



# Cause & Effects:

Volume 1: *"Real Magic for the Real World"*

by Cris Johnson, CH, CT.NLP

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## **Table of Contents**

**Dedication - 4**

**Disclaimer - 5**

Read this or else!

**Introduction - 6**

**“Introducing...WonderPet!” - 7**

A family stage magic comedy “infomercial!”

**The Perfect Strolling Corporate Opener - 18**

An airtight script and presentation for your nailwriter

**Blistered Voodoo Rising - 27**

Two classic effects come together

**Rainbow Ropes - 37**

A throwaway kids’ effect becomes a very funny and commercial stage piece with three volunteers

**Rising Cards - 43**

My closer for all strolling gigs. The method is cheap & perfect!

**The Amazing Fish Trick - 54**

Make the birthday kid the STAR at your next show!

**Cube-A-Libre - 64**

Great trick...and finally a script that gives the effect motivation!

## Dedication

Most of the time, an author of a book dedicates it to their spouse. Well, my wife is certainly the smartest person I've ever met and a big reason why I'm making a nice six-figure income performing and not cleaning vomit out of cars anymore. Yes, I'm serious about the cleaning vomit.

But I'm not devoting this book to my wife. She hates my writing style and thinks I should write in a more professional voice. I respect her opinion, but I prefer my own style. It's FUN. This entire book is going to be written in a style that is downright loopy. Plus, I'm proud of the fact that I'm probably the only author of a magic book with a reference to squid arms in it.

There's a fairly well known information product marketer who encourages all of his listeners and readers to write in "their own voice." I'd love to dedicate it to him, but his speaking and writing style is boring as hell, and I'm sure he wouldn't want a dedication to him written that describes him as "boring as hell," so to protect my bank account, I'm not going to dedicate it to him, either.

Many magician authors dedicate their books to someone in the industry who inspired them. Usually it's someone fairly well-known. Maybe Dai Vernon. I was born ten years too early, because it seems that most of my peers ten years or older than me were lucky enough to meet the Professor. That guy got around. I didn't meet the Professor, so I won't dedicate this book to him.

So, I'll just dedicate this book to my best friend Rodney, who is a helluva magician in his own right. He also inspires me and pushes me to exceed my goals and dreams. Plus, his Billiard Balls routine is better than mine. Bastard.

- Cris Johnson, December 2009

## DISCLAIMER

This book talks about using fire and various sharp and/or pointy things. Fire is dangerous. If you set yourself, your property, or any other person's property, or any other living thing on fire, it is not my fault.

The reader assumes ALL responsibility for ANY use of fire or any use of any and all sharp pointy things or even any dull and soft things used improperly.

If you're reading this book in a McDonald's and you spill hot coffee on yourself or otherwise burn yourself, that's not my fault either. If you're reading this book or doing any of the routines described in here and you trip over a kid (yours or someone else's, that is also not my fault.

I absolve myself, my company and anyone related to me from any responsibility for anything.

## **Introduction**

I know, I know...yet ANOTHER magic book! (Please, make it stop!!)

Now that we've got that unpleasantness out of the way, I'll share my reasons for writing this book. Here it is...

Writing a good, commercial magic routine that plays in the real world for real money is HARD. Sometimes it takes me years to fine-tune a routine. Other times it takes me a lot less time.

The point is, so many effects come with the already-badly written instructions translated from Greek or German and to those of us who only speak English, it's tough to make heads or tails of things.

Add to that the startling realization that all full-time pros realized when they were starting out that (GASP!) people did not fall over themselves in shock and awe when that penny found its way to the little bag inside of all those little metal pin tin things. (Oh, the joys of younger days...)

Of course I'm talking about presentation. Scripts. The jokes, the moments, the asides that make a "trick" into amazing theater.

I'm certainly not world famous and I'm not the end all, be all in magic, but as a guy who's been doing this stuff professionally for 15 years, I feel some people out there may get a kick out of my presentations. They've served me well and can certainly do the same for you.

This book is called "Volume 1" because rather than delay putting this out any longer, I simply cut the book in two, with the intention that "Volume 2" will come out later.

Also, as an aside, this book was written when I was in a REALLY weird mood, especially the write up for WonderPet. When you read the routine and especially my "Author's Notes" throughout the book, you may think I'm off my meds. You could be right...but either way, I'm not telling.

The "Author's Notes" sprinkled throughout the book often have little tips and important (I feel) asides to the routine I'm describing at the time.

Other times, with "Author's Notes," I'm just being a smart-ass.

On with the program!

## **“Introducing...Wonder Pet!”**

***An entertaining family magic “infomercial!”***

### **Introduction**

This is a personal favorite of mine from a scripting standpoint. I wrote the script years ago, back before the ‘infomercial craze’ was as prevalent as it is now. This is good, cheesy fu with humor that plays on different levels. There are jokes and gags that play to the adults in the audience and things that play for kids. For the family stage magician, this routine has it all: comedy, magic, and cool props. What more could you ask for?

### **The Routine**

The magician walks out carrying a small silver pan. He sets the pan on a table. ***(Author’s Note: Why is it we magicians, and I’m including myself in this, always write their trick descriptions as ‘walking out?’ At some point, during a show, the magician is going to be THERE. Maybe one of these days I’ll describe a routine starting as: ‘Once the magician realized the audience was staring at him, he started to perform. Okay, back to your regular routine description.)***

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he begins, “At this point in the show, we’ll need to take a commercial break. Now, a message from our sponsors, Wonderpet.”

At this point, the performer’s demeanor changes. He adopts a loud, overly-enthusiastic “infomercial host” voice.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages, the next time you’re looking for that perfect gift, give your loved one a Wonderpet! What is Wonderpet, you may ask? Wonderpet is the perfect companion! He needs no food, no water, and no exercise. In fact, Wonderpet can live in the smallest of spaces!

“Normally, Wonderpet is transported in a sealed, zip-locked plastic bag for safety and comfort, but for today’s show, I thought he could make a more FLASHY entrance.

“Simply apply a small amount of heat...” As the magician says this, he squirts light fluid into the pan and lights a match. “...and voila! Before you can say ‘Abra-Cadaver, Wonderpet is ALIVE and in your home! Everyone, please welcome...Wonderpet!

The magician throws the match into the pan, which bursts into flames. He quickly covers the pan with a metal lid. An instant later, he lifts the pan lid and out pops the most repulsive, evil looking rubber rabbit, its face etched with a permanent

snarl. The audience, which had started to applaud, now sit quietly, staring at this...thing.

“Look at him folks! Isn’t he GREAT? Just think how grateful your child will be! Imagine the look of surprise on his or her face when they wake up and see THIS laying next to their pillow! You’ll hear the screams...of joy for miles!

At this, the audience laughs, albeit nervously. One child timidly says, “But he’s...horrible looking.” Everyone laughs harder. The magician/infomercial host continues on.

“And he’s incredibly skilled! Wonderpet can do MAGIC! Yes, I said MAGIC! He will FLOAT in the air right before your eyes! Watch!”

The magician plucks the rubber rabbit out of the pan and sets him on the table and watches.

Absolutely nothing happens.

“Sorry, folks, as you can guess from his appearance, he’s a little shy. Let’s give him a bit of privacy with this newspaper.”

At this point, the magician picks up a sheet of newspaper and holds it in front of Wonderpet, which is now sitting on the performer’s table. With the newspaper in front and both of the magician’s hands clearly visible, the audience can see WonderPet’s feet and the bottom half of his body. Suddenly, the rabbit’s feet float up into the air! The audience gasps in amazement!

“That’s not all! WonderPet is incredibly well-trained! You won’t have to worry about a thing because he is completely housebroken!”

Right on cue, a stream of water dribbles forcefully on the floor. The audience howls with laughter!

Horrified, the magician’s demeanor changes to more of a stage whisper. “STOP that! You’re embarrassing me! Now clean that up!”

At that point, a roll of toilet paper unrolls, hitting the floor and rolling away.

“Oh, funny guy! Uh, see, folks, he’s even got a sense of humor! Well, let’s get down to business. How much would you expect to pay for such a marvelous little fellow? \$29.95? No way! \$39.95? Not a chance! No, folks, WonderPet is available to you today for only...\$99.95!”

At this point, a small sign presents itself from behind the newspaper, apparently held by Wonderpet. The sign moves back and forth, as though the pet is 'marching.' The sign reads, in large letters, "ORDER NOW!"

"Order today, and we'll even throw in a free spay or neuter!"

At this point, Wonderpet flies up from behind the newspaper and across the room!

"Folks, we take credit cards, checks, cash, firstborn children, and stolen goods as collateral. Order your Wonderpet TODAY! We now return you to your regularly scheduled program!"

The magician takes a bow, folding his newspaper back up and preparing for his next routine.

### **The Big Secret:**

To do the routine as I do, you'll need the following items:

- Dave Powell's 'Newspaper Séance'
- Rabbid Jr. latex rabbit thing (Yes, it's Rabbid, with two ds. Not a typo. Of course, any repulsive fake critter can be used.)
- A roll of toilet paper almost used up, maybe 6 feet or so still on the roll
- A squeaker. This is the kind you can buy at a magic shop for about a buck. Or you can wait for your dog to mangle a squeak toy and then before he completely guts it, grab it from him and swipe the little squeaker from the innards of the carcass of the stuffed animal. It's about the size of a quarter, is round, and squeaks. It has a tube at one end where the squeak thingie is mounted. More on this later.
- Velcro strips
- Superglue or some other super-strong bonding agent that comes out of a tube and smells bad. It must smell bad.
- Some strong twine
- A small dowel rod. Buy a full length one (about 3 feet long) from Michaels or some other craft store
- Cardstock and a marker, or access to a computer

- A table or some other waist-high surface you can set things on during the routine.

This routine uses a ‘daytime séance’ type of gimmick as the means to making the pet levitate and all of the other stuff behind the newspaper. I suppose you could use a standard séance cloth, but I’ve never owned one, so I’m not sure. I personally used a ‘Newspaper Séance,’ put out by Dave Powell. Google it or check your fav dealer.

Essentially, the Newspaper Séance has two plexi-glass pieces that are hinged in the center, so they can fold closed or open. There are also two upright pieces, one on each half, that the newspaper is scotch taped to, in order to provide stability and ensure the newspaper stays upright. The instructions that come with the effect explain how to attach the gimmick to the newspaper.

By now, I’m sure you’ve correctly surmised that there is also a fake hand of some sort at one of the ends. Yup, you’re right.

The basic nuts and bolts of the routine is this: Because the hinged plexi-glass pieces are rigid, you can hold the unit with one hand and because of the fake hand, it will look as though you are hold the newspaper between both hands. That leaves your remaining hand (***Author’s Note: unless you’re a squid, in which case you’d have seven extra***) free to do most of the dirty work behind the paper.

Our little Wonderpet appears courtesy of our old friend, the Dove Pan. I personally used a chick pan, as it’s possible to cram one of these latex Rabbid Jr. puppets into a little chick pan, making it look all the more impressive when he appears. Still, a regular dove pan is much easier.

The rabbit itself is a latex creation known as a “Rabbid,” which is, as the routine describes, a hideous-looking rabbit. This thing really looks evil! They come in two sizes. I always used the Rabbid Jr., and while they are getting harder to find, you can still find them on eBay. Or, again, you can use a lightweight fake pet of your own choosing.

The Velcro is used to stick stuff to the newspaper séance and use as needed through the routine. The squeaker toy is used to make the animal “pee.” (***Author’s Note: Although this animal pees, the rest of the routine has nothing in common with Steve Spill’s Mind Reading Goose, which is AWESOME in every way. However, I developed this routine before I ever heard of Steve Spill. Besides, my Wonderpet pees in a completely different manner and I’m sure other magicians have thought of making obviously-fake animals pee. I’m just sayin.’***)

Those are the basics as far as the workings, but I want to make a few comments on the script. We'll cover the details of the routine, construction and so on, but the script's the good stuff.

### **Script Comments:**

Firstly, I'll be the first to admit that this script is not for everyone, nor do I do it exactly the same way in every venue. The peeing doesn't bother any clients, but the remarks about spaying and neutering are definitely things I would ONLY play at more forgiving venues, such as fairs or festivals. Schools? Eh, not so much. Ditto for the line "Abra-Cadaver," which I cheerfully admit I stole from "The Simpsons." (***Author's Note: Mr. Burns says it when he's given an award for being the oldest person in Springfield. Actually, the REAL oldest guy in Springfield, upon acceptance of the award, is kissed by Brittney Spears. The guy dies instantly. Really. Mr. Burns, as the second-oldest guy in Springfield, accepts the award and, realizing he has no speech prepared, grabs the dead guy's speech. Hence the line, "Abra-Cadaver." To me, it's comedy gold. Buy lots of "Simpsons" DVDs. You'll laugh a lot.***)

I also would not play this for very young children...mostly because the thing is so hideous, preschoolers may cry. Also, I leave it up to you as to whether you use fire. Full disclosure: Since I perform 75% of my shows in schools, in the interest of being PC, I dropped any and all fire from my shows 7 years ago. I miss it. Not in a pyro-psycho way. Maybe just a little.

Again, for fairs, you can get a little edgy. Not profanity-edgy, but a little edgy with your magic. If you're a family performer, I'm not talking about Needle Thru Arm edgy. Just a little edgy. Fire in the dove pan edgy is OK, at least for the fair shows I have seen.

The main thrust of the script is the fact that you're playing an over-the-top, overly enthusiastic infomercial host and as such, you're completely oblivious to the fact that this pet that you're describing in such glowing terms is hideous and ugly. That's what makes this so funny. (***Author's Note: Max Maven talks about this same "oblivious" concept in his wonderful mentalism 2-DVD set, "Nothing."***)

Incidentally, I wrote the script the way I did for good reasons. First, it amuses me. Second, it's different from the magic books I read as a kid. Thirdly, I really have had a little kid say, in the quiet after the laughter, "But it's horrible." That's what's so funny – the poor little kid simply doesn't understand why this seemingly intelligent and well-spoken adult is trying to pass off this horrible rubber thing as a cute pet.

My favorite part of the entire routine is right after I reveal the pet from the dove pan and as the audience is realizing how hideous the thing is, I cheerfully chirp,

“Just think of the look of SURPRISE on your child’s face when they wake up and see THIS next to them!” I guess I’m just sick, but after many performances, my audiences apparently ‘get’ my sense of humor.

My point in all of this is that this is best played sincerely and over the top. If you wink at the audience during this, you’ll kill it and then it becomes stupid. Well, it IS stupid, but if you play it straight and not “isn’t this so cute” the audience will appreciate the way you’re playing it.

## The Details

### Preparing the Gimmicks

#### The Newspaper Séance

Okay, to do this routine as I do, you’ll want to stick the male part of the Velcro along the horizontal ‘arms’ of the Newspaper Séance gimmick. The glue-in-a-tube is recommended for this as very often, the sticky stuff on the back of the Velcro sucks and loses it’s sticky-ness after a while. Also, I just glue entire strips along the gimmick, so when you’re sticking things to the gimmick during the course of a performance, you don’t have to worry about putting it in the EACT RIGHT spot. This makes working a LOT easier as I don’t want to “think” while I’m performing. (***Author’s Note: Insert joke here.***)

#### Squeaker

You’ll need to glue the opposite Velcro, the female, softer side, to the squeaker toy. You’ll definitely want to glue this to the squeaker as opposed to using the Velcro’s sticky-ness. Wiping the squeaker with alcohol (non-alcoholic) will help stuff to adhere. If you stole this from your dog, wipe his slobber off too. Important tip – only glue about a ½” or so to the gimmick. The squeaker, even when filled with water, weighs very little, so you won’t need much Velcro to hold it securely to the séance arm. If you use a LOT of Velcro, in the course of the routine, it’s going to be tougher to pull the little bugger off of the séance arm. Velcro grabs, so by using a minimum of Velcro, accessing your squeaker will be easier.

The squeaker itself has, as I mentioned, a tube at one end. The squeaker itself looks like a teeny whoopee cushion. Whoopie cushions have the tube at one end where the, uh, “whoopee” comes out. The squeak toy is similar. (***Author’s Note: I’m adopting a very strange writing style for this book, but I’m trying to cling to good taste, so I’m trying to avoid writing the word ‘fart’ too many times in this book.***)

Look in your squeaker’s tube. You must remove the squeak thingie in the tube. Once you wriggle that thing out, you’ll be left with a thing that you can pour a tiny bit of water into. Turn it upside down when filled with water, and the water stays

until you squeeze it. This is very cool, but when you stick this water-filled squeaker on the gimmick before the show, you'll still want to stick it with the tube pointing to the sky, so when you walk out with the gimmicked paper, you will not have any premature drippage.

### Rabbit or Hideously Deformed Animal

You'll next need to glue a small (roughly half-inch square) female Velcro to the back of the Rabbit's head, behind and in between his ears. Since the Rabbit is mostly white with streaks of black, either buy white Velcro for this and dab it with a black magic marker to help it to blend in or use black Velcro and dab it with white out so it blends. If you're using some other rubber, hideously deformed stuffed animal, try to blend the Velcro in someplace where it will not be visible. Additional Note: if your animal of choice is cloth, you can also sew your patch of Velcro for more security.

### Toilet Paper

The reason why I recommended that the length of toilet paper left on the roll as around six feet is because much more than that makes the workings rather difficult. Also, what I did was completely remove the six feet of paper and use Scotch tape to secure it to the little cardboard tube. This makes reset simple. Then, with the toilet paper wound back on the tube, take a piece of twine long enough to loop through the tube and tie together, so you can let the toilet paper tube dangle from the twine. Make sure this loop has enough "play" in it so the toilet paper can unroll freely through the loop of twine. Finally, fasten a piece of WHITE Velcro to the twine so you can hang the whole thing from the Velcro-covered gimmicked arm of the Newspaper Séance. Using white twine and white Velcro will help everything blend in nicely so when the toilet paper falls, no one will notice the black Velcro. If they see black...well, they might think it's, um...something else. We are using toilet paper after all. (***Author's Note: Yes, I realize that in a parlor situation, people might catch a glimpse of the twine, but since it's just a sight gag, I've never once had anyone come up to me after a show and say, "Hey, I laughed my butt off when the toilet paper fell, but once I saw the twine, I no longer laughed. In fact, I felt sad. I'm suing you." Not gonna happen. This is simply visual sight gags.***)

### The Little Sign

I made my sign by printing up the words "Order Now!" or whatever on white card stock, twice. I then cut these two words out into two rectangles, roughly three inches across, two inches wide. I then glued the two together with a six-inch piece of dowel rod in the center, making it a sign you can show the audience regardless of which side you show. The six inch length of the sign "post" ensures you can freely show the sign above the newspaper without fear of your fingers showing. I would have preferred a larger sign for more visibility, but for the ease

of the routine, I had to stay with a smaller sign. After all, there's a lot of weird stuff sticking to the Velcro back there.

Wrap some Velcro around the base of the sign.

### **Set-Up**

Where to set this thing up is up to you. When you do this, you'll need to access it quickly. No one likes waiting for 30 seconds waiting for Mr. Magic to dig out his next prop. ***(Author's Notes: That's like those crappy firework displays I saw as a kid. There was like two minutes between fireworks, so you got real bored waiting. That sucks. Now I feel sad. Who can I sue?)***

Keep in mind that the folded newspaper gimmick will have a squeaker with water in it mounted to the Velcro, so you can't have this buried until a pile of stuff. I use a backdrop during my larger family shows to hide my bigger props. (Author's Note: This is just my opinion, but I hate it when a magician has all of his props out in the open. Looks like a garage sale.)

I usually have the paper gimmick set on top of my levitation. That way, I can duck behind my backdrop while I'm talking and grab the gimmick. It takes less than two seconds.

The dove pan is usually in my performing table. I have a real snazzy roll on table that my buddy Rodney built for me. ***(Author's note: Rodney's the guy with the sweet Billiard Balls routine. He's also great at building things. Bastard.)***

The Joe Lefler tables or pretty much anything is perfect. It's just a dove pan, and what's great is the fact that the little critter stuffed inside is not alive so you can leave him there til you retire.

### **Gimmick Set-Up**

Here's what I do to set this bad boy up. I will Velcro the water-filled squeaker to the right side of the gimmicked arm of the Newspaper Séance – to the far right, leaving it closest to my rand hand, so I can grab it easily. A light touch is required here, so when you grab it, be careful so you don't hose the newspaper.

***(Author's Note: As an alternate water method, you could try one of those incredibly tiny squirt guns. They are even smaller than the ray gun Will Smith had in Men In Black. Put Velcro on it and stick it to the gimmick. I've never tried it, but it might work.)***

Next, stick the dab of white Velcro (attached to the toilet paper) to the right arm, but no where near the water gimmick. I then stick the little sign to the far left of the left arm of the séance gimmick. This leaves me plenty of space to Velcro Mr. Rabbid to the left gimmick arm during the routine.

I then carefully set the gimmick in folded “closed” position, with the left side on the bottom – that’s the side with the water. I can therefore duck behind stage, carefully open the gimmick, pick it up, and walk out with the newspaper already open.

### **Table**

As I mentioned, you do need a table surface for this. Anything around waist high will be fine. If you are not the type of magician who uses a roll on table, you can simply use a table top attached to a Eureka table base. Anything will do.

### **Performance**

To begin the performance, remember that this is supposed to be a commercial break. I like to make my opening announcement with nothing in my hands and then, when everyone hears me say “commercial,” I reach down and grab my dove pan. Important point (And I will be serious for a moment): maintain eye contact whenever you are getting props. If you have to go behind a curtain, keep talking. Try to make it so there is never any periods where the audience is simply staring at an empty stage and you are not saying anything. Boring!

Once the dove pan is out, load it with lighter fluid. ***(Author’s Note: DO check with your performing venue before you use fire in a dove pan. Unlike flash paper, lighter fluid burns for a while. Setting off smoke alarms during your show would suck. It’s never happened to me, but I have heard stories about such things.)***

QUICKLY douse the flames. Again, this routine plays just fine without it. Lift the lid and reveal the Rabbid. Pause here. Let the audience revel in his ugliness. Stand there with a big sh...uh...stuff eating grin on your face. ***(Author’s Note: I don’t know about you, but with the dove pans I’ve used, occasionally those three prongs that hold the inner secret compartment in place occasionally get turned sideways when it latches the two components together. When you’re setting this up, just take a moment to double-check the three latches. Despite the extra three seconds of work this may cause you, lay people still react fantastically well for dove pans. Dove pans are great.)***

As you start the portion of the script about the little guy levitating, really build it up in the minds of the audience. That way, when he just sits there like a week-old turd, you can really sell disappointment. Let this play non-verbally across your face. First, excitement...then confusion...then frustration. It’s great. This also brings things down emotionally for the audience. Their expectations are lowered.

When you bring out the newspaper, do it rather quickly. Again, staring at an empty stage, not so fun. If you have an assistant to bring you the props, be sure

to practice the hand off of the gimmicked séance newspaper. It has to look casual, as if it's just a newspaper. Also practice angles, so that no one wonders who the Mystery Hand belongs to. That would be creepy.

Hold the newspaper above the Rabbid. I prefer to hold it so half of his body is visible. This looks very fair to an audience. Then, reach down with your free hand and pick the guy up by the top of his head and lift him up. The audience laughs and freaks out. ***(Author's Note: A critical mistake I made with my first Rabbid was leaving him crammed in the dove pan all the time. This warped him and as a result, he would not stand on his own. Latex is pliable. Therefore, he would only lay on his side. That would work for the routine, but having the pet standing upright allows you to show more of his body during the "levitation" and the audience REALLY reacts. I thought it was just going to be a silly gag, but they LOVE it. Moral if the story? Be nice to your latex pet.)***

Stick the pet with the Velcro to the arm of the gimmick. Immediately go for the water gimmick, as the removal of this must be done carefully and slowly. You have a few sentences of script to cover your actions.

When you make him pee, make sure you are no long standing near your table. Firstly, when the pee hits the floor, unless it's carpeted, it will make a nice sound. Secondly, if you're too close to the table, it won't be as surprising. Re-stick the water gimmick to the newspaper. Since it's now empty, you can do it quickly and firmly.

When you are ready for the toilet paper, unhook it from the gimmicked arm, grab it by the loose end of the toilet paper and let it unroll. This is VERY funny. If it hangs up on you, just fling the whole thing over the edge of the newspaper. It will still be funny.

The little sign is the last gag, right before you toss the Rabbid away. Make the sign move back and forth in a sort of up and down, back and forth action as though the little guy is walking back and forth. Re-stick the sign to the newspaper gimmick.

As you deliver the final line, unhook and fling Mr. Rabbid over the newspaper in front of you, or perhaps to your left. This will surprise the audience and give you the cover you need to turn profile to the audience (with the fake hand AWAY from the audience) and cleanly fold up the newspaper and finish the routine 'clean.'

### **Closing Thoughts**

I personally tried a lot of different gags for this routine, but for me, these play the best. I tried others, but the amount of gimmicks stuck to the arms of the

Newspaper Séance made it too cumbersome. If the peeing thing really makes you uncomfortable, I'm sure the toilet paper gag would play just fine without it.

This may read more than just a little complicated, but it's worth the effort. This baby's a winner!

## **The Perfect Strolling Magic Corporate Opener**

***Psychologically strong, tightly scripted, this is a GREAT use  
for your nailwriter***

**Introduction**

Having the perfect opener for a corporate strolling set has been something I've been chasing for years. For about 8 years, my strolling opener was Money Morph, yet another in a long line of variations on the \$100 Bill Switch. It's really good. Check it out and tell its creator, Kevin King, that I sent you. He's never heard of me, so you'll probably freak him out a bit.

I still do Money Morph, as for me and my tastes, it's almost the perfect magic trick from a visual standpoint. But I don't use it as an opener anymore because I don't feel your very first effect should involve borrowing money from someone. It just feels awkward. You know what I mean. Some random guy comes up to you and says he's going to entertain you, then he immediately wants money. In many cases, people are seated, so I'm sure some were expecting me to just run away after I got the money.

Next, I used Banachek's wonderful Psychokinetic Silverware presentation. Fork bending = wayyyyyy cool. I don't care if it's "trendy." I've been doing it for around 8 years and it rocks.

Although I still always use it in strolling, I don't open with it anymore. Why?  
***(Author's Note: I hate it when an author of a magic book writes something and then questions it. Almost like he's got split personality. Weird.)***

I don't open with bending silverware because at many of the strolling events I do, guests are standing around holding glasses of adult beverages and therefore, getting them involved with the routine (Banachek's routine involves the spectators handling the forks almost as much as you do.) means there is a constant shifting of glasses from one person to another. Not very elegant at a high-dollar banquet, if you ask me, at least not for an opener. After I've broken the ice, I don't feel bad doing it.

My most recent opener, before I settled on the one I'm about to share, is Hundy 500. You know, where 5 \$1 bills change to 5 \$100 bills. GREAT effect, but again, to really take advantage of Greg Wilson's handling and psychology, there's some guest-handling going on. So, while I still use it A LOT, it's not my standard opener at a corporate event.

I know what many of you are thinking: "Why is this guy rambling about different tricks in the introduction?" It's simple. Despite my rather odd writing style in this book, I do take my work very seriously and I wanted an opener for my strolling or close-up set that did not involve borrowing anything, a minimum of handling by

guests and, ideally, something that tied in with what I was doing on stage later. I'm also a stage hypnotist, and mentalism fits in nicely with hypnosis.

My most important point I had to consider was simply that it had to be GREAT. An opener is the first thing the audience judges you and therefore, falls into the category of First Impressions. It would also be nice if the effect is personal to the spectators, or at least, one of them.

This had to be so good, that if I were performing and this was the ONLY thing I did, they would leave the event singing my praises. I don't know if this has ever happened to you: You're performing at a table and you're in the middle of your multi-phase Killer Routine, whatever it is. Suddenly, you hear the CEO of the company over the house system. Everyone turns toward him because he's drawing door prizes. You are now ignored and must slink away like a schmuck. Not good.

That's another reason why multi-phase routines like Color Changing Knives were out. Too long, as an opener, for me. (***Author's Note: Right now, some of you are thinking, 'man, he's REALLY over-analyzing this!' I don't think so, and neither does my shrink.***)

Finally, it would simply be awesome if this effect also left the spectator with a souvenir...something with my contact information on it so they could book me themselves.

That's a LOT for one little routine to accomplish. This routine I'm about to share, while not the most original thing in the world, accomplishes all of this and more.

So, without further buildup, here is my corporate strolling/close-up opener.

### **The Effect:**

The performer...oh, screw it, I'm not in the mood to write in the "third person" today. Let's start over.

I walk up to a group of people in a corporate setting. There's about six people talking and laughing with each other. Each person is holding a drink. One guy has two.

I say, "Excuse me, sorry to interrupt. My name is Cris Johnson and I've been hired by Ms. HR Director to entertain the company with some close-up magic. May I show you a few quick things?"

That is my opening script for 'breaking in' to a new group or table. It's never going to win any national IBM or SAM awards, but it does several things quickly.

1. It lets everyone know who I am and why I'm wandering up to them.
2. I show manners by my ASKING if they'd like to see something. (Maybe the people in the group hate magic. I'd rather not perform for them, in that case. This opening gives us BOTH an out.)
3. The phrase "quick things" subtly assures them that it won't be very long (i.e. if I suck, at least it will be a short amount of suck.)

Other people have their own methods of breaking into a 'cold' table, but that's what works best for me.

I also don't shy away from the word "magic" as it sets up a certain expectation in their minds. Maybe they love magic and are thinking of cool Criss Angel stuff. Or maybe they think magic is "cute" and I will be pulling silks out of my butt. Whatever. This is a mentalism thing, and if I introduce myself as a "psychic entertainer," "mind reader" or anything like that, I'll get a question like "Hey, can you tell me what I'm thinking?" Solve the problem by eliminating it.

I know many people shy away from the title "magician." Do what feels right. I'm feeling very Zen-like today.

Anyway, after my opening script, I get the 'go-ahead' to proceed. I turn to a woman next to me and ask her name. After she tells me, I repeat it back.

"Hi, I'm Cris Johnson. What's your name?"

"Mary."

"Hi Mary, it's nice to meet you." I then repeat this with a few other people. It's an age-old trick to not only get people to remember your name, but it gives you a chance to do a bit of 'dirty work' ahead of the game. (**Author's Note: If you're only performing for one person at this time, stop after you ask her name. Don't keep asking the names of the invisible people around you. You might freak out Mary.**)

After I ask a few people their names, I then turn suddenly back to Mary, almost as if something just hit me, a realization that I wasn't aware of a moment ago. (**Author's note: This requires ACTING. It really helps 'sell' the effect. More on this later.**)

"What a minute," I stammer. "Did you say your name was Mary?"

"Yes...?"

I stare at her for about two seconds and smile ever so slightly. "I wonder...Mary, what's your last name?"

“Smith.”

“Smith...with an S?”

“Yes!” (*The exclamation point here is not signifying amazement. Usually Mary is laughing, trying to figure out if I’m a stalker.*)

“Mary...this may sound weird, but do me a favor...say the first two-digit number that pops into your mind.”

“Twenty-three.”

“Why did you say the number twenty-three?”

“It’s my daughter’s birthday. January 23<sup>rd</sup>.”

“Twenty-three? You could have thought of ANY number, but you said twenty-three. That’s WEIRD. Mary, you may not believe this, but I had a feeling that I HAD to stop here and see this group. Let me explain. Before I arrived here tonight, I took one of my business cards...” With my right hand, I reach into my right jacket pocket and take out one of my cards and show it to Mary.”

“I wrote something down on the back of it.” At this, I turn the card over. It’s blank.

“Then, Mary, I put that card into my wallet, because I knew I’d need it later.” I then look down at my wallet, which I’d been holding in my left hand the entire time. I casually switch it to my empty right hand, giving everyone a chance to see that my left hand doesn’t have anything else in it. I then open the wallet. There are a bunch of credit cards in the wallet, but only one business card, hiding in the small compartment below the credit cards.

With my right hand off-handedly empty, I pull the card out about half an inch so Mary can see it and grasp it easily. I motion for her to take the card. She slides it out and turns it over.

The back of the card has, in pencil, the following: “MS 23”

I say, “Mary, I wrote down the initials ‘MS’ and the number ‘23.’ I guess this was meant for you.”

There are, of course, appropriately amazed reactions.

### **The Big Secret**

You’ll need the following:

- a gimmicked wallet or an envelope with a ‘window’ cut in the back of it, allowing you to write with your nailwriter while holding the wallet or envelope...thereby supposedly not able to write on the biz card inside...follow??

- a nailwriter

- **plenty of business cards.** Don't feel let down. If you're working in the real world, this routine is GOLD.

Again, the method may not scream “original,” but there's a lot of little subtle things in the script that really make this thing cook. I've refined it over the past year, performing it 30-40 times a night at certain corporate functions and this is so strong, it's often hard to follow. First, it's personal. Second, it involves reading minds, or predicting the future. Finally, it's surprising. While that's part of the design of the routine to keep spectators from asking impossible things of me, the side benefit is the fact that this routine really comes out of left field. I'll cover the handling first and then get into the script.

To do this routine as I do, you'll need a Stealth Assassin wallet by Peter Nardi. It's a thing of beauty, allows you to load the business card into the wallet right under their noses, and if you're really worried about it, you can even show both sides of the wallet after the work is done. It's fairly pricey – at about \$180, last time I checked. It's a good investment, though, as it will allow you to do a ridiculous amount of cool stuff with this one prop.

Another less expensive alternative is to use the wallets from Outlaw Magic, [www.outlaw-effects.com](http://www.outlaw-effects.com). The only drawback with these wallets is, last time I checked their design, you can't show the other side of the wallet. The “trap door” or secret opening is camouflaged on the Assassin, but not on the Outlaw wallets. **(Author's Note: That may have changed since I last saw an Outlaw wallet, so if it has been changed, don't send me angry emails pointing out what an idiot I am. Make your own choice. Both are GREAT wallets.)**

There are other wallets which will serve the same function, but the point here is the idea of using a wallet to hide the business card while you do the sneaky stuff with the nail writer.

As far as the nailwriter itself, I personally love the simple thumb tip writer by Vernet. It's essentially a shorter-than-usual thumb tip with a piece of pencil lead in it. I like these the best because I can actually USE them. I tried boon writers but regardless of how new the sticky stuff was, they'd always fall off. I tried the band writers, but found them awkward. I tried the under-the-nail writers and promptly lost it mere moments after I opened the package. **(Author's Note: “Invisible!” the package proudly bragged. No kidding because I never found the stupid thing.)**

You can use whatever you feel comfortable with, but I like the thumb tip writer the best because it's easy to find again after I do the 'ditch,' is easy to get on or off, and gives me legible handwriting. Actually, since I spend most of my time typing, my nailwriting is wayyyy more legible than my regular handwriting. How sad.

You'll also need many, many business cards. If you're going to be working a strolling gig and plan on doing this multiple times in one evening, plan on bringing more cards than you need. You'll see why soon.

I also wear a sports jacket while I work. This makes the working much easier than a pants pocket.

### The Details

First, the handling. Load a business card with the back of the card facing out, so when you hold the wallet with the working side toward you, can easily write on it. Put the nailwriter on. Load a bunch of extra business cards in your right jacket pocket (left, if you're a leftie) and you're ready to go.

When you ask the woman her first name, you then move on to ask two or three more people their names. That's when you write the first letter. This is nice, because the audience just thinks you're being polite, but you're really covering the writing of that first initial.

Then, after you have asked the other people their names, you turn suddenly to the first person and ask her last name. Again, the acting here is important, as it seems as though something important just hit you. To me, if you come off as all knowing, that's when people start asking those questions we want to avoid. That's another reason why I stick with the initials and not the full name – if I "knew" in advance, why all the farting around? (**Author's Note: Oops.**)

After you nail-write the last initial, then ask her to "name out loud the first two-digit number that pops in her head." The wording here is critical. You're not asking her to THINK of a number and THEN name it. People are sharp...it may tip them off that you're going to try to pull a mind reading "trick" on them. You are, but you're not going to let them know til it's too late.

That's when you write the number. (**Author's Note: You could just stop after the initials, but people might think, and I have had this happen, that I just asked somebody else for "that lady's name...that one, where the t-shirt with bananas printed on it." The two-digit number bit REALLY makes this impossible for people watching in many cases, because the initials help seal the deal...as well as setting up the lovely tag line at the end. Back to the trick...**)

After you write the number, you reach into your pocket to retrieve a business card. First, this allows you to ditch the thumb tip (**Author's Note: took me a looooooong time to come up with motivation for going to the pocket!**)

Second, it allows a nice 'false ending.' Many people gasp, thinking the card I pull out of my pocket is going to have the stuff written on the back. When it doesn't, there's a dip in the emotions, which climbs REALLY high when I reveal the card in my wallet, which is supposedly more secure (from their point of view) and in plain sight the entire time and therefore supposedly - from their point of view - impossible to do any funny business.)

Time for a "Time Out." This is important.

What this whole routine is built on is the fact that they do not know what's going to happen until I tell them. I'm one step ahead of everyone. That's why, I think, many presentations of lock tricks such as 7 Keys to Baldpate are not nearly as exciting as they could be ...the audience KNOWS that the lock is going to be unlocked.

Relating this back to the wallet, I love the fact that it's out in the open the ENTIRE time, but attention is never called to it until the end. Nevertheless, on a subconscious level, people do realize it's been 'out in the open' the whole time.

You do have to watch your angles a bit, and some of you are probably thinking, "Couldn't I just pocket write and save the trouble with the angles?"

Yes.

I prefer the nailwriter because of the openness of the routine, but pocketwriting goes over fantastically well for this routine as well. I usually use pocket writing when I'm performing a stand-up show for less than 50 people. (**Author's Note: For more info on pocket writing, check out Banachek's wonderful "Psi Series" of DVDs from 'your favorite dealer.' Great stuff.**)

### A Few Thoughts...

As I mentioned before, a lot of non-verbal acting goes into this. I'm acting as though SOMETHING weird or important is going on but I'm just as lost as everyone right up to the end. Even the last line of the script in which I say to the woman that the card was destined for her is designed to play into the idea that while I do receive "impressions," I'm not as sure-footed about how to use them. In short, I'm not being a smarmy ass.

It's sort of like those card to wallet effects where the Smarmy Guy hands the card to the person at the end with a self-assured smirk. I hate it. So I play this off like

I'm feeling my way through the dark, knowing there's a light switch nearby, but I am just not sure WHERE.

Also, again on the word magic, this sets up a certain expectation in the minds of the audience. If you want to introduce yourself as a "mentalist," go ahead. I tried it once and didn't like the confused looks I got, but that's just me.

The scripting motivation for going to the pocket took me a long time to work out. If you choose to do this routine with a boon writer under-the-nail writer, pocket writing or some other method using something really tiny, you can skip this, but I like the thumbtip writer. If you're going from table to table and group to group, the rest is nice.

Also, this has got to be extremely rare – the kind of trick you can reset almost in front of your audience. Take another card out of your pocket, open your wallet, and place the card in as though it were a regular wallet and approach your table. As you're gathering names, casually put the thumbtip back on.

Easy.

### **Doing It Upon Request**

The easy reset also helped me get out of a potentially dangerous situation at two recent gigs. This effect is so powerful that I kept having people drag me to another table or group and say, "Do that thing you just did, but to her. (***Author's Note: Insert joke here.***)

Since the reset is so fast and easy, I was able to pull it off multiple times. People were so stunned by this that I kept getting shuttled from group to group, which eliminated the awful 'break in' at a new table.

That was fun, but what about when someone is watching you off to the side as you 'do this to someone else,' and then after the effect, they want you to immediately do the exact same effect for them? Most of the time, I was able to side-step the whole issue and just do something different. However, at one event, my client (yup, the woman with the check) insisted on this same effect.

Here's what I did.

I said, "Okay, let me get a card." I reached into my pocket, pulled out another business card and looked at the back of it and then looked up into my client's eyes. She stared back. I looked down again and then up at her again. Finally, I let a small smile creep across my face. "This should be the one," I said.

I then loaded the card into the wallet openly as I began talking. As I secretly put the thumbtip back on in my pocket, I changed the presentation slightly. "Would

you think of the initials of someone you are close to?” (***Author’s Note: This gave me motivation for not being sure that the card I picked and had supposedly written on before I got to the gig was really “her card.”***)

I then did the number thing and finished as described earlier. You may think, “Well, it didn’t make sense for you to put the card into the wallet, do the trick, and pull the card back out again.”

Get off my back!

Just kidding. It worked great as an on-the-fly solution to a sticky situation. The card was ‘isolated’ in the wallet and I felt secure knowing she could have looked at both sides of the wallet afterwards. Plus, the dodge with “someone else’s” initials helped kick this up a notch in her mind. Obviously, using HER initials would have been stupid for at least 5 different reasons

### **Final Thoughts**

Don’t overlook this puppy. We magicians tend to be jaded as far as methodology. (***Author’s Note: We like new stuff. I call it the “Ooooooh, Shiny’ Principle. We see something new and shiny and we run toward it.***)

# **Blistered Voodoo Rising**

## ***Two classics come together in a very commercial routine***

### **Introduction**

I've been doing this routine for almost 25 years. I can't even begin to explain the effect it has on people. It's one of those routines that really make people look at me and wonder if I'm insane and/or in cahoots with the devil. A few have even asked me if it was true.

I declined to answer.

In any rate, in its original form, the script was actually too dark for professional use. People at a cocktail party want to relax and have fun. While they may appreciate something on the spooky side, you really have to be careful.

As a result, I've spent the last few years "softening" the presentation a bit, making it more commercial, with a nice gag at the end. The effect has always been the same, but the script has evolved a lot.

### **Effect:**

Near the end of a close-up set during a strolling corporate gig, I ask the people at the table I'm performing this question:

"Would you like to see something disgusting?"

There is generally confused looks, uneasy smiles, and laughter, at which point I say, "It won't be horror movie disgusting, nothing like that!"

Finally, I take out of my pocket a small, weathered wooden box.

I continue, "Inside this box, are some unusual things. The first is a drawing of a human hand." I remove a business card, showing the back of it bearing a simple outline of a human hand. I place the drawing of the hand on the table for all to see.

"The next...a box of matches." Matching words to actions, I bring out a box of matches.

I hand the box of matches to a lady I've ben working with, someone who I believe will be a good sport for the routine's ending gag.

"Mary, please remove a match, just one, any match at all." Mary does so.

“Mary, in a moment, not yet, I’m going to ask you to light that match on the side of the box, blow it out, and touch it to any of the four fingertips on the drawing...not the thumb. If I miss this up, I still need to be able to pick up the phone to order pizza.” Mary chuckles, as do the others at the table.

“Don’t light the match yet, Mary, because I have one additional thing in the box – a voodoo doll.” With that, I remove a small voodoo doll, fashioned from wicker, out of the box. (***Author’s Note: I know all of the great authors tell us that the ‘props don’t matter,’ but there are certain props, when we introduce them, that qualify as a Big Moment. This is one of them. So simple, but so cool.***)

“Mary, if you know anything about voodoo...you know that we’ll need a victim.” I then stare, unblinking, at someone else at the table. If someone has been giving me a hard time or perhaps making little snide jokes, that’s who I stare at. (***Author’s Note: I have an issue with any magician who says there are ‘no bad audiences.’ That’s B.S. Sure, if you’re a GOOD pro, you’re going to encounter fewer than the boobs who have no performing skills, but there will always be at least the occasional putz to deal with. Pros know how to handle them.***)

After the spectators laugh a bit, I break the stare and say, “No, I can’t use you...for insurance purposes I will need to be the victim.”

I then set the little doll horizontally on the palm of my hand. (***Author’s Note: As if he were asleep. Poor little guy must be tired from being stuffed in that box.***)

I then say, “Mary, before you light that match, I must harness the power of the voodoo. Watch!”

I then stare at my hand. So does everyone else. After a few moments, everyone sees the doll begin to rise, ultimately standing straight up, almost levitating off of my hand. When the doll is almost vertical, I command Mary, “Now! Light the match!”

Mary lights the match, blows it out, and after a few moments of indecision, presses the burnt match head against the third finger of the drawing.

I immediately scream in pain and shriek, “Blow on it! Blow on it!”

Mary begins blowing on the match.

“No!” I yell, “The finger! The drawing!”

There is laughter as Mary hurriedly leans in and blows at the business card. (***Author’s Note: Don’t worry if she spits on it. She’s going to keep it as a***

***souvenir, but I'm sure you already knew that as soon as I typed "business card" in the trick description.)***

As the laughter subsides, "I regain my composure and say, "Mary, you could have selected any one of the four fingers. Which one did you select?"

Mary responds, "The third finger."

I continue, "So you could have chosen any finger, but you picked the third finger. Everyone, look closely...some of YOU WILL FREAK OUT...(**Author's Note: More on the 'all caps' in a bit.**) but look: I now have a blister on my third finger tip."

I turn over my hand, which I have had at the center of the table, near the drawing, ever since Mary finished blowing on the card. My hand has remained palm down, fingers open, in plain sight, for at least the last thirty seconds.

I slowly turn my hand over. Everyone can see a small, perfectly round blister on my third fingertip...with no other blisters in sight.

"Mary," I say, "touch it. Make sure it's not makeup."

Mary tentatively reaches forward and gently touches the 'blister.' As soon as she makes contact, I scream once again and jerk my hand away. Mary jumps and the entire table laughs out loud.

"Just kidding," I say. "Mary, please keep the card as a reminder of the impossible...if that's too esoteric or cryptic, keep it and call me if you need entertainment."

In actuality, what I say as I leave the table varies depending on my mood and the mood of the table. I thank everyone and I'm outta there.

### **The Secret**

It's the old blister effect with the Okita Rising Doll, available from Your Favorite Dealer (mine is Hocus Pocus) for about \$10.

Before I go any further, do NOT be disappointed. There are a lot of fine points of this routine that really play BIG. You gotta look at this from the point of view of the audience and not the magic community.

Think about this. You've got a VOODOO effect, where the magician's skin is harmed with a physical manifestation, a levitation, a mentalism effect of sorts and

a snazzy way to had out your business card. Plus, with just a touch of caution, you can perform this baby surrounded. This routine has a LOT to offer.

The only thing it DOESN'T offer is appropriate content for young children. Teens love it, corporate audiences love it, but if you perform it at Johnny's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party, you're a dumbass. Sorry, but it's true.

Before I get into the particulars of the mechanics (such as, where and how I get the blister, which is pure genius and I can say that because I didn't think of it) I want to cover several points of the script and why it's in it's current state.

First, I do not get into a lengthy discussion of voodoo or what the textbook definition is. I simply mention the word, show the prop, and allude to the 'harmful' aspect of it a bit in the script until the big surprise with the blister at the end.

If you have any experience doing corporate events, you know that most of the time, people are socializing and drinking. If your set up for a trick is a lengthy narrative, people can and will be distracted by other co-workers bumping into them, the "amazing" senses of humor of Jack from Accounting who HAS to be the center of attention and on and on.

If you're performing this at the Magic Castle, on the other hand, by all means, expand on the idea of voodoo. I gotta eat, so I trimmed the script down to its bare essentials and upped the humor. To read it, it's not jokey funny, but it plays really well. The bit where I mention the need for a victim and then stare at the resident wiseass goes over VERY well.

Jumping up to the first line of the script, asking spectators if they want to see something disgusting is very provocative. It may not appeal to you, but I can tell you in my experience, it plays just fine. I developed the line after reading one of Eugene Burger's older books where he discusses the idea of using "buzzwords" in a script, particularly in the opening line of a script. Opening lines are important – let's face it, if someone walks up to You and says, "Wanna see a card trick?" how excited are YOU going to be? (***Author's Note: Buy every Eugene Burger book you can get your grubby hands on. If one of his books is out of print and you can find it on eBay for \$400, but it. If you really want to be a professional, Eugene's stuff will only help you. In my opinion, it doesn't matter if you've been a full-time pro for 20 years or 20 minutes. If Eugene's stuff doesn't make you think about your craft, you don't have a pulse.***)

Likewise, I 'deflate' the line a bit when I assure more sensitive spectators that it won't be "horror movie" disgusting. I will also confess to you that I sometimes assure spectators that it won't be "porno disgusting." I only use that line if the banter at the table has been risqué. I NEVER curse or do anything inappropriate at corporate events (***Author's Note: Other than making a goose pee. Thanks, Mr. Spill.***)

That said, in many cases, certain corporate audiences are like children, and they will twist anything you say into something sexual. For instance, if you do any fork bending or spoon bending, you have probably had adults snicker like 10 year olds when the fork bends, especially if a lady is rubbing it. It's annoying, but you can't very well tell your client's guests to "grow up." If I have a crowd of people acting like this, I will throw the "promo" line out there.

Jumping to the end of the script, I also had the phrase YOU WILL FREAK OUT all in caps. That's because when I deliver this line, I slightly, and I DO mean *slightly*, stress this phrase a bit more emphatically. In NLP terms, this is an embedded command. The action that I want them to do, in this case, "freak out," is inserted in the center of the sentence. If I were to just tell someone, "You will freak out," they would most likely roll their eyes at me. By placing it in the center of the sentence, and stressing it slightly, it shoots into the subconscious, not picked up by the 'conscious mind's filters. In some cases, though certainly not all, the subconscious mind reacts to this 'hidden command' and will act upon it.

This is a very mild, sneaky form of hypnosis – covert, or waking hypnosis. As a Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), I have been adding in more "bits" like this into my performances to increase the reactions to effects, compliance to requests and much more.

Kenton Knepper, noted mentalist and teacher, put out a series of audios called "Wonder Words" in which he explores similar applications of NLP and other 'suggestion techniques.' I don't agree with everything that Kenton teaches, but overall the CDs are great and I encourage you to check them out. If you're really into this stuff, contact me directly, as I am currently working toward my NLP Teacher's Certification and find this stuff amazingly useful for performers.

Now onto the last 'gag' where I lure the spectator in to touch the 'blister.' Besides being rather funny, the screaming and jumping gag serves a crucial purpose – it breaks the state everyone is in. Very often, after I do this piece, everyone is sitting around the table, amazed, contemplating what just happened. You may like to leave your audiences like that, but I don't, at least not with something as mildly creepy as this effect. My clients want to me to amaze everyone, get them laughing, and having good memories.

By breaking their state with the gag (***Author's Note: Breaking State is another NLP term that means exactly what it sounds like.***), I'm leaving them laughing, which is what I want my final memory to be – the fun guy.

Very often, this is my close-up 'closer' because it involves an amazing effect, a levitation, and a real reason to leave them with a business card – to me, a good closer! (***Author's Note: I have another close-up 'closer' you'll be learning***

**later in this book. In strolling magic, it's good to have multiple closers, as the next table may have been watching your whole set.)**

Another line in the script I want to point out is the place when I tell them not to pick the thumb as a possible finger choice because, well, it's not a finger, but more importantly, if you perform the effect as I do, the thumb can't be used. So, by using the pizza line, I'm restricting their choice to the four fingers while giving them a reason, bogus it may be, NOT to choose the thumb. **(Author's Note: Stay ahead of your audience.)**

Now that I've rambled on about aspects of the script, let's turn to the mechanics of the effect.

### **Workings**

As I mentioned, the little wicker doll is an Okito doll, which is available for about \$10 from most dealers. Since it's a marketed item, I'm not going to discuss the method, but the doll rises completely under your control with no strings, threads, magnets, or anything. The entire secret is right in the little doll.

I found a small wooden box at a garage sale that's about 4 inches square, an inch or so thick. It's hinged and opens easily. The box could hold a deck of cards with a little extra space, to give you an idea of the dimensions. The box holds the doll, the matches (the little cardboard boxes which slide open and contain 50 or so matches – available at any grocery store) and the business cards with the hand drawn on the back of each one.

The box, incidentally, is the secret for the actual blister. The way the blister is formed is extremely easy and is as old as dirt. In the past, magicians have pressed their fingertips against the hole in a belt loop, the hole in a metal washer, or even the hole in a house key. By pressing one's finger very hard for a few seconds, you wind up with a raised portion of skin that is white and looks just like a blister. It will stay in this condition for maybe 30 seconds or so, plenty of time to do your revelation and leave. Since it's my closer very often, I don't have an issue with people wanting to constantly examine my finger.

Now that you understand the concept behind the blister, I'll tip how I do it. I didn't want to worry about belt holes, hidden keys, or anything like that as far as previous methods. Instead, the hole that I use is right on the bottom of the little wooden box!

There's a hole about the size of the blister I need drilled in the center of the box. The wood of the box is roughly a quarter inch thick, so the hole is only drilled about half way through. Really, though, it could go all the way through and it wouldn't matter because the audience never gets to handle the box or look inside.

This idea of using a hole in the box is not my original creation. In fact, this entire idea of using the Okito doll in conjunction with the blistered effect is the creation of Lauren Turner, a part-time, amateur performer who helped me get started in magic. Lauren's specialty is Bizarre magic and he's a gifted story teller. Quite frankly, his original presentation for this routine was very spooky.

### **The Routine "Flowchart"**

Since I know some magicians may suffer from "magician's guilt" over some of the ease and/or blatant-ness of this routine, I'll lay it all out in sequence.

When I first approach the table, I'm carrying the box, as it's a little big for my jacket pocket. When you're hunting for your own box, try finding something that will fit in a pocket, as it would make this a bit easier. I found mine at a garage sale – just an old, beat up looking box.

Anyway, I approach the table and set the box down. If I'm doing a strolling gig where everyone is standing, I generally won't do this routine because I won't have anywhere to set it down.

I perform the rest of my close-up set, which is usually around 5-7 minutes before I introduce this piece. ***(Author's Note: One big reason why this is a closer is because there's quite a bit of set up, verbally, before the magic happens, and a corporate audience in a cocktail situation very often has the attention span of a three-year old who's just eaten three boxes of Twinkies.)***

As I introduce this piece, I pick up the box and start removing the items. I take my time here, as each item is, in relation to the larger concept, a bit weird. Theatrically, we're setting the stage.

I make sure the business card is set where I can see it. I place it myself in the center of the a table so everyone can see, which is true, but my main motivation is so I can see which finger she touches with the match. ***(Author's Note: I suppose you could do a center tear or something like that, but why complicate matters? This is direct.)***

After I make my joke about the need for a victim, I introduce the doll. This is a big deal and should be treated as such. The box, by this time, is set on the table, on my right side so I can pick it up easily.

I set the doll in my left hand and after telling the spectator to wait until I TELL her to light the match, I focus everyone's attention on my hand holding the doll. Sometimes, if the room is attentive and quiet, I'll take a deep breath and "sell" it a bit more before the doll starts rising. As the doll starts rising, I nonchalantly pick up the wooden box with my right hand.

My thumb is on the lid of the box with my four fingers on the bottom. I feel for the hole with my middle finger, as that's the one that is chosen most often for me. I keep the middle finger over the hole.

I let the doll rise completely and as it reaches it's most vertical point, I tell the spectator, "Now!" meaning she is to light the match, blow it out, and touch it to a finger. Incidentally, early in the routine when you're telling her what to do, pause after each 'step,' like this:

"When I say, 'now' I want you to light the match...(PAUSE)...then blow it out...(PAUSE)...and then touch it to one of the fingertips on the drawing."

This may read as being condescending, but I'm not.

People are not stupid...but they are easily distracted. People are drinking, people are laughing and making comments, and as a result, these instructions can often run together. Pausing and making direct eye contact with the spectator can make the comprehension of what to do easier.

There's nothing more annoying then going through a routine and having to redirect a person's actions. In this case, there's no sleight of hand the person can mess it, but without the actions going smoothly to the selection of the finger with the burnt match, the revelation loses its meaning and besides, the climax feels "clunky."

After touches the burnt match to a fingertip, that's when I cream (or yelp, actually, a loud "AHHH!" complete with jerking my head back. That's when I press the correct finger over the hole. Press HARD to get a good "impression" on your finger. ***(Author's Note: Unless you have really strong pinkies, you may find it beneficial to use the third finger to 'push' against the pinky as it pushes against the hole for added pressure.)***

I should also mention that as she touches the fingertip on the business card, that's when I allow the doll to lower in my hand. It stays there, ignored, for the rest of the routine, until I put it back in the box.

After I yelp in pain, I start demanding that the participant "Blow on it!" This is wonderfully ambiguous, because if she blows on the drawing, I snap at her, and correct her to blow on the match. If she blows on the match, I correct her, telling her to blow on the drawing! Not only being funny, this whole exchange gives me several more seconds to REALLY press that finger and get the best, most visible and clearly defined blister possible. Don't overlook this step, as it's critical for 'getting the blister.'

I then slowly set the box down on the table. No quick movements here, as what you're doing should appear innocent. I act like I'm in quite a bit of pain. I then spread my fingers out, palm down, in the center of the table, near the business card.

What's nice, here, is I never specified which hand I'd be using or exactly what would happen. Not only does this give me the ability to use whichever hand I want, but since I haven't explicitly stated what's going to transpire, no one can "get ahead" of me in the routine and start looking for secret stuff.

I then ask, "You selected...which finger?" She will either point to the finger or say which one out loud. I do this for two reasons: first, many corporate events have large, fancy centerpieces on each table, so some people actually may not have seen which finger she selected and I definitely want everyone there to know which finger she picked BEFORE I reveal my blister.

Secondly, this question subtly suggests to some of the people that I myself did not know what finger was selected, adding another layer of 'wow' to the effect. I never SAY I didn't see it...I just let them make those connections for themselves in their own minds.

After we all hear confirmation of the finger chosen, I then dramatically, slowly turn over my hand, saying, "Look, there's a blister on my middle finger" or whichever finger they chose.

At this point, I hold the hand out to the spectator who chose the finger and say, "Touch it, make sure it's not make-up or anything like that." I wait for her to touch it, and that's when I yelp again, loudly, breaking everyone's state and leaving the table smiling and laughing.

I then place the doll back into the box along with the burnt match (**Author's Note: Tidiness counts. Many of my events are high dollar corporate affairs.**)

I make a point of saying that I'll leave the business card in case anyone "wants to figure it out," which is a silly thing to say, considering it's just a business card. Everyone laughs, picking up on the fact that the REAL reason why I'm leaving the card is for promotional purposes.

### **A Few Final Thoughts...**

Some people may have the idea of using flash paper for the fingertip touch by the match. I was tempted myself, opted not to do it for several reasons. First, the flash paper may light before you have a chance to see for sure what finger is chosen. Second, the flash may startle the volunteer, and she could wind up throwing the match...not good.

Also, this piece plays well for very small stand-up audiences as well. I've done this for teen birthday parties, smaller corporate events and so on. When working for larger groups, for the fingertip selection, I will (for corporate groups) simply use a large drawing of a human hand, making it easier to see which finger is selected from a distance.

If I'm performing for a small teen group, such as 15 or so teens in someone's living room, I actually use an old art project from my high school days. Using parchment, I hand-bound a booklet in which I drew weird symbols and arcane drawings, along with the human hand in the center of the book. It's very horror-movie prop looking and despite the fact that I made it over twenty years ago, I can't bear to part with it. If you're a horror movie buff and want inspiration for your own book, rent or buy "The Evil Dead," directed by Sam Raimi of Spiderman fame. In the movie there is a 'Book of the Dead' and they show a few close-ups of different pages in the book.

You can also pester me into scanning you copies of my pages. If you perform for teens a lot, a prop like this really helps 'sell' the routine. I make no claims as to the book's origins. I simply say that I have a strange book and flip through the pages. Very cool.

Again, don't read "blister" and "\$10 Okito Doll" and pass the routine up. It PLAYS.

# Rainbow Ropes

***An old throw-away trick becomes a highly entertaining and funny stage piece with three children volunteers***

## Introduction

For those of you who have never seen the routine before, this routine, in a nutshell, is as follows: ***(Author's Note: I'm going to do the annoying "third person" magician description for this. Sorry!)*** Three ropes are shown – one red, one blue and one white. Each rope is around 14 inches or so long. All three ropes are tied together at the ends, so you have three ropes, two knots.

As the magician patters, he unties the knots and reties them, so the three ropes are now tied together end to end, with two knots. The magician then wraps the rope around his hands, so eventually, the end-to-end ropes are all wrapped around his hand. He unwraps the rope and lets the three ropes fall. The knots have vanished and the three ropes have "merged" to one, forming one long, red, white and blue rope.

The routine is visual, magical, and very easy from the technical end.

The Rainbow Ropes, or Patriotic Ropes, along with the voodoo routine I just explained, are the two routines that have been in my professional set for my entire career. The Rainbow Ropes is a standard dealer item and you can get versions for as little as six bucks...but they suck. Let me elaborate.

Most versions of this trick use what feels like clothesline – the rope is very stiff. The red portions of the rope and the blue portions are dyed, but the dye job is on the pale side and it fades over time. I typically perform this routine 50-75 times a year and every year, I had to buy a new Rainbow Ropes. At six bucks or so, that's not a huge investment, but last year, I found out that the great rope magician Daryl had put out a version of this. ***(Author's Note: For all I know, he put it out 10 years ago and I just never knew about it.)***

Anyway, Daryl's version is more expensive, about \$20, but MAN what a difference! The blue and red colors are extremely vibrant, the rope is soft, and it even comes with a DVD so you can get handling tips from a true pro.

The rope is made of material and dye that is designed to never fade as well as machine washable. This is AMAZING, and coupled with the fact that I never have to buy replacements has me voting this as the BEST version of this effect, hands down.

Despite the fact that I had performed this for years, it still evolved quite a bit. First, it was a staple of my kids' birthday parties. I performed it just as a straight stand-up piece – the kids sit and watch and I perform.

Years later, as my presentation evolved, I stumbled across a marvelous way for this simple routine to not only play to huge audiences but also use three volunteers from the audiences, which dramatically increased the appeal of the routine.

The routine is designed for K-5 age children's audiences or family shows.

Since this is a marketed product, I'm not going to get into the actual 'workings,' but once you buy the prop, it will be extremely easy to follow this script.

Read on...

### **The Presentation**

**"I need THREE volunteers..." (Author's Note: *The easiest way to get everyone's attention in a kids' show is to ask for volunteer's but if you don't monitor the situation, it can turn ugly. I then place 'conditions' on volunteering...*)**

**"...who are sitting quietly...with his or her hand in the air...smiling...and not talking..." (Author's Note: *All of this allows me to subconsciously tell the kids to sit down and behave, but since I'm doing it as a condition of helping out, it serves as a reward for the kids who are picked as well as a GREAT crowd control technique without admonishing the kids. I perform most often in schools and trust me when I say teachers are EXTREMELY impressed with how I 'hold' the attention of the group.*)**

I then pick my three volunteers: two girls and a boy, for very specific reasons. I ask for all three to line up in a straight line to my right, so the audience can see us all clearly. I then arrange the boy between the two girls for reasons that will become obvious later. Blocking is a fundamental secret to making a stage performance appear polished.

I quickly ask all three their names and proudly announce, "Ladies and gentlemen, these three volunteers will be ACTORS in a play!" With that, I quickly take out the rainbow ropes and display the knots.

"This will be a story about three brave knights – a red knight, a blue knight, and a white knight. These knights were strong and powerful, but they never learned to work together with each other. They always argued about their differences, not understanding that their differences were what made them unique and important."

I let this sink in for a moment and point to the knots. You can see the knots, and that means they argued a lot.” (***Author’s Note: I’m linking the colors to each knight and the knots to the idea of not getting along and arguing.***)

I then place one knot into my breast pocket of my jacket so the other knot and the majority of the three ropes will be visible the entire time. I’m going to be talking and handling other props, so I don’t want the ropes to be out of sight and going back and forth to a table to handle the ropes is a lot of needless “blur” onstage.

“You three are going to be the three brave knights. Sally, you’re going to be the red knight. The red knight has a strong red helmet to protect her head from getting hurt. I couldn’t find a red helmet, so instead I have this fluffy red hat!”

With that, out of my table I pull out a bright, fire-engine red winter hat that I place on Sally’s head. The audience laughs along with Sally. (***Author’s Note: Kids like to play dress up, so this doesn’t embarrass kids. Doing the same thing for adults on the other hand might not be good.***)

“Sara,” I say, pointing to the second girl, “you get to be the white knight. The white knight had white ‘gauntlets’ to protect her hands from getting hurt, but I couldn’t find any white gauntlets, so instead, I have a white oven mitt!”

I quickly pull out a white oven mitt and hand it to Sara to put on. This gets a nice laugh as well. (***Author’s Note: I like the word ‘gauntlet’ as it’s very ‘medieval’ sounding. It’s one of those ‘buzzwords’ that instantly adds flavor to a routine. Since most kids will not know what a ‘gauntlet’ is, I don’t want to waste a lot of stage time describing it, so instead, as I’m saying “gauntlet to protect her hands,” I am wrapping my right hand around my left and vice versa. That, plus hauling out the oven mitt, is enough to let everyone know that a gauntlet covers the hands.***)

I continue: “Steve, you are the blue knight. The blue knight has a blue sword that he uses to vanquish evil.” At this point, there are murmurings of excitement as the kids think I’m going to hand Steve a sword! I then say, “But a sword would be too dangerous, so instead I’m giving you a blue pooper scooper.”

I then hand a blue, plastic ‘scooper’ to Steve as the audience erupts in laughter. I then turn to the audience and say, “Don’t worry, it’s not USED!”

From there, I continue. “You three are going to have some actions to do during this story. Listen carefully – if I say ‘fight’ during this story, you’re going to hold up your hands in a fist, put one foot forward and keep that pose, OK? Try it...FIGHT!” The three kids strike a fighter’s pose.

“Great!” I continue. “Then, I will say ‘argue.’ When you hear me say ‘argue,’ turn toward each other and wave one finger toward each other.” I demonstrate by wagging my finger in front of my face. The three kids mimic me, waving their first fingers in each other’s faces.

“Fantastic!” I exclaim. “At the end of the story, I’m going to say ‘working together.’ When I say that, that’s when you have to hold hands.” **(Author’s Note: That’s why I pick two girls and a boy and why the boy stands in the middle. With younger kids, grades K-2, they nonchalantly grab each other’s hands. With grades 3-5, boys and girls are aware of the differences and are reluctant to touch each other in front of their peers. This is funny. ‘nuff said.)**

“Here’s the story. Once upon a time, there were three brave knights: a red knight, a white knight, and a blue knight.” **(I point to each child as I say the names.)** “They were the bravest knights in all of the land, but each of them was too concerned with their differences, the fact they weren’t exactly like each other. Being different from each other is good thing...but they didn’t know it at the time.

“One day, they were summoned by a king to slay a dragon. The three knights were led to the castle, down the hallway, through the corridor, to where the king was sitting high on his throne and he said in a loud, clear, royal voice...’Dudes...I really need you dudes to slay the dragon, dudes.’” **(Author’s Note” At this point, there is often laughter, as kids don’t expect a king to say “dudes.” I ad-libbed it one day, it worked, so I kept it.)**

“Can you dudes slay the dragon?” The kids nod. “So, the three knights go to the cave where the dragon is and prepare to fight...FIGHT!” The kids get into their ‘fighting stances.’

“Unfortunately, the knights did not work together. They ARGUED...” At this point, the kids, with a bit of prompting on my part, begin shaking their fingers at each other. “...with each other over who the better knight was. The blue knight went down.”

As I’m saying this, I’ve untied one of the knots holding the three gimmicked ropes together. I drop the blue rope’s free end and begin tying the red and white rope back together, displaying the new knot.

“The red knight and the white knight ARGUED whose fault it was.” The red knight and white knight continue wagging fingers at each other. I then drop the new knot and the blue end rope, focusing my attention now to the other knot, with all three ropes still tied together at the ends.

“The second time the king summoned the knights, they were led to the castle, down the hallway, through the corridor to where the king was sitting at his throne.

He said, in a loud, clear, royal voice...’Dudes...I really need you dudes to slay the dragon, Okay, dudes?’” The audience laughs as the three knights laugh.

“So...the three knights go to the cave, ready to fight...FIGHT!” Once again the three kids jump into their fighting stances. “Unfortunately, they did not get along. They still hadn’t learn to work together, so the red knight went down. By this time, I’ve untied the knot and let the red rope’s end drop so it hangs freely. Holding the blue and white ropes by their untied ends, I continue.

“The blue knight and the white knight ARGUED...” the two kids behind their finger wagging. “...about whose fault it was.” I then tie the blue and white ropes into a new knot.

“So, by this point in the story, you can see the knights have not learned to work together at all.” Here, I am displaying the three ropes, now tied end to end with two knots. As I continue speaking, I slowly wrap the entire length of the three ropes, roughly three feet, around my hand.

“The THIRD time the king summoned the knights, they were led down the hallway, through the corridor, and the king sat up high in his throne and he said, in a loud, clear royal voice...’Dudes...I really need you dudes to slay the dragon, dudes! I need you dudes to whip some dragon booty, dudes!’” At this line, the kids and the entire audience bursts out laughing. (***Author’s Note: At this point in the routine, right at that laugh line, I am ridding myself of the rope gimmicks. Without giving away any secrets, any time you can cover a ‘move’ with a laugh line, you’re doing a good thing.***)

By the time the laughter has subsided, I have done the “dirty work” and we’re at the conclusion of the routine.

“This time, the knights went to the cave and they learned to WORK TOGETHER...” I non-verbally encourage the kids to hold hands, side by side. “...because only by WORKING TOGETHER...were they able to get rid of the dragon...”

As I say the last line, I let the rope unwind from my hand, revealing to the audience that the knots have vanished and the three ropes have ‘merged’ into one long, complete three-colored rope. Here, I pause for a beat, because sometimes it takes the audience a moment to comprehend what just happened. Then the applause starts. I then send the kids back to their seats as I collect their props.

To occupy the ‘dead time’ as the three kids leave the stage, I will often use this line: “Thank you, Dudes!” as a nice call-back.

***(Author's Note: In our hyper-sensitive society, we really must be careful about appearing to promote violence. Therefore, as the routine draws to a close, I do not say 'slay' at the end. I instead say that we 'get rid of' the dragon. It's a fairy tale-type presentation so it shouldn't matter, but as a guy who presents an anti-bullying show, I don't want to be seen as someone who promotes violence. In reality, I should change the script to eliminate the word 'slay' completely, but thus far I have not.)***

### **Final Notes**

This routine plays very well, from the introduction of the volunteers, to their physical actions to the silly props, all of this really helps to elevate this from a simple rope effect to a wonderfully fairy tale story. It also has a GREAT message that I use, but that's for another book and another time.

# Rising Card

***This rising card routine can be done with a BORROWED deck, is cheap, can be done surrounded, and is basically bullet-proof!***

## Introduction

You may be thinking, “Man, do we REALLY need another “Rising Card?” Relax. I’m not proposing a new gimmick-of-the-week. I have actually developed a KILLER real-world application for the rising card plot. The commercially available gimmick is cheap, and my handling and presentation creates an incredible magical moment that gives your spectator a souvenir, can be done surrounded, and even performed with a borrowed deck!

It’s a lot of hype, but believe me, this has been my most-frequent close-up ‘closer’ for about 10 years. (***Author’s Note: Readers may be familiar with my presentation for the Voodoo Blistered routine, which I also use as a closer. It’s nice to have two closers for close-up, both for repeat audiences and for those times when the people at the next table over were craning their necks and watching the show.***)

## Presentation

Near the end of my set, I normally will have done a lot with one volunteer, usually my “Perfect Corporate Strolling Opener” followed by Banachek’s “Psychokinetic Silverware.”

I’ll say, “Mary, we’ve been through a lot and I want to show my gratitude, so I’m going to give you a souvenir.”

Mary says, “Oh good!”

I respond: “Don’t get too excited. It’s cheap.” There is laughter. (***Author’s Note: With this simple exchange, I’ve created a ‘motivation’ for the entire routine. Most magic really comes off a rather pointless, so I try to motivate my stuff as much as possible.***)

“Mary, I have a deck of cards. We’re going to do this in stages, because when it’s all over, you won’t believe what you’ve seen.” As I say this, I remove the deck of cards from my breast pocket and remove the cards from their case. I hand the case to Mary and continue.

“Mary, please check out this card case. Make sure there are no trapdoors, threads, magnet, hidden reptiles, or anything. And don’t forget to show the inside to your friends, stick your fingers in it, whatever.” (**Author’s Note: The ‘hidden reptiles’ line was something I got from my early mentor, Lauren Turner. It’s a cute line that gets laughs.**)

Mary examines the card case as I say, “When you’re done, just set it on the table. Great, now please take this deck of cards and check them out, too.” (**Author’s Note: All of this set-up may seem like it’s taking a bit of time, but trust me, it will enhance the effect because once people see the effect, they will remember having freely handled everything and have no where to go.**)

“Mary, feel free to mix up the cards.” As Mary begins shuffling, I then continue, “...but whatever you do, don’t change the order of the cards!” Everyone laughs as Mary either freezes or continues mixing cards with a smirk on her face. (**Author’s Note: An old line, but a good one.**)

Now, Mary, please look at the faces of the cards and take out any card that you like. Your favorite card may not be in there because it’s not a full deck. Every time I do this, I lose a card.” (**Author’s Note: Two things – one, with this gimmick, you can’t use a full deck anyway, so the fact that I give away the card legitimately at the end explains this and secondly, I NEVER EVER say “I don’t play with a full deck.” Let your audience members say it if they insist, but as my friend Doc Dixon says, ‘I step right up to the edge of hackdom...and then back off.’**)

Mary selects a card as I pull out a Sharpie. “Mary,” I say, “I’ll trade you the rest of the cards for the pen.” Mary and I swap.

“Mary, I’d like you to sign your name on the FRONT of the card.” (**Author’s Note: Very often there is a tiny bit of disbelief and some even say, “But I’ll ruin the card!” to which I will ad-lib a response, such as “That’s okay, I have 52 more in another deck” or “That’s okay, it’s YOUR card,” and so on.**)

As Mary signs the card, I am careful to hold the deck up in my left hand and say, “I’ll just turn away so I can’t see Mary’s card, and I’ll just stare at this gentleman here, so he can make sure I’m not doing anything ‘tricky’ to the cards.”

As I’m saying this, I’m staring at another person at the table. I’ll open my eyes really wide and STARE into his eyes as I continue with, “Am I making you uncomfortable?”

If this person says “No,” I’ll wait two seconds and say “How ‘bout now?” If he says “No,” again, I repeat the line. If he says “yes,” I say, “I’m trying!” (**Author’s Note: I love this exchange, but it’s a way to keep the entertainment value of the**

routine up while emphasizing the fair procedure and killing time while the card is being signed. Three purposes, one exchange. Priceless!)

By this time, Mary should be finished. Once I receive confirmation that the card's face is hidden, I turn back around and face Mary, deck in hand. "Mary, let's recap. You checked out the card box. You've shuffled the cards. You selected a card and signed it. Steve here was watching to make sure I didn't do anything funny. There's no way I could cheat at this.' As I'm saying this, I have put the deck back into the card case and taken my Sharpie back. **(Author's Note: I've lost so many Sharpies by forgetting them at the table. Then I feel like such a putz running back to the table 10 minutes later because I need it for the next group!)**

"Mary, I'm going to take your card, but I'm not going to look at it. Even if I did, it wouldn't matter because your NAME is on it." I then put her card back into the deck.

"Mary, here's the thing. Most people think that if they can see behind me, they'll figure out how I do everything. Therefore, I'm going to hold my hand out in the center of the table, so we have people looking at it from EVERY angle, all the sides, underneath, whatever. My sleeves are up, so there's nothing there." **(Author's Note: If people are still eating, mind your manners and don't stick your arm over their plate or your armpit near their face!)**

"Now, we can either do this the easy way or the hard way. Which shall it be?" **(Author's Note: I used to just have the person name the card and make the card rise, but I had a lot of people say, 'Why do I have to tell you?' or things like that. It's not a big deal in the routine, but it does signify a bit of lost control to the people watching and I like to maintain my control, so I added the following bit of business.)**

If Mary says the "easy way," I say, "Good! Just name your card." **(Author's Note: Often, the person forgets the card! That's one more reason for the signature! This keeps the trick from dying the death of questions, as Eugene Burger so eloquently put it!)**

If Mary says the "hard way" as thy do 90% of the time, I say, "Fine! Hold up your finger like this!" I then hold up my pointer finger in classic 'E.T.' fashion. When she does, I touch my finger to hers.

"Mary, the easy way is when you just say the card, but the hard way is when you just THINK it to me. So...think it to me!" I then wait a beat and say "Watch the deck!"

Once I have everyone's attention on the deck, I allow the card to rise out of the deck. In a nice bit, often, because my arm has the deck out in the middle of the

table or group, if everyone is standing, the card rises with its back toward Mary, so I can do a nice little reveal with the following line.

“And Mary, that wasn’t just ANY card that rose out of the deck, but it was YOUR card, for you to keep forever and ever!” (***Author’s Note: Occasionally I get very lucky and Mary has signed her card along one end of the card and I wind up putting it in the deck signature side down, so when it rises, the signature is not immediately visible til I pull the card out of the deck to hand to Mary. It’s a nice little extra kick, as I’ve had a few “aha!” moments when the signature is revealed, which tells me some people are thinking, “Gee, is it really the SAME Two of Hearts that she signed?” I can’t control it because I don’t look at the face of the card, but when this happens, it’s nice.***)

As everyone is gasping and looking at the card, I put the deck of cards away and if I’m in a ‘cheeky’ mood, I’ll point to the back of the card, which has a sticker on it with all of my contact information, making this a perfect giveaway.

### **A Few Notes...**

As I said, this is the closer I use much of the time when I’m performing close-up magic. First, it involves getting my contact info into the hands of a spectator. It involves a visual levitation of sorts, is personal, and seems completely impossible.

From a scripting standpoint, I suppose this could be an opener, but the verbal goings-on are lengthy until the magic finally happens, and for me, I like to do something amazing as fast as possible when I ‘break in’ to a new group.

I’ve tried eliminating all of the ‘check the card box, check the cards,’ etc, but it doesn’t play as well. This is a perfect example of staying ahead of the audience until the magic happens and leading them where I want to lead them. When most people see card tricks, they assume it’s all about the identity of the card or finding the card with sleight of hand, such as Ambitious Card plots.

With this effect, it truly would not matter if I knew which card was selected, but since this serves as good misdirection (and it does enhance the effect...I won’t lie) I keep everything in as you’ve read.

This REALLY seems impossible because everyone has examined everything and like I said earlier, I have done this with a borrowed deck. On to the secret!

### **The Secret**

When I reveal the secret, don't be disappointed! It's...an elastic loop, nothing more. I'll wait for your disappointment to fade. Done? Good!

The gimmick I use is called "Almost Impromptu Rising Card" and is made by Hampton Magic. They're available all over the place and you get three loops for about \$6.00 along with some crappy instructions.

With care, each loop can last a hundred or so performances. I typically do the effect around 20 times per strolling/close-up gig and I generally replace the loop after 5 or so such gigs, although I have had some last me much longer. Typically when I hit a brick and mortar magic shop (sadly, not too often anymore) I'll grab the shop's entire stock. I think I've got something like 15 loops right now.

The loop's "stretchiness" is designed to wrap around no more than two-thirds of the deck and still afford enough "stretchiness" to still rise the selected card out of the deck.

Of course, nearly any deck can be used. I say "nearly" because I always use Bicycles. In addition to me just being a snob, they are the best cards for the loops. Let me elaborate...

Two years ago, I was hired by a paper company to do magic at their trade show booth. In addition to their usual array of pads, post-its and so on, they were debuting their new line of playing cards that could be customized with their clients' names on the backs of the cards with logos, etc.

Since they were debuting the cards, they specifically wanted me to use their cards in everything I did. It wasn't until I actually got to the gig that I was able to get my hands on their cards...where I discovered to my horror that their cards were highly plasticized, more so than Bicycles, and as a result were rather sharp. After my second loop broke on one card, I had to abandon the trick for the trade show. Bummer! Use Bicycles – it's worth it.

### **The Handling**

You'll notice in my handling that people were able to freely handle the cards. That's what makes this routine so much more than just a cheap rising card trick. It's so clean! In a nutshell, I start the trick with the loop already wrapped around the deck. Then, during the course of having the card box examined, I slip the loop off. I then slip the loop back on while Mary signs her card. Simple.

Now for the details...

First of all, the instructions tell you to start the trick with the loop either around your wrist or around your hand, I forgot which. (**Author's Note: I haven't read the instructions in years.**)

If you do it that way, you're in real danger of losing the loop or breaking it, unless you only plan on doing this one trick for one group. By having the loop around your deck to start, you can jump into this routine at anytime.

Remove a third of the cards from your deck. Because new Bicycles are so slippery, I don't recommend doing this with brand new cards, at least until you get used to the handling.

I'm going to now cover a few basic moves with this routine. They may feel a tad odd or obvious, but with some very simple misdirection, this will blow by anyone in a close-up situation.

#### Move #1: Putting the loop on the deck

First, you need to know how to wrap one of the loops around the deck. The following instructions will detail how to do this both in preparation before your performance as well as during live, in action performances.

Start with the two-thirds deck, held by the ends in the right hand. The best way to put the loop on the deck (to preserve the loop for as many uses as possible) is to hold the deck in the right hand, with the loop around your left hand's second, third and fourth fingers. The loop is positioned just above the knuckle on each finger closest to the hand...in other words, not the knuckle near the fingertips.

Then, dip your left thumb below the loop and pull back an inch or so. Now the loop should be resting on your left thumb, at the base of the nail, with the loop maintaining its position around the other three fingers. This motion with the thumb creates an opening in the loop that the deck goes into.

Again, with the deck in your right hand, held facedown with the thumb at one end and your second and third fingers at the other end, with the first finger against one side and your pinky against the opposite side, you're in a perfect position to slip the deck into the loop. As the end of the deck, with the right thumb, approaches the loop, the right thumb briefly lets go of the deck. Due to the positioning of the other four fingers, the deck is squeezed, maintaining a firm grip. As soon as the loop touches the end of the deck, the right thumb re-grips the deck as the right hand carefully pivots the deck into the left hand.

Alternatively, you don't have to let go of the deck at all with the right thumb. You can merely get the loop around the deck to one side of your right thumb. The point is, you've got choices.

Once the loop is completely around the deck lengthwise, remove your left fingers and thumb from under the loop. When learning it, I would put shift my right middle finger tip, which is right by the loop on that end of the deck anyway, slightly so the right fingertip covers the thread against that end of the deck. With the thread thus “anchored” by the right finger, carefully work your left fingers, and thumb out of the loop, allowing it ‘roll out’ for lack of a better word onto the deck. There’s a bit of a knack to this. Don’t try to rush it and be gentle. Again, I’ve had loops last me literally hundreds of performances.

Once your left fingers are free, you should now be holding the deck in your right hand.

Remember this, as it’s the basic move you’ll be doing to get the loop onto the deck during performance.

Move #2: Getting the loop off of the deck.

To take the loop off of the deck during a performance, start with the deck held in your right hand, fingers at one end, thumb at the other, with the deck and palm “face down,” with the thumb closest to your body.

Slightly buckle the entire deck in your right hand, so that the face of the deck, toward the floor, buckles AWAY from the loop. If your hand strength is not what it needs to be to buckle the deck, you can give yourself a bit of leverage with the left fingers held casually against the face of the deck (again, the face of the deck is toward the floor, so your left fingertips will be touching the deck pointing up, if we could see through the deck.)

Once the deck is buckled, from here, carefully and gently slip your second, third and pinky fingers of your left hand into the loop, up to the knuckles (or roughly there) closest to the hand. It’s pretty much the same position as before.

Then, making sure the thread is not being held in place or blocked by any of the right fingers, carefully lever and pivot the deck horizontally (parallel to the floor) out of the loop into your right hand.

You should now have the deck in your right hand and the loop over your second, third and fourth fingers in your left hand.

***(Author’s Note: Since the loop is elastic, it “grips” the deck and/or fingers, depending on the move, actually aiding you in these two moves.)***

Those two moves are the only technical needs for this effect. Now I will cover the sequence of the routine. At the end, I’ll give some performance tips, things to look out for and so on. I will also cover how I’ve done this with a borrowed deck.

### The Routine Sequence

Start with the deck cased. I like to have the deck in the breast pocket of my suit jacket, where it's easily accessible. The Sharpie marker is right next to it. I use a Sharpie because it is quick drying and the ink shows up well. Incidentally, I use red-back Bicycles, as the black ink shows up much better in case the spectator has a "brain fart" writes her name on the back of the card, despite my instructions to the contrary.

As I launch into my script, I carefully slide the cards out of the case into my left hand, making sure the loop does not get hung up at any point. (**Author's Note: To make getting the deck in and out of the case easier, I remove the little flaps of the card case. After a card case has been used a lot, the little end flaps get a little warped and mangled and they really inhibit the process of deck removal and such. Just a small touch to make handling during performances smoother.**)

Specifically, when I remove the cards, I angle the open end of the card case onto my left finger tips, so the end of the deck rests on my fingers as I slide away the card case. This looks completely natural and saves wear and tear on the loop. Remove the cards by pulling the deck might mean you accidentally yank on the loop with your fingertips.

Once the deck is in my left hand, I hand the card case out to be examined. I put a lot of "heat" on the card case because it keeps anyone from looking too closely at the cards. The loop is pretty invisible, but in the right lighting conditions (direct sunlight, for example) the loops are visible, so be careful.

I also put "heat" on the card case because after the rising card, I don't want anyone to have "anywhere to go" with possible methods.

As the card case is being examined, I am watching everyone's eyes carefully. At the first opportune moment, I slip the loop off onto my left hand, using the Move #1 described earlier.

I then have the card case placed on the table. I then hand the cards, in my right hand, to the spectator. I then remove the Sharpie from my jacket pocket, using my right hand. (**Author's Note: Not only is using my left hand to remove something from my left jacket breast pocket awkward, it might ruin the loop on my left hand.**)

I transfer the pen to my left hand. Once she has selected and removed a card, I hand her the pen using my left hand and gesture for the rest of the deck with my right. It's totally innocent looking, and since you're asking her to do two things at once – give you something and take something different – her attention is

completely occupied. If you're in direct sunlight, simply keep your left fingertips together to mask the loop.

As she signs the card, I will then turn to another spectator, making it a point of stressing how I am not watching her. I wait until everyone's eyes are either on her, or on my face, and with the deck held a little above waist level, I slip the loop back onto the deck using Move #2 described earlier. It's all in the eyes – watch everyone's eyes and do the move at that time. ***(Author's Note: Have no fear – this may read as bold, but it's 100 times easier than a classic pass. The psychology is strong, too – the selected card is being held by someone else. With most "pick a card" tricks, the emphasis is on the selected card, not the rest of the deck, so unless the selected card is actually in the deck, no one cares about the rest of the deck. Besides, NO ONE has any idea what I'm going to do. If I were to announce that her card was going to float out of the deck, then everyone would be burning me a lot more!)***

Once the loop is safely around the deck, wait for her to confirm she's done. I also, during the signing process, after the loop is on the deck, stress to whoever I'm staring at to "make sure I'm not doing anything funny with the deck." I also make sure I hold the deck slightly above waist level because if I were to drop the deck to my side, later people might remember this as being suspicious.

At this point, most of the work is over. It's A GREAT feeling! I ask for the pen back and put the cards slowly and openly in the deck, shielding the loop with my fingers. I then hold the deck in my left hand with my fingers and thumb holding the deck in the center of the deck, where the most surface area is. I hold the deck loosely as I take the card and carefully push it into the center of the deck. With the card pushing against the loop, I now squeeze fairly tightly to keep the card from rising.

I then go through the "easy way or hard way" bit, position my arm where everyone can see all around me and at the right moment slightly ease up on my grip. The card will start to rise slowly. It's important that your entire body freeze completely. If I were to move, people might associate the movement with the card's movement.

When the card has risen as high as it will rise (the older and more worn the cards AND loop, the less it rises.) I remove the card with my left hand and hand it to my volunteer while simultaneously flipping the card case lid closed and putting it back into my jacket breast pocket. I'm now clean and reset for the next table.

Because I have so thoroughly eliminated any clues to the method by all of the "set up," at this point I have NEVER, after having done this THOUSANDS of times, ever been asked by anyone to examine the cards.

I firmly believe that if you do not cover your bases early in the routine, you'll have people asking you all day to check out the cards.

### **Additional Thoughts**

**Point 1** - Don't forget about the idea of using the deck to advertise! I just use simple white Avery mailing labels and print my contact info on them. I then stick one on the back of every card. If you feel like doing this in a really classy way, there are places online where you can get cards custom-printed with your contact info on the back. I've actually been meaning to do this for a long time but keep forgetting.

One word of caution – ask the manufacturer to see a sample before you commit to it just for this trick. You'll want to make sure you do not run into the same problem I did with that trade show client and their cards.

**Point 2** - Another important point...actually, a review point...that I want to stress is that this routine relies heavily on your observation skills. You must keep track of where everyone's eyes are. Only do the moves when no one is watching your hand. The moves are very easy, and quite honestly, with the blur of sight caused by simply moving your hand horizontally, I've done the move with 13-year olds at Bar Mitzvahs "burning" me. I'm comfortable enough with the routine to know what I can get away with. When starting out, simply watch eyes. It works!

**Point 3** – When deciding how many cards you'll go through, you need to consider how long you intend to perform for each group, how many potential groups you'll perform for and the length of your gig and so on. I personally just put two thirds of the deck in my card case and when I use roughly half of that, I don't do the trick anymore. I tend to work one or two hour events, mostly for relatively small crowds of 75-100 people. I'll spend 5-10 minutes with each group, so I generally do not have to "reload" cards, but I always stick an extra dozen or so in my inside jacket pocket just in case.

**Point 4** – I'll have an extra loop or two in my car in my close-up case, but because I have another strong closer or two, if a loop breaks, I usually don't bother going to my car for a replacement loop.

### **Using A Borrowed Deck**

Since I work mostly corporate events, most people where I work do not have decks of cards! However, I occasionally do grand openings and at one, a teenager was so captivated by this trick that he ran into the convenience store where I was working and bought a deck of cards. He then "challenged" me to do it with his deck.

I was kind of expecting it, so when I saw him approach me, I already had the loop in place on my left hand. As he opened the deck of cards, I asked him to split the deck in two and as I held one half, I asked him to pick a card out of the second half. I explained this away by saying I did not even want to come NEAR the card he selected, again putting the “heat” on the selected card itself.

While he signed the card, I had all the time in the world to proceed with the normal handling, using the half of the deck to actually do the card rise..

To clean up at the end, I took his half deck out of the case, asked him to “really check out the card case, make sure there’s no springs or thread,” which gave me all the time in the world to slip the loop off before I returned his cards to him.

I normally do not go for challenges like that, but this grand opening was VERY flat and I was really bored!

You can really fry someone using this in their home with a borrowed deck. Personally, I would NOT bother doing this if someone had seen you do it and simply wanted you to repeat it with their deck...they’re really going to be burning you and impatient for you to “get to it.”

### **Final Thoughts**

This routine is a real worker! Don’t judge this lightly.

# The Amazing Fish Trick

## *Turn the birthday child into a STAR with this amazingly commercial routine*

### Introduction

When I was performing birthday parties, this little gem was one of my most talked about routines. It's one of those things you can describe to a client over the phone and they get REALLY excited. "Yes, Mrs. Birthday Mo, little Johnny will make a LIVE fish MAGICALLY appear during the show! He'll be the star."

See what I mean?

The presentation is something that plays well and it will even play well for adults and teens because the ending is so unexpected – almost no one makes a fish appear. Bunnies and doves, yes, but not fish!

Important Note: As I no longer do birthday parties, this is something that has not been part of my working act in quite some time. As a result, parts of the routine, especially the use of a candle, may strike some readers as not appropriate for youngsters. I performed this mostly for birthday parties where the kids were age 7 and older. Nevertheless, if you're not comfortable with the use of fire, feel free to drop it.

At the end of the section, I will offer some additional ideas, including simplifying the handling and making this an opener. As I performed it, this was usually the second or third effect I did.

### The Routine:

After one or two opening effects, I will remove from my table an ornate wooden box, about the size of a jewelry box. Out of the box I remove a small tealight candle, which I light with a lighter. I also set a champagne glass on my table top too.

"When I was about 7 years old, I decided I REALLY wanted a pet snake..." My voice trails off as the kids squeal and squirm. (**Author's Note: Buzzword!**)

"But my mother said, "No way, I don't want a snake in the house! It doesn't have any legs!" Everyone, especially the adults, laugh at this, especially those not too fond of snakes.

“So, thinking as a 7 year old would, I said, ‘Can I have a spider? They have LOTS of legs! A big, hairy tarantula!’” Once again, the kids squeal while the parents shudder.

“My mother said, ‘No, you can’t have a spider, they have too many legs!’ I thought about that for a few seconds and finally said, ‘What if I snap off four of the spider’s legs and tape ‘em to the snake?’

Everyone laughs at the absurdity of this line.

“Well,” I continue, “I’m not allowed to have a snake and I’m not allowed to have a spider, but I think you’ll like what I can do.”

With that, I call the birthday child up to help me. I direct him to stand in front of my roll on table, slightly to the right. I hand him the glass of water.

“I like to draw, so I drew a picture of a pretend pet.” With that, I display a 3x5 index card that has a cartoon drawing of either a fish or shark, depending on how one interprets the drawing. I wait for everyone to chuckle and then I wrap the drawing into a tube. I then take a piece of flash paper and clip it in my pinky while the rest of my fingers holds the tube.

I look at the birthday child and ask him to say the magic words. If I have already asked for the magic words, usually “abracadabra,” that’s what he’ll say. If we have not covered any ‘magic word’ business, he will usually make up something.

Just as he says the magic words, I touch the flash paper to the candle flame. After the flash, and after everyone reacts, I say, “Wow, Billy, you really are amazing. That was cool!” (Author’s Note: I only call the kid Billy if that’s name. If it’s not, I don’t say Billy. Just to be clear...)

I then tip the tube over the top of the glass of water. A live fish plops into the water.

Everyone is suitably impressed, and I hold the glass up to everyone individually so they can see the little fish swim in the glass.

“Don’t drink this,” I caution the audience as I set the glass down. Everyone laughs as I proceed to the next routine.

### **The Secret**

A thumb tip.

Wow, I can sense your disappointment.

One thing that I've learned over the years is that many working pros, even if they have incredible sleight of hand skills, prefer to use simpler methods in actual working situations so they can concentrate on presentation. Heck, Eugene Burger himself said on a recent DVD that he wants to be known as "the King of Wax," because many card effects are possible simply by using wax. GREAT stuff.

With that in mind, consider the impact this effect has on people. You're making a LIVE fish appear from thin air! A fish seems even more impossible than other animals because a fish needs water to survive, which supposedly makes the effect much harder.

In reality, this effect is really easy to do, but the biggest challenge is recognizing the fact that the fish is a living thing and deserves to be treated with respect. If you don't LOVE animals, don't put them in your act.

I used to do a pretty snazzy dove act. I eventually dropped it because I was tired of taking care of the birds. Realizing that wasn't fair to them, I gave them to someone who is an animal lover.

As far as the idea of using a thumb tip for the production of the fish, I can't say it was my idea. I first read of the technique in the old "Invocation" magazine. "Invocation" was a magazine first published by Tony Raven, then Tony Andruzzi and finally Doc Hilford that was devoted to Bizarre magic.

The routine pertaining to a fish was called "Living Alchemy," and if memory serves (always a scary assumption), the concept was credited to Siegfried and Roy. In any event, "Living Alchemy" as scripted used an arcane script which simply would not play to most audiences (a common problem with most of the stuff in "Invocation.")

I changed the presentation and simplified the handling, which included a spark-emitting 'Funkin' ring.

### **Prop List**

Here's what you'll need for this effect:

- A jewelry box with a footprint of around 5x3 inches
- A thumbtip – the longest one you can find...in other words, DON'T use the "half tip" ones you see for thumb tip nailwriters
- A candle – you can get a package of a dozen or so "tealight" candles from dollar stores
- A 3x5 index card

- A black sharpie marker
- A champagne glass – if you can find a plastic one, do it, as they travel easier
- A small plastic jug that holds a quart or so of liquid. This should also have a flip top cover that opens to accept a straw.
- A second plastic jug, identical in size to the first one. If they next together, that's even better, but not necessary
- An aquarium of at least ten gallons set up properly for tropical fish
- Fancy guppies
- Flash paper
- A lighter
- A small fishnet

Now that you know what you need, I'll elaborate on the items.

The reference to the aquarium is another reminder that the fish is not a prop to be shoved in a corner. Setting up a tropical fish tank, with the proper heating and filtration is beyond the scope of this book, but you'll need it to house the guppies. You'll also need to know as much as possible about their care and feeding.

The jewelry box is used to hold the thumb tip with the fish in it during the show. The candle is used, obviously, to light the flash paper.

The Sharpie is used to draw a picture on the index card. Draw any interpretation of a cartoon fish. Artistic ability does not matter. Mine always sucked, although I did have a pretty decent set of "Simpsons" style eyes on my fish drawing.

The index card is obviously what you use to wrap around the thumb tip.

The champagne glass can be swapped out for a simple clear plastic tumbler, but I like the champagne glass because as the child holds the stem, the water is clearly visible for the production of the fish. If the child (or adult) is holding a tumbler, then their hand may block the view of the fish.

I recommend using fancy guppies for this routine. Guppies are rather hardy fish and they're very pretty. Also, since they are freshwater fish, they are much easier to care for as opposed to the extremely delicate (and expensive) saltwater fish. ***(Author's Note: My first attempt at housing saltwater fish ended when a \$30 fish chomped a \$25 fish into bits within an hour of going into the tank. Not good.)***

The plastic jug is used to transport the fish from show to show. Fish are very delicate creature, so in the next section I will detail how to handle the fish, including transport, loading him into the thumb tip and more.

### **Transporting The Fish**

First, I always wait until the day of the show to load the fish into the plastic jug. Fill it about halfway full with WATER FROM THE FISHTANK. The fish is already acclimated to the water in the tank, so using the same water will minimize stress.

Using the fish net, catch the fish as put him into the jug. The reason why I stressed using a jug with one of those “flip tops” where you can insert a straw is very important. (**Author’s Note: It’s not so you can drink him.**)

The flip top ensures you can open the jug and let fresh air in while minimizing spillage as you drive.

When transporting the fish in your car, be aware of temperature. If you are performing outside and the temperature is more than 78 or so degrees, don’t do the trick. If it’s below 68 degrees...why are you performing outside???? Just kidding, but if you are performing outside, only do this trick if the temperature is between 68 and 78 degrees. That’s a decent range for guppies.

Also, even if you are doing the show inside, be mindful of your car’s temperature. If you’re performing in January and there’s a ton of snow on the ground, warm up your car so it’s very toasty BEFORE you bring the fish out to the car. If it’s cold out, tuck the jug into your jacket to shield him as much as possible from the elements.

The same thing goes for warm weather – if it’s a broiling 95 degrees outside, crank up your car’s AC before bringing the fish outside.

### **Loading the Fish Into the Thumb tip**

Once you are at the show, you’ll need a quiet place to load the fish. In the case of birthday shows, I always informed my client that I could NOT have anyone in the room while I was setting up. Loading the fish into the tip is a delicate matter and you don’t want any distractions.

When you are ready to set this trick up (Author’s Note: This was always the second-to-the-last thing I set up before my show started), set the second container on a stable surface next to the first jug that contains your fish. Have the jewelry box next to the two jugs.

Take the thumb tip and carefully fill it with water from the fish jug. You’ll want the tip to be roughly half full. BEFORE you put the fish in, try the water-filled tip on. If it’s too full, some water will squirt out when you put the tip on. Better now than during the actual show.

Take the thumb tip back off and put it into the jewelry box. With the lid open toward the audience and shielding their view of the box's interior (in other words, the lid opens away from me), I put the thumb tip into the box leaning against the bottom right corner. I'm right-handed, so this worked best for me. Since there's water in the tip, it has to remain upright.

Once the thumb tip is stable, I would then catch the fish with the net. To do this, I would, very quickly, gently, and smoothly, pour the water out of the jug to the second jug, with the water flowing through the net. The fish will eventually fall into the net.

To get him into the thumb tip, I would VERY CAREFULLY grasp the net around him and deposit him into the tip. This takes some practice. I recommend having plenty of guppies in your fish tank so you can rehearse the thumb tip loading procedure at home so when you get to a show, you can do it quickly and smoothly with as little stress on the fish as possible. (***Author's Note: I recommend having many guppies so that when you are rehearsing this loading sequence, you are not stressing out the same fish over and over in a concentrated period of time. This is critically important.***)

Over time, I found it much easier to just pour the water from one jug to another with the water pouring over my hand rather than the net, and then I could dump the fish directly into the thumb tip from my hand. I developed this "knack" over 10 years and it's tough to describe.

Some key things to keep in mind during the loading procedure:

- keep the fish IN water as much as possible
- If using a net, get the softest net possible to minimize stress to the fish...cheaper nets are made of coarse material and can damage scales
- Once the fish is in the tip, he may struggle. Keep an eye on him to make sure he is covered by water no matter what position he is in
- Use male guppies – females have larger bodies and many are too big for this trick
- Use a jewelry box with a hinged lid as it will help keep the fish from jumping out of the thumb tip

Once the fish is loaded, VERY carefully place your thumb into the tip, making sure you don't squish the little guy. Make sure he has enough water, too. Once you do this little test, place the thumb tip upright in the box, against the lower right corner (or lower left corner for lefties.) With this arrangement, simply

reaching into the box when the lid is opened will make it a simple and natural way to slip the tip on.

Place the index card with the drawing on it diagonally in the box, drawing side out, against the tip. This way, when you reach into the box, your thumb goes into the tip as your fingers and other hand grasp the index card.

At the other end of the box, place the votive/tealight candle. (***Author's Note: I used to have a really nice looking brass tealight candle holder which kept candle wax from dripping on my table top.***)

Place a piece of flash paper about 2 inches square next to the candle, along with a lighter.

Place the box and champagne glass (which is now filled about halfway with water from the jug used to transport the fish) in a safe place, preferably unseen by the audience, before the show starts. (***Author's Note: If you use a Joe Lefler Table as I used to, that second shelf is perfect.***)

### **Additional Notes**

Again, to refresh your minds, for the safety and comfort of the fish, I strongly recommend doing this effect either first or second in your show. Since my way of performing this is as a “talky” kind of presentation, I always did it second.

It's my belief that when people are told a magician will be performing, they will want to see what this person can or can't do right away. Therefore, I always strive for my first effect to be flashy, fast, and very visual. For that reason, when I was doing birthday parties, I opened with a dove act.

This was my second effect, and since I usually used the birthday child for it, it makes sense to use it early in the show – it's “all about the birthday child,” so it gets him/her involved easily, and they get credit for making the fish appear, even though all they have to do is stand there.

Additionally, this trick always gave me an easy way to “gauge” the cooperativeness of the birthday child. Some kids were REALLY shy, and they didn't even like being in front of a group doing such a simple task. This told me that later on, when I supposed to make the child float in the air, it might be best to use a different kid. If the child was real wiggly and couldn't hold still for the 20 seconds or so it took to make the fish appear, then it would be a good idea to use someone else for the ‘Floating’ part of the show.

With all of that in mind, it's very easy to adapt this as an opener – wait until your audience is seated and ready to go, slip the thumb tip on and walk out, show

your hand empty (in traditional thumb tip fashion, with the tip pointed at the audience), pick up the glass, make a fist (subtly removing the tip) and dump the fish into the glass. Instant opener.

Now I'll turn to my step-by-step notes on the way I always performed it. I liked this presentation, because it was one of my very first original scripts, it got the audience involved, and since it was both a talking performance and a volunteer piece, it burned up a fair amount of time.

### **Performance Notes**

I've already covered the details of reaching into the box and putting the tip on during the show. Here, I want to give some finer points.

**First**, tell most of the story before you get the volunteer up. I used to get the kid up and then tell the story. This is wrong, because even the most well-behaved kid will eventually start to feel like the glass is too heavy and the arm holding it will start to droop.

Also, take the candle out of the box and light it while you're telling the story. I personally NEVER bothered to explain or narrate this action. I can't stand it when magicians narrate obvious actions. (**Author's Note: "And now, I will cut this rope! And now, I will place this bag into your hand! And now, I will duck as the audience throws sharp things at me!"**)

The whole candle action is something that doesn't need to be explained. People will realize, when the flash paper goes off, that the candle was the catalyst for the fire. It's like the foreign-language-sounding incantations mystics use in movies: you don't need to directly translate and explain everything. People will pick up that something is magical without you needing to explain it all.

Eugene Burger said, in a recent DVD, that once he writes a script, he tries in subsequent rewrites, to get it down to as few words as possible. Good stuff.

**Second**, before you tell the story, before you get the kid up, do not tell the audience he/she will be helping out. Volunteering for a magic show is the favorite part of 99% of all kids I encounter, even high school kids, so I've found if you telegraph this, no one will care about the presentation.

In many ways, magic is like a game of chess – you must stay at least one step ahead of your audience as often as possible. I wish it wasn't the case, but most people have this idea that you're trying to "trick" them, which bugs me to no end. I'm not trying to trick anyone – I'm trying to entertain them.

**Third point:** when you hand the kid the glass, keep a close eye on him/her. I always try to make eye contact and engage my audience, but once the glass is in the kid's hand, you have to watch closely.

**Fourth point,** after you pick up the index card (and load the thumb tip on your hand), take a moment and really allow the audience to appreciate your silly drawing. I personally never bothered to flip the index card over and show your hands empty or anything like that, although I suppose you could. My feeling is that the fish-in-water production is so impossible, people just could not figure out how you could secretly be holding onto the fish. They're delicate and all adults know that, adding to the mystery.

**Fifth point,** after allowing the audience to look at the drawing, roll the card carefully around the thumb tip in one fluid motion. Once rolled, remove the tip from your thumb and firmly hold the tip/index card in your left hand. The cardstock is a bit stiff, so your grip must be secure to keep the tip from slipping out. Also, as you draw everyone's attention to the flash paper, casually allow your forefinger to hover over the top of the tube...every once in a while, the little fish will jump partially out of the tube, so if your finger is hovering there, you'll keep the little guy from tumbling to the floor.

**Sixth point:** using your right hand, remove the piece of flash paper out of the box. If you want to have something written on it, like "pixie dust," you can display it to the audience. I never did, but I do think it's a good idea, as it gives the paper a reason for being without you having to waste spoken words on explaining it.

**Seventh point,** I used to slightly wad up the flash paper and stuff it into the bottom of the cardstock tube and then light the flash paper that way. When I did it that way, I did have the occasional person think that somehow I had the fish in that little paper wad. To adjust my handling, I just clipped the paper, flat and uncrumpled, with my pinky of my left hand. A quick dip into the flames and voila! Instant magic!

**Eighth point:** Once the flash paper goes up, watch the child carefully. Most 7 year olds (and older) are really into fire! However, with some shy kids, they may not want you to get anywhere near them after the flash. Again, you can easily eliminate the flash paper, but I never had anyone complain about it. Using a bit of flash paper in a private home is not nearly the taboo that it would be in a school, for instance.

**Final point:** After you dump the fish into the glass, keep your hand extremely close, ready to steady the glass. This is a likely photo moment for the kid, so if cameras get whipped out, let the kid hold the glass for a few moments. It often takes people a few moments to realize the fish is actually alive, so the reaction, though unbelievably strong, may be delayed just a tad.

I then take the glass and move it about, letting each person have the opportunity to look closely at the fish swimming in the glass. For a private party of 15 or so people, this takes less than half a minute.

I'll place the glass in some out of the way place, or perhaps back onto my Lefler table shelf. Quite often, when the show is over, I would have several people hesitantly ask me, "Can I see the fish again?" which I'm happy to do.

### **Final Thoughts**

This is an unbelievably powerful piece. If I was still doing private parties for kids, I would still be doing it. Treat your fish with respect and I guarantee, this can be a real reputation-maker.

# Cube – A- Libre

***Always a great routine...and now here's motivation, a reason,  
for doing it!***

## Introduction

This effect is awesome. In essence, a performer shows two stacks of blocks. There are six blocks in each stack, with a number on each block. The stacks are each in numerical order, from one through six, counting from the top down.

Each time the stack on the audience's left is rearranged, the stack on the right is covered briefly with a large tube just barely big enough to cover the stack (leaving no room for the blocks inside to turn).

When the tube is removed, the blocks inside have somehow rearranged themselves into an order that perfectly matches the other stack. This is repeated in increasingly more difficult combinations until, for the final phase, an audience member calls out a random order for the left stack to be arranged. When the other stack is covered by the tube, it too rearranges itself to match the left stack!

If you don't have this effect, that description may read as incredibly dry, but trust me, it isn't. This effect gets an incredible reaction.

There are many versions out there. When I first started performing this effect back in the late 90's, I used a version from Harries Magic. These days, I'm using a set made by Jay Leslie and is available from Hocus Pocus.

I'll be right up front about something...I've seen a few other pros do this effect and their presentation was, for me, lacking. The presentations amounted to exposition: "If I cover these blocks, they'll match." Boring!

What I've done is added a few groan-inducing laughs along the way and a presentational frame that gives my audiences some background into me as a person. It's not Pulitzer material, but it ain't bad.

I've also reduced the number of phases in the routine from the standard six or seven phases to four. I really feel that for lay people, six or more phases of any routine is just too many. That's just my preference.

Enjoy.

### **Set Up & Presentation**

The two stacks of blocks are on my table, with the stack that changes on my left. The shells are in place and the numbers match...that is, the number block has the number shell covering it and so on. The tube is already covering the changing stack. After my last effect, I begin to transition to this effect.

“You know, one thing I’m often asked is how I got into magic. Well, it’s a lot like music. Do we have any musicians in the audience?”

(A few hands go up.)

“If you play music, you know that you start off with scales. These blocks, numbered 1 through 6, are my scales. When I decided to learn magic, this is the first thing my teacher taught me.

“As you can see, this stack of blocks is labeled one through six, with the one at the top and the six at the bottom.’

(Here, I am reinforcing the order of the blocks. This is useful for young children in the audience.)

“Over here, hidden in this tube, I have another set of blocks, with the one at the top and the six at the bottom.”

(When I remove the tube to show the second set of blocks, I leave behind the shells. This is important, as I want to show the inside of the tube.)

“Now, the blocks are too big to turn inside the tube...”

(Here I pick up one of the blocks from the stack on my right...that is, one of the ‘non-changing’ blocks. I put this block part way into the tube and turn it. The audience can see it’s too big to turn inside the tube. They also get a chance to see inside the tube, though I don’t point it out. Why run when you’re not being chased?)

“And the tube is only big enough to hold one set of blocks...”

(At this point I again cover the changing stack on my left with the tube, gesturing to both stacks, emphasizing that I couldn’t squeeze more than six blocks into the tube.)

“I’m only telling you this to give you some shortcuts later when you’re trying to figure this out.”

(As I say this, I'm lifting the tube back up, stealing the shells. I set the tube behind the blocks.)

"I wanted to learn magic, so I found a guy who was teaching it. I went to his house and when I walked in, he was lying on the floor. I asked him why he was lying there. He said, 'Because my name is Matt.'"

(There will be groans mixed in with the laughter. It's stupid and cheesy, but it works. If I get one or two groans but no laughter, I'll occasionally stop with the name gags right there, as I'm setting up a running gag to use throughout the routine.)

"Weird guy. Anyway, for my first lesson, he explained that it was my job to change the order of these blocks like this..."

(Here I reverse the order of the stack on my left, so the six is on top, and the one is on the bottom. I'm handling the blocks individually and the shells are inside the tube, so I can do this quickly.)

"...so the six is on top and the one is on top." (**Author's Note: Umm, what I said.**)

"Then he covered the set of blocks and said it would be my job to make them change instantaneously to match the first set, like this."

(At this point, I cover the blocks with the tube and quickly remove it, this time leaving the shells behind. The audience can see that the blocks have instantly reversed themselves. This gets a great reaction. Most audiences applaud, some don't. It's such a kick to the head, many audiences just stare. I find if I look right at the audience as I finish raising the tube, timing my script so I finish talking, I'm in a pretty good applause que when I finish. Occasionally I'll step forward slightly and spread my arms. The applause will come.)

"Thank you. I saw that and thought, 'no way can I do that,' which says a lot about negative thought. But I took the blocks home and I worked on it all week, and by the time the following week arrived, I was ready. I got to his house and walked in. This time, he was hanging on the wall. 'Why are you hanging like that?' I asked. He said, 'Because my name is Art.'"

(More groans. I then begin rearranging the blocks once again. Since the shells are now covering the blocks, caution is needed. Incidentally, for the way that I work the effect, the first three phases serve to get me in position for that last phase. I'll get back to it later.)

"It's the moment of truth, so I change the order of the blocks so the six is at the top and the one is at the bottom. I cover the blocks, wave my hands over it, say a

quick prayer, and remove the tube showing that just like him, the blocks have changed to match the FIRST set...just like that!”

(As I lift the tube, stealing away the shells, I once again time it so as I say “That!” the tube has completely cleared the blocks and I am making eye contact with my audience. Boom – applause.)

“But just like music, I couldn’t stop there. That was just the beginning stuff. The lessons got harder. The following week, I arrive for my lesson. I found my teacher floating in the pool. ‘What are you doing?’ I asked him. He said, ‘My name is...Bob.’”

(I pause right before I say ‘Bob’ because very often, several audience members will chime in with ‘Bob.’ It’s a cute way to get some audience involvement, get a cheap laugh and even acknowledge the fact that it’s a cheap laugh all in one fell swoop.)

“When the lesson started, he explained that things were going to get tougher. This time, he changed the order is the OTHER stack, changing it’s order so the SIX was on TOP and the one was on the BOTTOM.”

(Here I follow words with actions as I quickly reverse the order of the stack on my right, with the six on top and one on top, retaining a numerical order. Turning to the stack on my left, I then lift the top two blocks, the one and two off as one. I place the two blocks on the table top without reversing their order. The one is on TOP of the two. This is CRITICAL.)

“To make things even harder, he then changed the order of MY blocks, so they were no longer in any kind of numerical order.”

(I then pick up the rest of the blocks, numbers three through six, and set them on top of blocks one and two. Once again, I am NOT changing the order of three through six. Once I set these four blocks on top of the first two, the order should be, from the top down, three, four, five, six, one, two.)

“Even though this was much harder, once I covered the blocks with the tube, I was still able to make the order change to match the other set.”

(As I say this, I lift the tube once again, leaving behind the shells. The order will now look to be, from the top down, six, five, four, three, two, one.)

“Thank you! You know, you have been such a nice audience that I’m going to try something I’ve never tried before...” (**Author’s Note: building interest for the big finish.**)

“I would like YOU to give me a random order for one set of blocks and I’ll try to make mine change to match yours.”

(As I say ‘YOU’ I am indicating someone, usually a woman because they cooperate more, in the first couple of rows. She’ll usually look horrified that I picked her in which case I then reassure her that she will not have to come up on stage. This bit of reassurance goes a long way to gaining her cooperation.)

(Here, I start asking her what order she wants the blocks to be in, but I do it in a way that leaves no room for confusion as we race to the finish line.)

“Which of these six numbers do you want to see on the BOTTOM?”

(This wording eliminates any confusion. Whatever number she names, that’s what I put on the bottom. Let’s say it’s four.)

“Great, four. Now what number of these left do you want to see on top of the four?”

“Six.”

“Great!”

(Let’s skip ahead to the last number and assume the only block that hasn’t been placed yet is the two block. I hold it in my hand and point to it repeatedly as I say...)

“And what number do you want to see on top?”

“Two.”

(It gets a good little laugh. The last block is obvious, so I call attention to it. Let’s say that the order, from the top down, is Two, One, Three, Five, Six, Four. Now it’s the most difficult part of the routine. I must now rearrange my set of blocks with the shells on them so that when I cover them with the tube and steal away the shells, my order will match hers. I need to be cautious handling the blocks while not LOOKING like I’m being cautious. Also, I must continue speaking so that we don’t have dead time while I rearrange the blocks. Finally, I must be careful of where I put which block so that the ending plays as it should. Here’s a sample of what I say during this rearranging process. It varies from show to show, but this will give you a good idea of how I handle this phase.)

“Okay, Sherry, we have your blocks in a random order that you decided and in fact we have not set this up before the show, right? In fact, you didn’t know I was even going to call on you and I’ll bet you wish that I hadn’t, right?”

(Laughter.)

“Now I am going to rearrange my blocks into a new order completely different from your order. This is going to make this much harder on me and more impressive for you...”

(That’s as good an example of what I say most days. I then restate how hard this phase is and cover the stack with the tube and lift it, to thunderous applause.)

“Thank you... I’m glad you liked that because it was expensive.”

(One final little line to get a laugh as I remove both stacks of blocks from my performing table. I don’t like having a lot of different small tables onstage as I feel like the stage looks like a weird garage sale. I like one table, one focal point, so that last line I deliver buys me a few extra seconds to get the prop out of the way.)

### **The Block Order**

If you’ve done the effect exactly as I have in this description, when you reach the final audience-participation phase, the blocks should be in the right order for the big ending.

At this point, the blocks are on the table with the shells over them. The order, from the audience’s point of view, should be, from the top down, Six, Five, Four, Three, Two, One. INSIDE the shells, the actual blocks’ order should be, from the top down, Three, Four, Five, Six, One, Two.

This means that when you are rearranging your shell-covered blocks, you must set up your blocks so that the inside numbers correspond with the order of the blocks the audience member has given.

Remember the way the numbers match up: one-two, three-six, four-five. It’s really simple, but will take some practice.

If you follow my presentation, you’ll be just fine. If you have any difficulty or if something I wrote was not clear, feel free to contact me via email.

I’ve been doing this effect for about 15 years now with the presentation you just read and it always gets a great response.

## Final Thoughts

As I always say at the end of ezine, “Cause & Effects” and my blog, “Trick Talk,” available at [www.Hocus-Pocus.com](http://www.Hocus-Pocus.com) I encourage any comments and questions.

These routines have been responsible for literally thousands of dollars going into my bank account. It’s not the stuff of dreams, but it’s all tested, commercial stuff that makes me money.

Oh, final thing, if you DO have any comments or wish to join my “Cause & Effects” ezine list, shoot me an email to [crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net](mailto:crisjohnsoninfo@verizon.net). It’s FREE each month.

Cheers!

Best,

Cris