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TopHat

June 2005 - Edition 39

Welcome to June's TopHat, arriving bright and early in your Inbox. The writers this month have busted their asses in getting their stuff in before a tight deadline (set by me) so I could make sure this was out on time. So special thanks to everyone this month whose work features here.

During recent weeks, and particularly the past few days, the File Sharing forum has been buzzing with activity; it seems many members have found its uses in developing new sleights and effects. It's amazing to see how many members actually post videos and comment on others. The benefits of this system are immense. By watching people's videos throughout their time on MagicBunny, you can see how people develop ideas and effects with the help and guidance of others. Many magicians do not have other like-minded people to discuss their techniques and so this feature provides them with a means of communicating their magic to other magicians. In his article this month, Tony Spallino talks a little about how useful it is to have someone around to discuss ideas.

However, we also have to think about the downsides of such a resource. A discussion is currently active in the File Sharing forum pleading for more presentation in the videos posted. It's argued that practicing in front of a camera has little reflection on the real world. Some think that having a video of a completely invisible pass on the forum has no basis for the ability of the performer. Still, the feature remains for you to use and enjoy: hopefully you'll benefit from it as many have done so far.

All the best,
~Jon Snoops~
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Every issue of the TopHat contains original effects and articles written by readers and members of MagicBunny.co.uk. If you would like to submit a piece, please email TopHat@magicbunny.co.uk

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Introduction and The Hesitant Girl

Introduction and The Hesitant Girl

More tales from Admin

By Nigel Shelton



All through their lives, most people are content with just one name - I have three. Allow me to explain a little more about the need for a second name and how the third came to be.

My name of Nigel Shelton hardly conjures up a vision of a man of extra sensory perception and psychological insight. It sounds somewhat drab and mundane and, when I began to apply my conjuring skills in the field of mentalism, I adopted a stage name as I felt it would be more appropriate for the part. My formal magical background in work begun with various sleights of hand and a number of small, well-hidden gimmicks but I found that the field of mentalism was one that adult audiences could relate to more freely. Soon, I moved from an occasional children's party magician and ventured into the dark and sombre world of adult performances, reading minds and performing feats of mental dexterity under the pretence of some inherited powers of ESP. Perhaps a few of you may appreciate the blurred move from the bright showy children's entertainer (who produces an array of colourful silks from the sleeves of his audience members) to the sombre bizarre mentalist (who is able to infiltrate a person's innermost thoughts and feelings.) Some of these effects rely on the same menagerie of gimmicks and subtle sleights of hand, although the end result is so much different. However, in common with many in my trade, I shall not use these pages to disclose the secrets of my craft – I must place bread on the table for tomorrow and the veil of secrecy allows me to continue with a task that I enjoy as well as paying my way.

Please allow me to continue, if I may, to explain how my third name "The Ghostman" came into being.

When I first began performing within the field of mentalism bookings were few and far between. I was keen to build up a name for myself and was not accustomed to the use of written contracts. I had been booked to perform an "Evening of ESP" at the Swallows Arms, Belton as part of the festivities around the appointment of a new landlord and landlady. A verbal booking had been made two weeks prior and I rang the pub the weekend before the reservation, in order to confirm the final details. I dialled the number and waited,

"Good evening," I began, "Is that the Swallows Arms? I'm ringing to confirm my visit this Friday evening."

A man's voice answered with a nervous confirmation.

"I believe I made the arrangements with your wife," I continued, "she wanted me to run through a few mentalism routines at your venue, this Friday evening. I just wanted to ring to confirm the details and to reassure you that everything is all set and ready for the night."

There was a very slight pause and then the man's voice relaxed. "Oh, sorry!" he replied, "Yes, Friday's evening is fine. I didn't realise that Brenda had contacted you – she's currently out, meeting with the removal company, please forgive me for being disorganised but there's so much happening at the moment with our change of address. Yes, I shall look forward to seeing you Friday evening and then Brenda can fill you in with all the relevant details. She's the one who deals with this – I just end up doing all the physical work." He laughed, if somewhat uneasily.

I summarised some brief details about ESP, book tests and clairvoyance and then finally the landlord checked with me that I had the correct address and start time, quickly running through some brief directions as to how to locate the venue.

Nothing that was said in that conversation led me to realise the mistake that had been made. The family were indeed packing, but not unpacking as arrivals; they were in fact making plans for a hasty exit. I had not been booked for an evening's entertainment but instead for something that was far more sinister and covert, something that I would not appreciate until after arriving at the venue later that week.

Introduction and The Hesitant Girl (cont.)

That Friday evening I drove along the country lane, at the same time eyeing the clock on the dashboard. The console light glimmered through the dimness of the winter's evening to inform me that I had plenty of time, it was six-thirty and I was nearly at my destination. I headed off the main road up a narrow winding country lane; the headlights stretched two narrow pencils of light into the far hedgerows, where the road twisted and deviated through the bleak countryside. I headed around a final corner to discover the sombre imposing brickwork of a two-story building standing alone and secluded from the main village. The car park was deserted; apart from one single car nestled snugly adjacent to the side of the pub and the only lights I could see came from a front upstairs window, behind the thin wisp of curtain material, and another from the rear of the building. Apart from these the pub looked lifeless and silent and I guessed that the occupiers had really gone to town to set the scene for the night's entertainment.

I parked my car alongside the one other in the car park, stepped up towards the main door and turned the handle – it was locked. I glanced around for a second main entrance but found none and so knocked firmly. It was then that I began to guess that something was amiss. I heard steps shuffling towards the door and the sound of a key being turned in the lock. The door opened to reveal a very uncomfortable man.

"I'm most dreadfully sorry," he began, "there has been some kind of terrible misunderstanding. Do forgive me. Please come inside and allow me to explain."

He led me around the back of the pub, into a brightly light kitchen where I saw two figures sitting at a small wooden table; a young attractive woman of about the same age as the man dressed in a pair of faded denim jeans and a light blue t-shirt and a young girl of about eight or nine dressed in a charming, but somewhat dated, party dress.

The young woman began to speak first. "There's been a dreadful mix up and I'm so very sorry," she blurted out, before clasping her hands to her face and bursting into tears.

The young man placed a reassuring arm over her shoulder while the young silent girl looked on quite perplexed at all the commotion around her.

"This was meant to be our opening evening," he began, "but we never really settled into our new home. This has been quite a most dreadful experience and one that I shall be glad to put behind."

He stroked the fleshy pad of a comforting finger across the cheek of the woman, brushing away a tear, and then continued, "This building was meant to be our future, one in which we could raise a family, but it has turned out to be our nemesis."

The small girl sat at the table and remained quiet. I guessed that this must all be quite traumatic for her, two house moves in just a few weeks and now an inconsolable mother too. My heart felt for her and I offered a brief smile across the table together with a knowing look. Her eyes caught those of mine and for a brief second I looked into her soul. She seemed so sad and alone, so confused and isolated. Then the man spoke and I returned my gaze to the couple.

"When you phoned earlier this week," he continued, "I thought that you were an exorcist or something and that my wife had contacted you to sort out this problem."

I stifled a small laugh. This was the first time that I had ever been referred to as an exorcist and the thought of it seemed so outlandish.

"It's our bedroom," the man continued, "it just seems so cold and uninviting." He paused. "Things move."

I butted in, "Move? What do you mean by this?"

The man looked me straight in the face. "I know that you must find this hard to believe but ... but ... the drawers ... nobody touched them." He continued, "When we first moved into this pub, we placed the drawers in the corner of the room in order to cover a mark on the wallpaper but when we returned, the drawers had been dragged into the middle of the room. First of all I thought it was Brenda. I thought that, perhaps, she moved them out for some reason but it happened again and again. It wasn't you, was it Brenda?"

Introduction and The Hesitant Girl (cont.)

The man turned towards his wife for a reassuring nod before continuing with his story.

"I never felt at ease in that room," he muttered, "It feels so cold and unwelcoming, as if some chilling draught is penetrating your very innermost being. Please, let me show you what I mean."

He stood up and beckoned to the door. The woman took his hand and followed in his footsteps. I pushed the chair back to stand and, as I did so, I felt the cold grip of a small hand as the young girl curled her fingers around mine. I guessed that she too must have found this most trying and yearned for reassurance from an adult figure too. The two of us followed the couple through the door, across the hallway and up the stairs. Up to this point I felt nothing unexpected or extraordinary, the house seemed as warm and as inviting as any other that I have visited and, to be honest, I felt very sad indeed that the three of them hadn't settled down in their new home.

At the top of the stairs, the man pushed open one door to reveal an empty room. By this stage much of the upstairs furnishings had been packed away and there was a eerie reverberation in the room as we stepped inside. As the couple walked to the far side of the room, their footsteps echoed on the bare planks of the floorboards and the only light in the room was provided by a single bare light bulb hanging precariously from the ceiling, casting strong defiant shadows across the four walls of the room. I tried to follow but I felt a slight tug at my hand by the young girl – it was obvious that many of the fears of the couple had manifested themselves in the mind of the youngster. I turned to offer a reassuring smile but this time my grin was not reciprocated. I looked at the juvenile face of the girl and she seemed to be truly terrified. Her face became contorted and fretful and she began to shy away, towards the open doorway, pulling my hand at the same time. I could see that this was going to become quite an ordeal for her and I didn't want to add to her panic by forcing myself to continue to follow after the couple. I let go of her hand and turned to face the far corner of the room, where the couple now stood.

"Please, if you mind, I really would like to leave now," I began, "Your daughter obviously is very uncomfortable and I don't feel at ease when she is so distressed."

Immediately, the faces of the two people dropped and their pallor drained to the palest of hues. The woman took the barest number of great strides towards the door and within seconds she had disappeared from sight down the staircase. The man followed very quickly in her wake, whispering to me as he passed my startled presence, "We don't have a daughter, we have no children. There are only the two of us living here!"

I glanced around the room and peered up and down the hallway. There was no sign of another person, no sign of the young girl at all. All I saw was the backs of the two people, heading downstairs with great haste. Very soon, I was the third person to follow them except, rather than head to the back of the building, I made my way straight to the exit and directly to my awaiting car in the car park. Within minutes the bleak structure was nothing more than a silhouette in my rear view mirror and I made sure that it would stay that way by promising myself that I would never return to that imposing, isolated building.

Since that evening I have thought about the events that happened that night again and again. Even now, every detail plays in my mind once more, like the reoccurrence of the background in some animated cartoon, and I wonder what it was about my background or make-up that allowed me to view something that I know, in retrospect, was not physically possible. Perhaps my route from conjuring into mentalism was not as accidental as I once thought – perhaps there is some tangible force of destiny that has controlled my fate. All I know is that I need to explore this area more thoroughly and that is why I adopted the third name of "The Ghostman" as I began my quest for this answer.

By Nigel Shelton

Scotch 'n Soda

Thoughts From Mid-West America

Mark Wilson's Complete Course in Magic: Scotch 'n Soda

By Michael Saint-Louis



Wow! Spring has burst on to the scene here in Middle America. Not that winter was very harsh this year, but it was like suddenly flipped the "Spring" switch and SNAP! All of a sudden it's 85 degrees and I've got to start mowing the damn lawn again. I swear, I'd pave over my whole year and paint it green if my wife would let me (Hell, I'd even cover it in Astroturf for a classy touch): I'd not allergic to concrete or Astroturf. Spring means a little less time sitting around, too. My wife and I take the girls to the playground as often as we can. It also means baseball season and that I should be out before the games working the crowds... truth be told, though, between work and children I

haven't worked out my act yet and I am a little too cautious to go out there before I am bullet proof. This weekend is a holiday, though, so I can get back to the act.

A while ago, I wrote a little piece on my cut and restored rope. I think it may have even been in the Forums.... Anyway, I was perfecting my cut and restored with a pop-off not. Not learning, not practicing, **perfecting**. I had a grocery bag and I didn't stop standing in the living room, night after night, until that bag was overflowing with popped-off knots. That's something I can do blindfolded now, though. I can do it with four pints of Samuel Smith's Imperial Stout in me (by the way, I am currently searching for the greatest stout in the world, e-mail me with suggestions). That bit is bulletproof and I refuse to go out on the street until my whole routine is that tight!

But none of this is why y'all are here. You're here to talk about Mark Wilson and his Big Ol' Book of Magic, right? Kind of avoiding it this month. Not because I am not prepared; I am. I just think I really disagree with Mr. Wilson and company this time around and I don't really feel like being negative. Next month we start paper money, but this time we have to finish out the coin stuff. all that is left is the coin in the ball of wool and the shell stuff.

I don't like the coin in the ball of wool, or any of it's variations. Never have and never will. Whoa, whoa, whoa... I know, the whole point (or at least a major purpose) of this series is to go back and discover the magic in all of these disregarded tricks. Who am I to say that this trick is no good? It's all in the presentation, right? It's the magician that provides the magic, right? I agree. But the coin in the ball of wool (or match box rubber-banded shut) burnt me once. It's **personal**. I was about 5 years old and it was the first trick that I ever had the gimmick malfunction and it has scarred me for life! I had the gimmick from my handy-me-down Hocus Pocus set. I got my match box from the trash and began collecting rubber bands. This would be my greatest illusion ever! THE GREATEST EVER! And after a couple weeks of secret rehearsal I finally was ready to perform. I even kept my scratchy, uncomfortable church clothes on through dinner so I would have a jacket on (like all the cool magicians) Calling my entire extended family together one Sunday afternoon after our big ol' family dinner, I borrowed a quarter and launched into my killer routine (okay, it was just the one trick, but I was 5 so cut me some slack). I performed everything flawlessly. I repeated: I did my part freaking **FLAWLESSLY**. I produced the matchbox and casually handed it to my aunt who proceeded to strip away the rubber bands to reveal an **EMPTY STUPID MATCHBOX!** I was so stunned I blurted out "Dammit!" and next thing I knew I was not only a disgraced magician but in trouble. Turns out though, in retrospect, nothing gets a child magician out of a tight spot like being hauled off stage by an angry parent! Later, as I tried to drool the last of the Lava Boy taste out of my mouth, I discovered the borrowed quarter still lodged in the lousy gimmick! So you see, i am never going to like the coin in the ball of wool!

My problem with the rest of the coin section is a little less personal and a little more practical. I can not for the life of me understand why the coin shell is being introduced without Scotch and Soda. It is my advice to you all that if yo wish to experiment with coin shells you disregard the expanded shell stuff in *The Complete Course* and instead pick up a decent looking Scotch and Soda set (there are a few out there) and Hampton Ridge's "25 Tricks with Scotch and Soda." Shells are expensive but at least with the Scotch and Soda you get a double sided coin and a shell and a locking shell to boot! It just seems to be a much more practical use of your magic time. If Scotch and Soda is a bit too much to invest in (and don't buy a cheap set; it has

Scotch 'n Soda (cont.)

to look realistic!), then look at an American Dime and Penny set. Same principle, same parts, just smaller! And for those of us on this side of the Atlantic, a Dime and Penny set has the advantage of using much more common coins!

I think that's about it from the US for now. I'm almost done with my pint and it is getting late and it's been a big week. My nephew was born night before last and I assure you that there is real magic in a newborn! One last thing, if anyone had picked up any pointers or practical use from our little study of *The Complete Course* or just has a funny little anecdote, please pass it on to me. I'd like to put together a little "What we have learned so far" article! Until next month...

By Michael Saint-Louis

How to Build Your Own Magic

How to Build Your Own Magic

And problems you may meet

By Tim Arends



Building your own props can be one of the joys of magic. Not only can you have the satisfaction of creating your own props and a chance to express your own creativity, but you can save a nice bit of money at the same time. You will doubtless have found entertaining effects you can build in books.

If, however, like me, you don't have room for a workshop, you might think that building magic is out of the question. Not true! You can build some nice looking props without a workbench or power tools if you know the secrets!

For example, Papier-mache can be used for making objects that need to be a particular shape. For small items, you can use modeling clay. Use the type that you bake in the oven to harden rather than the type that air dries--it will be stronger and more resistant to moisture. The thrift store can also be a good place to find items for magic.

The success of my efforts in building larger props, however, has been somewhat mixed. I was cleaning out the closet the other day and came across some of my own failures, which are shown in the accompanying picture. First, let's examine the rabbit. This is a cute effect in which two chosen cards appear at the tips of the rabbit's ears. The picture doesn't do justice to just how dreadfully this rabbit turned out!

Without power tools, one needs a material one can cut easily. I made the rabbit out of two layers of corrugated cardboard glued together, with an extra layer of poster board on top to give a smooth finish for painting. The double layer of corrugated cardboard actually turned out to be surprisingly strong--except at the ears! Naturally, they are very wobbly at this weak spot! The cardboard card case which the Rabbit holds is also not strong enough.

Corrugated cardboard is not the best material with which to build props. But there is a material that can be easily cut that is much better. Artists use a type of cardboard called matting board to frame their pictures. This is a very thick, stiff type of cardboard which can be purchased at the local framing shop. The material comes in different finishes and the most inexpensive type will be fine for this purpose. You might even be able to purchase damaged scraps at a big discount. Two or three pieces of the material cut to the same shape can be glued together for surprising strength and rigidity. Elmer's glue is the best glue to use for this purpose.

The rabbit prop could be made of two or three layers of matting board and be quite sturdy, if pieces of wood

How to Build Your Own Magic (cont.)

were glued inside the ears for added strength. If you want to try your own hand at this prop, you can find instructions for it in Milbourne Christopher's magic book, (out of print, but possibly available in secondhand stores.)

Now we come to the subject of paint. The biggest problem with the props shown is that I used tempera paint with a layer of shellac on top to keep it from running or smearing. Over time, the shellac turned yellow. A much better paint can also be had from the artists' supply shop. It is an acrylic paint that comes in tubes (my favorite brand is Liquitex). Like tempera, it thins and washes up with water, but unlike tempera, it is waterproof when it dries. Of course it's pricier than tempera. It can be bought more economically as a set rather than individual tubes.



The plastic self-adhesive shelf paper sold in some places under the brand name of Con-tact can also make a very nice material for covering your boxes and tubes, if you can find it in an attractive pattern.

The Forgetful Freddie prop suffers from the same problems as the rabbit. (This prop also came from the aforementioned book.) One thing I did which worked well, however, was to use as their mechanism a mouse trap glued to the back of the prop. The strong spring provided the action of Forgetful Freddie's head popping up and the cards appearing at the tips of the rabbit's ears. A mistake I made with these props, however, was to make them a bit large, which makes them difficult to carry. Bigger is not always better!

The milk carton trick shown in the picture is supposed to be an effect something like the passe passe bottles. Unfortunately, I used poster board for the tubes and later found that, if poster board gets the slightest bit wet, the color spots and runs! Add to that the fact that milk hasn't been sold in paper cartons in my locality for years, means that children seeing this effect wouldn't even know what they were. I'm not sure what lesson this example is supposed to teach. Perhaps that you should actually use your props before they go out of date!

The giant dice come from a real oldie—Houdini on Magic by Walter B. Gibson and Morris N. Young. Said to be from Houdini's own notebooks, the effect is that the die disappears from a hat and travels to another location. Both dice are made of cardboard, but one is just a shell. The problem is that the shell is a little too tight to slip off the ungimmicked die easily. (The dots were perfect paper circles purchased from a craft store.)

The lesson here? You are bound to make mistakes when constructing your own props. Do not let this discourage you. In fact, you may find it is best to construct many of your props twice. The first time will be a learning experience. Almost always, the second time you construct a prop it will turn out better.

As for the card stand, I don't even remember what effect that is for!

These mistakes have been followed up by many successes in prop building. Why did I show you my mistakes? Because we can learn more from our failures than from our successes. I hope that by seeing these, you can avoid making some of the same mistakes yourself.

I also hope that this article will inspire you to look at your magic books and magazines in a new light, and to start building your own magic!

By Tim Arends

Tim Arends lives in Indiana and posts to Magic Bunny as "Cybernettr" (a nonsense word he made up). He can be reached at cybernettr@aol.com or timarends@aol.com.

Life or Death Part I

Life or Death

Part I of Series

By P. Craig Browning



Recently I was drawn into a couple of those on-line *discussions* concerning the validity of things Psychic, Paranormal & Surreal. You know the kind, where all the magicians are putting forth the company line e.g. *it's all fake and anyone that believes in anything like that is cracked!*

Have you ever stopped and pondered, if but for a moment, how ugly that statement is. Especially in the mind of a layperson who happens to have a somewhat religious/spiritually based life?

In the past decade more and more ministers of various denominations have started discouraging young people from learning anything to do with magic. It has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that we practice *the art of deception* and tons to do with that *company line* noted above. More and more "magicians" feeling it their *obligation* to disbelieve in anything "supernatural" including God. Let's face it, if you're a "Skeptic" that's adamant about the falsity of Psychics and the existence of things Miraculous, you can't exactly exempt the prophets, heroes and messiah types of any world religion from said little box. After all, that whole water to wine thing can be done by most anyone familiar with a Lotta Jar and there are records far older than the New Testament of Egyptian and even Babylonian Priests who could both, walk on or part the waters of various rivers or lakes or small seas, in order to retrieve lost articles. We can even find a plethora of Sun Gods & Goddesses who were immaculately conceived. Hell, Zeus knocked up at least a dozen Virgins all on his own, taking on the form of this or that critter... it would seem the molestation of young girls was a common thing for the High Lords of the Heavens to do, regardless of which culture or faith you were dealing with. So it's rather obvious, the church itself is one of the greatest lies told the whole of humankind — just another con we skeptics need to expose and educate the world on. Right?

"Ouch! You really shouldn't slander someone's religious ideas like that Craig!" Comes the cry from the hypocrites alley.

What the heck do you think you're doing when you attack Readers, slander Mediums, and place everyone that believes in such things into the same little niche basket?

Like so many skeptics, I too paint with a very broad brush at times. My experiences and eye-witness accounts of how certain aspects of organized religion operate has seriously calloused my heart and tainted my ability to ever trust anything calling itself clergy. I've watched the hustle and the behind the scene duplicity for far too long and believe me, 95% of it all is pure con... especially here in the U.S. Then again, the prophets said that the institution would fall from God's grace as we came into the latter days of time... brother, were they ever right!

Ironically, many of the world's skeptics find it convenient to omit anything and everything allied with Christianity and for that matter, Judaism and Islam to a significant degree, from their inclusion about things that are of the miraculous being fake. After all, one must keep up the appearance of superiority and therefore their acts of exploiting and debunking must likewise preserve the pristine image of church authority and its exclusivity to "genuine" acts of prophecy, divination, healing, visitation, et al. Too, as we discovered during the days of the Inquisition, it's perfectly fine for these iconic institutions to use the arts of deception so as to discredit any rival tradition or belief... just put a little spin on those old Moses-based laws when it comes to *bearing false witness* against those that do not adhere to our own way of life.

The bottom line is very simple, you'll not find genuine integrity in any line of business whether it's religion or something dealing with Wall Street — corruption and the philosophy of taking the public for everything you can, is one of the few constants in the Universe... at least in the Westernized European ways of this earth. That could be why some of the wise ones of old encouraged us to use the same exact rule of measure towards all issues and circumstances, when we attempted to judge and/or compare. Sadly, few ever attempt to deal with "things" on such a fair and impartial level. Especially from within the magic fraternity. Our bias stemming primarily from our egos — the idea that magic could be "real" and some sacred guru sitting on a mountainside really can manifest "miracles" — the kind of which we can but dream of, is just too

Life or Death Part I (cont.)

much for many of us to bare.

I can assure you of two things based 100% on my own experiences in life; miracles are real and do happen; and too, there are a heck of a lot of dangerous *con artists* and *fast talkers* in our world waiting to exploit the gullible.

I know, it sounds as if I'm contradicting myself. I'm not, but it sounds that way.

Many years ago I was involved with the family of a dear friend that lived in Los Angeles whose former in-laws were involved with a rather large "cult". At first he thought nothing of the fact that his son was being exposed to the church via its Scouting program, Sunday School, etc. But then he began to notice that the boy had absolutely no sense of socializing outside the church itself. He was quite literally being "programmed" and robbed of his freedom of choice.

To make a very long and sorted tale a bit more brief, it took a team of seasoned Martial Artists, most of whom were former Vietnam Vets and/or members of the famed Hell's Angels motorcycle club, to kidnap this boy from the private grounds (compound) owned and heavily guarded by this particular group. This action coming as the end result of a very ugly series of court encounters, the cutting of brake lines, verbal and written threats on people's lives (including the son's), et al.

This was my *initiation* — my baptism of fire — when it came to the world of Dangerous Cults and Psychic/Spiritualistic Fraud. It would not be the last time I'd be looking at the horrors allied with such things, let alone the level of brutality these people are willing to go in order to preserve their hold on other people's lives (as well as their bank accounts), and to perpetuate their course of action. This particular episode being one of two such encounters I'd know while living in Southern California. The second of which would be the first time I'd encounter actual *hate crimes*, complete with burning crosses in the front yard and my favorite pets murdered... *all in the name of God*. After all, these were both "good Christian" organizations we were dealing with, not those evil Pagans or New Age types.

In all fairness, two of the other life & death investigations I found myself dealing with involved non-Christian groups. In fact, both groups were of the neo-Pagan variety. One based in Northern California and the other in Las Vegas. The latter of the two being the single most dangerous group I ever had the privilege of dealing with. The antiquity of this group, the fact that it centers around a legitimate family legacy (that I happen to belong to, in fact)... well, all of it reveals the kind of organization very few skeptics will ever be able to infiltrate. For those that have concerns about the Illuminati type conspiracies, this group is one such family! [NOTE: There was one other Fam-Trad situation in Northern Nevada but it did not become nearly as violent as this one.]

For reasons that should be apparent, I can't go into details about these investigations. In some instances there are still pending factors afoot and too, just because I've moved some 2,000 miles from where things originally happened, it doesn't mean these folks can't reach out and "touch" me. In that I really am the world's biggest Winnie when it comes to physical violence, I choose self-preservation via creative editing, so to speak. Hope you can understand and accept this.

I've helped shake down several groups and questionable operations over the years. Frequently working in tandem with law enforcement agencies in each community. What I've discovered through the course of these actions is a far cry from the things we are told about in the books and articles composed by all those armchair experts. The real cons, especially those operating as *Readers* and *Mediums*, are typically part of a very large family group. Ironically, most tend to be Hispanic in today's world, though you will find other nationalities (including the classic Roma/Gypsy clans). These people tend to target their own i.e. poverty ridden, poorly educated, and religiously dependent (superstitious) members of the Hispanic and Black communities. Depending on what part of the world you're in (or the U.S. as the case were) you will find that most of these family groups exploit people's belief in Evil Spirits, Folk Magick, Voodoo, etc.

Yes, there are other "target" groups preyed upon by these "Fam-Trad" networks. This includes the young and naïve new to the world (college & high school aged young people); white's of lower education levels who come from a heavy religious background (again, superstition and fear are the key); Senior Citizens (especially those who live alone); and of course, the generally gullible and desperate. Ironically, if you look at the world of Televangelism, this is the same demographic they tend to target. You see, FEAR and GUILT

Life or Death Part I (cont.)

are two of the charlatan's favorite cornerstones from which to build a campaign. The other of course, is the sell of false hope. An area that many a business has been founded upon including aspects of the International Pharmaceutical & Insurance Industries, Gambling, Health & Beauty Spas, Politics and countless Religions.

I know, my crass points of view make it seem that everyone is out to take advantage of everyone else.

Guess what... **THEY ARE!**

There's not one person that goes into business, regardless of the kind of business or even vocation we choose, in which some level of exploitation is not used. The marketing and sales worlds that I grew up in are constantly looking for that *chink* in the consumer's armor that allows us to take the greatest advantage. Right now that happens to be the human ego and its insatiable appetite for self-adornment; be it clothing, bling-bling, or "toys". You may consider it splitting hairs, but we all volunteer to be taken by one kind of charlatan or another. As to the extent by which we are "taken" is entirely up to us as individuals. This is the reality of life... at least, in the whole of the so-called Westernized "Culture".

Keeping things in focus on the whole Psychic/Dangerous Cult theme however, the reality that we all must face is that not all people working the Shut-Eye Consumer Market are crooks. You will find them wearing various cloaks, including that of Catholic and Protestant minister or, as the case may be, the more politically and culturally motivated Televangelist. After all, not all cons involve money. In fact, most involve Power vs. monetary advantage. The tale of the *Three Musketeers* is a classic example of how a cleric's lust for power and political influence entailed a great deal of espionage and cloak~n~dagger type intrigues. Granted, we live in the early 21st century there certainly aren't any corrupted Bishops or Evangelists out there trying to exploit public fears and phobias and place "their men" into positions of influence... we have nothing to be concerned over...

Yea, I have chills go up and down my spine every time I consider such things too. But we are talking about the world of the con artist. The most dangerous kind of con artist are those empowered by conviction and the dogmatic belief of self-righteousness and piety, of the likes don't exist. Yet, these would be *masters of subterfuge* have learned how to sew their agenda — their dream, as it were — into the minds of others. Like the tableside charlatan the magic world keeps picking on and pointing to, these individuals of position create a symbiotic rapport between members of the populace and themselves. To do this, they appeal to humankind's lesser states of conscience; fear, bigotry, ego, greed, and the delusion of organizational or even racial, supremacy. Essentially we are talking about all the ingredients that go into the make-up of a dangerous "Cult" or newly forming Reich, as it may be.

I know, I keep taking this article to a much more broad sense of perspective than we, as a fraternity, would normally weigh when it comes to the idea of fakes, frauds and phonies. The reason is relatively simple as well as logical (at least to me)... there are things in this world far more dangerous than Auntie Clara doing Tarot Readings in the local Tea House or some old Witch brewing healing ointments and love potions in her kitchen. That's not to say that we shouldn't be concerned about these lesser evils. At the same time, we need to stop allowing those lesser issues to misdirect us from our *obligation* to the greater whole — the public element the Skeptic's associations of the world keep claiming that they're out to protect and enlighten.

In the shut-eye community there exists those "Watch Dogs" (elders) who quietly observe things. They are aware of the local Spiritualists ministers using billets in their Sunday Services just as they are aware of those opportunists that tend to be exceptionally predatory. What's interesting is that in a very quiet and subtle way, they have ways of keeping such things in check. That's not saying that they put an end to the practice, only that they steer "the innocent" away from such things as they can and even strive to educate the public in their own peculiar mode of course.

In recent years, say the past decade, there have been more and more instances in which true professional Readers that are 100% shut-eye and unaware of the tricks & whistles used by magicians/mentalists, are speaking out at higher profiled media levels, when it comes to those who exploit the consumer along the line of what we've mentioned previously; those self-proclaimed Voodoo Priests & Priestesses that offer to sell spells, casts curses, heal the blind, raise the dead, et al. The scream that is coming out of the shut-eye realms is that ***these individuals are destroying the legitimate side of the craft for those who sincerely wish to help the individuals that come seeking help, answers and direction.***

Life or Death Part I (cont.)

As the opening installment to a new series, this article has taken us from the large to the small of it all. In the next few issues we are going to take a look at the various sides to honest Psychic work as well as Debunking actions. There are right and wrong ways to do things, issues that must be weighed, and responsibility that must be assumed by those that would step up to the plate and initiate a legal and justified shake-down of an operation. One of the biggest things that must be weighed however, is our motive in doing this kind of work. Are we stepping up to the plate and harassing the local Readers just because Ian Rowland told us how to do it in his comprehensive guide to Cold Reading? Are we simply seeking to be a jerk and give someone a hard time so that we can feel superior about ourselves? Or, are we honestly investigating someone that is suspected to be running deliberate cons and ripping off members of the community or worse, "possessing" people at such a significant psychological level, that they (the Reader) literally controls the lives of those who pay homage to them?

There are many things about the Psychic Issue Mr. Randi and the CSI Cop type never address or have the ability to explain. Granted, they have the skeptic's favorite "out", a little word known as "Coincidence" which, in the real scientific and metaphysical world DON'T EXIST! It's a hypocritical cop-out NOT an explanation! I can assure you I've seen and experienced many things no magician can replicate under the same exact conditions. As a Reader with over three-decades experience under his belt, I've had things come through during private and even public sessions, that defy all the classic explanations of the magic and skeptic's community. Fortunately, I'm not alone when it comes to such things. Like myself, the many others who live and work in both worlds (that of the believer as well as that of the magician) are realists. We don't buy into *boogymen* or *Easter Bunnies* but, we know that the analytically minded have their short comings and little cons as well. It is somewhere between the extremes found in the world of the Believer and that of the die-hard Skeptic that the genuine truth exists. For, from what I've seen at least, both sides of the issue are correct... at least in part.

We are all familiar with the idea that *the magic of our ancestors is the science of today*. But in my opinion, the idea of magic is little other than an alternate term meaning "Science" and we're only just now coming into the position of rediscovering and reclaiming knowledge our long forgotten ancestors once knew and employed in the days preceding the Dark Ages... maybe even prior to then.

With that in mind, I'll leave you to dwell on things until next we meet.

Until then!

By P. Craig Browning

Custom Mouth Coils

Custom Mouth Coils

The make-at-home approach

By Peter Marucci



This is probably more trouble than most people would want to go to but, if you need mouth coils in a special color (as I do) or a special length, this works.

First get sheets of tissue paper in the desired colors.

Then cut the paper into strips about two inches wide and then glue the strips together end to end until you have a long strip, two inches wide and (in my case) about 15 feet long.

This is very important: Wait until the glue dries, otherwise the paper will stick to itself and ruin the coil.

When the glue is dry, begin to roll the strip around a Magic Marker or some other dowel-like thing, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter.

When finished, you will have a roll two inches wide.

With a razor blade or very sharp knife, cut about three-quarters of the way through the roll, starting at one side (that is, not at the open ends).

Custom Mouth Coils (cont.)

Bend the roll at the cut until the two sides of the back meet; then put a small piece of tape on the top and bottom of the roll, to hold it together.

You should now have a roll, folded in half (but cut three-quarters of the way through). If it were cut all the way through, you would have two rolls, about an inch wide each.

On the side where you made the cut, pull out about half an inch of the inside of the roll (you should be able to find the start of the coil on the inside). This will provide a "tail" for you to pull on and draw the coiled strand out to its full length.

The final length will be a little shorter than the original 15 feet, because the coil is curled and, therefore, not quite as long.

When starting, it may take up to 10 minutes to make each coil but, as you get better at it, you should be able to make each coil in a couple of minutes.

Make at least a dozen at a time, just to save having to set up all this stuff every time you need a coil.

I don't know if this is particularly cost-efficient (it probably isn't, because you can buy a dozen coils from any magic dealer for about \$10 or \$15) but, as I said earlier, if you need specially designed coils – for birthday parties, or holidays -- you can make these to suit your needs.

SECOND THOUGHTS:

While they are called "mouth coils", it's not a particularly good idea to pull them out of your mouth.

First of all, if you are doing kids' shows, you don't want to give the kids the idea that it's all right to put foreign objects into the mouth, or pull them out.

And, most important, no matter who you are doing this for, pulling something out of the mouth is just downright unpleasant-looking for the audience.

Some people may disagree – but there are also some people who say Brad Pitt can act, too!

By Peter Marucci

A Time and a Place

A Time and a Place

Thoughts on Circumstance

By Tony Spallino



In my life, I have almost no friends who are magicians. (Not offline, anyway...) So it was a relief when I met Bob (whose name has been changed to protect the innocent). Bob is a magician also, although we tend to specialize in different things. We get along great and have had many a jam session where we've both come away with lots of great ideas for things we've been working on. We share the resources we have regarding magic and performances. But, with all this, there seems to be one problem.

Bob will practice his slights often. Now this by itself is not a problem except he will do it in full view of a group of people. I've watched him many time practice bill switches, changeovers, and manipulations in full view of groups of adults and sometimes kids.

He also has a tendency to show effects at some of the worst moments to perform. We were at a lunch with several other people. He was talking about something new he was working on. Bob had two people to his left (one of which was me) and someone sitting in front of him. This effect required him to keep the back of a card hidden until the right moment. Since he was pretty much showing the effect to the person in front of him, the side view became wide open! I don't know if the person next to him saw it or not, but I could see it and I was sitting two people away. He wasn't 100% comfortable with the move and he had told me that from the beginning of the conversation. An announcement from the front podium also interrupted the flow of the effect, which really didn't help matters any.

We were at a party with some friends from work. Now, I'm not much of a drinker so I tend to just have one or two, especially early in the evening with some food and that's about it. Bob decided to have a bit more

A Time and a Place (cont.)

than that. It gets late in the evening and a mutual friend of ours suggests he does an effect. Let me tell you...when you've had a few drinks is not the time to do an effect such as Ambitious Card. one effect followed another along with announcements from those present as to how what he was saying wasn't matching up to what he did. "He said the card went into the middle, but he stuck it near the top!" and "He didn't shuffle that very well." This was in addition to the effect that got totally screwed up and had to be aborted in the middle.

My point here is not to tear Bob down. On the contrary, I value his friendship and his abilities as a magician. We've shared a lot that I normally wouldn't be able to under other circumstances. My point is to address the idea of *appropriate* practice. Nobody in their right mind will say that a magician shouldn't practice. On the contrary, I believe that we should practice any chance we get. But it has to be done the right way. We talk a lot about how we practice but not when we should practice. What are the best circumstances for practicing?

This is a question that will vary from person to person. Obviously, when we are in our own houses, perhaps watching some TV or devoting ourselves to a practice session is a great time for practicing. But, what about other times? People are more aware than we sometimes give them credit for.

Practicing slights is fine, but keep in mind that people will be watching you. When you're talking to someone and both his hands are flipping a coin around or folding and refolding a dollar bill, someone's bound to notice!

Even if they don't know why you're doing it, they will still see it. This is a half step away from exposure.

I've been known for practicing my palms during everyday situations. I'll practice in the middle of a store while grocery shopping and practiced while giving students a test. I'll walk around the room and keep coins palmed, even switching between different palms as I pick up books, papers, and pencils. So what's the difference here? I've already accomplished these palms. I'm just reviewing. Plus I'm making my best effort to keep things totally out of view of someone. I'm not doing something new right in front of their face. People are a curious lot and they will watch you if you are doing something unusual in front of them.

What about when to try out a new effect? Again, we talk a lot about knowing an effect inside and out before showing it to someone. This is a key piece of advice that needs to be followed. But, it should also be considered what is the best environment to do the effect. If you're not 100% comfortable with the effect, why would you do it when your performing conditions aren't at their best? If your effect requires you to keep aware of certain angles, don't show it if someone is sitting right in that spot! Pick your opportunity. If your environment isn't prime for an effect, either do a different one or wait for the chance to present itself. You shouldn't risk exposure for the sake of "test driving" an effect. If you've already mentioned that you need to practice it a bit more before you even get started, it seems that people will be on the lookout for something to go wrong. You've planted that seed of doubt before the effect begins.

Last, but not least, please...please...please.... if you are not in control of your body, don't try to do an effect. This kind of magical drunk driving can only lead to disaster. I'm not talking about a drink or two. Personally, I'm not against having a drink or even of getting drunk on occasion. But when you've tied one on is not the time to pick up a deck of cards and start finger-flinging. Your dexterity has been hampered, your thought process is way low, and it's much harder to make the routine flow. Your chances of messing up the effect have just increased dramatically.

This basically comes down to awareness over your performing environment. You have to be in control, and if you're not in control, then look for the opportunities that will give you the best chance of pulling off an effect.

If you're not at your best, for whatever reason, then wait for a better chance. Don't take the risk of doing an effect badly or possibly exposing an effect just because you (or someone else) wants you to do an effect right then and there.

Nobody's perfect, and I'm as guilty of bad judgment as much as the next person. By keeping your environment in mind you will find that you will increase your chances of successful entertainment as a magician. Be sure to pick your chances and maximize your success.

By Tony Spallino

An American Magician in London Part IV

From the Desk of Michael Jay
An American Magician in London Part IV

By Michael Jay

THOUGHTS



Start with a coin hidden in your hand...

Start with a card upside down on the bottom of the deck...

Start with a billet secretly finger palmed...

How often do you read that at the start of an effect that you're trying to learn? They never tell you how to get there, only that that is where you need to start. Drives me absolutely crazy. At the end of this article, I'll tip one of my pet effects to you. In this case, I'm not going to tell you how to do it, but I am going to tell you how to start. For anyone interested, I'll tell you where to find the explanation of how to do the effect, but in that explanation, you'll not find out how to start. So, between my handling and the book that has the effect, you'll have a whole trick.

AN AMERICAN MAGICIAN IN LONDON PART IV

England is orange. I know, because when I looked out of the airplane's window, I could see lava flows. Bright, orange, writhing flows of lava. It was night time, the clouds were heavy in the sky and we were over the top of those clouds. At different points, the clouds broke in small areas, and I could see all the way down to the land below. As the clouds swirled around, it gave the illusion of movement to those orange flows. They were the street lights that line the hamlets, towns and cities of England - little orange lamps that light the night. Yes, England is orange.

I was in London just short of a week prior to my engagement at the Magic Cavern. It was in this time that I met another performer for that evening, "The Doctor of Magic." Doc turned out to be a young magician of strong conviction where performing is concerned. Having a plenary background in stage magic, Doc is well spoken, intelligent and has a keen sense of humor. He is also a collector of fine props, like cup and ball sets that are displayed behind glass in his home. Doc is also a hospitable host, making me feel very comfortable in his home, when I got the chance to sit and chat with him over tea, later on in my stay.

Between Doc's hospitality and the kindness that was showed me by Ralph and Betty (Gary Scott's folks), I can safely call London my home away from home. Words fail to express my deep appreciation for all of these fine people.

During the days and evenings before that night at the Magic Cavern, I helped Gary to work through his debut of "Alucard Van Horn." Alucard is a bizarre presentation of a dark individual, with a Transylvanian accent, reminiscent of a vampire. And, I have to tell you, the presentation that Gary was working on was very much an obsession for him. Gary constantly poured over music that fit the mood of Alucard and we both obsessed over presentational factors, like angle problems, candle lighting problems, book burning problems and so many little details that separate an exceptional performance from a semi-okay performance. To say that Gary has a strong commitment to this art is an understatement. I'm also proud to say that I had a part in the creation and polishing of this fine presentation, which went down quite nicely on that night at the Magic Cavern.

Early in the evening, the day of the show, we gathered up our props and called a taxi. The cab driver grabbed our bags and hurled them into the trunk. I just about had a heart attack, knowing that we had glass and other breakables in those bags. Pushing the man out of the way, I finished putting our equipment in the taxi. What is it, exactly, with people handling baggage that they feel the need to throw things about so carelessly? It's almost as if they are taking out their entire pent up frustrations on those poor, helpless bags.

An American Magician in London Part IV (cont.)

The Magic Cavern is a small theater, located in the basement of a pub. So, we show up at the pub and wait for the owner/producer to arrive. Gary Scott, Doc and a gentleman that I don't know yet - Jonathan B. - and, of course, myself all sit down to have lunch. It is here that I get to talk to Jonathan and get to know him a bit better. And, of course, I have a Guinness...Okay, I had two.

Once the owner arrived, I signed some papers for him and we all went down stairs to do some pre-show work, check the lighting and so forth. I got my opening act prepared, so that the lighting would be appropriate, and we did a cursory run. Without some real practice time, though, there are no guarantees that things will go as planned (that's called foreshadowing to anyone who's paying attention...). I was the final act for the evening, the "headliner" as it were. Folks, I'm no headliner.

Everything was set and people began to file in. During my down time, I was able to go up to the pub and have another Guinness. It was at that time that I met Sam X and his lovely better half. We talked for a bit and shortly thereafter, I was informed that it was time to go downstairs and brace for the impending show. Unfortunately, being the last act, I was stuck backstage (which is completely hidden from the stage area, itself) and did not get to enjoy watching Doc, Jonathan and Gary put on their performances. I still feel ripped off, as a result.

Gary introduced me and the music started. This was the first problem. From where I was standing, waiting to make my entrance, I couldn't hear a word that Gary said and I couldn't hear my music start. When I walked out, I was behind the music and not altogether sure where I was (the prompts in the music that I use are very subtle).

My opening routine, set to music, finished off with a dancing cane. Originally, I was supposed to have a dark spot on the stage that I could stay in while the cane danced. Unfortunately, the spot wasn't there. As I tried to find a useful spot, I knew that the music was getting away from me. Also, I could see flashes and I knew that if I could see flashes, then so could the audience. If you are not familiar with the dancing cane, the flashes that I'm talking about give away the gaffe and completely ruin what appears to be a very magical happening. As a result of trying to keep to the music, find a reasonable spot and keep it all together, I lost the balance of the cane. It began to fly in the air, wheeling about in an insane fashion. When it hit one apex, I realized that something could go terribly wrong and the cane would fly off, into the audience - not something that I wanted to deal with.

So, I cut that part very short and did the best I could to simply dance with the cane held in hand, until the music finally quit. Jon Snoops would later comment, "I never saw a dancing cane do THAT before..."

The rest of my act was pretty much stock effects, for me. To my way of looking at things, the stage is basically my living room. That is how I approach my shows - "welcome to my living room." So, I like to talk with my audience and get them involved. I feel that it makes for a much more intimate show and I did what I was supposed to do, I entertained my audience. I won't go into a lot of the fine detail, since this article would go on and on for pages upon pages. Suffice it to say that there were a few other technical problems that, for the most part, I got past. And, again, my audience was entertained.

Nearing the end of my stay, Gary and I traveled to a town that is near the home of Andy D. Andy picked us up from there, and we traveled farther up north, to Blackpool, where a massive magic convention was convening. This was to be the culmination of my stay in England - the Blackpool Magic Convention.

Now, I could write an entire novella on these few days that we spent in Blackpool. I met so very many of the people that I've come to know and respect on the boards of MB, that they are too many to list here. So, I'm going to hit you with some of the highlights and, if I miss out on anyone, please forgive me.

Andy D. does magic for his own enjoyment. He is a bit apprehensive to show magic to anyone, because he is worried about messing up. However, there is one magic trick that Andy did, Sunday evening in the hotel that we stayed at, that I will always remember. Gary was sitting across from me, and Andy was at an angle to both Gary and I. We were waiting for the pub to open so that we could have a night cap, when Gary, tired of waiting for a bartender to show up, stated, "I could really use a diet Coke about now." Andy spoke the magic word, and there it was, a bottle of diet Coke, full, unopened and out of nowhere. Gary's jaw,

An American Magician in London Part IV (cont.)

along with my jaw, hit the floor. We were both at a complete loss. Where and when Andy had picked that damn thing up, nobody but Andy knew. Far as I'm concerned, it was real magic - magic of the masters. Well done, Andy.

Saturday evening, we sat in the pub (Andy had gone off to bed, the old git) and were met up by Will (Magicwill), Mike (MagicMike) and a friend of Will's and another friend of Mike's. The half dozen of us talked and showed magic, all the while drinking, and drinking a lot. The night is much of a blur to me. In fact, the next day, I didn't make it up in time for breakfast and, after I finally did get up, I found that I had to go back to bed and get some rest. Man, I'm just not as young as I used to be.

At some point in the weekend, Andy had managed to find this little electronics shop. Out of all the gadgets and gizmos, Andy zoomed in on one item in particular. It was a little black gadget, attached to a key ring, and when the red button was pressed, it made a "raspberry" sound. The British readers will recognize the sound that I'm talking about, it's the sound that is made when someone on "Family Fortunes" gets a wrong answer. Andy bought the thing, showed it to Gary, and we all went to the store and picked one up. So, here's these three grown men, walking down the street, making these "AH-AHH" sounds. Andy kept his in his front trousers pocket and, by lifting his leg high (reminiscent of Monty Python sketch, "The Ministry of Silly Walks") he could make his gizmo go off at any time.

During the Sunday evening show, the headliner from Las Vegas was talking to the audience. All was silent. As he was introducing his next trick, Andy tried to position himself a bit more comfortably. The Vegas magician said, "When I was young, I won first place in a ballroom dance contest..." At that very second, out of the silence rang, "AH-AHH." Andy had accidentally hit his red button. Gary absolutely lost it - he had to walk out of the theater to regain his composure. I came very close to following.

I guess that it wouldn't have been quite so funny had Andy not admonished both Gary and I to make sure that we didn't set our gizmos off in the theater...

In my next article, the final in this series, I will go over a few other events that highlighted my time in England. Until then, I will leave you with this, as promised in the beginning of this article:

THE APPEARING COIN

If you have a copy of Bobo's "Modern Coin Magic" then you will be familiar with making a coin appear from between two cards. The trick explains to start with a coin hidden in your hand. The question is, how do you start with a coin hidden in your hand?

The following is my solution to this problem.

If you carry a deck of cards on you, you can do this impromptu with short sleeves (or long sleeves, but it is more convincing if you have short sleeves). This set up can also be used in table hopping.

Simply have the coin already loaded into the box that holds the cards, to the very bottom of the deck. As long as you keep the deck going the same way in the box every time, this is very easy to do. For example, when I carry a deck of cards, the faces of those cards always goes to the side of the box that has the tab on it. Whenever I open the box, I know that the cards are face down in relation to my hand. So, when I pour the cards out of the box, backs up, the coin will slide right out of the box onto my hand, underneath the cards themselves. At that point, I have the cards sitting on my hand with the coin easily hidden underneath. From there, I can go into the coin from the cards, as per Bobo.

And, if you don't want to start with that coin trick for whatever reason, simply pull the cards out with your fingertips, rather than pouring them into your hand. The coin stays behind in the box - no worries.

Until next month, thank you for reading and take care.

By Michael Jay