotal, but your answer would probably reveal more about your assumptions than about the story, since my description was far from detailed. So let's look at a couple of different framings. The Theatrical version may start like this:

"In Deadwood, Oklahoma, old-timers still tell the legend of Luckless Pete, the gambler. He wasn't always luckless, but one day he used some fancy dealing to cheat a Gypsy out of a large pot. The Gypsy knew it, but couldn't prove it. So instead of pulling out a six-gun at the table, he pulled out six candles in his cabin, and intoned a curse that would change Pete's life...."

Everything about that says 'Theatrical'. We refer to the story as a legend. We treat the curse as a real thing, fully aware that the vast majority of audience members won't actually believe in curses. We're politely inviting them to suspend disbelief in order to enjoy a piece of fiction.

Okay, suppose we wanted to do it Anecdotally. Now we have to bend over backwards to make sure the story sounds like it could be real history. Perhaps it would begin this way

"If you've made a study of gambling in the old West, you may have come across stories about the guy they called Luckless Pete. He wasn't an important figure but you can find him mentioned in footnotes here and there. His real name was Peter Corbin, a compulsive gambler like so many others, but with an unusual excuse for being perpetually low on cash. He claimed he'd been cursed by a Gypsy he'd once cheated. Nobody ever disputed that he might have actually cheated a Gypsy, but most card men seemed to feel that Pete's poor luck could be just as well explained by his equally poor playing."

See anything implausible there? Anything that looks like it couldn't be a real story about some eccentric historical figure? And yet we've introduced the idea of a curse, Pete's reputation for bad luck and have started putting everything into place for the magical twist ending.

Now, how does the story fall along the Demonstrative/Evidential axis? There's no ambiguity here. The story as I described it was clearly Demonstrative. Why? Because the magical moment only demonstrates what happened during that fateful poker game. Whatever caused the ace of spades to become a three of hearts today, it was not that curse. The curse was on Pete, not on the magician talking about him. So the magic is not evidence that the curse was real.

But let's imagine a very different performance scenario. Suppose our Bizarrist addresses his audience like this:

"Y'know, people aren't generally willing to play poker with a magician, for obvious reasons. But you needn't worry about that with me, because I won't play with you. Not for money, anyway. It doesn't matter how many card tricks or how much sleight of hand I may know, I'm going to lose. I'm always going to lose. You see, years ago when I was much younger, much more full of myself, and much, much stupider, I'd make some extra money by cheating at cards. And one night, I cheated the wrong man...."

He tells how he was cursed so that he'd never win at poker again. He invites two audience members up to demonstrate. He goes so far as to tell everyone that, in order to increase his chances of winning, he'll cheat. He openly stacks the deck right in front of everyone and instructs one of the others to deal, because he won't touch the deck any

further. It's eventually revealed that the other two have mediocre hands, but he has that royal straight flush. There's some interplay about betting and when the last bet is called, the players lay down their hands. One has a pair, the other a slightly higher pair, and our Bizarrist's hand turns at the last instant into an almost royal straight flush piece of crap.

Now we have an Evidential effect. We have 'proven' the curse. Everyone has seen it in action.

As a rule, I find an Evidential effect more powerful, and potentially spookier, than a Demonstrative one. But the approach is not always practical. I don't care how good your story is, if it depends on you claiming to be that vampire who can walk through walls, nobody is going to take your effect as being anecdotal or evidential. And as the goose pimples on many audience members have proven, a Demonstrative effect can be plenty potent when carefully crafted. Still, if you want to put lasting shivers in the spine, there's more oomph in making it look like it's "really happening" rather than merely being simulated.

Considering all that, it probably won't surprise you to learn that my favorite type of Bizarre effect is the Anecdotal-Evidential. I also find it the most challenging to write. So I'm going to reveal the scripting of one of my A-E effects, heavily annotated to showcase the details that make the story work the way I want it to. The script has changed over the years as I've found ways to tweak it, and it will probably continue to do so, but I present it as I perform it now.

I recommend you read through the script twice rather than trying to take it all in on one go. First, read it straight through, ignoring the notes. Then go back and check out the commentary.

We won't spend any time on method because you already know it. This is simply the classic Haunted Key. It differs from other versions only in presentation. Which brings us to this important point:

The following script, unlike the previous tales of Luckless Pete, is copyright Yours Truly and is presented here to illustrate my approach and stimulate your thinking. No performance rights come with this publication. Create your own script in your own style based on your own life, character, and/or personality. Please don't make me put this in underlined bold italic caps. Thank you kindly for your cooperation.

A couple of over-all notes before we get into the specific script and details. First, I know this presentation works as an Anecdotal effect because even people who know perfectly well that it's a trick, and who even know exactly how the trick works, tend to believe the story. While they realize that I've scripted the telling, viewers frequently believe I'm basing the effect on a real place, real people, and real events from my childhood. I know it works as an Evidential effect because when I offer people a closer look at the key afterwards, a huge percentage shy away from touching it. If you have a Bizarrist's turn of mind, that is so much more fun than applause!

Second, should you choose to do a bizarre approach to the Haunted Key, especially an anecdotal one, don't use the commercially available prop unless you can give a damned convincing reason why the key looks so new, clean and shiny. Those things are near impossible to distress! You can find usable keys in antique shops. They won't be as perfectly balanced as the commercial prop, and you may have to shop around a bit, but it's not hard to find one that works just fine.

Ready? Here we go!

The Hothskeller¹ Key

When you were a child, was there that one place you and your friends considered the "haunted house?"² Yes, that's pretty common. For me, when I was a child in Milwaukee,³ it was the Hothskeller house.

¹ Names matter. I wanted one that was unusual, evoking Old Country and a bit of Gothic. There's no recalling how many names I auditioned before settling on this one, which just felt right. Spend some time and effort choosing the right names for your stories. Find or create something that fits the feeling you want without being overly obvious. And please don't make the mistake of a Bizarrist acquaintance who created a truly lovely story for a truly spine-tingling effect featuring a Korean soldier to whom he had given a (*sigh*) Chinese name. Here's a tip: if you have to name, say, a woman from Zimbabwe and have no clue, Google, "Zimbabwe Actress" for a bunch of authentic women's names.

² Eugene Burger, among others, has written about using an opening question to get participants involved. It does that here, of course, but it does much more. It also evokes the spooky imaginings they enjoyed as kids. Furthermore, it sets up this tale as being about a real place. After all, their childhood haunted house was a real building, even if the hauntedness was pretend. So why shouldn't the Hothskeller house be real as well?

³ If you're interested in what parts of this story are true, I really did live in Milwaukee from age four through most of seven.

Whatever happened in the Hothskeller house, it was the sort of thing that (air quotes) “decent people just didn't talk about” back then.⁴ First as a child and later as an adult, I tried to get Mrs. Schiff, the neighborhood gossip who'd been the Hothskellers closest neighbor, to tell me what she knew. Uncharacteristically, she never would.⁵

(Pull key from pocket and show it to listeners) She did keep this key.⁶ She said it was the key to Tobias's room, and, while I can't prove that to be true,⁷ I do have reason to believe her.

You see, the court records were sealed and the newspaper accounts were sketchy at best,⁸ so all I know for certain is that one winter night before I was born, Tobias Hothskeller, a young man of (a beat) evil⁹ reputation, was found dead. Of unnatural causes Alone. His door and windows locked — from the inside.¹⁰

⁴ The attitude described here is really more fitting to my parent's childhood. Or possibly my grandparents. But bits of it lingered on and I take advantage of that. Meanwhile, it explains why nobody knew Whatever Happened, why those who did know some of Whatever Happened kept their mouths shut, and further makes it clear that Whatever Happened was worse than the usual bad. I'm going to build on that.

⁵ Even the neighborhood gossip wouldn't take about it? It must be *really* bad. Maybe even *scary* bad!

⁶ Eugene Poinc, who I hope you read about in a previous issue, insisted that, when a story involves a prop, it must come out early. Initial drafts of this script brought the key out much later, because there's really nothing for it to do just yet. But Gene was right. He almost always was.

⁷ You'll see that I do this a lot when I want an odd tale to appear true — leave plenty of room for skepticism. I do it more subtly here but more blatantly later on. For now, I'm hinting that there's something important about this bedroom and that Mrs. Schiff felt there was something important about the key. I'll build on those ideas, too, as we go.

⁸ Here I'm preempting any overly-analytic listener from wondering why I couldn't get answers from some basic research while further suggesting that Whatever Happened was so bad that even the authorities wanted it hushed up.

⁹ Not “bad reputation.” Not “odious personality” or “criminal intent.” Not “known to be an asshole.” Evil reputation! The word “evil” evokes the worst of the worst, allowing room for the supernatural, including the satanic and demonic. I use that brief pause not only to emphasize the word but also to suggest that I'm thinking about my word choice and choosing it as the most accurate term.

¹⁰ This doesn't rule out suicide, but suicide doesn't explain what's to come in the next lines. So it's implied that someone (or something) killed him in an impossible situation. Not so impossible as to ruin credibility, as a number of locked room murder mystery novels prove (if you're interested, look into John Dickson Carr), but amply mysterious.

A few days later, two of his siblings were carried away, cursing and screaming, to a mental institution they would never leave.¹¹ Shortly after, the rest of the family fled the house to new lives elsewhere, refusing to have anything more to do with the place — even to sell it.¹²

Of course, every kid on the block knew the (air quotes again) "true story." And every "true story" was different.¹³ The only thing we all agreed on was that the house was haunted. Because it HAD to be! I mean there was that eerie history and peeling paint and broken windows and banging shutters and those creepy, creaky noises though the night!¹⁴

And of course our parents all explained to us that those creaks and groans were just the natural sounds of a decaying old building.¹⁵ But one night, my brother¹⁶ ran home, out of breath, face white, teeth chattering, slamming the door behind him, too frightened to speak. He finally told us he'd seen a face, red, and silently screaming, peering from an upstairs window. My father assured him that what he saw was only an illusion, created

¹¹ Here I'm teasing the question whether these siblings were murderers or other victims, only to amplify the mystery with the next point.

¹² Moving away seems like a natural enough thing to do under the circumstances. What I describe here, though, (refusing to have *anything* to do with the house) is over the top. The implication I'm trying for is that the rest of the family thinks there's something extremely wrong with the house itself. Listeners may conclude that the Hothskellers are unwilling to pass the evil to another family, or that they're afraid *any* interaction with the property will bring evil back to them. Maybe they'll figure something else. I just want to hint that the family is terrified of the place.

¹³ Here we are back to hard core reality. This is a description of kids being kids. You remember things like this from your own childhood, don't you? So does every listener, so this line becomes a moment of relaxed tension and light humor after an intense bit of history.

¹⁴ Further hard core reality. This is what an abandoned old house is really like. But it's also what a haunted house is supposed to be like. I'm started to bring the fantasy and reality together... but...

¹⁵ This is more of what I was talking about in endnote 6, all the spooky stuff, now in the imagination of neighborhood kids, being brought back to perfect plausibility. But I'm about to do it again, ramping it up a bit.

¹⁶ Just between us, the only other bit of reality in this story. I really do have a brother.

by the reflection of nearby Christmas lights.¹⁷ My brother didn't buy it, and to this day he will not talk about that night.¹⁸

(Brings attention back to the key.)

I got the key from Mrs. Schiff's equally odd daughter, now an old lady herself.¹⁹ I looked her up on a visit to my old neighborhood hoping that her mother had confided in her, and that she could tell me the truth behind the tales. But apparently, this was the one juicy story the old busybody took with her to the grave.²⁰

She did give me the key. She seemed happy to have it out of her kitchen drawer²¹ and I was delighted to have a relic from my childhood Haunted House.²²

My brother refuses to touch it.²³

¹⁷ More of 7 and 15, but more intense. Now it's a real experience, and a chilling one, by a real person, immediately made realistic with a reasonable explanation. Creepy, but now believable...

¹⁸ ...Except that the person who had the experience does not believe the believable explanation. Not when he was a kid, not now that he's an adult. What I'm saying here is, "you and I don't have to believe there was anything supernatural, not when there's such an easy and rational explanation, but at least one presumably sane person *does* believe."

¹⁹ This is a point where a lot of attempted anecdotal stories blow their plausibility. The stories may be credible so far, but then they let the prop undercut their efforts by begging questions like, "Oh? So how did *you* come to own the pocket knife of the Jack the Ripper suspect?" Or, "How is it that *you* came in possession of the actual rope used to hang the accused witch?" I made my gaining the key as mundane as possible.

²⁰ See #5. I mean *realllly* bad!

²¹ Note that you can take this two ways: the supernatural (she was happy to get rid of a haunted object) or the simple (she was glad to get one more piece of old junk out of her house).

²² Subtly emphasizing the anecdotal aspect here, I underplay getting the key. I could have claimed feeling the hair on the back of my neck stand up when I took the key from her hand, or something about it haunting my dreams at night ever since. Nopers. To keep the story as believable as possible, it's just a cool souvenir of my childhood (so far). But...

²³ ...it effects at least one other person *as if* it's much more than that.

Now, I can't prove that this really is the key to Tobias's bedroom. But I can tell you this. My old neighbor claims that Tobias never left that house, even when the place was demolished.²⁴

(Sets key in palm and holds it to be seen) She insists that even now, with his old home as much a ghost as Tobias himself is alleged to be,²⁵ he struggles to unlock²⁶... (key has begun to slowly turn) and escape... the room where a terrifying death found him. (Key finishes turning.)²⁷

Notice that I make absolutely no attempt to solve the mystery or reveal What Really Happened. First off, if I suddenly knew the answer, it would contradict the entire story. Furthermore, what would be the point? All that matters is that something unbelievably terrible happened, something the ghost is still trying to escape. And even furthermore, the unknown is always spookier than the known. Don't be afraid to leave unanswered questions if the answers to those questions don't really matter.

Having said that, I'll admit that, as the author of this piece, I do know What Really Happened. At least to a degree. My concept of What Really Happened informed my writing of the tale, including what to leave out to maintain the mystery. But no, I'm not going to tell you. Let your imagination come up with its own explanation. That's what I want my audience to do. Honestly, it's ghostlier that way.

²⁴ Okay, now we have to get down to it. I'm still not claiming anything, but the odd old woman who lived next to the Hostskellers as a girl is. After hinting at it through the stories, after giving both creepy information and rational explanations back and forth, we come to the climax with somebody making a concrete claim that something supernatural is going on. I personally think it leads to a stronger ending for that somebody not to be me.

²⁵ One more carefully underplayed reinforcement that there are others, besides kids playing at Haunted House, who seriously believe in the ghost of Tobias Hostskeller, heralding the imminent spooky moment.

²⁶ Making it clear why the ghostly manifestation will be what it is.

²⁷ QED

Production Team

Designer & Publisher: Michael Jay

Editor: Michael Jay

Proof Readers: Gary Scott

Shaun Robinson

Scott Fridinger

Technical Advisor: Wayne Clancy

Assistant Tech Advisor: Tam McLaughlin

Based on the design of Wayne Trice

The next issue of Top Hat is due out the 1st September. If you are interested in submitting an article for publication please direct your inquiry to tophatv2@gmail.com - the deadline for submissions is the 15th August.

If you have any comments, questions or criticisms, please send them to the e-mail address above. We welcome all feedback.

PARTING SHOT:

From a performing point of view, it's a real achievement to induce the emotion of amazement, for believe it or not, amazement IS an emotion; an emotion that has been swept aside in this world of technology where people take everything for granted. So it's nice to be able to emotionally affect people in an unusual way.

-Lee Hathaway-