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TOP HAT

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This month, we have four articles from our top regular columnists. Firstly, Nigel Shelton updates us with the latest new from MagicBunny and how the Special Guests forum has built up a great success over the months. Next, Craig Browning presents the second part in his latest bizarre magic series of "Spirits Amongst Us."

Michael Saint Louis' Thoughts From Mid-West America are, as always, extremely thought-provoking as he talks on his most recent topic of building magic. This month, he gives advice on magic filming and short cards. Finally, Daniel de Urquiza shares some more of his Argentinean knowledge in "Argentinean Techniques." He teaches the half pass and double-peek control with the Argentinean touches that make it an excellent read.

That's all for this 24th edition of the ezine (2 years!) so if you have any comments or suggestions for the contributors or articles for next month, please send them to the author of the article or TOPHAT@magicbunny.co.uk and I'll make sure that they're passed onto the right people.

All the best,

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

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The Latest From MagicBunny

The Latest From MagicBunny

Website News

By Nigel Shelton



In the summer of 2003 a new project was begun at Magic Bunny. This project was to become one that would become increasingly successful and popular with a large number of members; the "Special Guest" forum.

Roughly once every two or three months, some respected professional from the world of magic (or an associated profession) is invited to become a "Special Guest" at Magic Bunny. This commitment involves visiting the forums over the course of a nominated week, to answer questions and provide feedback on a variety of topics of the members' choosing. These visits have become eagerly anticipated by the membership and their feedback is always positive and encouraging. We have been incredibly fortunate to be hosts to such an incredible wealth of experience over the past two years or so and there is always a huge amount of interest in the visits of these people.

Tora, a leading mentalist from Turkey and a world respected professional in the art of magic, offered the very first "Special Guest" visit. Tora had been a strong supporter of the Magic Bunny forums for many months and he made an excellent first choice for this project. The feedback that he offered was particularly well received and I was astounded by the depth and width of his experience. Other Magic Bunny members provided positive encouragement and Tora created a particularly high benchmark for following "Special Guests" who came to these forums.

Since the very first "Special Guest" visit, we have been honoured to play host to other celebrated professionals, each providing their own unique perspective into the world of magic. Each visitor has made an outstanding contribution to the growth of information to be accessed on these boards and we have been indebted to these professionals for their contributions to Magic Bunny. Over the past two years we have been fortunate to receive visits from Tom Cutts, Peter Loughran, Ron Bauer, the late Milt Kort, Daryl, Michael Vincent, Geoffrey Durham, Peter Marucci, Doc Eason, Peter McCahon, Duncan Trillo, Julie Eng and Peter Kessler, as well as our own band of moderators and myself.

Some of these visitors perform professionally, while others work in areas that are related to the performance of magic. Each and every one has offered advice and input that has been unsurpassed and we are indebted to these people for giving so freely of their advice and time.

If you are serious about your interest in magic, please do explore the "Guests" link that you will find at the bottom of each and every page, the information that you will find on these additional pages is quite literally gold dust. We are honoured that we been graced with the presence of these remarkable people.

Some of the correspondence that I receive in the role of "Administrator" takes the form of requests for additional visits from other professionals in the role of "Special Guest." If you do have private contacts with any person whom you think would be an ideal candidate for this project, please do get in contact with me privately and I shall set the ball rolling by making contact and finding out whether your nomination would be willing to assist in this role. Sometimes it is hard to make a suitable new contact with an appropriate person and any leads are always gratefully followed through. So, if you are in the know, please do let me know and I shall be very happy to find an even wider breath of visitors to complement the outstanding contribution already found in abundance on these forums.

By Nigel Shelton

Spirits Amongst Us Part 2

Spirits Amongst Us
Part II of Series

P. Craig Browning

It's been mentioned time and again by others, that the power of the Psychic Entertainer stems from his/her ability to demonstrate their ability at the drop of a hat. Or, as Stephen Minch once suggested "to effectively exploit opportunity as it is presented." This is one of the explanations behind people like Uri Geller, who take credit for situational opportunities such as watches stopping, people finding those slightly bent spoons or glass stems in their presence, etc. As Minch points out "there is no level of low to which a true Mentalist will go in order to bring about a desired end." To do less is to prove that you still suffer from "Magician's Guilt."

Magician's Guilt is the one thing we, as Psychic/Bizarre performers cannot afford. Granted, there are many within the magic fellowship who wish to negate this reality, insisting that all aspects of Mentalism is nothing more than a trick and should be presented that way. In my observations however, those that hold to this mind-set have never experienced the power or potential of mentalism done right. Then again, some have and the public's response frightened them so, that they have chosen to not only abandon said course of study, but discourage others from doing so. I know that I had such an experience in my earlier days of experimentation – being 25 years of age and having people see you as their guru being quite discomfoting. Probably why so many of the old timers discourage those with little life-experience from venturing into said field, claiming that Mentalism is best done by someone with a hint of gray in the hair and more than a few wrinkles on their face. That however, is a decision that must be made by the individual. There are ways for young people to present effective mentalism that is just as bewildering as what a learned adept brings forth.

Ignoring all the debates I'll assume that those reading this series are doing so because they have a penchant for delivering the impossible; the desire to be more than what the public typically equates to being "a magician." Which brings us back to our opening perspectives – the obligation of the Mentalist to deliver a memorable demonstration on the spot. The awesome reality of this idea being that anyone that's studied Annemann and Corinda all ready have it in their power to do exactly this. You need no other insights or resource. These two books alone have paved the way for hundreds of careers. Many of the personalities of our past built impressive personal empires using less than a half-dozen techniques outlined therein. The moral of the story being, stop looking for the next cool thing that can "make you" and start making yourself with what you already have.

When it comes to those impromptu situations we need little more than a working knowledge of basic billet work, some muscle reading and perhaps the convenience of Swami gimmick or cut-off golf pencil in our pockets. Granted, understanding of basic Cold Reading techniques or Psychological Force manipulations would come in handy, but they are not all so much a necessity, just a nice thing to have available from time to time.

In my book the idea of doing something at the impromptu level is taken literally e.g. I have nothing in my pockets, just ideas and routines in my head. In that the majority of us are Recovering Magicians however, I'll be gracious and yield to some of the more current beliefs, that Improvisation for magicians simply means "being prepared" and having a few simple gadgets stuffed into at least one pocket. For the working mentalist however I would suggest that you think this habit over carefully, keeping your pocket arsenal limited only to the practical e.g. a Swami Gimmick, Pocket Writing Pad & Pencil, and maybe a Thumb Tip. I also make it my habit to have a simple spiral pocket notepad (typically in my breast pocket) complete with pre-set dummy billet, a nice pen and lead pencil set and of course, a few business cards (frequently with a tic-sheet on the back). What is important to note, is what I do not have in my pockets; playing cards, packet effects (though I have been guilty of carrying "Twisted Sister" upon occasion), peek pads, special wallets, etc. The reason being, for me at least, that the public sees such things for what they are "Magic Tricks". The last thing I want them to credit me as being, is a magician. I am a Psychic Entertainer and it's my job to leave my audience entertained but uncertain if or not what I do really is a trick or is real. Let's consider the kind of circumstances we get ourselves into or, to be more concise, the appropriate opportunities for extending a demonstration or experiment.

Recently I was at a Starbucks in downtown Northampton. A friend of mine introduced me to a gent who

Spirits Amongst Us Part 2 (cont.)

happened to be a talent manager. Andrew's enthusiasm, letting the cat out of the bag, that I was into magic. This led to a brief conversation and my clarification to the man and his wife, as to the style of magic I do. No sooner did the words come out of my mouth than the man commented on his experiences with Uri Geller during his college days. The discussion following along said path, opening the door for me to present a very simple demonstration. The Spirit Key... which didn't work the first few times I attempted it. Explaining that I wasn't really up-to-par I asked him to take hold of my wrist and fingertips... sure enough, the key rolled over. I was immediately asked to get him a copy of my press materials.

Had I been thinking like a "Magician" I would have bored the poor man to death, by shifting into other bits. For the performing Mentalist however, less is more! The fact that these people saw me fail in my first couple of attempts created a kind of empathy, which made the main subject of my focus more willing to invest himself into what I was doing. That commitment being made, I was able to deliver to them a perceived miracle vs. a basic magician's trick.

The dynamics of this kind of work have been reviewed time and again by other seasoned performers like Bob Cassidy, Kenton Knepper, and Marc Strivings. When we learn to consciously create said discipline within our own character, the magic we present becomes less penetrable and our reputation as a presenter of the impossible, solidified. Sustained by that great medium known as Word of Mouth PR... which is our goal as we move along this series.

Sometimes, as Minch observed, it is up to us to manipulate and take advantage of circumstances. Such was the case a few years ago when I was visiting a New Age bookstore in Reno, Nevada. A couple was looking at books on ghosts and spirit channeling. She was the staunch believer; he was the ardent skeptic.

I'd been discussing some business with the owner of the store when the theme of their conversation caught my ear. Given the lack of receptivity I was experiencing from the owner, the given situation couldn't have come at a better time.

Casually, I worked my way into the conversation of this young couple and began giving reference to my experience with the ghosts of my estranged grandfather (poor guy gets blamed for a lot of things I do). Long story short, I was in the perfect setting for presenting Banachek's PK Touches. But I added to the scenario a bit, retrieving a couple of business cards from the convenient holder by the cash register and nesting them, blank side facing one another, after showing them such. I handed these to boyfriend, who just happened to be my mark for the other routine.

Needless to say, the business owner as well as others gathered to witness the experiment at hand. When it came to pass that good old granddad tapped the gent just as I'd done to his girlfriend, looks of amazement filled the room. When I asked the boyfriend to open up the bundled business cards he was holding the entire time, the name of his deceased mother was found with the words "I am forever with you David"... Well, let's just say that the couple no longer argued as to the validity of ghosts and spirit contact; in fact, he pulled out his credit card and paid for nearly a dozen books covering the topic.

In that I've shared this particular story in the past I'll not tarry too long going into detail. Obviously, the PK Touch sequence is readily available. The spirit message on the other hand, employs two principles; pocket writing, and Rick Maue's TOCAPADMO move (pg. 49 BHM) and his TAROT & BEYOND follow-up routine. Remember that I was eavesdropping on the couple long before I stole the opportunity. As fate would have it, their conversation gave me the perfect bit of information I needed to sell a solid spirit message. All I had to do was steal a business card or two prior to initiating the situation, and pocket write the gleaned insights.

Why pocket write?

Granted, that may be overkill in some people's books. I could have left the area and jotted down the information ahead of time. But, why risk having someone else see you doing such dirty work? With but little practice most of us can become fairly well versed in PW actions. In this case the misdirection was more than I could hope for, as was the "pre-show" material gained. Too, I've used this combination upon several occasions, when pitching a facility for my Halloween season shows. The fact that the supposed spirit writing contains personal information or thoughts not previously written down typically leaves folks speechless!

Spirits Amongst Us Part 2 (cont.)

Do bear in mind the psychology built within this routine

The Improvisational Nature of the Presentation
The Fact That I am never Near the Key Patron once All Is In Place.
The Personalized Message that Materializes in the Patron's Hands
The Reaction of Multiple Witnesses.

Quite simply, this is powerful stuff! The kind of improvisational work that will be remembered, spoken of frequently, and establish you as being more than the average Psychic, let alone the traditional magician.

It is most unfortunate that I'm so limited for space when it comes to discussing this particular topic and how it can benefit you in cultivating your character, your public image, and your career goals. The routines I've shared with you are however, applicable to the footwork you will have to do when seeking out a location for your Halloween season dates.

In the meantime, think a bit about how and when you perform your magic and what you can do to get more out of it. Consider the advantages you can give yourself when exploiting opportunity vs. showing off.

Until then...

By P. Craig Browning

Let's Build Magic!

Thoughts From Mid-West America

Let's Build Magic!

By Michael Saint Louis

Whew! If you are reading this in March, I'd like to thank the folks at Top Hat for cutting me some slack... if it's April or May already then it looks like I am late again! Aiya! I hope I make the deadline. Things are, as usual, crazy in the St. Louis Mansion. The missus and I are putting the final touches on starting (legally starting, that is) our video production business and that is keeping me pretty busy. As of yet, no one in City Hall can figure out exactly which business license we need! I figure after three wrong answers I should be exempt from needing any permits or licenses, but I also figured that the City Hall Business License Office would know which business license(s?) I would need. Shows what I know...

I'm also in the midst of getting another business project started and still am expected to show up at work every morning. Obviously, this hasn't left a lot of time for magic. I hope that sounds familiar to at least some of y'all out there. I'd hate to think that I am the only one who has to go two or three months at a time here or there without any serious magic study or practice! Of course, this will all change soon because my two and a half year old told her Sunday school teacher "My daddy knows lots of magic!" and an hour later I was agreeing to doing a magic show for the children of my church. Despite the fact that I haven't given a formal performance in at least five or six years (and I think the last one was entirely in Mandarin!), I have never done a children's show (or had any desire to!) and will be doing a Biblically themed routine (another first) I think I am looking forward to it. It at least gives me a reason to move magic from my "Things I Want To Do" to my "Things I Gotta Do" list. Besides, I can probably smooth it over by adapting my old act, right? Anyone got a good Biblical reason for me to be brandishing a Chinese broadsword? Alright, anyone know how to say "Leviticus" in Mandarin?

But out of all this confusion emerges a great article, right? The tie-in is obvious. I have spent the last six months immersed in videography.

Let's Build Magic! (cont.)

While my wife gets up to speed in modern nonlinear editing technique (the technology has advanced a bit since she graduated), I am pricing equipment, figuring short cuts and building what I can. Although not formally schooled in video equipment, the background in projection and pro-audio is helping quite a bit. Throw in magic and what do we come up with? How to shoot your own magic video! You know you've thought about producing a demo-reel or even adding your two cents on the finer points of card manipulation. But you are on a budget and you want to do it yourself, right? Luckily, it's a pretty short article so pay close attention: DON'T DO IT YOURSELF!

I'm all for DIY. That's the whole point of these articles after all! But the simple fact is that your amateur video will look amateur. There is way too much to cover (what kind of camera should I use, how do I shoot decently lit video, how do I shoot interesting video, how can I learn to edit, where can I get music, blah, blah, blah) before you can put out something decent.

Give up and focus on your magic. Save up and pay a pro or find some film or tv production students to shoot your video. You should be able to get students to produce a demo reel for you for less than the cost of buying a decent computer editing program (I know, I know there are programs out there for less than 20 pounds... they are junk). If nothing else, the time that the project would take away for your magic justifies paying someone else to do it. I realize that some of you might be thinking that I am trying to convince you to go with professional production because I have invested thousands of dollars into video production equipment. Well, all my junk is NTSC and 90% of y'all are reading this in PAL format countries 6 time zones away from me! What do I have to gain from that? I wouldn't even know what to charge someone in pounds (previous articles should have proven that I have absolutely no idea what the exchange rate is... heck, for all I know y'all use Euros!). My honest advice is this: whether you want a demo reel, a performance video or to make your own instructional your best bet is to hire film or TV production students. TV production (aka electronic media) is probably better. They'll have equipment or access to equipment, they'll have a lot more practical knowledge than you and have resources you won't (like experienced teachers to point out permits and releases that may be required). They are also usually in desperate need of resume builders and/or cash. Your whole crew could honestly cost you a couple cases of Newcastles and three or four pizzas and produce something far and away above your own efforts! Oh yeah, your demo reel might also become part of their demo reel so every time they apply for a job those TV bigwigs will be seeing you perform too!

Have I rained on your parade enough? Sorry about that. Let's build something, okay? I don't do card magic so it took me by surprise when I realized how many times I have seen the short card referenced lately. After all, I don't read card stuff! Back when I did card magic, though, I loved the short card. My favorite thing about it was the fact that it is the easiest to make 'pro' card gimmick out there. You'll need a deck of cards, a razor knife, a safe place to cut, a metal art or drafting ruler (or at least one with a metal edge) and fingernail clippers. Most of the short card is pretty obvious and printed in lots of magic books... place card on cutting surface, place ruler across card parallel to side you wish to shorten, press firmly down on ruler and card while making one smooth and continuous slice along ruler edge. Card is now short, yes? Sure, but it doesn't look right, does it? The corners are all messed up. We'll get to that in a second, but first lemme drop some knowledge on you to help you make that smooth, continuous cut.

First of all, use a sharp knife. I like to use a new blade to shorten cards. An entirely metal ruler with a corked back (sometimes are an art ruler, other times a drafting ruler) is the best ruler to use for this. The entirely metal body provides a good straight cutting guide (the wooden rulers with metal edges may not be mounted straight) and the cork backing helps grip the card so it won't scoot as you cut. It is important to really press down on the ruler as you cut! I'm a righty, so I make a fist with my left, place my knuckles on the ruler over the card and lean my entire weight into the ruler as I cut. Try your best to make that smooth continuous cut very smooth and continuous. Also, that razor knife is sharp so be careful.

It doesn't take much of a cut to put a magician on the injured reserve list for a few days! How much you trim off is a matter of personal preference, so experiment. I found that I really never had to cut much off at all...

1mm is plenty for me. Also, if your cards have a border your short card is gong to be a lot easier to notice... never cut off more than half of the border!

Now that only really leaves the corners, right? Well, what do you think those fingernail clippers are for? A

Let's Build Magic! (cont.)

sharp pair of clippers (I used to keep a set that I only used for cutting cards) will make a very clean cut. Rounding the corners is a lot easier with clippers than scissors or a knife but will still take some practice! I used to use regular adult size clippers but I am wondering if baby fingernail clippers might not have a better curve to them... Had there not been a pair sitting right here next to the iMac that may have never occurred to me...

One more thing... it is my understanding that Bikes are relatively hard to come by in Europe. If you don't have a spare deck to practice on then sacrifice a cheaper deck because your card cutting skills will be universal!

And do European decks have that extra card that advertises other card decks and books? Practice on that thing... no one ever misses that!

By Michael Saint Louis

Argentinean Techniques

Argentinean Techniques

By Daniel de Urquiza

I'm giving you here two techniques I've independently developed. They will be of use to the medium and advanced card worker. If you are not included in those categories, I suggest you still read and study this ideas. They are based in principles and criteria you may find of interest, although you were not interested in advanced card magic.

ARGENTINEAN HALF PASS

This is very direct.

I'm supposing here that you are more than acquainted with the Charlier Pass.

Well, this would be a Charlier half pass. You'll see what I mean.

Begin cutting the deck with one hand, Charlier Pass style. When the lower packet is about to surpass the top one, don't do it. Simply press together both halves, and let them fall flat in your hand.

Of course, you will have to remove your index finger out of the way.

How to use it in the real world: haven't you ever wondered why the Charlier one handed cut is called a "Pass?" Well, because it can be used as one.

Try this: do the Charlier pass, but, while doing it, point to some object in your room with your index finger, all in one motion. So. You have the deck in your hand, you begining to point, in this large movement you do your cut, finish when actually pointing.

The same applies to my move. A large movement conceals a little one.

Think of this: if you can do a Charlier Pass, you must be able to get away with a half pass, because there is much less need of movements. I have my own justification movements; I suggest you create your own physical misdirection. A hint: you can adaptate to this technique all the paraphernalia of movements developed around palming and top changing a card.

Another use: as you know, the main utility of the pass is to control a card to top. That's the principal idea behind, also, of the Charlier Pass. Ok, what if you can not only control a card to top, but also half pass the deck? That's what the Argentinean Half Pass can do for you. As you might see, there are many applications to this result, specially at the triumph kind of effects.

Another interesting application is to Ace Assembly effects. There are several variants wich use a half passed deck to do the switch, from the Expert Card Technique to the magic of David Williamson. I let other ideas to you imagination.

Argentinean Techniques (cont.)

ARGENTINEAN DOUBLE PEEK CONTROL

This is a technique I created when I first encountered with an Elmsley four aces routine. Inside the routine there was the need of controlling two selections to the top. The choice of Elmsley was a double peek control. But I didn't feel comfortable with Elmsley's proposal to control the cards. I went then to Vernon works. Studying the Inner Secrets series, I found several double and multiple peek controls. Those didn't were what I've been looking for. The same happened with other classics I consulted. So now, what?

Well, my answer was this control, and that's how it born.

It is direct, natural, uniform and coherent in appearance, and quite easy to do compared to the techniques I've found at the above mentioned sources.

So, hold the deck as to perform a classic one card peek control. Begin to do the riffle of the corners, but aiming to achieve the spectator selection and peek among the first half of the deck. To do this, simply riffle slowly. After a few cards, look at the spectator like saying: well, will you stop me or not?.

When stopped, let the spectator peek the card, and then let the card slip from your finger. You are taking your break ABOVE the peeked card, not below, as usual.

A point of interest: when slipping the card, don't do it in front of the view of the spectator. Do it while your hand began to fall down, apparently relaxed. The reason is not to conceal the taking of the break, but a more subtle one: if you don't do this, the spectator will be able to see the next card. So, he will perceive TWO cards. That it is a hazard to the later recollection of the card by the spectator. Trust me, it has happened to me. It took me a while to figure it out, so don't overlook this advice.

Then you hold a break above the first peeked card. It is hold by the little finger. If you relax your hand, and let the hand fall waist level, you would be simply holding an ordinary little finger break.

You do this, and walk to a second spectator, lift again the deck towards the face of the spectator, and ask him to peek another card. Of course, you began your riffle below your break.

Hint: to help concealing the break from the second spectator's view, bevel the deck. The bevel will hide the break better, and will help you to do the riffling of the corners.

Also, it will help you to take your second break.

So, take your second break with the ring finger, again ABOVE the peeked card.

Then, square the deck and give it a few cuts. While doing it, you get to control the peeked cards, in order, to the top.

Remember, we where holding two breaks, a little finger one above the first peeked card, and a ring finger one above the second peeked card.

Pretend to square the deck, and inside the action of squaring it, take a thumb break to replace the ring finger break, and let the lower packet, the one that was holded by the little finger, to fall free in the palm of your hand.

Now, is pretty much like a double cut control. Take the lower packet to the top of the deck, keeping the thumb break. Square it well. Then do a slip cut in the hands, cutting to the break. That's it.

As you can see, the action is very short and direct, compared to other moves in print. Two spectators peek a card. Magician squares and cuts the deck. Period.

The idea of this description was not only to give you the skeleton of the move, but the living body of how to REALLY do it.

If you don't have in your repertoire any double peeked control, this is the one to add, trust me. Others are unnatural or too complicated.

If you knew other double peeked control, you may consider to forget the previous one and use this one. Or, b), think I'm crazy, and feel pity about me. Up to you, my lad/lady.

KR
Daniel de Urquiza
AltaCartomagia
Argentina

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

Jon Snoops