



# The Pursuit of Impossible Things



**With Carisa Hendrix**

It never resets to amaze me that any one person could ever be interesting enough to capture the attention of an audience for ten minutes, let alone over an hour. As magicians, we hone our magic, structure our shows and work hard to craft compelling personas to keep our crowds engaged, amused and, on our best days, inspired.

Before you read anything here, remember there are no hard rules in this soft art.



The photo above contains four of my favorite characters. From left to right we have Dee Dee, Max Darling, the Stunt Girl and of course Lucy Darling herself. The lady with the phone is me, which is, in a way, its own sort of character.

# Spectrum of Identity

**Persona**

**Character**

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I have made the bulk of my living as a professional entertainer since the age of sixteen. My career began out of necessity. After being kicked out of the house at that young age, I needed to find a way to support myself. With a handful of underdeveloped circus skills and a few mediocre card tricks, I

built my first act, and it was... very bad. However the fear of starvation and homelessness is an excellent motivator and I managed to quickly go from profoundly terrible to wonderfully mediocre.

Even in those early days I preferred working as a character. The jokes hit harder, the tricks could be more stylized and it was easier to look like I had experience beyond my years, useful when you're the new kid in the biz, and literally an actual child.

I have developed many characters over the years for my different roving acts, circus performances and kids shows, but I have never loved character work as much as I do as a magician.

## **Meet the family**

Dee Dee Darling is a lovable character obsessed with fame and fortune and with her I did/do children's magic shows, circus and bubble shows. (Check out [NonsenseKids.com](http://NonsenseKids.com) to learn more about bubble shows)

Max Darling was an elegant mover with whom I performed a number of circus acts from hula hoops to acrobatics. A silent ethereal character, that allowed me to add dance elements to the act and focus on being physically expressive.

The Stunt Girl was my sideshow character and with her I've won world records and worked the Ripley's Believe it or Not touring exhibit. I walked on glass, ate fire, hammered spikes into my face and watched as audiences looked on in shock. T was great.

Lucy Darling is one of my newest, and by far most popular, characters. She has taught me so much about magic and performing. There are days when it feels like a completely out of body experience when she takes the stage. In fact, Lucys says and does things that I often would rather she didn't. But I have to admit, she is rarely wrong.

## **Creating new Characters and Personas**

Everytime I create a new character I learn something about the way I am perceived and about who I am as an artist.. Characters give us the opportunity to see the world from a new perspective and tell different kinds of stories. They can unloc new talents we didn't know we had.

There are so many advantages to performing as a character, especially in the realm of magic. For one, it's easier for audiences to "buy into" the magic.

It can be difficult for audiences to allow themselves to be fooled. Even if the magic is incredibly powerful and expertly performed, many spectators will cling to flimsy explanations unwilling to risk feeling stupid. How many times have you seen a lay person lean over to their date mid performance and confidently whisper "magnets"?

With character magicians, we don't see this resistance to mystery as much. Even the simplest effect in the hands of a beloved and believable character seems to fool and amaze well beyond it's relative skill.

When performing in character or with a clearly defined persona you are playing in the arena of theater and benefiting from the unspoken social agreements that theater entails.

Let me explain. When an audience sees a play or an opera, they allow themselves to emotionally believe that what is taking place on the stage is real, even though they clearly know it is not. At the end of act three of *Madame Butterfly*, (spoiler alert!) we see a woman dead on stage and weep for her. Although I have seen this opera many times, I have not once witnessed an audience member confidently whisper to their companion “I know how they do this, she’s not really dead. See look! She’s breathing”. Not even once!

The conventions of theater allow us as an audience to let go of what we know to be true, that these are actors, props, and sets, and participate in the belief that this story is real. We see a woman die on stage and we ignore the artifice and allow ourselves to feel the loss.

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Kidding. But you will need to do some homework.

First, decide where on the spectrum of identity you would like your act to live. On one end we have the “persona”, a heightened and simplified version of you. Your persona will be based on your true self and would be recognizable to friends and family as a honed version of you at your very best.

Think of David Williamson or Mac King for example. These are clearly defined personas whose motivations and personalities are immediately clear to the audience.

On the other end is a full “character.” This is when your true self melts away and the entity you see on stage is a complete and believable construction. Think Rob Zabrecky, Ali Bongo, or even my own Lucy Darling.

There are magicians on every point of this spectrum. Pop Hayen, Amazing Jonathan, and Jeff Hobson are all somewhere in the middle. One spot along this spectrum is not inherently superior to another, however one spot may be better or worse for you, depending on your taste, your acting abilities and your artistic and professional goals.

## Exercise

Take a moment to write down a list of your ten favorite magic (or non-magic) performers. Draw a long line and attempt to place these acts along the spectrum from persona to character.

It’s a good exercise both to understand the difference between the two extremes and uncover your own hidden preferences. Where is the midpoint on the spectrum based on the ten names you used? That might be a good place to start when working out how to present your magic.

Persona

Character

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## **But why craft a persona or a character at all? Isn't authenticity the best policy?**

Think of a performance like a first date. You can't tell someone your entire life story over dinner, or at least you really shouldn't. Your goal is typically to truthfully represent the best parts of yourself. What you don't say on the first date is just as important as what you do say.

It actually starts even before we leave the house. Knowing we have a very short period of time to make a good first impression with this potential partner, we carefully pick out an outfit, to act as a visual summary of our general personality and level of shit-together-ness.

In the words of Walt Whitman

**“I am large, I contain  
multitudes.”**

In the same vein, you can not walk on stage and be everything you are all at once. You are too complex, contradictory and deeply unknowable.

Luckily we live at an interesting point in time when our audiences are the most visually literate in human history. The mass consumption of all forms of media means that we are all scanning each other at all times for meaning, whether intended or not.



What you wear, how you carry yourself, the design of your props, the tone of your voice, your choice of words, your pacing, your expressions and your microexpressions, all wash over an audience in an instant to give them what feels like a nearly complete reading of who you are and what they can expect from you and your performance.

Now let's say you walk out on stage without considering these things. You could be fine, what you communicate to the audience about who you are might be organically clear and likable. You might naturally be the exact right amount of unusual or charming and with a few years of experience all the million elements that make up your on stage identity will naturally bend and snap even more into place.

But I don't like leaving that sort of thing up to chance and we can't all be born with that kind of natural charisma. I'd rather be deliberate about how the audience is to perceive me, what about me I want to communicate and what information or traits are irrelevant, contractory or otherwise not right for the act.

## If they don't care about the character, why would they care about the plot?

- Jack Grapes award-winning poet & playwright

The above quote rings in my ears every time I find myself watching yet another beautifully skillful and yet somehow still completely unremarkable magic act. I can see that despite the

flair and fun of the performer, this performance will fall from an audience's memory the second they leave this room.

We care about people, what they want and why they do what they do. We care much less about performers who act as little more than human tripods for beautiful magic effects.

The following questions might be useful for getting started. Think of the routines in your repertoire.

## Helpful Considerations

What does the character want to achieve in this act?

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What does the audience learn about the performer in the act? Is it information they don't already know?

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Does the audience learn about the character through their actions, decisions and reactions (preferable), or through being directly told about the performer (less ideal)?

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How do the props, costumes, stands and tables reinforce what we know about the performer?

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Why is your character performing this routine?

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Why is your character a magician?

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What is your character hiding?

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What are the stakes?

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# How to be likable

## Read John Truby's "the anatomy of story"

That's it.

That's the whole section.

I reread that book about once every two years and each time I find new things in it. I come to the book as a different performer and I always seem pull exactly what I need at the time right out of it's pages as if those particular words had been added since my last visit.

I had some false ideas about the supreme importance of likability for performers, as many of us do. On one of my many rereads I encountered the following line. One line that was very important in the creation of Lucy Darling.

“Always tell a story about your best character. “Best” doesn't mean “nicest.” It means “the most fascinating, challenging, and complex,” even if that

# character isn't particularly likable.”

I don't know about you, but being “likable” always seems to be the primary goal of character development. This line and the accompanying chapter in John's book taught me to value creating sympathetic characters over strictly likable ones.

This is so much easier because likability can be restrictive but a sympathetic character needs only to have goals that are both clear to the audience and relatable. With this new freedom I could explore creating a slightly more antagonistic edgy character, one that might be narcissistic, selfish and even rude at times.

These explorations lead me to one of my most popular theories.

## **The Bugs Bunny Theory**

**Antagonizing your audience while remaining the protagonist in your narrative**

Bugs Bunny Image taken by [Tim Ellis](#)

Dee Dee Image taken by [Lorena Watters](#)

It's not unusual to find me curled up on lazy afternoons with a bowl of marshmallow-laced cereal, indulging in a few hours of classic Saturday morning cartoons. *Animaniacs*, *Batman*,

*Freakazoid!* and, of course, the fantastical universe of Looney Tunes. Some might mistake this as a pointless and time-wasting activity, but in fact I'm doing valuable research. There are some striking similarities between animation and magic, the most interesting of which is the seemingly limitless possibilities of their respective realities. You see, in the world of animation you can do anything, and in the world of magic you can do anything, so it's what you *don't* do that becomes crucially important.

Chuck Jones—the animator, not the magician—talked about the idea of “discipline,” in his book *Chuck Amuck: The Life and Times of an Animated Cartoonist*, as the specific limits he placed on his characters. Each of Chuck's iconic characters has clearly defined desires and limitations, and there is one character for which this balance is of particular relevance to magic: Chuck's beloved trickster, Bugs Bunny.

Bugs is a smart, confident, capable, and (within the narrative of the show) very handsome rabbit, who is always one step ahead of the antagonists. Bugs seems to always be up against bad guys who are far less capable. Typically, we tend to side with the weaker opponent or the



underdog, and the sorts of behaviors Bugs gets away with would come across as bullying: teasing, pranking, and manipulation. However, with Bugs Bunny, we are always on his side. Why? What character rules has Chuck implemented to ensure that Bugs is always cast as the “good guy”, even as he picks on weaker opponents?

The answer is that Chuck gave Bugs a critical discipline: Bugs never starts it. That’s it. Simple. In every episode, the conflict begins in the same way. Bugs is minding his own business in his laid-back, cool sort of way, until someone comes along to try to “kill da wabbit.” We watch Bugs struggle to be the bigger bunny for a while, to be above the conflict, but eventually the annoyance becomes too much and we see his mood turn when he declares, “You realize this means war.”

Bugs’s defining limitation is clear and we see how effectively it keeps us firmly on the side of the rabbit, but this is, of course, only half the story; what motivates Bugs or any character is just as important. Unlike the other characters, such as Pepé Le Pew, who wants love or Wile E. Coyote who wants only to catch his dinner, Bugs’s desires are less reliant on others. Bugs simply wants to have fun. Which means that for all of the testing, teasing, and toying with his aggressors, there is always a twinkle in his eye.

In an art form such as magic, with all of its “gotcha” routines, trickery, and general shenanigans, the application of some simple concepts and specific desires can change the tone of a routine, transforming an act that frames the magician as unlikable into something fun and playful.

You don't need to perform as a character to benefit from these principles. When you step onstage the audience is immediately reading everything you do, say, and wear in an effort to find out more about the person standing in front of them.

## **How do you know if an act is antagonistic?**

An antagonist is the adversary or villain that motivates the conflict in the narrative, and magicians take on this role all the time. Let's take an effect like the Finger Chopper. In this effect, we have a potentially problematic premise: at its core the magician appears to be placing the spectator in harm's way for the sake of a few laughs. In the right hands, it can be a fun routine with a nice dose of tension and drama, however there is a necessary bond of trust between the volunteer and the performer in acts like this, so it is critical that the performer is casting himself as the good guy.

Anytime an audience member steps onstage and into your care, you have entered a social contract. The unspoken agreement is that *you will take care of them*. The fragility and importance of this onstage dynamic becomes very apparent when you try to do a similar effect in a walk-around scenario, one on one, and it becomes much more challenging to get someone to offer up a finger.

Gambling demonstrations, Do As I Do routines, and borrowing personal items from spectators and then destroying or damaging them before their restoration—these are all potentially antagonistic premises. If you think back to the magic shows you've seen, you will likely be able to recall a time when one of these effects was performed without necessary care or



sensitivity, the magician was unaware of the power dynamic and, as a result, the magician came across as unlikable, or worse, creepy—and ultimately they “lost the room.” I have seen magicians aggressively force the spectator’s hand over the final cup in a Smash & Stab routine and never recover the goodwill and love of the audience. I have seen a simple gambling demonstration where the client vowed openly to never rebook a magician again after the performer overplayed how stupid the spectator was for losing over and over. I have seen a magician pretend to throw a woman’s beloved ring across the room and her erupt in tears of grief. Performers who don’t understand the power dynamic that exists between themselves and the audience risk pushing too far and becoming the villain.

This is why it’s critical to know what it takes to remain the lovable protagonist throughout your material, even while presenting acts that involve “picking on” the audience. You can “pick on” an audience member and not become the villain, if the audience member is perceived as the antagonist. There are two ways this can happen, either it will happen on its own and you need only to harness it or you will need to find a way to make it happen.

## **1. When you are lucky, the antagonist appears**

Every once in a while, an audience member will do all the hard work for you and make an antagonist of themselves. The guy that interrupts to add a mediocre tag to your joke, the woman with the distractingly unusual laugh, the person who responds to everything a full second after the rest of the audience. In these moments, all you have to do is acknowledge the moment for the gift from the comedy gods that it is, comment on what

just happened so that it's now part of the show and, most importantly, do not allow yourself to be thrown.

Think of it this way:

Imagine you invite a friend over to your house. Once you've chatted for a while, he pulls out a big red ball, places it in his lap, and continues talking. This seems a little odd, but the conversation continues. A while later you see your friend's grip tighten around that ball, and you anticipate that he's about to toss it your way. As a result, you catch it flawlessly and gently throw it back. Now imagine that instead, you don't look at the ball, or your friend. When he eventually does toss you the ball, it will most certainly hit you in your face.

An audience is made of real people, a collection of individuals with individual lives and individual motivations. As a result, sometimes they will interrupt your carefully written script, ignore your well-worded instructions, or act unpredictably. In these moments you can ignore the ball and let it hit you in the face or you can play catch.

Walking out onstage every time with the knowledge and understanding that anyone could do something unexpected at any time will help to inoculate yourself against the interruption paralysis that many performers suffer from. Often an act gets blindsided by a line tossed to them by the audience, and this minor diversion from their script becomes a major stumbling block.

## 2. Sometimes you have to create an antagonist

It's not going to be every show that the clouds part, the sun shines through, and an audience member hands you everything you need. On most days you will have to manufacture this relationship yourself.

My favorite way to do this is to—borrowing a tip from our good pal Bugs—set up the audience to “start it.” You can see this principle at work in the performances of David Williamson, Jeff Hobson, Mac King, Paul Daniels, and Harry Anderson, who are some of magic's most lovable, elite performers.

There are a number of ways to control or guide the audience to get a reliable response that feels spontaneous. Mac King is a master of this, and you can see it when he controls a spectator to sign the wrong side of a card in almost every show, setting him up for a great gag.

Humans are creatures in search of complete sets, precise patterns, and satisfying conclusions. This craving can be exploited to get a spectator to give you the reliable response you need, something you can build on in your performance. One of the simplest ways to achieve this is to set up a bit, a joke, or a line with an obvious punch, leaving just enough silence afterward for someone to feel compelled to jump in to complete your joke. It's amazing how consistent this is, especially if you've already created a back-and-forth dialogue with your audience by asking someone's name or commenting on something about the event or the room, which shows that you are paying attention.

In my kids show, I exploit this concept with my “Super Genius” routine, using the script below.

DEE DEE  
Not only am I a  
magician, I am  
also a super  
genius!

KIDS  
No

DEE DEE  
What? Yes I am!  
Here I will  
prove it! I can  
memorize the  
names of not  
one, not two but... (pretend to count)  
...all 786 people at the same time!

KIDS  
No!!!!!!

DEE DEE  
You don't believe me? I'll show you. At the  
count of three, everyone shout out your  
first name at the same time.  
Okay, One (long pause) Two, Three.

KIDS  
(Shout names.)

DEE DEE  
I have it! Your names are  
blahblahblahblah!!



KIDS  
NOOOOOOO!

DEE DEE  
Okay, you guys were clearly mumbling, let's  
try again but you need to enunciate.  
Okay, One (even longer pause) Two, Three.

KIDS  
(Shout names.)

DEE DEE  
I have it for sure this time! Your names  
are blahblahblahblah(make a fart noise)!!

KIDS  
NOOOOOOO!

DEE DEE  
Okay, Okay Okay! This time I'll get it for  
sure! One (an even longer pause) Two,  
Three.

KIDS  
(Shout names.)

DEE DEE  
I HAVE IT! Yours! Names! Are! BOB!!

In that pause after I say “one,” in the first counting phase at least one kid will usually jump in to call out the next number, providing me with the perfect opportunity to react in a way that feels impromptu but is actually precisely crafted. A typical response to a child shouting the next number would be, “I can do it!” or “I was getting there” or my favorite: a simple, “I know.” The child who has jumped in will now be the one I refer to

throughout the show, making them a secondary character I can refer back to again and again. In my bubble show, if a bubble pops, I imply that that particular child somehow did it, which gets a huge laugh.

It is important to note that just because an audience member jumps in with the line, it doesn't automatically make them the antagonist. It is *your* reaction to the "interruption" that communicates to the audience whether it was or was not a "faux pas" worthy of your frustration. If the audience member who jumps in to complete the incomplete joke or deliver the line, is met with satisfaction or a positive reaction from you, then the bit is over; it will get a little laugh but it will not make them the "bad guy". However, if you look at them as if they have broken the unspoken social agreement between audience and performer, then you have created an antagonist you can play with and gently poke throughout the performance. The reaction to the spectator jumping in can be as simple as a one-word response or even just a look.

An added advantage to this method is that by setting up a playful conflict where someone jumps in with a line, this audience "antagonist character" has been self-selected. This will usually ensure that you have a participant who will be comfortable enough in public to be pushed a little, so you can build on the situation comfortably.

Another option is to dust off your improvisational skills and start a dialogue with a spectator, angling for them to say something that you can turn into the catalyst for a playful conflict. I did this in my touring show, *The Ladies' Guide to Deceit & Debauchery*, by asking a spectator to play Hide & Seek with me in my Chop Cup routine

(<https://youtu.be/tK3PfSobGOI>). This is a much more challenging way to set up this dynamic; however, when it's done well, it can be extremely effective. This method also tends to feel more spontaneous and fresh, which adds to the thrill of the experience for the audience.

The way you choose to start a dialogue will depend on your style, character, audiences, and the venues where you perform, however I can offer some helpful advice. Ask yourself “What’s the game?”

If you are going to start a dialogue with the audience, there should be a game. Recently I consulted on a theatrical escape show in Canada. The performer wanted to open the show by talking to the audience, asking where they are from and such. These sorts of interactions often feel unspecific and odd, but I understood what the goal was, to create a playful rapport. So, instead we found the game. She would come out onstage with three sets of handcuffs tightly clamped upon her wrists, look down at the restraints and up into the eyes of the audience. She'd ask a few people about themselves and at precise moments, she would very deliberately look back down at the handcuffs. After interacting with a few people she'd finally say:

Really? No one is going to ask me about this?

We found the game: can she do enough to make the audience feel she's trying to get them to do something, but not enough that they will catch on to exactly what it is? This way, when she delivers the line, the tension of that question is released and we get a nice moment.

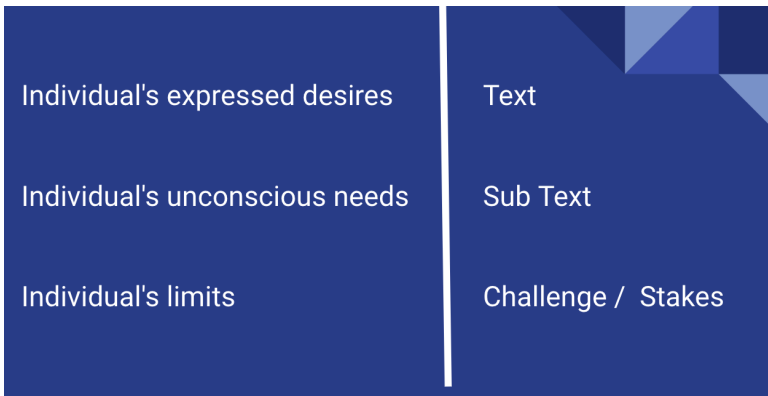
She is also in a reasonable position to be a little disappointed that the audience members did not catch on, and she now has a few minor antagonists to choose from.

No matter what your character or style might be, playing with this idea and challenging yourself to craft routines that allow the spectator to initiate the conflict in the scene is a wonderful way to explore onstage power dynamics and perhaps discover something that can elevate your act.

These concepts have changed my magic in wonderful ways, and I'm so excited to hand them off to you and see what you do with them. In the words of our friend Bugs Bunny, "Goodbye now, don't forget to write!"

## Text and Subtext

When scripting your routines it can add a lot of dimension to your character or persona to consider the following questions, think about these both for your act overall and for each routine.





## **What are the individual's expressed desires?**

Are they looking for love, like Lindsey Benner in her Book of Love show? Are they trying to swindle the audience like Pop Hayden or just make a friend like Zabrecky?

These desires will appear in the text of your routines. This is what they say and what they think is motivating them. In a silent act what we think of as the text of an act is visible in your inner monologue, the ideas that motivate the choice the character makes.

## **What are the individual's unconscious needs?**

Are they secretly lonely, lost or self critical? What does this person need to be happy or complete?

These needs will appear in the subtext or your routines. In the way they react to the audience or to an unexpected challenge. These needs are hidden behind the veil and poke out from time to time, just like with real people. This depth makes the performance more sympathetic and the character more real.

## **What are the individual's limits?**

Are there things this person would never do, either because they are out of character or because of some physical or moral limitations? You might be tempted to skip this question, however a lot of the best conflicts in your act can come from the limitations of your character.

# The Third Surprise

## Understanding the relationship between comedy and magic

It was seeing Joshua Jay speak at both the Melbourne Magic Festival and later that same year at the *MAGIC* Live! convention in Vegas in 2017, that sparked my interest in the “Magic by the Numbers” research. For me, it was less about what questions are answered but what questions are raised.

One of the things that struck me was that when researchers asked audiences what they loved most about magic, the same answer came back over and over: surprise. People love to be surprised. Specifically, the research seemed to conclude that audiences want to see magic effects they’ve never seen before, but I think there is more to it than that. Human beings have created a number of social structures designed to fulfill a number of basic needs and desires, and entertainment is a safe space to explore newness and surprise. The highest-grossing film this week is not the same one as it was last month or in 1976. Does this mean films keep getting better and better? Absolutely not. Theatergoers are not looking to see the *best* film when they go to the cinema, they are looking to see the best *new* film. They want to be surprised.

I believe this is part of what makes magic so special: it is the art form of surprise. As a comedy magician, I have often felt that I have to choose between comedy or magic. Do I set up a moment for the surprise of a punch line or the shock of a killer effect? As

I moved through my script, I would hit a fork in the road:  
comedy or magic?



After reading about Josh's research and this desire all audiences share, I kept thinking. The common thread between comedy and magic is surprise. In a joke, I establish a premise or a pattern and then I deliver a surprise conclusion. In

magic, I establish the rules of the world as we know it and then I do something impossible. This was why I always felt I had to choose between the joke or the moment of astonishment; they are both there to satisfy the audience's desire for surprise. There had to be a way to explore this and make the experience of both stronger. Maybe there is a third sort of surprise that would heighten the experience of both.

What if we don't just surprise the audience with the joke or effect; what if we surprise them with the question of which is coming next? When you are creating the setup for an effect or joke, ask yourself: What does the audience *expect*? I'll give you an example.

When I was working on the intro routine for my act at the Magic Castle, I wanted to create something that would be specific to that space. I wrote the following joke:

I simply adore magic, don't you? I think of it as a high art form, on par with the very best...

Shakespearean sonnets and...

baroque paintings and...

erotic cakes.

And, I am here tonight at the Magic Castle to prove it.

Although I do think, to be fair, I should offer you something as a point of comparison. So tonight I will begin my act by reading the first 92 pages of *Crime & Punishment*.

In its original Russian.

Not a bad opening—it's playful, establishes the character, and acknowledges where we are, making the act feel present in the space. However, the setup is clearly leading to a punchline, so it would be more surprising if it ended with a magic trick. I worked for weeks to figure out how to produce a copy of *Crime & Punishment*, to subvert the expectation that what was coming next was simply a joke. Over time, the routine evolved into this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CEdWvvrHGw>

This is an act that keeps the audience guessing as to what is coming next, breaking down their defensive walls so they give themselves over to the performance.

The best part of a comedy show is when you have laughed so hard and so much that you just lean back and enjoy; you stop

analyzing. The same is true of a magic show. Magic is at its best when the spectator has been so completely floored by the tricks that they give up trying to solve the puzzle and just enjoy the experience of being fooled. An act that subverts the expectations of a typical comedy or trick structure will surprise people in a new way, quickly moving them into that perfect spectator headspace.

Take some time and look at your script. Are your joke setups and magic patter completely different in tone, structure, and delivery? How can the line between these be blurred or even erased? Try to zig when they expect you to zag—but no Zig Zags, that’s something else entirely.

This concept is one of my favorites, because laughter and astonishment are the reactions I live for. Pulling a big belly laugh out of a sleepy crowd or a powerful gasp out of a skeptical one is the best feeling in the world. When they roar and reel despite themselves, there is just no better feeling.

In contrast, applause or a collective “aww” or even a standing ovation are often polite responses bestowed on a performer as a gift of appreciation from their audience. This is not *always* the case, but we’ve all seen shows that lack precision, originality, or even any visible effort still elicit these reactions because of the proper application of vocal inflection and body posture. A raise of the hands, a swell in the music, a sentimental childhood story whether true or not—these tactics tend to pull together the hands of a generous audience. This can be a trap. Performers who rely only on applause as a direct indicator of the quality of their performance will be missing part of the picture. A crowd can be cajoled into clapping, so applause alone teaches us little of the true merit of our show.

What I'm saying here is that you can manipulate an audience into applauding, or you can engineer a standing ovation, but you have to truly earn laughter and astonishment. These are honest, immediate reactions that the performer draws out of an audience by means of surprise, and honest reactions provide us with real feedback.

For years, I have felt this constant tension between comedy and magic, and I've struggled with choosing one over the other. Sometimes I found that making a joke, even though it was clever, risked stepping on the drama of an effect or distracting the spectators from the moment of magic. And sometimes my magic got in the way of making a great joke. *Should I make them laugh or fool their pants off?* This is the question that comes up again and again. I began to wonder if there might be a way for the comedy to serve the magic, and vice versa. Rather than a struggle for dominance in my act, maybe they could be convinced to work together.

Most magic shows can feel like a collection of setups. Some are setups for magic and others are comedy setups, and it's usually obvious which is which. If you apply this new theory, the reactions will not only be coming from the surprise of the joke or the magical effect, but also from the very structure of your act. The audience will never be sure what is coming next and they'll find themselves drawn into the performance even more. So go make 'em laugh *and* knock their socks off!



# Topological Oddity

## The Book Production

By Carisa Hendrix - Originally Designed November 2017

“Topological Oddity: the Book Production” is something that I have been refining for a couple years. These notes will help you to build your own appearing book with step-by-step instructions and helpful photos and diagrams. This effect is powerful and incredibly deceptive if you construct your prop with the necessary care.

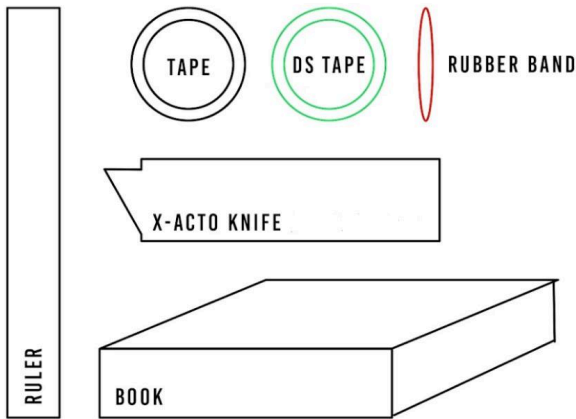
Let's start with what you'll need:

## Supplies

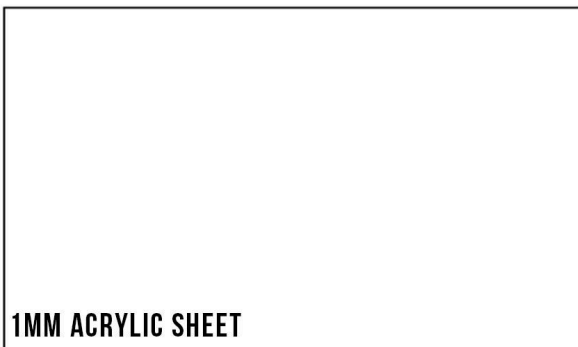
Any 400+ page hardcover book  
Transparent tape  
Double-sided tape  
Assorted rubber bands  
A 1mm Acrylic Sheet

## Tools

Ruler  
X-Acto knife  
Scissors  
Cutting surface  
Sharpie  
Pen & Paper  
Pythagorean Theorem  
Calculator



**Note:** You can buy acrylic sheets at specialty craft shop.

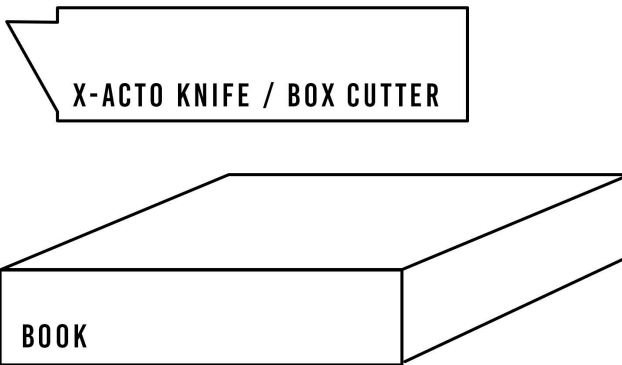




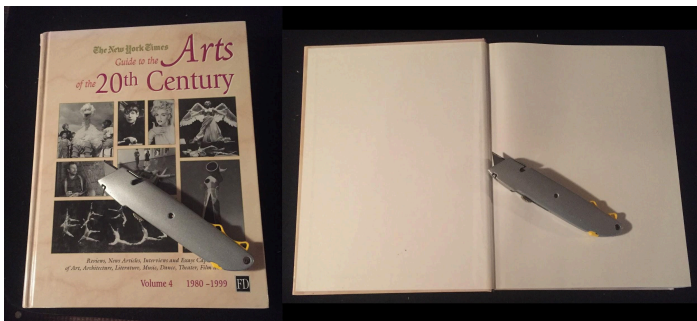
# Step 1: Gut Your Book

You may want to use *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* since it's the book that is already set up on the forcing page (included) or you can build whatever book you like and make a routine of your own. When selecting a book, you'll want one with a strong cover and a good number of pages, at least 400 is ideal. If you go to a thrift store or resale shop, you can get books inexpensively and you don't have to feel guilty about destroying them. If you are planning to use a new book, you may want to build one with a thrift shop book first for practice.

You will need:



The only part of the book you need is the cover and the first 10-15 pages, so you can get rid of all those book guts (pages) and



toss them into the recycling. Lay the book down and cut along the fold where the cover meets the block of pages. Most of the time the block of pages will come out fairly easily, but once in a while you get a book where the binding is super-glued in place and it will take a bit of elbow grease. If you are having trouble, try removing the pages in smaller chunks and don't rush it.



## Optional Step: Tape the Spine

With the pages removed, the spine of the book might feel a little too thin or flexible to provide the structure you need. If so, you can reinforce the spine with thick tape on the inside to add a little additional strength.

You will need:





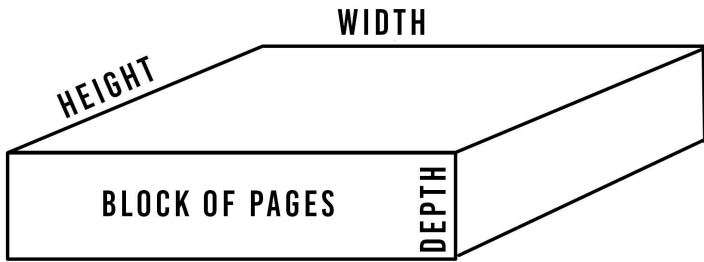
## Step 2: Measure and Calculate

Now you should have a book cover and a block of pages. You are going to use that block of pages to get your measurements for the pop-up insert.

You will need: Your Ruler

**RULER**

Measure the depth, height, and width of the block of pages, as shown in the diagram below.



Write down the measurements on a piece of paper and get ready to do some easy math.

### **Depth = Measurement D**

The depth of the block of pages will be our first measurement for the insert. We'll call this **Measurement D**.

### **Width & Height = Measurements A & B**

You're going to shave a little off the width and height measurements to accommodate for the thickness of the acrylic and give yourself a little wiggle room for the pop-up, so you don't risk your pop-up insert overhanging the cover. Subtract between a half and a full inch from each of the width and height measurements.

Rather than making a single pop-up form to fill the paper block area of the book, you are going to make two half-sized pop-up forms. This will add strength and stability to the form and provide you with two gimmicked pop-up sections, so if one elastic breaks in performance you have another section that can do the pop-up action. To get the correct measurements for this,

you must divide your book block width (minus the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch subtraction) in two. The following simple equations and example calculations should help to clarify if you are feeling a little lost.

Total width, minus  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, divided by two = **Measurement A**  
Total height, minus  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch = **Measurement B**

Example:

Say your total width is 8 inches, then the calculation is:

$$8 \text{ inches} - \frac{1}{2} \text{ inch} = 7.5.$$

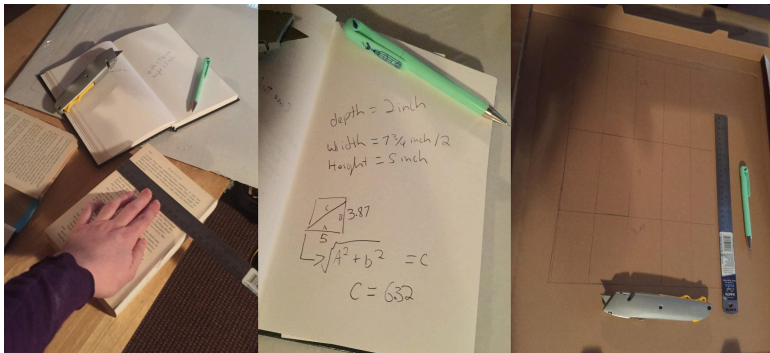
$$7.5 / 2 = 3.75 \text{ inches.}$$

3.75 Inches will be your **Measurement A**

Say your total height is 5.5 inches, then the calculation is:

$$5.5 \text{ inches} - \frac{1}{2} \text{ inch} = 5 \text{ inches.}$$

5 inches will be your **Measurement B**



**Diagonal Brace Pieces = Measurement C**

Our final measurement will be for the diagonal brace that holds the pop-up form square in its expanded form. To find this

measurement, you need to tap into some high school geometry or just use Google's handy Pythagorean Theorem Calculator.

Example:

6.25 = **Measurement C**

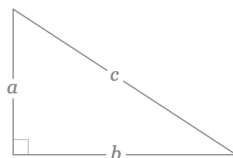
Pythagorean Theorem

Solve for hypotenuse ▾

$$c = 6.25$$

$a$  Leg

$b$  Leg



## Step 3:

### Trace a Grid and Cut the Pieces

Now that you have your measurements, you can use them to create the grid that will get you the necessary pieces. Use your measurements and ruler to trace the grid as shown in the diagram to the right and score the pieces precisely with your X-Acto knife. Use the edge of your ruler as a guide for cutting straight lines. If you have scored your lines precisely, you should be able to gently snap apart the pieces along those lines.

**Note:** In the following images I have substituted cardboard for the clear acrylic sheet to make it easier to see what is happening.

**D**

**D**

**D**

**D**

**A**

--	--	--	--

**B**

--	--	--	--

**C**

--	--	--	--

Once you have all the pieces, use your scissors to snip off the corners at a 45-degree angle on one end of each piece, as shown in the above image and in the diagram below.

## Step 4: Assemble the Pop-up Forms

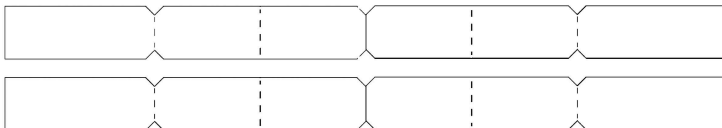
Now that you have all your pieces, you can start to assemble your pop-up forms. Tape together your pieces using the diagram below. Make sure to tape the pieces together on both sides and use the edge of your ruler to make sure that each new piece is lined up precisely with the others. Care should be taken to make sure the workmanship on your form is precise, because it will make your production book more durable and more deceptive.

You will end up with two long sections that can be folded into your pop-up forms.

**TAPE TWO SECTIONS AS SHOWN**



Tip: When assembling your pieces, it's helpful to remember that the 45-degree clipped-corner end of each piece will meet up with the clipped-corner end of another piece, as shown above.



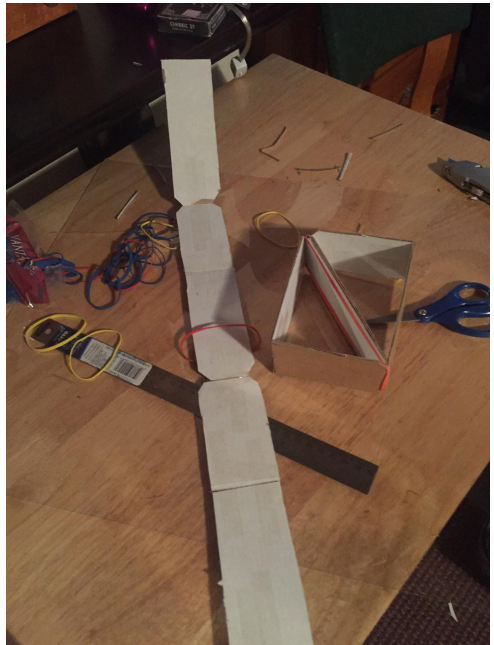




## Step 5: Fold and Add Rubber Bands

Now that you have your pieces taped securely into two lengths, you can fold them into the correct shape and add the rubber bands.

Pull one of the forms through the rubber band so that the rubber band sits in the very middle. Fold the shape inward so that both the end pieces run diagonally inside the square shape as shown. With the rubber band sitting in the notches on the bottom end, pull the rubber band up and into the notches on the opposite side of the shape as shown. The elastic should run along the



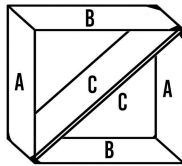
internal diagonal braces. These notches will hold the rubber band in place, so there is no need for additional tape.

Tip: When selecting the size of your rubber band, select one that is large enough that it will be under minimal tension when the pop-up form is in its expanded (square) shape. If there is too much tension, the form will warp over time.

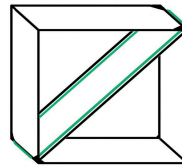
Additional Tip: You might have to trim the diagonal center brace shapes slightly to accommodate for the thickness of the acrylic and get the form to sit square. Trim very slight amounts at a time; if you over-trim, you will have to cut your diagonal shapes again.

## Step 6: Securing the Pop-up Forms to the Book Cover

Now that you have your two shapes and your book cover, it's



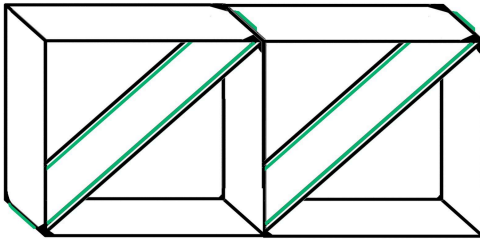
FOLD INTO THIS ORIENTATION



ADD RUBBER BAND AS SHOWN

time to put everything together.

Start by orienting the two forms so they fold in the same direction, and secure them together in the middle with transparent tape. Place the finished form on top of the page block from earlier to check that the size is correct. If you measured correctly, it should be about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch smaller than the page block.



**CONNECT  
TWO FRAMES  
AS SHOWN**



You are now going to dress your form so that it looks more like pages.

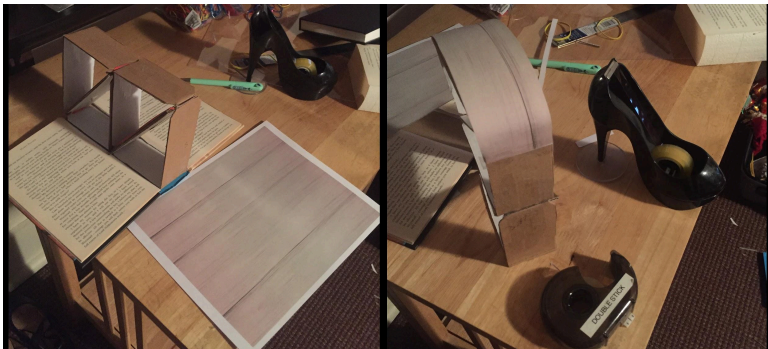
Grab your page block and place it with its spine on the tabletop. Use a camera or smartphone to take a picture of the side of the pages. You can press the pages together with varying pressures to get a few different images and then choose the one with the look you like best. Upload the images to your computer and, using your favorite image-editing software, make a printable

sheet of the page texture. Or you can use the page texture sheet I have premade for you [here](#). (You're welcome!)



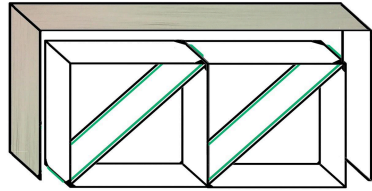
Cut out strips of the page texture and use your double-sided tape to attach them to the outside of the pop-up form as shown. Try to avoid using any transparent tape on this part, because the shiny tape will interfere with the effectiveness of the page texture illusion.

The texture can be printed on regular printer paper at home or for a slightly more durable and waterproof option you can have it printed on adhesive vinyl at a print shop such as [stables](#).





PRINT BOOK  
SIDE PAGE  
TEXTURE  
FOR FALSE COVER

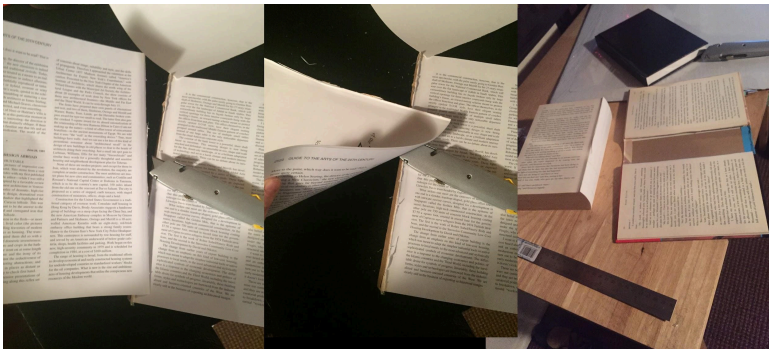


ADD FALSE  
COVER

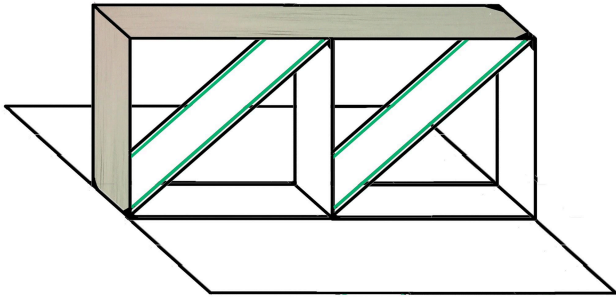
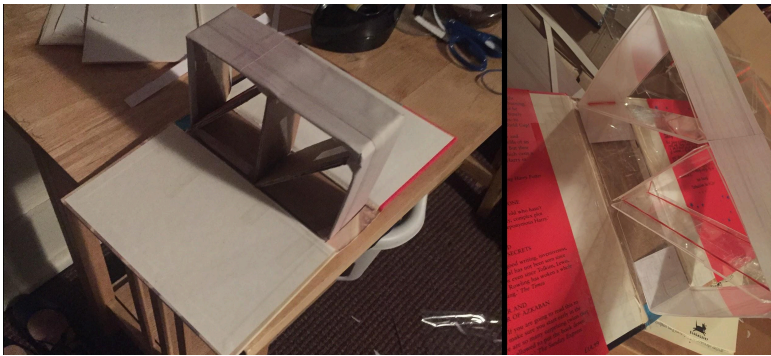
If you find you are getting a crease in the texture overlay sheet where the two forms meet, you can cut an additional length of acrylic sheet measuring D by  $(A \times 2)$  and secure it to the long side of the form before adding the texture. This will eliminate the creasing and add additional strength to the form, but will make the pop-up form slightly thicker and harder to repair. So it's up to you. (I do it.)

## Step 7: Add a Few Real Pages

You should add a few actual pages to the front or back of your book so that you can flip through them as a convincer. Simply use your handy knife to cut a few pages off your page block and then trim them down to just a bit larger than the size of your pop-up insert. Secure these pages with tape to the inside cover of your book.



Now that you've dressed your pop-up form, you can secure it to the book cover with transparent tape as shown below. I have included one image which shows the finished form in cardboard, and another that shows a transparent version so that you can better see how the rubber bands are oriented in relation to the rest of the form.



## Step 7: Do Magic!

You should now have a completed book! Well done! Put slight pressure onto the top corner of the form—the corner that the diagonal center brace does not touch—and the pop-up form will fold down into its collapsed state. The cover of the book should fold over to keep the pop-up form in place and reduce the overall footprint of the book when it's folded flat.

# The Polite Pickpocket

## A Fun Take on Boston Box

This is a fun three-phase routine from my working repertoire. It uses pickpocketing as a dramatic framing device to add a dash of intrigue to what is a simple, easy-to-perform coin trick. This routine also allows you to follow up with another coin trick or Boston box routine using the same props. The action happens almost entirely in the hands so it's practical for walkaround and the routine can be reset right in front of the spectators.

Effect:

Five un gimmicked coins are counted onto a spectator's hand. The spectator is asked to close their hand firmly around the coins, and the magician causes one coin to magically vanish from their fist and appear on another spectator's shoulder.

The illusion is repeated with the four remaining coins, and again one coin is impossibly stolen out.

The four coins are placed into the solid brass "coin safe." The brass coin box is placed on the back of the magician's fist, and positioned above the spectator's hands. The lid is removed to show the coins waiting securely inside the box, and yet the moment the coins are fully covered again, they fall through the bottom of the box, through the magician's hand, and into the waiting hands of the spectator.

Everything is handed out again for examination.



## The Journey:

In May of 2019 I had the pleasure of lecturing and performing at the Trix in the Stix convention in the UK, my first trip in England. Following the convention I spent a wonderful, magical week in London adventuring around with some newfound friends.

One of the many highlights was watching Brendan Rodrigues work the room at the *Maskelyne and Cooke* bar. Absolutely everything he did was visually stunning and utterly baffling and he was generous enough to show me the work on a few things. There was one coin move that I just loved and this routine grew from the overwhelming desire to do something with it. After playing around with a few ideas, the routine really found its rhythm as part of my table magic set during my three month residency at the Chicago Magic Lounge.

You might already be familiar with the “Seven Penny Trick”, often taught to children as an introduction to coin magic. I recently found it published as Penny-tration in *Self-Working Coin Magic: 92 Foolproof Tricks*. In the effect, you count seven coins into a spectator’s hand, they close their fist tightly around the coins, and you can pull one through the back of their hand. This trick is very easy to perform because it takes advantage of the fact that it’s hard to tell the difference between six and seven coins and often the spectator doesn’t even get a chance to count the coins in their hand because the magician will drop the final coin on top in a way that completely covers the pile in the spectator’s hand. I was shocked when I realized that one of the moves Brendan fried me with was essentially that (a move I’d seen as a kid), but with such perfect timing and directional control that it is impossible to catch. After playing with different ideas on timing I got brave and moved from doing the count

with five coins as he had shown me, to using only four and was pleased to find I could still consistently get away with it as long as I made a couple little tweaks.

You will need:

Six half-dollar coins

A Boston box

Magicians wax, the thicker stuff that comes as a stick

Preparation:

Rub a little wax on the head of each of the coins and on the bottom recess of the Boston box. The wax will help the coins stick more reliably to shirts and skin for the shoulder-load phase and will give it a little bit of a bite on the recess of the Boston box to help with the flip move.

Place five coins inside the Boston box and place the lid on top. The Boston box will hold five coins, not as comfortably as it holds four, but well enough for this trick, and place the sixth coin in the recess of the box, tails out, so that the wax is holding on slightly but it can still fall easily into your palm when needed.

I like to place this little prepared unit into a coin purse to keep it all together.

The Work:

While introducing the premise, dump the five coins from the box into your hand and place the box onto the table, being careful not to flash or drop the additional coin hidden in the recess on the bottom. Place the lid next to the box.

Allow the spectator to examine the five coins. Take back the coins and have the spectator hold their hand in a “scoop” shape rather than flat and open; this will partly obscure the coins, making it harder for the spectator to count the amount in their hand at an inopportune time and decrease the chances that one will accidentally fall out mid-performance.

Count the coins into the spectator’s hand one at a time by picking them up out of your non-dominant hand and placing them into the spectator’s hand while counting each one. Legitimately count the first three down into the spectator’s hand. With the fourth coin, fake placing it on top of the other three by clicking it on the pile to create the same sound and feel as the previous coins, then pulling the fourth coin into the fingers of your dominant hand. You will want to practice this sequence till the rhythm and the action feel exactly identical for each coin.

Once you have faked the fourth coin, keep the rhythm consistent, while shifting focus to the fifth coin sitting in your open non-dominant hand, this will reinforce the idea that you have only one. Gently drop the last coin onto the pile in the spectator’s hand.

You can cover any heat on the dirty hand hiding the fourth coin by mimicking the actions you would like the spectator to do while looking them in the eyes. Closing your hands and pulling them tight to your chest, silently imploring the spectator to follow along.

Depending on the arrangement of any additional spectators you are performing for, you can shoulder load the fourth coin under the guise of sneakily hiding behind one of them. The silliness of

this moment will help cover the load but this may not suit your character. If there is no way to comfortably load the coin or it is not a good fit for your performance style, simply reveal the coin using your favorite method.

First have the spectator reveal and count the remaining coins in their hand and then direct their attention to where the coin has magically appeared.

It feels a bit ballsy to perform this sequence again for your audience with one fewer coin, and it is, but with some subtle additions you can get away with it flawlessly. The first phase will give you a chance to see how your spectator follows along and if they are too drunk to control effectively or hell bent on messing with you, it's best to skip this phase.

For the second phase, you will again perform the same count as before, legitimately counting the first two coins down and faking the addition of the third coin; however there are a few small tweaks. First it's important to help the spectator feel pressure to close their hand quickly, more quickly than last time. You can do this with scripting and you can equally communicate this physically; crouching slightly, lowering your head and bouncing a little like a boxer to make the situation feel like a playful physical game, a game they want to win. Allow them to feel the tension of the moment and you will see them prepare to slam their fingers closed over the coins by shifting their weight and tightening their shoulders. It is important to get them to close their hands quickly because you can really tell the difference between the look of a pile of three and four coins so you don't want to give them a chance to see it.

When you tap the third coin in the sequence, let your hand linger above the pile for just a second longer as you bring your non-dominant hand containing the final coin around and in between their hand and their eyes obscuring their view of the pile as you gently toss in the last coin. If they do not close their hand quickly enough your non-dominant hand is there to obscure the view and give you a second to gently remind them to close their hand.

After revealing that you have again stolen out one coin and they now only have three, you can pick up the box from the table and place it into your non-dominant hand. Place the stolen coin from the last phase into the box and ask them to add their remaining three coins. Hand them the lid to examine, and flip the box in your hand by gently closing your non-dominant hand slightly, so that the additional coin hidden in the recess of the Boston box is now on the top and the other four are ready to fall out into your hand.

Have the spectator place the lid on what they think is the top and pick up the box from your hand, slipping your thumb under the bottom to hold the stack of four coins securely inside. Gently shake the box allowing the audience to hear the coins rattling inside and also see that both hands are otherwise empty.

Mime the position you'd like them to mimic as you request they hold both their hands open and together. Lift the box out of the palm of your hand, allowing the four coins to move silently into finger palm while turning your hand over to place the box on the back of your loose fist. Lift the lid to show what appears to be the stack of coins still inside but is actually the single additional coin sitting in the recess of the bottom of the Boston

box. Slowly slide the lid back onto the box and once the lid is replaced, drop all four coins which you have in your finger palm into the spectator's hands.

Lift the box off the back of your hand and slip your middle finger under one edge of the box so that when you drop the bottom of the box into your palm it will flip 180 degrees, cleanly displaying the inside of the box while hiding the additional coin. The small amount of wax on the additional coin will give it enough hold to keep it in position during the flip, but will allow it to stay loose enough that it will fall into finger palm easily, so you can hand out the box and lid for examination along with the coin at the end.

You are now set with an additional coin in finger palm. This gives you a wonderful response when inevitably your audience asks, "How did you do that?" You can now pick up a coin and press it into the back of your hand and respond, "Easy, I just pushed the coins through the back of my hand," as you pull it into your fingers and release the one you have in your finger palm.

**Script:**

As you dump five half dollars out of a Boston box and place the box onto the table you begin:

*A few years ago I got the opportunity to study pickpocketing with one of the masters. I learned something really interesting about myself during that time. I learned that I am a terrible pickpocket. Not because I can't do the moves, no, because I feel so guilty taking things, even when I know it's just for entertainment. I think I'm just*

*too Canadian. So I have figured out a way around my guilt, I only steal things that are actually mine.*

Pass the five coins to the spectator.

*I have five large coins, please can you check them out. Make sure they are solid and don't do anything coins are not supposed to do. Also try to get used to the weight of them, they are bigger and heavier than typical coins so if one was missing you would really notice, yes? Fantastic*

Hold out your hands to physically cue the spectator to return the coins but say nothing, the spectator pours the coins back into your hands.

*That is the easiest pickpocketing I'll do all day. I don't even have to ask or anything, you just gave them to me. That actually happens to me all the time; it's the little known Canadian super power, people just give you stuff. Okay, which is your dominant hand?*

*Perfect, I want to give you every advantage. I'm going to count these coins back into your hand one at a time so you can be sure you have all five and as soon as you get that last one...*

Mime the actions you are asking them to do as you say:

*...close your hand tight and hold them to your chest so I can't just sneak one out at the last second. Sounds good?*

Count the five coins into the spectator's hand, secretly holding back the fourth

*Close your hand tight, you got 'em? You can really feel the weight of those coins, yes?*

*Great, I'm going to hide over here.*

Crouch playfully behind another spectator and load the held-out coin onto their shoulder.

*And even from way over here, you won't notice me sneak over and steal one coin out of your hand and place it right there in that little brass box.*

Point to the Boston box on the table.

*\*snap\**

*Nobody moves, slowly open your hand and count the coins out loud.*

The spectator counts only four coins.

*I know right!? But that is not even the best part, the best part is that when you were trying to figure out how the fifth coin was going to get into the box it actually landed over on your shoulder.*

Point to the second spectator's shoulder. Pick up the coin from their shoulder and place it next to the box on the table.

*You know, that wasn't really fair. You didn't know what to expect, and five coins is a lot of counting. Let's do it again but with only four to give you a better chance. I'll even tell you where you went wrong.*

Take back the remaining four coins.



*You closed your hand nice and tight, but this time you want to really close it super quickly when you get that last coin to lock me out. Okay?*

Again you count the four coins into the spectator's hand, secretly holding back the third coin.

*I'm looking at you right now I can see the confidence, you know you got them for sure that time, right?*

Allow the spectator to respond. If they are sure they have them all, then the reveal is even more impressive. If the spectator is not sure, it is an opportunity to smile coyly and get a little laugh. Leave a little silence after their response, before pretending to pull the coin from the air between you and the spectator. Wait for them to open their hand to see they now only have three coins, confirming that one was stolen out again.

Pick up the brass box from the table and place the stolen coin inside.

*Let's add another layer of difficulty, for me, not you. Can you add your three coins to mine inside the little brass safe?*

Hand them the lid to examine while secretly flipping the box in your hand so that the hidden additional coin is now on top.

*Make sure the lid is solid, it doesn't do anything a lid is not supposed to do. Lovely. Can you place that on top, sealing the coins inside.*

Once the lid is replaced, pick up the box from the palm of your hand, slipping your thumb under the bottom to hold the stack

of four coins in place underneath. Gently shake the Boston box, allowing the audience to hear the coins rattle inside and see both hands are otherwise empty. Mimic the action of holding your hands open together.

*Can you hold your hand like a tray? Thank you.*

Lift the box off the palm of your hand, allowing the four coins to move silently into finger palm while you turn your hand over to place the box on the back of your loose fist. Lift the lid to show what looks like the stack of four coins sitting inside but what is actually the single additional coin sitting in the recess of the bottom of the box. Slowly slide the lid back onto the box.

*I want to let you off the hook. The truth is that it never really mattered how tightly you held the coins or how quickly you closed your hand, or where you looked, or how hard you paid attention, because all that matters is that the very second your money is out of sight, to a good pickpocket it's as good as theirs.*

Drop all four coins into the spectator's hands. Lift the box off the back of your hand and slip your middle finger under one edge of the bottom so that when you drop the bottom of the box it will flip 180 degrees and so that you can openly display that the inside of the box and the lid are empty. Allow the recessed coin to fall into finger palm and hand out the box and lid for examination along with the coin.

# Becoming a Magician

In my twenty years in entertainment, I have done and been many things: a bubble artist, a circus performer, a fire eater, a stilt walker, and a mermaid, just to name a few. It has been surprisingly easy introducing myself as any one of these things, but when it came to calling myself a magician I just couldn't; it felt too big somehow. For years I would avoid this title by saying instead that I loved magic, or that there was magic in my show but never would I give myself that special little label.

Until one day, I noticed myself saying it, without any reluctance. I said, "I am a magician." That could not have been the first time. It was so easy to say, so natural. I have since learned that this is not at all a unique experience, many people see the title of "magician" as sacred. And even when they do use the word they often qualify it with "hobbyist" or "amateur".

I will never know the exact moment when I first started to refer to myself as a magician, but I do know the moment I first let myself think it.

Years ago, in my short-lived street performer days, I was traveling across Canada, fringe festival to fringe festival, in a little blue hatchback with two of the strangest men I would ever know. Jimbo, a devastatingly funny magician doing a lovely Cups and Balls act, and Dan, a contortionist

whose finale consisted of juggling running chainsaws with twenty clothespins on his face while reciting Shakespeare.

Jimbo and I would often jam on magic late at night at the bar and inevitably Dan, intoxicated and feeling left out, would interrupt by accosting some poor stranger with the one and only trick he knew.

The trick was “Kolossal Killer,” and if you are not familiar, it involves asking someone to name a card, after which you then pull out a single playing card from your wallet, which does not quite match, but then you turn the card over to reveal on the back of the card, in Sharpie, you have written “off by one”.

I am not a fan. Maybe because I see no value in a single-phase card revelation where you correctly predict that you would be wrong, or because I saw it done to death that summer, and dead I wish it to remain. Dan must have performed that trick for forty different women, and I did not see it get him laid even once despite his best efforts.

As we moved from city to city, the three of us became sickeningly familiar with each other’s material. We developed an adorable bit. We would hide in each other's crowd and softly whisper all the punchlines to their joke in a playfully irritating way. Great fun for the two of us in the crowd, less so for the one on the pitch trying to eke out their fifth show of the day.

On one of those crushingly hot days in mid-August, when the crowd was particularly hard to win over, Jimbo and I were entertaining ourselves during Dan's show by making a delightful nuisance of ourselves doing our favorite bit. On this occasion we were being particularly unsubtle about it and we could see Dan was starting to lose his resolve, but it was way too funny to stop.

Twenty minutes into the show Dan, sweat pouring down his face, threw us a furious look that scared us into behaving...for maybe five minutes. When we started up again we were full of nervous giggles, like two children frightened of getting found in a game of hide-and-seek. Finally Dan, frustrated and furious, stops abruptly mid-finale, only ten clothespins on his face, and growled at us, "I hate you SO MUCH."

The crowd was stunned, they had no idea what was going on. It was not clear that comment had not been directed at them, but rather at Jimbo and myself, so the crowd looked around trying to figure out how they had possibly angered the weird man with the chainsaws. Dan realized he needed to recover fast, as he was just minutes away from his hat speech (the "give me money" part of a street show). Dan took a breath and smiled wide, maybe a little too wide, and said cheerfully to the crowd, "Good, I have offended all of you, now I shall have the joy and pleasure of winning you back."

This did very little to comfort the crowd, who looked on in deafening, awkward silence punctuated only by the stifled

giggles of us two weirdos brought to our knees by the whole thing. We must have all had heatstroke, because to this day I have never laughed that hard at anything.

Dan looked over to give us another angry look and noticed this strange man in the crowd, near us but clearly not with us, who was happily giggling along and none of us were exactly sure why. With a flourish, so dramatic it knocks two of the clothespins off his face, Dan points at the man and says “Sir! You have remained unoffended!” Dan looks the man up and down and yells in his deep theatrical voice he usually saved for Shakespeare, “Your face is dumb,” and again Jimbo and I topple to the ground in painful laughter.

The phrase “your face is dumb” became the slogan of the tour, we worked it into every conversation and started using it in lieu of “goodnight” at the end of the day. It was our battle cry and our term of endearment. We all had a wonderful time together. But all good things must come to an end and eventually, Jimbo and I drop Dan off in Vancouver to fly home to New Zealand. After a tearful goodbye, Jimbo and I started our fourteen-hour journey east to Calgary.

We cruised through the mountains, onto the Coquihalla highway and four hours into the drive we got a panicked phone call from Dan. He has left his wallet in the car.

There was no way to turn around on the Coquihalla and even if we could, it would add eight hours to an already brutal drive. We pull over onto the shoulder, turn on the

hazards and begin to bargain with Dan. I promised him that I would personally ship his wallet, priority first-class ultra-fancy-mail, to New Zealand, the very second we got into the city. He still had his passport and all the cash from the tour. I assured him that he would be fine for the week and, reluctantly, he agreed.

Jimbo and I continue our long drive. An hour passed and another and another and I got bored. So I start to go through Dan's wallet and I find the trick. That awful trick that has haunted us at every bar for months.

Jimbo and I exchange a knowing glance. Without a word, I pull out a fresh deck of cards, and Jimbo hands me a Sharpie. I carefully lay the cards out on the dashboard and on the backs I write "Your face is dumb". I swap out the "off by one" version of the trick in the wallet for my improved version and when we arrive in Calgary I dutifully ship it off, and proceed to immediately forget about it.

Until a week later, when we receive a text from Dan that just says "[BLEEP] You".

And here is the rest of the story as Dan told it to me:

Dan walks into the FedEx location in his hometown and behind the counter is what he described as the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. As she clicks away at the computer in front of her, he tries to chat her up.

"I'm a contortionist."

She's not impressed.

“Just came back from a world tour.”

No reaction.

“I was traveling with these two magicians.”

She says, “I love magic,” and he's in.

At that moment, Dan realizes that the only trick he knows, in the entire world, is sitting inside a sealed envelope that this woman is currently holding.

He starts into this heartfelt delivery about how he had a dream about her while touring through the Canadian wilderness, a dream that proves they were destined to meet. Her dream self warned him that she would be skeptical and would need proof so, in the dream, she said to put one single card in his wallet and when they met it would show her that this was fate.

He has her name a card, and she says the Two of Diamonds. He has *her* rip open the envelope, he has *her* take the wallet out and make sure there is nothing else inside. Dan takes his wallet and confidently pulls out the Three of Diamonds, to which she says “That's not my card, it's off by one.”

**SHE ACTUALLY SAYS, “OFF BY ONE!”**

Deeply pleased with himself, Dan replies, “You're right, that's why on the back I wrote....” and just before he turns



the card to reveal this perfect miracle, his eyes drift over the writing on the back of that card.

And looking right back at him are those four beautiful words “Your face is dumb.”

He put the card back into the wallet, and left without saying another word.

Hearing Dan’s side of the story was the first moment I thought of myself as a magician. Because using only my knowledge of magic I was able to deeply mess with my friend from the other side of the world.

# In Conclusion

I'm writing this in America, with the smell of fresh rain in the air, as my good friend lays on the floor with his dog in his arms, on my first tour back on the road after 507 days of lockdown in Canada in September of 2021. I can't know where or when these lecture notes will find you. Maybe these have sat on your shelf for years till this very moment, just waiting for you. Maybe you found them somewhere far away, somewhere I have never been. Maybe you have immediately devoured them after the lecture hoping to soak it all in.

However you came to this page I want you to take a breath with me, you there in the future and me here in the past, because I want you to really feel this.

If you have been waiting for a sign or a push, let this be that push. This is your invocation to begin the thing, the scary thing, the big thing, the little thing.

The thing you are most scared to do, or write, or perform.

Here are the words that were that invocation for me:

“Say who you are, really say it in your life and in your work. Tell someone out there who is lost, someone not yet born, someone who won't be born for 500 years. Your writing will be a record of your time.”

-Charlie Kaufman

Now go make magic damn it!

All my love,  
Carisa Hendrix