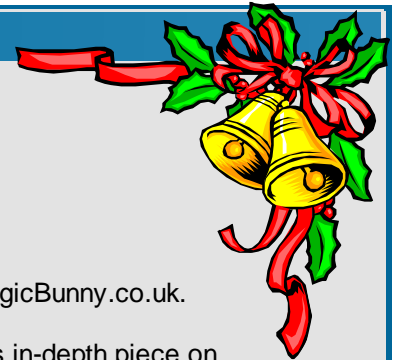




MagicBunny.co.uk

TOPHAT



December 2002 - Edition 9

Merry Christmas MagicBunny!

Well, this is the 9th issue of the TOP HAT e-zine exclusive for you, members of MagicBunny.co.uk.

This month's issue has a host of articles and effects, including Huw Collingbourne's in-depth piece on Body Magic and an effect from professional magician, Peter Marucci. Coupled with the latest news from MagicBunny.co.uk and other features, this issue contains another great wealth of articles from you, our users.

On behalf of MagicBunny.co.uk, I'd like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year. Let's hope that MagicBunny continues to grow as it has done so far.

See you next year,

~Jon Snoops~
Compiler of MagicBunny.co.uk's TOP HAT Monthly e-zine
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Contents

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

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Message From Admin



May I take this opportunity to wish all our members a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. I trust that you will enjoy the festive break and that you may return to your workplace refreshed and enthusiastic in the New Year.

I'd like to also thank you for your support of the Magic Bunny forums over the past year. The input from our active membership has caused Magic Bunny to expand at a faster rate than many other magic sites across the globe and we have well over 25 thousand posts covering a wide range of different branches of magic. That is quite some achievement for a small independent magic forum.

As a special festive treat this month, three of the four December magic challenges have been open to all our membership and the response to these has been quite overwhelming. Of special note has been the excellent feedback to the "Logo" competition and, who knows, this may lead to a change to our current "Serious Magic" banner in the near future.

The guest pages have now been uploaded and are accessible for all to view. These have received a great deal of positive feedback and have generated further interest in the "Special Guest" forum. Two leading professionals have expressed an interest in visiting the forums in the New Year and I shall give you further news about this when the final details are confirmed.

Last month saw the opening of an affiliate link to www.alakazam.co.uk from the Magic Bunny store and this has received many hits from our members. Don't forget that, if you use this link when making online purchases, the forums shall receive 5% commission that will go towards the cost of prizes, postage, loans items and various Internet expenses.

I hope that, after the festive cheer has lost its shine and the final remains of the turkey has been consumed, I may see you back on the forums discussing some of the finer aspects of the art of magic.

Merry Christmas everyone.

Best wishes,

Admin.

BODY MAGIC: From the Samurai to the Georgia Magnet

Imagine how extraordinary it would seem if one, two or three muscular men were unable to lift or to push over a small girl no matter how hard they tried. A girl who could resist such force would surely have to have some very special powers at her command. Well, wouldn't she?

At any rate, that is what the audiences who flocked to see the so-called 'Georgia Magnet' in the 19th century seemed to think. This astonishing girl (though actually there were at least two who adopted that title – one named Lulu Hurst and another named Annie Abbott) could resist being pushed over by men twice her size; and yet she could push the men over with the slightest touch! Some people thought that she made use of secret electric powers which is why she was also known as the Electric Girl.

If you want to know more about the Georgia Magnet, I strongly recommend that you read Houdini's book, 'Miracle Mongers and Their Methods'. You can download this as a free ebook in various different formats from the Virginia University E-Book Library (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ebooks/>).

Recently, some magicians and mentalists have begun to take a new interest in miracles of 'body magic' similar to those of the Georgia Magnet. When I first heard of this I must admit that I was surprised to find that so many performers considered feats such as 'unraisable body' and 'unbendable arm' to be magical at all. Well, you see, I had been practising those and other techniques for years without ever realising quite how startling they seemed to the lay public. That is because I spent many years practising and teaching the Japanese martial art of Ki Aikido. Students of this art learn techniques of 'immovability' and stability with names such as immovable body, unraisable body and unbendable arm. The techniques have nothing to do with strength. They are just as

BODY MAGIC: From the Samurai to the Georgia Magnet (cont.)



effective whether practised by a small girl or a muscle-bound man. They have everything to do with calmness and relaxation.

While I can't hope to teach you the techniques of Ki Aikido in this article, maybe I can give you a small insight into the art. If you want to take it further, I suggest you find a good Ki Aikido teacher.

Unraisable Body

EFFECT

This test can be done in two different ways.

- 1) A single person tries to lift you by grasping you beneath the armpits and pushing upwards.
- 2) Two people attempt to lift you. You stand with your arms slightly away from your sides to allow each person to grasp your wrist. On the count of three they lift.

No matter which of these tests is performed, it is usually best (more impressive) to ensure that the lifter or lifters are clearly bigger and stronger than the person being lifted. An initial lift should be permitted to demonstrate that, when you (the person being lifted) are so minded, it really is quite easy for the lifters to lift you. Then, when you subsequently 'engage the power of mind over body', it will seem the more extraordinary that the same person or persons who just lifted you easily now cannot move you. To the observer it will appear that you have mysteriously 'gained weight' purely by the power of thought!

METHOD

Students of Ki Aikido are taught the power of 'dynamic relaxation'. That is, how to become calm in mind and body while still remaining very alert (well, alert enough to fend off four or five black belts with knives – and, believe me, *that's* alert!). In Aikido, students develop this feeling through a series of 'Ki' exercises such as the ones described above. Students are told to:

- 1) *Extend Ki*
- 2) *Keep Weight Underside*
- 3) *Keep One Point*

In a rough and ready translation (Aikido purists may object to this translation – see my footnotes below), these points might be expressed as:

- 1) *Remain alert and focus your attention*
- 2) *Relax your body so and remain consciously 'grounded'*
- 3) *Try to feel your weight concentrated upon your 'centre of gravity' just below the navel.*

It would be impossible to learn this sense of dynamic relaxation from my explanation here or from a book. You really would need to be taught this in person by a teacher. However, I can at least try to convey why it helps in the performance of an exercise such as 'unraisable body'. I will consider the second version of this test – the one in which you hold your arms slightly away from the side while two people try to lift you.

How To 'Make Yourself Light'

EFFECT

Two people try to lift you. They do so with ease.

METHOD

Remain tense. Keep your arms straight and the muscles of your arms and shoulders should be slightly contracted. Getting this feeling is easy. Just do everything you can to resist being lifted. This is what most people do automatically. They will 'fight against' being lifted. In so doing their body becomes tense. The result is that the lifters have an unyielding, solid object in their grasp, with convenient handles (your wrists). If they can lift a box or chest of your weight then they can lift you. Simple physics.

BODY MAGIC: From the Samurai to the Georgia Magnet (cont.)

How To 'Make Yourself Heavy'

EFFECT

When the same two people now try to lift you, they cannot do so no matter how hard they try.

METHOD

Relax. Let your arms and your shoulders feel 'loose'. However, don't just flop like a rag doll. Concentrate on keeping your shoulders down (they shouldn't go up to your ears when the people try to lift you!). Try to imagine that the fingers of your hands are tied to the floor with invisible strings (some people find it easier to imagine that an invisible energy is shooting out of their fingertips like water from a hose). When the people push your arms, the arms should not bend or collapse. They remain straight even though the muscles are relaxed. In most cases, once you have mastered this sense of relaxation that alone is enough to prevent anyone lifting you.

How Does This Work.... Ki?

One explanation of this is that you are literally grounded by an invisible force called Ki. On the other hand, this effect can also be explained by pure biology and physics (with a bit of psychology thrown in!). The technique works just as well whether or not you believe literally in Ki.

Basic Mechanics?

Here I will consider the purely mechanical aspects involved. When the body is relaxed, each joint in your wrists, elbows and shoulders absorbs some of the energy expended by the lifters. I'm not a physicist so don't expect a precise explanation. However, just imagine how much more difficult it would be to lift a sack of potatoes suspended from the centre of an rubber hosepipe than it would be to lift a solid chest of the same weight, provided with convenient handles. The pipe absorbs much of the lifting power. The centre of gravity of the sack of potatoes is constantly shifting every which way. You end up exerting a heck of a lot of effort to very little effect. The same is true when dealing with a relaxed body. The subtle shifts and movements may be imperceptible but they have an enormous effect.

The Power of Thought or Simple Geometry?

I've always felt (I'm not sure if this is literally true, but it's a picture I've always kept in my mind when doing this exercise) that the lifting power of the two people can be made in some respect to cancel one another out. The arms of the person being lifted form a slight angle away from the side. The apex of that angle does not meet at the shoulders. To find the apex you would need to extend the 'lines' formed by the arms to just above the head. The two lifters are in fact pushing towards an angle formed at this apex, slightly counteracting each other's efforts. They are not really (as they think) pushing you vertically.

One Person Lift

OK, so what about the other type of test? One person grabbing you under the armpits? I have to say that personally I have always found this to be slightly more difficult to 'perform' than the two person lift. Many other people find it easier. My own thought is that the relative difficulty may depend upon your physical build. I am relatively slim. Most strong people can easily get right under me, brace themselves against my chest and attempt a vertical lift. When lifting people who are shorter and broader, such a lift is more difficult.

However, there are other subtle techniques that can be used to increase the difficulty for the lifter. The most obvious is to shift your centre of gravity by moving yourself towards the lifter slightly. If the lifter has put himself in a position directly beneath you, this will mean that your combined centre of gravity has now shifted slightly behind the lifter, making a vertical lift impossible.

This is just a rough explanation to some fundamental techniques. As I said easier, while there are a few little tricks (such as shifting your centre of gravity) that can help you regain control in a tricky situation, the really important technique is to learn how to relax without just going 'floppy' or 'slumped'. That, I'm afraid, is something that you can only learn from a teacher.

BODY MAGIC: From the Samurai to the Georgia Magnet (cont.)

Other Techniques...

As I mentioned earlier, Ki Aikido teaches many different type of 'mind over body' exercises that may seem impossible to explain to the untrained spectator. I've already mentioned immovable body (people can't push you over) and unbendable arm. There is also unliftable arm (you extend an arm and nobody can lift it even though you are is quite relaxed). Plus there's an exercise where someone pins your arms to your sides yet you simply and effortlessly lift your arms over your head (optionally throwing the person over your head at the same time! – don't try this at home!!!).

There's also an exercise in which you appear to make your body rigid (yes, you guess it, in fact your body remains relaxed). You are then propped between two chairs (as though for a levitation) and one or more people sit on you. Once again, this feat has a history in magic as well as the martial arts. If you have a copy of Ricky Jay's book, 'Jay's Journal of Anomalies', turn to page 189. There you will find an old engraving of a woman performing precisely this feat. She is suspended horizontally between two chairs while a man stands vertically on her stomach. The picture is of a certain Madame Gobert, known as 'La Femme Forte' (The Strong Woman).

Back to the Georgia Magnet

Actually, many of the descriptions of the Georgia Magnet's performances sound much less impressive than the techniques that are taught in Ki Aikido. Often she would hold one end of a stick while some men pushed her from the other end of the stick. Houdini astutely observed: "Her methods consisted in utilizing the principles of the lever and fulcrum in a manner so cleverly disguised that it appeared to the audience that some supernatural power must be at work." Houdini was also on the right track when he added "The jiu jitsu of the Japanese is, in part, a development of the same principles." Jiu Jitsu is in the same line of descent as Aikido from the sword techniques of the Samurai and it too makes extensive use of biological and physical principles. At heart this is all simple stuff. But to an audience, it appears to defy a logical explanation.

An Experiment To Try At Home

Ask a friend to stand upright with their arms at their side. Gently touch the centre of the top of their head. Tell them to concentrate all their thoughts at that point. Now, gently, push the person in the centre of the chest. Usually, they will lose their balance and have to take a step backward to regain it. Now ask the person to place their finger tips at a point a couple of inches below their navel. Tell them this time to concentrate all their thoughts at that point (this is the 'one point' of Aikido). By doing that alone, they will automatically feel much more solidly 'grounded'. Now, once again, gently push at the centre of the chest as before. In most cases, the person will be more difficult to move!

A Brief Guide to Some Odd Terminology

Aikido

This means 'The Way to Become One With Ki'

Ki Aikido

A style that emphasises Ki – also called 'Aikido With Mind and Body Unified'

Ki

A Japanese word which is untranslatable. I have seen it translated as everything from 'energy' to 'the Universe'. The Chinese equivalent is Chi (as in T'ai Chi). In shorthand, to do something 'with Ki' usually means to do it with absolute determination and complete alertness to everything around you but simultaneously to remain absolutely calm in mind and body

One Point

A point just below the navel which, in Eastern thought (from Buddhism to Yoga) is conceived to be the centre of the body's energies (Ki). The founder of Ki Aikido, Koichi Tohei, describes it as "a point of intersection of mind and body" and says that "mental and physical coordination is possible on when a calm of mind" is centred there. For those of you who are not of a mystical turn of mind, it is enough to know that most people, most of the time, think of 'themselves' as living inside their heads.

BODY MAGIC: From the Samurai to the Georgia Magnet (cont.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Note: I don't know if all these books are still in print)

'Ki In Daily Life' by Koichi Tohei

An explanation of Ki and how the principles of Ki Aikido can be used in everyday life.

'The Spirit Of Aikido' by Kisshomaru Ueshiba

The founder of Aikido's son gives a reasonably lucid and non-technical account of what Aikido is all about.

'Aikido With Ki' by Koretoshi Maruyama

Illustrated Ki exercises and self-defence techniques. Including unbendable arm, unliftable body etc. A good reference if you decide to study Aikido with a teacher.

'Aikido – the co-ordination of mind and body for self-defense' by Koichi Tohei

Great book for serious students. Good examples and photographs of unbendable arm, unraisable body, immovable body etc. Plus lots of way to throw your 'friends' from one end of the room to the other! What more could you want....?

Huw Collingbourne holds a 2nd dan black belt in Ki Aikido and used to run his own club in London. It's been a few years since he's done any serious practice, though, so he asks you to be gentle with him....

By Huw Collingbourne

An Early Christmas Present

I have long had a fondness for outrageous gags, puns, and such like.

The late, great Sid Lorraine was also a fan of that sort of thing and the following routine uses a punch line of his from many years back.

The whole bit will work for almost any holiday where gifts are exchanged -- birthdays, anniversaries, you name it -- but with Christmas coming up, it's especially fitting now.

THE GIFT TIE

Effect: The magi shows a colored bag that he says he got for his spouse for (whatever the occasions -- Christmas, anniversary, etc.).

As he turns the bag inside out repeatedly, it continues to change color.

As he is doing this, he says that his wife was undecided whether to get him a new computer or a new color television.

After several color changes of the bag, the magi turns it inside out one last time and reveals the ultimate bad-taste necktie.

"She couldn't decide whether to get me the computer or the TV," the magi says, "and it ended in a tie -- this one!"

Working: All right, the "magic" here is not going to give Lance Burton any sleepless nights worrying about you. But audiences get a real kick out of it.



An Early Christmas Present (cont.)

You'll need: a Gag Bag (the usual dealer item -- the Van Cleve model is one of the truly well made props in magic; it will last longer than you will, probably; dealer Hank Lee also supplies an excellent bag, with a zippered compartment in the final section, making it ideal for this handling.)

For those unfamiliar with the Gag Bag, it's a bag about 10 inches square with a colorful pattern on the outside. When you turn it inside out, the lining is red (or another color). Then, when you turn it inside out again, it becomes blue (or, again, another color) -- and so on for five color changes.

(If you can't find a Gag Bag, there are alternatives, although not as good. See Second Thoughts at the end of this column.)

And, of course, you'll need a tie -- the most outrageous, ugliest, flashy piece of neckwear you can find. Second-hand shops are best for this (assuming you didn't come across a suitable tie in the back of your own closet).

Load the tie in the inner section of the Gag Bag, reset the bag, and you're ready to go as in Effect above.

Second thoughts: As I said, this isn't mind-boggling magic but it does make a great bit for emcees, clowns, and as a short interlude for an adult magic show.

If you can't find the Gag Bag anywhere, you could use a standard change bag, showing it empty and then producing the tie on the punch line. It's not a very satisfactory alternative and I wouldn't recommend it -- but it might do in a pinch.

The effect, above, is sketchy on purpose; there are almost limitless gags that can be worked into this routine -- lines about gifts, lines about the specific gifts, lines about spouses, and on and on.

This is truly a routine that every performer can put his or her own personal stamp on.

And, after all, that's what's supposed to happen, isn't it?

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So - You want to be a Star, do you?

This is the seventh part in the "So - You want to be a star, do you?" series. Written by Nigel Shelton, this gives great advice about how you can jump the gap from being a hobbyist to a professional in magic. This section extends on last month's information about getting newspaper publicity. If you've missed any previous parts, look in the e-zine archive accessible from the MagicBunny.co.uk site.

After this, you will need to write the report. This is best written on alternate lines so that an editor may have space to make suitable alterations if any are needed. The report should be written in a clear and legible handwriting style, preferably type written. If this should cause problems then it will be necessary to write the entire article in block capitals. Black pen is best -- it can be photocopied more easily and it provides the best contrast for quick scan reading. Remember that the editor may have to read through a large number of different articles each day so the easier that you can make his job, the greater that your chances of being accepted are.

Now, there are additional things that you may like to try to improve your chances of producing a really effective

So - You want to be a Star, do you? (cont.)

article. Basically, the editor would rather submit a piece of writing without having to do too much to it. This means that, if you take some time to produce a really effective piece of writing, you may find that your article is produced in its entirety without any modifications. Obviously, this is where you can use your submission to your advantage. Before you write an article, read through other articles of a similar genre to gauge the appropriate style that you should aim for. Try and avoid deviating from this style too much. Use the passive voice and semi-formal language so that the article that you submit actually sounds as if you were reading it from the pages of a newspaper. If you do this, the editor may scan read through the piece and then submit it without any alterations. That means that you may include positive references to your performance and then find that they remain included in the final paper. This may sound devious, but it will give you a powerful voice, in a form that you have some control over.

You will also find that the inclusion of photographs will actually increase your chances of acceptance. Don't include just the one best photograph that you have. The editor will want to maintain some form of editorial command and will want to select a photograph that fits into his/her perception of the event, as well as taking into account the layout of the page. However, do not include a reel of 36 photographs, this will be too time consuming for staff to sort through. When you submit photographs with your article, select no more than four of your best photographs and include a range of different formats. Include some landscape and others portrait, include some with a single figure and others with onlookers. Include a sentence with each photograph to name the characters shown and, if the face of a person is shown, endeavour to gain the consent of that person too. You may also want to include a footnote to explain that the person's consent has been obtained – although, usually, it is assumed that if it is a formal pose, the person has given their consent by default. Check with the paper to see whether they will require the negatives of the film too. If they do, this will provide a more professional looking picture, as the photograph will be produced directly from the negative. If the negatives are required, remember to state with negative matches with which photograph.

Not only will the inclusion of a clear photograph increase your chances of the article being accepted - but it will also mean that the readers' attention will be drawn to your article too. This will only increase your opportunity to use this to increase your local publicity.

When you submit the article to the paper, it is often best to do this by hand. Walk into the office and offer the article and photographs to the reception. Offer to remain on the premises for some additional time, in case the staff wish to talk with you and question you about the material. Talk with the receptionist and get to know him/her too. In future weeks you may want to draw favours and it is better that you are known to staff and they can put a face to the name.

Good luck with your work in producing articles. If done professionally, this can prove to be a powerful way to draw attention to your work in the local community.

The next step could be to offer to do an interview with the paper. More news of this to follow...

By Nigel Shelton

Toad's Exposure!

Before you start the trick, the deck needs to be prepared.

Sort the deck into two piles; odd and even cards. (The Jack and Kings are counted as odd cards and the Queens and Jokers are counted as even.)

Place the two piles together and replace these in the box.

Method

1. Remove the cards from the box and fan the cards briefly to allow the spectators to view the faces of the cards.

Toad's Exposure! (cont.)



A brief display will mean that they should not be able to spot that the cards are in any particular order.

2. As you fan the cards, obtain a break between the odd and even cards and spilt the deck into approximately half.
3. Place both halves onto the table, face down, and ask the spectators to pick up one bundle each.
4. Ask the spectators to shuffle their half and then to replace the pack face down on the table.
5. Ask the spectators to pick up their partner's pile and to shuffle that too, to prove that there is no cheating.
6. They can then remove a card from the half that they have in their hands and pass the remaining cards back to their partner.
7. Ask the spectators to replace the card into their own pile.
8. (At this stage, there are two packets of cards on the table, each packet contains one odd card or one even card.)
9. Ask the spectators to shuffle their card into their half and to replace it upon the table.
10. Finally ask the spectators to cut the pile of their partner's cards.

Exposure

1. Pick up each pile and take your time in selecting the appropriate card from each pile. It should not prove too difficult, as you will only be searching for one odd card or one even card among a batch of the opposite value.
2. Place the cards in front of the spectators and simultaneously reveal these two magically.

By Mister Toad

Thoughts from Midwest America

The following article is submitted by Michael St. Louis. I met Michael, much as I have many other magicians, through the internet, several years back. He and I became fast friends and his writing style is something that I envy. It is funny while making a point, and humor was never easy for me. You'll find his offering to be an enjoyable read, so, enjoy!
Mike.

Disclaimer: It is important to note that there is some language in the following article that could be considered offensive. If you are easily offended, do not read this article. However, to edit anything out of it only changes the comical nature of this article, so read at your own risk, but I think you'll agree after reading it, this is a truly enjoyable article.

I've got a goody for you card guys at the end of this, but first you have to wade through my mad ranting a bit. Don't act like you have anything better to do; if you did you would be doing it instead of screwing around on the Internet anyway. Sit back, don't get huffy if you think I piss all over your card tricks and just listen, okay?

Now I know I have mentioned here and there that I don't do card tricks. That gets funny reactions. Some people assume that if I don't do card tricks I must be an aspiring illusionist (yeah, right... just hold your breath until my

Thoughts from Midwest America (cont.)

first family-friendly stage show spectacular in nearby Branson) or that I am one of those trick monkeys (well that's what I always called them) who run out to buy the newest marketed effects to appear on TV (I don't even own a folding quarter, much less a D'Lite). And some people take the time to explain card tricks and techniques to me ("You see, my obviously retarded friend, a double lift is when you pick up two cards instead of just one"). Well, to paraphrase Tom Selleck in the greatest western ever set in Australia (Quigley Down Under) "I said I don't do card tricks not I can't do card tricks."

I used to do card tricks. All of my formal magic performances have been tied heavily to Chinese martial arts so card magic never really fit in ("Pick a card, any card" never seemed to fit in between being beaten with sticks and making knives appear). But I used to run movie theaters-- small ones-- and if you have ever worked in a smaller theater you know there is a lot of downtime. Since I used to always have a deck of cards and a pair of dice with me, card tricks were the only resort when we had run out of dirty jokes and gossip. During my second tenure at a two screen art house in the suburbs I had a constant problem: the owner insisted on scheduling five minutes between shows but he added ten or fifteen minutes of previews to each film.

Every night when we had any business I would have the crowd in my very tiny lobby at 9:10 waiting to get in for the 9:00 show. Whenever I had the time (I was manager, projectionist, ticket taker and sometimes janitor, too) I had the cards or some change bouncing from hand to hand to help calm the masses. I've never owned a magic table (I'm gonna build one soon) but I have done a million tricks on that box for torn tickets! And every night after work I hit the bars. Everyone I knew slept all day and worked and played all night... movie theaters, casinos, bars and eateries are full of this night crowd and every one of us knows where to head on a Tuesday or Thursday at 2AM for a drink and some fun. Since we already had burned through the gossip and the dirt jokes, the cards came out. And I learned a hell of a lot.

But first let me talk about why I always had a deck of cards and a pair of dice. See, I used to supplement my income by gambling (and in fact for a while it was my only real income). Well, that's not really fair, gamblers take a chance; I cheated my ass off. I would use the cards for magic because they were ungimmicked (except for the odd Joker-short card) and other players could examine them to their hearts' content and find them a fair and honest deck... and, of course, they never let me deal! The dice, however, were sacred. If people get it in their minds that dice are funny they will never shake the notion so there were no dice-stacking or manipulations in my portfolio! But I bring this up to deal with yet another misconception: I cheated at cards for a living so I must be great with cards. No way. Cheating is not magic or is it artfully performed sleights and steals. Cheating is a crime and like all crimes it is ugly and cold. In a 'friendly' game of poker most of the cheating came not from card control but a system of signals between me and my partner. Same on the boats for poker but in blackjack it came down to the partner play combined with counting and memorization of a card playing system.

Now I won't say that I never controlled a card or two out of play, but most of the time it just wasn't the right tool for the job. Maybe Erdnase tore through America bottom dealing his way to riches but he would have had a way easier time finding a good partner and working out a few signals to control the betting and play!

So anyway, I learned a few things as I found cards and assembled aces between Guinnesses. The first was that most people hate card tricks because most card tricks are performed by annoying siblings and funny-smelling great-uncles and are performed badly on top of that. So I never just did card tricks; I waited for someone to ask and often waited until I was cajoled (truth is, at the time, I'd rather have been drinking and chasing skirts) or bribed with a Guinness. Everything works better with a willing and wanting audience. Second, as with all magic, your greatest tool is your mouth.

They say never do the same trick twice, but I have done the same trick for an hour straight (key-card location using a floating key determined each trick by a quick peek) with a different line of BS every time. Once you know you can do the mechanics of a trick (and \$100 worth of draft Guinness into a night and you should still be able to pull off a key card location), you can relax and enjoy the ride. In fact the only real skill from cheating at cards that I carried into magic was the ability to talk off the cuff in an entertaining and distracting manner. I learned that if you drink and do magic keep everything really simple (and drink while you practice)! And the final thing I learned from doing card tricks is that I'll never be a great card man but it really isn't necessary for what I want out of magic.

First of all, I have broken bones in my hands something like 40 times since I was 16 (I lost count in the mid

Thoughts from Midwest America (cont.)

thirties a few years ago... it's bad for magic but my gung fu has gained greatly) and they don't always work as smoothly as hands should.

I've got small hands too; I'm a big guy but I can barely palm a card. And I just don't care that much. That is a big one. I have the drive and focus to learn whatever I set out to learn, but I really don't want to practice until I can feel that I am holding 10 cards by the weight of it or even until I can smoothly pull off palming cards with my wee little hands! I learned that I can get along with all the card tricks I need or want using the double lift, glide, a couple of false shuffles and gimmicks.

I love to watch Ricky Jay but I sure don't wish I was him! Even if I did, I couldn't be skilled like him even if I devoted all my practice time to cards. Instead, I'll do everything else. I'll get good with coins and cups and ropes in the same time I could be getting good only with cards. Hell, I'm more interested in inventing and building magic than performing it anyway!

But the simple fact of it is that even my meager skills need to be practiced every now and then. So earlier tonight I was doing some shopping with Po and the Bean (my wife and little girl, in that order) and remembered in the Wal-Mart checkout line that I needed some new cards because all my cards are either gimmicked, old or cheap decks from the dollar store to cut up and experiment with. I figured that a little card practice would merge well with my plans to camp out on the couch and watch anime on Cartoon Network all night and when Po turned in (she seems to think that cartoons aren't for adults), I broke out the \$2.97 package of red and blue Bicycle Rider-backs.

And here is the goody that I promised y'all: the box is made up to look like a blue box sitting next to a red box. Follow me here: it's a box that is sized to precisely fit two decks of cards and it looks at the top flap, front, sides exactly like a deck box. A few careful cuts and gluing and you will have two three-sided shells, one red and one blue.

That's all from the American mid-west tonight. I am going to go listen to Coast to Coast AM and maybe do a few more glides. You go get a double pack of Bicycles from Wal-Mart or sit down, grab a beer and see how many times you can talk a key card location up as a totally different trick, whichever one is going to be useful for you.

By Michael St. Louis

Thanks, as always to all of our contributors. Keep those submissions coming in to TOPHAT@magicbunny.co.uk

Have a happy Christmas, and we'll see you in the New Year.

All the Best,

Jon Snoops

