

TONY HASSINI'S
HISTORY
of **MAGIC**

FROM THE STONE AGE TO THE PRESENT



Tony Hassini's History of Magic

from the Stone Age to the Present Day

Tony Hassini

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Contents

Dedication	1
Foreword	2
by Criss Angel	
Introduction	3
by Fielding West	
"I Am Magic"	5
by Tony Hassini	
1. Opening	7
2. Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen	15
3. The Davenport Brothers	18
4. The Great Lafayette	20
5. Buatier de Kolta	26
6. John Nevil Maskelyne	30
7. Anderson, the Great Wizard of the North	35
8. Carl Herrmann	39
9. Alexander Herrmann	44
10. Harry Kellar	48
11. Howard Thurston	56
12. Robert Houdin	63
13. Harry Houdini	72
14. P.T. Selbit	88

15. Horace Goldin	95
The Inventor of Cutting A Lady In Half With A Buzz-saw	
16. The Great Blackstone	102
17. Harry Blackstone Jr.	110
18. David Devant	112
19. Richard Potter	126
America's First Magician	
20. Chung Ling Soo	130
21. Servais Le Roy	138
22. Dante	148
23. Cardini	156
One of the greatest manipulation acts in the world	
24. Randy Pitchford	160
25. Dunninger	162
26. Richiardi Jr.	171
27. Mark Wilson	178
28. Greg Wilson	183
29. T. Nelson Downs	184
The Greatest Coin Manipulator	
30. Channing Pollock	187
The Revolutionary of Dove Magic	
31. David Berglas	192
The International Man of Mystery	
32. Marvin Berglas	206
33. The Magic Castle and the Larsens	208

34. Doug Henning Rejuvenating Magic	214
35. Siegfried & Roy Masters of The Impossible	219
36. David Copperfield	225
37. David Blaine	234
38. Penn And Teller	240
39. The Pendragons	244
40. Lance Burton	248
41. Criss Angel	251
42. Women in Magic Introduction	256
43. Adelaide Herrmann The Queen of Magic	257
44. Dell O'Dell	260
45. Talma	263
46. Melinda	265
47. Juliana Chen	269
48. Dell O'Dell	272
49. Dorothy Dietrich	275
50. Closing	279
Acknowledgements	285
About the author	286

I dedicate this book to my family:

MY WIVES: Carol Michaud and Cathy Edwards

MY CHILDREN: Diana, Linda, Ralph, Remi, Stephen, and Robin

MY GRANDCHILDREN: Antonio, Xandia, Grayden, Alexandra, and Aiden

MY GREAT GRANDCHILDREN: Jessica, Murron, Lee, and Malachi

MY MENTOR: Tony Corinda

Foreword

by Criss Angel

Magic isn't just an art form—it's an obsession, a rebellion against reality itself.

So when I was asked to write the foreword for Tony Hassini's *History of Magic*, I didn't hesitate. Because Tony isn't just part of magic's story—he's helped shape its very DNA.

I've known Tony since I was young, and even then, it was clear—he wasn't following the path of magicians before him. He was building something bigger. Something lasting. Something that would outlive all of us.

As the founder of the International Magicians Society, Tony created more than an organization—he built a global fraternity of mystery. Through the Merlin Award, he established a symbol of excellence that stands shoulder to shoulder with the greatest honors in entertainment—the Oscar, the Emmy, the Tony. It's not just an award... it's a legacy.

And with the Magic Academy, Tony did something few have ever dared—he pulled back the curtain and gave aspiring magicians the tools to transform obsession into mastery. From the first spark of curiosity to the highest level of discipline, he created a path. A proving ground. A rite of passage. Earn your place... or don't.

This book is more than history. It's a journey through the minds of those who refused to accept the limits of reality. And Tony Hassini is one of those rare individuals who didn't just believe in magic—he made the world believe in it.

Introduction

by Fielding West

If you're holding this book in your hands, chances are you already have a little magic in you.

Now, I've spent my life in magic—on stages, in casinos, in places where the audience is close enough to catch you... and still somehow doesn't. And if there's one thing I've learned, it's this: magic isn't just about tricks. It's about people. The dreamers, the risk-takers, the ones who decided that reality needed a little improving.

That's exactly what Tony Hassini captures in this remarkable book.

The History of Magic, from the Stone-Age To The Present Day isn't some dry, dusty textbook filled with dates you'll forget five minutes after reading them. This is storytelling. Real storytelling. The kind that pulls you into the lives of the men and women who built this art—who struggled, failed, got back up, and kept going until they made the impossible... possible.

You'll meet legends in these pages—not as distant icons, but as human beings. You'll see their triumphs, their setbacks, their moments of doubt... and the fire that kept them moving forward. And if you're a magician yourself, you might just see a little bit of your own journey in theirs.

Here's the truth: every magician stands on the shoulders of those who came before. Whether you realize it or not, every move you make, every routine you perform, has roots that go back further than you can imagine—sometimes all the way to the very beginnings of civilization itself.

That's why a book like this matters.

Because understanding where magic came from gives you a clearer sense of where you're going. It helps you navigate a world that's constantly changing, where audiences are smarter, faster, and harder to fool—but still just as hungry to believe.

Tony Hassini has done something special here. He hasn't just documented history—he's brought it to life. He's taken centuries of mystery and turned it into a journey you can feel, learn from, and be inspired by.

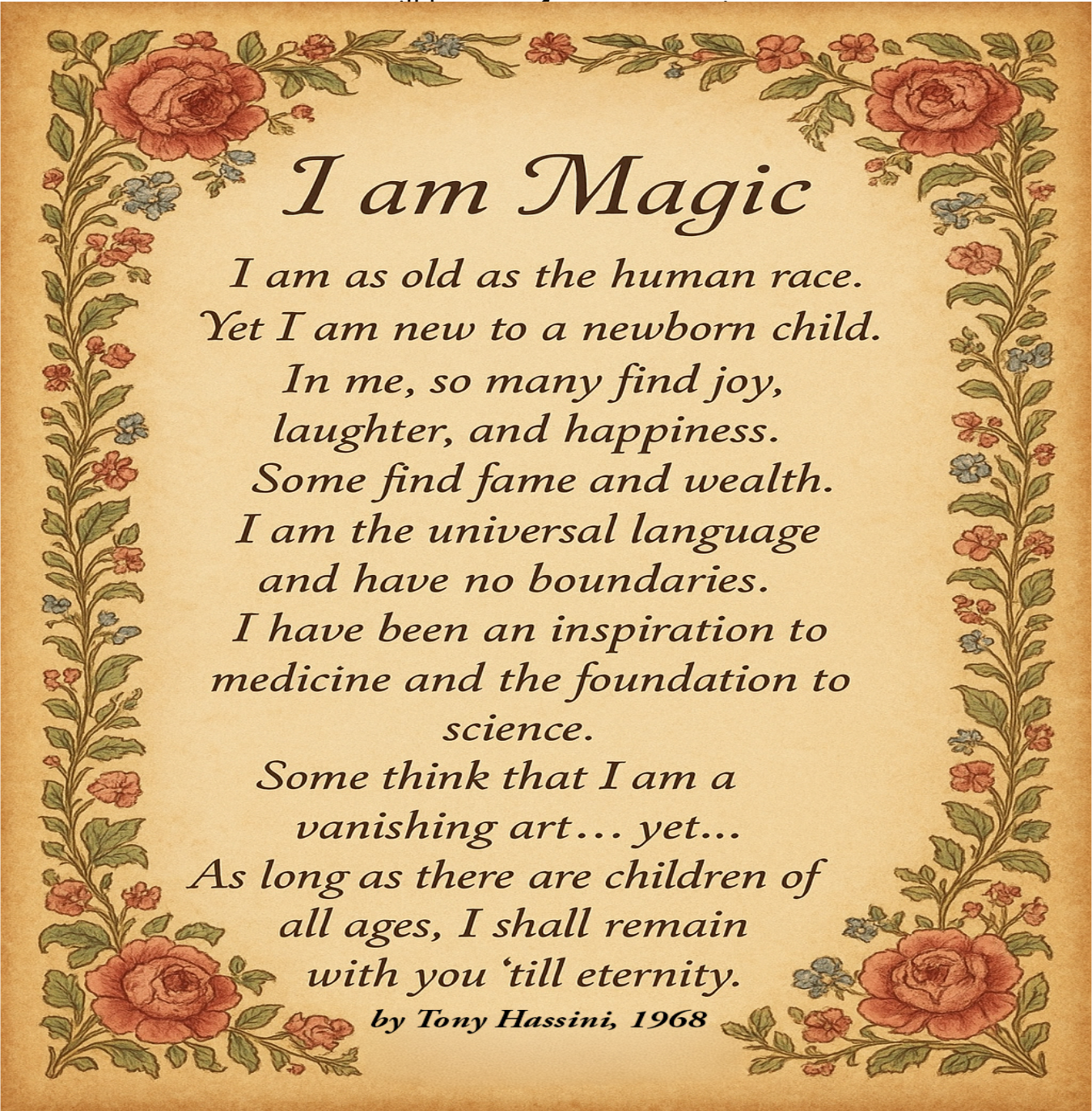
So read this book not just as a fan of magic, but as a student of it. As a performer. As someone who wants to carry this incredible art forward.

And who knows? Maybe one day, someone will be telling your story.

"I Am Magic"

by Tony Hassini

(I wrote this poem in 1968 and published it in the International Magicians Society's Sorcerer's Notebook. It was true back then. It is true today. And it



I am Magic

*I am as old as the human race.
Yet I am new to a newborn child.*

*In me, so many find joy,
laughter, and happiness.*

*Some find fame and wealth.
I am the universal language
and have no boundaries.*

*I have been an inspiration to
medicine and the foundation to
science.*

*Some think that I am a
vanishing art... yet...
As long as there are children of
all ages, I shall remain
with you 'till eternity.*

by Tony Hassini, 1968

Chapter 1

Opening

I 've done a lot of soul-searching before deciding to write this portion of the History of Magic. At the time I am writing this book, I am over 80 years old and have been involved in magic since I was 16.

I founded the International Magicians Society (IMS) in 1968. For over 60 years, I have met some of the greatest magicians of our time, having breakfast, lunch, and dinner with them, and discussing magic in depth. As always, I tried to learn as much as I could from them, especially the older magicians whom I hold in the deepest admiration and respect. With that, I believe this qualifies me to write this book. You and history will judge whether I did a good job or not.

My decision to write this book is simple. Like anything else I do in life, I keep it simple so that even a beginner or newcomer will learn and understand this amazing art we call magic.

By studying the past, we can better prepare for the future, gain a better understanding of history, and learn from it.

Before jumping into the history of magic, I would like to describe what magic is and what a magician does. Without a doubt, magic creates mystery. When a magician takes a shiny metal ball, makes it float in mid-air and makes it move all around, or when the magician takes a shiny metal ring and passes it around the ball to prove that there are no strings supporting the floating ball, people gasp. They wonder, "How could this be possible?"

I just described one amazing trick. By doing so I wanted to highlight how magic is a visual art. When people actually see magic being performed, they are mystified and amazed.

Here's another mystery that is greater than any magic a magician can perform. Because people do not see it, they hardly react to it. I'm talking about the Earth being suspended in mid-air with no strings attached. It rotates on its axis to create day and night and orbits the sun to create the four seasons. Yet very few people talk about it, and nobody is impressed, mesmerized, or mystified.

This proves that people need to see something to feel the emotions and experience the magic. Since they cannot see the Earth totally suspended in mid-air and moving, they don't react to it. This is my simple explanation of how magicians capitalize on visual effects.

There is another element of magic that most people do not consider. For example, when a child sees a magician performing a simple trick, it seems like a miracle that only the magician can do. When you show the child the working principle of the trick—the simple secret—for the first time in their life they realize that what seemed impossible has a simple solution. With this understanding they grow up and become better at whatever they do in life. Whenever something seems impossible, they know there is a simple solution.

Magic also helps children overcome shyness, gain self-confidence, learn hand-eye coordination, and, above all, become very good public speakers. This is because each time a child performs a trick, they tell a story that goes with the magic. For every new trick, they create new stories.

Did you know for every professional magician there are over 100 amateur magicians and hobbyists? They collect magic, visit magic shops and conventions, have regular jobs from all walks of life, and sometimes perform

magic better than the professionals, but they choose not to become professionals.

Magic is a mystery that creates wonder and excitement. How many times do we hear the word "magic" used to describe something amazing? How many products, services, and corporations use the word "magic"?

When Walt Disney built his first theme park, he named it the Magic Kingdom.

Filmmakers in Hollywood often refer to their work as "the magic of Hollywood."

Newscasters may say "it is so magical" to describe something visually attractive or emotional.

Many products have names like "magic coffee maker," "instant magic," "works like magic," and many others. Therefore, we know and understand that magic describes the impossible, the mysterious, or something spectacular.

So, let's now jump into the history of magic. Magic is as old as the human race, yet it's new to a newborn child. How did all this start?

Let's go back all the way to the Stone Age. The very first person who discovered something that no one else knew was the magician. He was the person of the moment. People looked up to him and were amazed by his discovery.

As the centuries went by more discoveries and mystifying objects accumulated in the magician's toolbox. Over time magicians were known as magi as well as medicine men with their discoveries. Magi also experimented with various oils and herbs. They were able to create ancient medicines believed to cure diseases. Rulers began seeking the magi's advice. Eventually, the magi became advisers to kings, queens, and warriors.

Magical secrets were passed down from grandfather to grandson and sometimes from mentors to their students. Later, magic fraternities would pass on secrets to their members. Becoming a member of a magic fraternity was not easy; you had to be chosen by two of the fraternity members.

As various religions appeared and gained power, their bishops and priests began to see magic and magicians as competition. The religious leaders did not like the idea of some newcomer claiming mystical powers while performing magic.

As a result, there was a smear campaign against magicians. They were called “devil worshipers,” “voodoo practitioners,” “witches,” and “black magic users.” Scare tactics were used to suggest that magicians could put curses on people and possibly cause their deaths.

The smear campaign by religious leaders against magicians was deep and ugly. Just in the United States alone, the Salem witch trials were a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts between February 1692 and May 1693. More than 200 people were accused, and thirty were found guilty, nineteen of whom were executed by hanging.

Overall, magic and magicians learned to survive the smear campaign. Some magicians were forced to reveal their secrets to avoid persecution.

Going back thousands of years, India was the land that produced two of the largest leading religions—Buddhism and Hinduism. India became very famous as a land of magic. You often hear about the Hindu basket, ever-growing mango trees, producing live animals in open marketplaces, and Indian levitation which I witnessed in Mumbai and Delhi. I’ve never seen the famous Indian rope trick and suspect it was a myth.

Egypt also has its share of magic and mysteries. The oldest recorded trick, known as the cups and balls, is found in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Egypt had its share of magicians serving as advisors to pharaohs.

In ancient Egypt magic was an important part of daily life and religion. It was known as "Heka", which was also the name of the Egyptian god of magic. People believed that priests and magicians possessed supernatural powers to communicate with the gods and protect people from all kinds of evil spirits and diseases.

Dedi was one of the most famous magicians in ancient Egyptian tales. This magician is mentioned in the Westcar Papyrus, which are displayed in the museum in Berlin, Germany. Dedi lived during the reign of King Khufu and was famous for his ability for decapitating the heads of animals, reattaching their heads, and bringing the animals back to life.

By the way, this type of magic is still being used today by magicians removing the heads of doves and putting the head back onto the body. For my readers this is completely safe for the dove. Basically, it's done with clever techniques. In today's magic, it's presented more as comedy than gory life and death.

King Khufu summoned Dedi to the palace and show his magic. Dedi successfully performed much of his magic including decapitating a goose's head and reattaching the head to bring the goose back to life. When King Khufu asked Dedi to teach him the magic, Dedi explained that if he were to learn the secrets of magic King Khufu's life would be cut in half because that was the sacrifice that magicians had to make to learn the secrets. Dedi told King Khufu that he wished for the king to live a long life and assured the king that Dedi will always be by the king's side to advise him.

The following magicians were just as famous as Dedi during their periods of ancient Egypt.

Hor, a magician mentioned in the Harris Papyrus, used spells to protect the pharaoh.

Pa-di-Amun, a priest and magician from the late Pharaonic period, was known for healing magic.

Kha-em-waset, the Son of Ramses II, was a priest and magician deeply interested in ancient relics. He was considered the first archaeologist in history and was believed to have the power to interact with spirits.

Imhotep was a doctor, architect, priest, physician, and magician. After his death he became a legend. He was worshipped and believed to possess magical healing powers.

Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu, a priest in Thebes, was known from ancient tombs and was associated with priestly magic and rituals.

Ka-nebu, a magician and priest mentioned in some texts, was known for summoning and controlling spirits. This seems like a guy that Houdini would have debunked.

Nefer-teb was a name that appears in a papyrus as a user of life and death spells. He seems like a target of the Salem Witch hunts if he were to have lived in Salem, Massachusetts in the 1690's.

CHINESE MAGIC

Chinese magic has a long and rich history.

Magic initially developed during the Qin and Han Dynasties. In the Qin Dynasty there were simple magic shows. In the Han Dynasty, with the increase of visiting foreign magicians, many Chinese magicians were influenced and learned the secrets of foreign magicians such as "breathing fire", "dismembering oneself", and "changing the heads of oxen and horses".

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties magic entered a prosperous stage. Magic shows were often held in the court. Folk magic was also rich and colorful. Programs like Wang Qiong's "tortoise-drawing technique" were amazing.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties magic further developed. There were skilled craftsmen like Huang Lvzhuang who invented automatic drama techniques that combined mechanical principles. At the same time, magic was also widely spread among the people and became part of people's entertainment.

As the centuries went by, many mysterious performances popped up and became part of the magic family. Just to name a few, there is juggling, spinning plates, blowing fire from the mouth (known as fire-eating), ventriloquism (where a person can speak without moving their lips and throw their voices to make it sound like their voices are coming from somewhere else such as a box in a distance), sword-swallowing, swallowing goldfish and regurgitating the goldfish, etc. Along the way came animal trainers who managed to train horses, dogs, pigs, and other animals seemingly doing magic such as a dog finding a chosen object.

90% of magic was performed outdoors, mostly in marketplaces and state fairs. Only about 10% of the performances were inside such as taverns, assembly rooms, and a very small percentage in wealthy homes for private parties.

It wasn't until 1584, when the first English book that actually taught magical secrets was written by Reginald Scott. The title of this book was "The Discoveries of Witchcraft". Scott's intention was to expose some secrets of the trade and suggest that not everyone doing mysteries are witches. For those who wanted to learn magic this book was a good place to start.

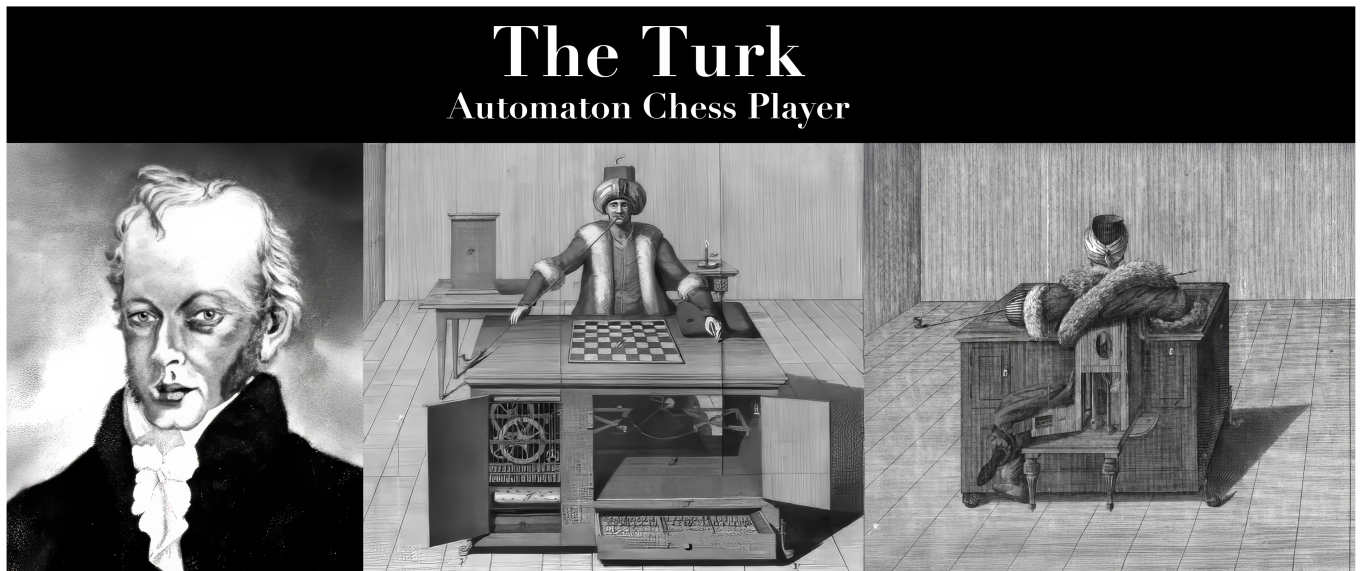
In 1612, Mr. Sa Rid published his book "The Art of Juggling". This was the beginning of publishing magic books for those who wanted to learn magic.

Thereafter, many books were published making it easier for those with a passion for magic to learn magic.

In 1876, Professor Hoffman published the book “Modern Magic” which became the most read magic teaching book. Many famous magicians started with this book.

Chapter 2

Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen



Until 1768, almost all of the magicians were using small and medium-sized magic apparatus. Probably the very first large illusion was invented by a Hungarian baron, Wolfgang von Kempelen. His invention was the automaton chess player “The Turk”. This almost human-like figure played chess with the best chess players of the time. And no one could beat The Turk. (Over a thirty-year period, John Gaughan has re-created this masterpiece.)

Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen first introduced his mechanical wonder in 1769 to the empress Maria Theresa and her guests at the palace.

The news spread all over Europe. The machine that can think and play chess. It was the artificial intelligence of its time. Everyone wanted to see this mechanical wonder.

For the next 50 years, this was the most controversial subject in Europe.

There were skeptics who believed it was a magic trick. And there were those who believed it was a mechanical wonder.

Here is a brief description: A large cabinet with doors and drawers on the front and on the back was wheeled in and turned around, so everyone can see the front and back. Behind the cabinet was an almost human-like half torso of a doll dressed in Ottoman Turk cloths and a turban. Before The Turk began playing chess with the guests, Baron von Kempelen opened one of the doors in the front of the cabinet. Then he opened the back door, where light could be seen passing through the cabinet. Inside the cabinet could be seen filled with mechanical gears, springs, and rods. He then closed the front and back doors. He then swung the cabinet around. He opened the back doors and also picked up The Turk's clothing to show that there was no one hiding in The Turk's body. Again, the cabinet was swung around showing the front and opening the two front doors. Once again, the lights could be seen going through the cabinet, and inside the cabinet could be seen the mechanical gears, rods, and springs.

The observers could see that there is hardly any room, not even for a small rabbit to hide inside the cabinet.

Baron von Kempelen finally closed all the doors. When he opened the bottom drawers, he took out the chess pieces black and white, and set the pieces on the chess board. Up until this point, The Turk's arm was resting on a pillow. Between his fingers there was a fancy smoking pipe. Baron Wolfgang gently lifted The Turk's arm up and took away the pillow. Also, he took away the smoking pipe, leaving The Turk's arm suspended awaiting the start of the chess game.

From the other drawer, Baron von Kempelen took out a mysterious black box, which controlled The Turk. He placed the black box on a small table nearby. He opened the black box and took out a large key. He then pushed the key into the cabinet and began winding the machinery. Finally, he

invited the challenger, one of the guests, to sit down in front of The Turk and begin the game.

The Turk's hand moved up, his arm crossed over the chess board and picked up one of the chess pieces and placed it down to start the game. The Turk's eyes moved side to side, following the moves of his opponent. Hardly anyone could defeat The Turk.

Baron Wolfgang set up a special room in his house and began demonstrating his amazing mechanical wonder to his special guests of about 30 spectators for each showing.

Baron Wolfgang got another invitation, this time from the Emperor Joseph II to come to the palace in Vienna to demonstrate The Turk to the Russian grand duke Paul and his family. To the total amazement of the Russian grand duke, right before the Turk checkmated his opponent, The Turk picked up his head, looked side to side, rolled his eyes three times, and checkmated his opponent.

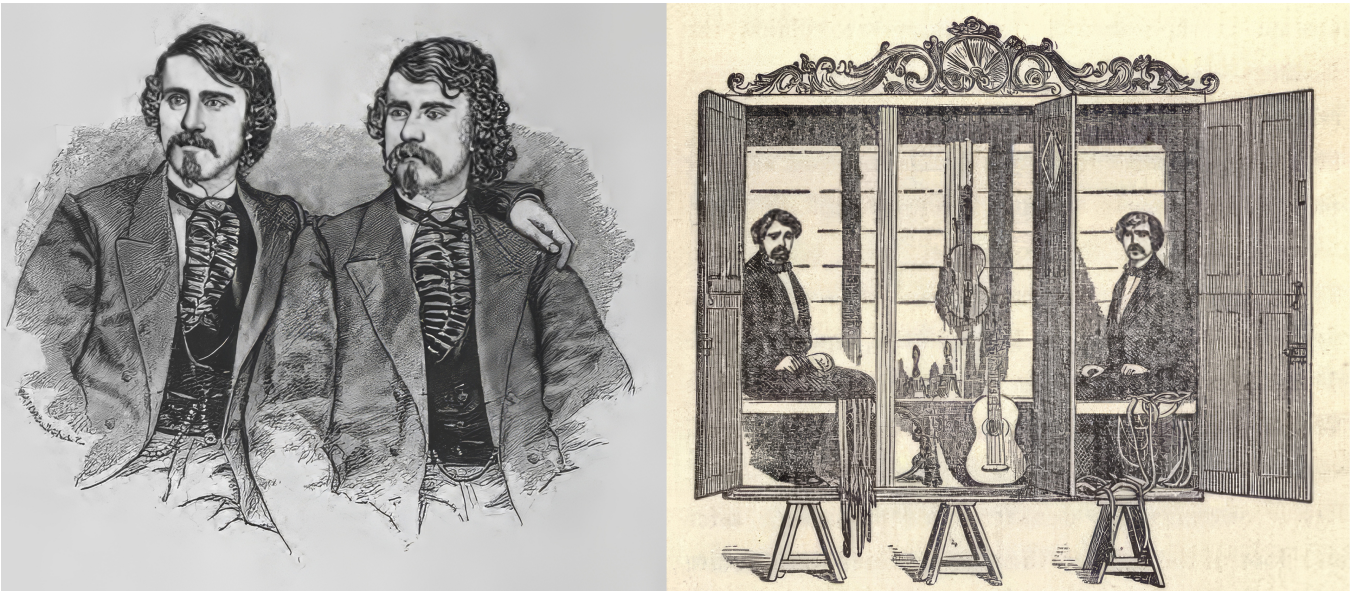
All of the opponents who played against The Turk tried extremely hard, but almost no one ever won.

Baron Wolfgang traveled throughout Europe demonstrating his automaton chess player.

Baron Wolfgang died on March 26, 1804. His ingenious invention The Turk was at his home with his other valuable collectibles. So, according to my calculations, he did invent the very first large stage illusion.

Chapter 3

The Davenport Brothers



Perhaps the second largest stage illusion was the Spirit Cabinet, built and introduced by the Davenport Brothers from Buffalo, New York.

Ira Erastus Davenport and his brother William Henry Davenport introduced their Spirit Cabinet in 1854. This was during the height of spiritualism. Six years earlier, in 1848, the Fox sisters from Hydesville, New York popularized spiritualism. However, the Fox sisters did not have the big cabinet as a large stage prop to attract a large audience.

Here is the brief description of the Davenport brothers' Spirit Cabinet: The brothers would invite audience members to come up onto the stage and tie them securely with ropes as the brothers sat inside the large cabinet. Inside the cabinet, there were also many musical instruments hanging from above. Once the lights were dimmed and the doors were closed, the brothers claimed that the spirits manifested themselves and entered the cabinet to play the instruments. They also opened the doors slightly to

throw out the musical instruments onto the stage floor. When the lights came back up, the musical instruments were all over the stage floor, but both brothers were still in the cabinet while securely tied with the ropes.

There was a lot of controversy about spiritualism. Some called it trickery. Others believed that it was real. As a result, the Davenport brothers got lots of publicity in major newspapers. This attracted people to the theaters to watch them perform the spirit cabinet and other spiritual effects.

The Davenport brothers made a great deal of money traveling throughout the United States for the next ten years. Then they went to Europe and toured there. After Europe, they sailed to Australia to tour there.

Their show came to an end, when William Henry Davenport died on July 1, 1877, in Sydney, Australia at the age of 36. The cause of death was tuberculosis of the lungs. Without any doubt, the Davenport brothers were the most successful spiritualism show of the 19th century. Their influence on two of the future greatest magicians is indisputable. The future greatest magicians that I am referring to are John Neville Maskelyne, who became the greatest magician in England, and Harry Kellar, who became the greatest magician in the world.

Chapter 4

The Great Lafayette



I will now begin to present each magician who in my opinion deserves to be in this book. I will not present them in chronological order or

any alphabetical order. As I wrote in the beginning of this book, I would like to keep it simple and entertaining. I'm going to start with the Great Lafayette. This is because there are parallel historical similarities between Siegfried & Roy and The Great Lafayette. Their careers were almost one hundred years apart.

All three of them were Germans from Germany. They worked with exotic animals. They had a love for their animals. They had great visions building large show extravaganzas with very original ideas. Unfortunately, neither one of them had the opportunity to say farewell to their audiences before closing down their shows. Both of their careers ended in tragedy.

The Great Lafayette was born February 24, 1872, in Munich, Germany. His birth name was Sigmund Neuberger. He later adopted the stage name "The Great Lafayette".

As a youngster, he watched a local magician and fell in love with magic. In his teenage years, he managed to work with traveling magicians as an assistant.

By the time he was 20 years old, he was working as a professional magician in variety and vaudeville shows with his stage name The Great Lafayette.

Eventually, he saved enough money to invest in his own shows and became better and better with each passing year, finally becoming a superstar in magic.

He was a multi-talented and an extremely creative artist. Each of his acts were a well-planned skit of storytelling. Each act was full of exotic props, rich decorations, and elaborate costumes. He had lots of animals that were used during the show, including a lion, horses, goats, ducks, rabbits, pigeons, turkeys, doves, swans, and a dog.

His first half of his closing act was better than anyone's final closing of any show in Europe.

I will describe one of his acts in detail, so you can visualize the magic and mystery. “The Lion’s Bride” was designed to take place on the stage in a large Arabian tent. The front and the sides of the tent were pulled up, so that it would be open for the audience to see inside the tent. The interior of the tent was designed as if you were watching the grand sultan’s elegant party.

With great fanfare and music, dancers, acrobats, fire-eaters, and snake-charmers would enter into the tent and begin performing their specialties. Then, the assistants would roll into the tent. A lion’s cage, with a real roaring lion inside the cage, was turned all around by them, showing the lion was real.

The audience saw way on the other side of stage right a beautiful bride in a white wedding gown. She would be brought into the tent by the slave-masters against her will. They would pull her to the front of the lion’s cage. Then they would roll the cage door sideways, pushing her into the lion’s cage. The lion roared and the bride screamed with fear. When her wedding gown covered the lion for about four seconds. The magic took place when the lion would turn into the Magician. The Great Lafayette, would then open the cage door and gently take his bride, walking off the stage to the thunderous applause from the audience.

The Great Lafayette introduced his Lion’s Bride illusion to the United States in 1901.

On stage he was able to do a costume change, which is known as quick-change, so rapidly and quickly that his audience was amazed.

Quick-change costumes were not just for showing off. It was for a purpose. Each quick-change costume was for a different act. For example, he would walk onto the stage with normal magician’s clothes and proceed to catch invisible doves from mid-air using a small fishing net.

Next, he showed a square tablecloth. He shook it and showed both sides of the cloth empty. He then would instantly make eight more doves appear from the cloth, and the doves would fly to a nearby perching tree.

He again would show the cloth front and the back empty and produce a goat. At this point, when the audience thought that it was over, he'd do a quick-change into a Chinese costume.

Then he would perform Chinese magic, including producing large bowls of water with goldfish. He produced a whole bunch of pigeons, then produced a large turkey, followed by the production of a young black child.

Finally, he'd change from a Chinese costume to a well-dressed army general uniform. Then the next skit would begin, where cowboys, Indians, and horses were on the stage, creating the drama for the next illusion. The Indians would capture the great Lafayette still dressed as a general and when they were about to hang him, Lafayette would vanish!

He was very eccentric on and off stage.

In London, at the Hippodrome, he was driven by a chauffeur in a big, beautiful car across the arena to the stage. What a brilliant way of entering the show.

Lafayette was the highest paid magician of his time, just like Siegfried & Roy were the highest paid magicians of their time.

He loved his animals, except the lion. There was a love-hate relationship between him and the lion. More than once, the lion sent Lafayette to the Hospital.

In 1903, at the Grand Opera House in Indianapolis, USA, the lion got hold of Lafayette's pet dog, which was named Beauty. Lafayette immediately took out his pistol, which was loaded with blank ammunition. The lion knew what was about to happen. The lion dropped the dog. When

Lafayette bent down to pick up the dog, the lion knocked Lafayette over and bit his shoulder. This was one of the incidents that sent Lafayette to the hospital.

Lafayette loved his dog Beauty. The dog was given to him by his good friend, Harry Houdini, the famous escape artist.

Lafayette, took his dog everywhere he went. Beauty traveled in his private railroad car with his master, as well as Lafayette's limousine.

Before making reservations to high class hotels, both in Europe and the USA, Lafayette made sure that the hotels would accept Beauty and that the dog could sleep in the presidential suite with his master.

In another skit, Lafayette would vanish one of his assistants and make her appear in a basket that was shown empty and in full view from the beginning.

In another skit, Lafayette would show a statue of a lady and a swan. Then magically transform the statues into a real swan and a real lady.

In another skit, he entered the stage on a white horse. Following the horse were eighteen musicians. Lafayette got off from the horse and became a conductor for the musicians. As they were marching and playing music, the conductor quickly and magically changed clothes six times. This was an amazing six quick changes. These were just a few of his amazing pieces of artistry and showmanship.

On May 1, 1911, Lafayette opened his show at the Empire Theatre in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Four days later, on May 5, his dog Beauty died. Lafayette was heartbroken. He cried the entire day. Tears poured down his cheeks during the entire evening performance.

Lafayette wanted to bury his dog at Pierhill Cemetery. However, the management refused to bury the dog in a human cemetery. Lafayette signed an agreement with the cemetery and paid \$2000 in advance. So that when he died, Lafayette would be buried next to his dog under the weeping willow tree. (Just as a point of reference, \$2000 in those days was like \$20,000 today.)

Four days after Lafayette buried his dog, the Empire Theatre was sold out with over 3000 people.

During the Lion's Bride act, a large lamp over the Arabian tent burst into flames. Within minutes, the stage was engulfed in an inferno. Lafayette ran down to the basement to save his animals. There was a ramp for taking the animals in and out of the building from the basement. Unfortunately, the ramp door was locked from the outside.

On May 9, 1911, Lafayette died at age 40 with his animals. Additionally, ten other performers died from this disastrous fire.

Chapter 5

Buatier de Kolta



I will now introduce one of France's most famous magicians with an incredible creative mind, Buatier de Kolta.

Buatier de Kolta was born in Lyon, France on November 18, 1845. His birth name was Joseph Buatier. His father was a silk merchant. As a result, Joseph Buatier knew everything there was to know about fine silks, which came in very handy in his later magical career.

At young age, Joseph Buatier learned sleight of hand magic and practiced day and night. He was obsessed with it and eventually developed his own style and his own tricks. He could take full-sized cards and shrink them down slowly until they disappeared.

Joseph was performing his magic at the local coffee shops when he met a Hungarian show producer and manager by the name of

Julius Vido de Kolta. They became good friends. Eventually,

Julius Vido de Kolta convinced Joseph Buatier that they could travel all over Europe and make tons of money together. They traveled to Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Russia, and Holland.

During their travels, Joseph Buatier invented his first amazing invention, The Vanishing Birdcage. He showed a small birdcage with a canary inside. He held it between his hands away from his body. Within a split second, both the cage and the canary vanished instantly, leaving his hands completely empty. This invention brought Joseph instant success. Even the magicians of the time couldn't stop talking about it.

Joseph Buatier felt very strongly that on the strength of this amazing trick, he could get a show in London, England. He asked his manager, Julius Vido de Kolta, to negotiate a deal with the British show buyers in London. He did and negotiated a good deal.

Upon arriving in London, when Joseph Buatier found the posters already printed to promote his show, he realized that the British confused his name with his manager's name, and they called him "Buatier de Kolta". Rather than arguing with the show buyers and having them reprint the posters, Joseph decided to let it go. From that day on, he became known as Buatier de Kolta.

He opened up his show in May 1875 at the Egyptian Hall in London. When the other magicians began copying his vanishing birdcage, he invented his next grand illusion. He would have the audience examine a small wooden platform. Then he placed this small wooden platform onto the stage. Over the platform he placed a large birdcage. A female assistant, dressed up in a yellow canary costume, would enter the cage. After covering the cage

with a beautiful silk cloth, and at the count of three, the cage, the female assistant, and the cloth would all vanish instantly. Bautier de Kolta was definitely ahead of his time.

(For those of you magicians who are reading this, and you know how you can vanish an assistant or the cage, you may be scratching your head wondering how de Kolta vanished the silk cloth covering the cage. He used the hold-out principle. And if you don't know what the hold-out principle is, I'll suggest for you look it up. You can also get in touch with me, if you are a member of the International Magicians Society. Just send me an email: Tony@IMSmagic.com.)

By the 1880s, Bautier de Kolta invented one of his most famous Illusions, The de Kolta Chair. On the stage floor he would place a bunch of newspapers. Then he would place a chair on top of the newspapers. A female assistant would sit on the chair. De Kolta would cover her with a beautiful silk cloth. He would then pick up the cloth to show her legs up to her knees. He then grabbed the lady with the cloth and threw them into mid-air, where the lady and the cloth would vanish instantly.

Among many of De Kolta's contributions to magic was to improve Black Art Magic, both in the presentation and the techniques. De Kolta introduced Black Art Magic to England in 1888 at the Egyptian Hall in London.

Now we have to give credit where credit is due. Black Art Magic was invented by Max Auzinger, a German magician who went by the stage name of

Ben Ali Bey.

(For those of you who are not familiar with Black Art Magic, let me give you a short description. This is where the possibilities are endless. You can change small objects visually into large objects. You can vanish objects from one end of the stage and make them appear on the other side of the

stage immediately. You can decapitate a person by removing their head, walk to the other side of the stage, and place the head on a table. The head is still alive and talking, while the head is being moved from one side of the stage to the other. This is just the tip of the iceberg.)

(If you'd like to learn more about Black Art Magic, you will find it at the International Magicians Society's Magic Academy volume 38. The Black Art specialist, Dondrake, teaches Black Art Magic from A to Z.)

Another of de Kolta's amazing Illusions was The Expanding Cube. He introduced this extremely visual illusion in 1903 while in New York at the Eden Musee. He would walk on a stage with a cube about 8 inches square. He would tell the audience that he is carrying his wife in this little box. He would then place the cube on a table. When he clapped his hands, the 8-inch cube would immediately expand to about a 40-inch square cube. He would then lift the cube up to reveal his wife. He always got a standing ovation for this amazing illusion.

A couple of weeks later, he traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana to perform. Unfortunately, he died suddenly from acute Bright's disease on October 7, 1903, at the age of 55. Since his death, just about every professional magician has used one of De Kolta's inventions.

Chapter 6

John Nevil Maskelyne



John Nevil Maskelyne was one of England's great magicians and a show producer. He was born on December 22, 1839, in Cheltenham, England.

Maskelyne's father was a saddle-maker. Growing up, Maskelyne helped his father and learned to work with tools and all kinds of different materials.

As a teenager, Maskelyne got a job working in a clock shop as an apprentice to a clockmaker. However, his heart was in entertainment. He loved dancing and singing. He sang in the church choir every Sunday.

Along the way, Maskelyne discovered magic. He learned some tricks and how to spin plates on a tabletop. Maskelyne practiced his tricks until he was good at them. He entertained his friends and had fun.

On March 7, 1865, Maskelyne went to see the Davenport brothers' seance show at the Cheltenham Town Hall. He was unlucky. He couldn't get a good seat. He ended up sitting way on the left side of the hall, almost parallel to the makeshift stage. This was an afternoon show. Because this was a seance show, the entire room needed to be dark. Therefore, the Davenport brothers covered all of the windows with heavy black cloth to prevent sunlight from coming through the windows.

On the makeshift stage was a large cabinet with three doors. Inside the cabinet was a long piece of wood nailed on each side of the cabinet, creating a place for the brothers to sit facing each other. Hanging from above were many musical instruments, such as a guitar, violin, bells, whistles, and tambourines.

The presenter introduced the Davenport Brothers. Then he asked audience members to come up on stage and examine everything to verify that all was normal and legitimate. The presenter then asked the volunteers to tie the brothers' hands behind their backs and tie their ankles to the floor.

A half a dozen men ran to the stage. One of them was Maskelyne.

After tying the Davenport Brothers securely, the volunteers went back to their seats. The presenter signaled for the lights to be turned off and the show began immediately. The violin began playing, then the trumpet, followed by the other musical instruments. At one point, one of the windows, which was covered by a black cloth, must have been slightly open and a little bit of wind caused the black cloth to move a little, letting the sunshine seep in. From way on the left side of the hall, where Maskelyne was sitting, he could see inside the cabinet from the slightly open door and realized that Ira Davenport was ringing the bells vigorously. Then the beam of sunlight vanished as the black cloth covering the window stopped moving.

(Keep in mind that during this time there was a great deal of controversy about how the Davenport brothers might be fake mediums.)

After the show, Maskelyne told the audience what he had seen but no one believed him. As a result, Maskelyne wanted to prove that seance shows can be performed as entertainment and that there was no need for the ghost manifestations. Maskelyne asked his friend, George Alfred Cooke, to help him build the cabinet, so that together they could perform the Davenport brothers' act. Maskelyne figured out that the brothers were able to slip their hands in and out of the tightly knotted ropes. The rest was easy.

After four months of practicing, both Maskelyne and George Cook performed the Davenport Brothers' act on June 19, 1865, at the Jessop's Gardens, demonstrating that seance and spiritualism can be done without the manifestation of the spirits. Basically, it was presented as well-done tricks for entertainment purposes.

The local newspapers ran with the story. Soon after, Maskelyne was famous. These newspaper articles caught the attention of a young show promoter, William Morton, who booked Maskelyne and Cook at the London's Crystal Palace in 1869. Over the next four years, Maskelyne invented many illusions, including the incredible levitation where he would levitate his assistant vertically, which had never been done before.

Maskelyne signed a lease in 1873 for one of the exhibition halls of the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. The Egyptian Hall originally was a museum with several exhibition halls. After many years, it lost its attraction and became available for rent. Maskelyne spent his own money to build a stage and turn the exhibition hall into a theater and began performing nightly with his friend George Alfred Cooke.

Each year, Maskelyne added more new illusions to his shows. Along the way, he invited other magicians to come and work at the Egyptian Hall

Theatre, making it possible for magicians from England and other countries to come and work in England.

In March 1875, Maskelyne introduced his amazing automaton “Psycho, the mechanical doll”. Psycho was about 22 inches tall and seated on a small square cube about 7 inches x 7 inches square. The cube was placed on a glass table, so there were no visible wires running from the floor to Psycho.

Because the glass table was transparent (and back in 1875, there were no remote controls), Psycho could still accomplish miracles. Audience members could name any card from a freely shuffled deck of cards. Maskelyne placed the cards in front of Psycho. Psycho would reach over and remove the selected cards. That was just the tip of the iceberg.

Psycho could do difficult mathematical equations. By placing cards with numbers in front of Psycho, Maskelyne would ask the audience members to name different numbers. Then there would be mathematical equations. Yet, Psycho could duplicate the mathematical equations by picking the correct number cards.

Psycho would also spell out words from cards that had the Roman alphabet on them.

This small mechanical wonder was so small that not even a rabbit could hide inside of it.

London newspapers wrote lengthy articles about Psycho. People were waiting in long lines to buy tickets to go into the Egyptian Hall to see Psycho.

Maskelyne continued his shows at the Egyptian Hall, up until the end of 1904. Then Maskelyne moved his show to St. George's Hall in Langham Place.

Maskelyne's new theater was opened in January 1905. Up until the First World War in 1914, Maskelyne hired many different magicians, and novelty acts to perform at his new show. From time to time, Maskelyne himself appeared on the stage.

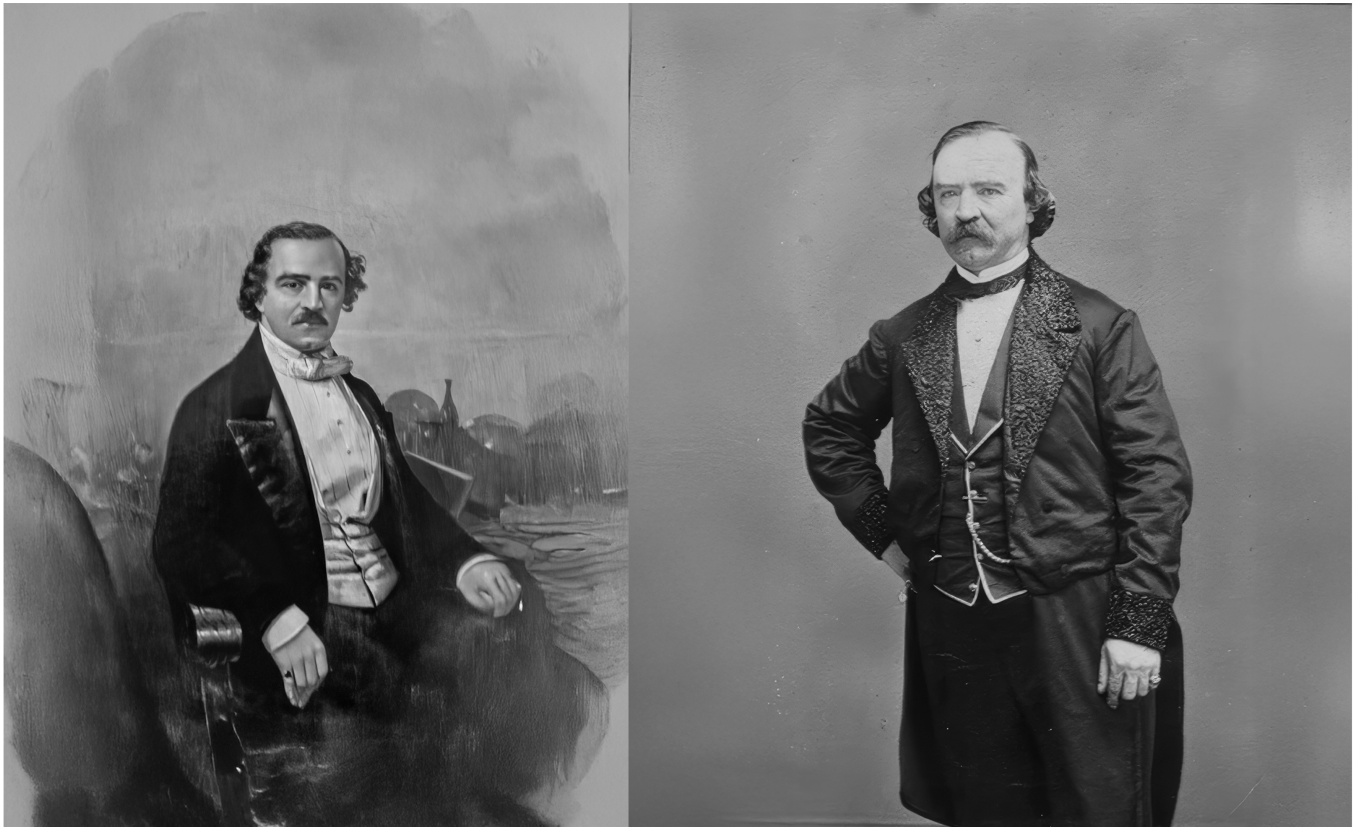
During the war years, business was bad. Maskelyne closed the theatre and continued developing new magic and illusions, as well as writing magic books.

Maskelyne reopened the theatre in February 1916 and began performing again.

By May 2, 1917, Maskelyne's health began declining. On May 18, 1917, Maskelyne, the great magician and show producer, died at the age of 77. The cause of death was pneumonia. He will be remembered as the longest-running magic show in Great Britain.

Chapter 7

Anderson, the Great Wizard of the North



John Henry Anderson, the Great Wizard of the North, became one of the world's most famous magicians at his time. Anderson was born on a small farm in Scotland. There was no chance of traveling any distance, other than the nearest city near his parent's farm. Yet, he traveled the world, wining and dining with kings, queens, and emperors. Anderson had an amazing life.

John Henry Anderson was born on July 16, 1814, to farming parents near Aberdeen, Scotland. As a child, he had seen some traveling magicians that performed magic shows in Aberdeen and that ignited the flames of desire

in him to pursue magic. This also caused the persistence in him to become a magician.

At first, Anderson began learning magic and practicing. By 1837, he began working as a professional magician. He spent some of his earnings buying better magical equipment. He spent most of his money on advertisement. He was probably the pioneer of creating very creative and eye-catching magical posters.

On some of these posters people saw his title "Wonder of the World." On other posters, it simply said "Anderson is coming." A week later, a new poster said, "Anderson is here."

On large posters, the kings, queens, and emperors bowed at him with approval, just as if he were approved by the world's most powerful people. He actually invented hype on posters. It is possible that P.T. Barnum got his ideas for his promotions from Anderson.

The other performers had only a handful of posters near where they performed. On the other hand, Anderson plastered his posters all over the city's walls "Anderson is coming" or "Anderson is here".

I am not surprised that later on he changed his title to "The Great Wizard of the North."

Anderson's early success started in Aberdeen, where he placed his beautiful posters all over the city. He managed to sell out in small theaters and assembly rooms.

After his tour of Scotland, Anderson moved the show to Ireland. In Belfast, he used the same promotion technique by placing large and beautiful posters all over the city.

Anderson then moved the show to Dublin, where he perform over 200 sold-out shows before moving back to Scotland and began performing in

Glasgow. Within two months, Anderson created his own theater near the Scottish annual fairgrounds. He named his new theater "The Palace of Enchantment."

During the 1838 annual fair, Anderson sold out over 100,000 paid tickets. The following season, he sold out over 200,000 paid tickets. One of the main attractions in his show was the bullet-catch.

In 1840, Anderson moved his show to London, England, where he began to bill himself as "The Great Wizard of North."

Anderson took his show all the way across Europe. Along the way, he entertained the King of Denmark, Christian VIII and King Oscar I of Sweden.

In 1847, Anderson traveled to the city of St. Petersburg, Russia, where he entertained Czar Nicholas at the Winter Palace.

On August 27, 1849, upon returning to England, Anderson was summoned by Queen Victoria to perform his amazing magic at the Balmoral Castle.

Anderson was a great promoter who made very good use of his royal performances. Upon returning to Scotland, he promoted to the audience that they would see a new amazing magic show with new and improved magic, and that this is the same magic show that entertained Queen Victoria and the royal family.

In 1851, Anderson sailed to the United States. He opened at the Broadway Theatre in New York. He was a genius at advertising with billboards and handing out leaflets. This made him the biggest success on Broadway. Within his first 100 nights, he sold over 250,000 tickets. After New York, Anderson began to play other cities in the United States.

In 1855, Anderson returned to England. After touring England and the British Isles, he decided to go on a world tour.

In March of 1858, Anderson sailed from Liverpool to Australia. In June, he arrived in Melbourne again with his clever advertising. Anderson sold out at the Melbourne Royal Fair for the next two months. From Melbourne, Anderson took the show to Sydney. After two months in Sydney, he took the show across Australia through some goldmine towns. From Australia, Anderson sailed to Hawaii, where he entertained the queen of Hawaii.

From Hawaii, Anderson sailed to America and arrived in San Francisco. In December 1859, he opened up in the biggest theater, The Opera House. As always, he played to packed audiences. From San Francisco, Anderson took the show to Sacramento, then across the country all the way to Boston.

When the American Civil War started in March of 1861, the friction between north and south got ugly. Ticket sales went down, and shows were no longer profitable. The straw that broke the camel's back was when he was in Richmond, Virginia. People began tearing down his posters and saying, "This guy has the nerve to promote himself as the 'Great Wizard of the North'!"

It was then that Anderson decided to go back to England to retire in Scotland.

John Henry Anderson, The Great Wizard of the North, passed away on February 3, 1874, at the age of 59. He was buried at the cemetery in Aberdeen, not too far from the farm where he was born.

Chapter 8

Carl Herrmann



Carl Herrmann was born January 23, 1816, in the outskirts of Hanover, Germany.

His father was Samuel Herrmann, a local magician.

Carl grew up learning magic from his father and other local magicians. He also learned magic from traveling magicians. Carl was a very likable child. His father's friends also taught him magic. As a result, Carl became a very good sleight of hand artist. He was very good with playing cards, coins, and cups & balls, all of which required dexterity.

A traveling gypsy magician taught Carl how to do bird calls (imitating bird sounds) and ventriloquism.

By the age of 14, Carl was making over 20 different bird calls.

Carl continued working with his father as a magician's assistant.

By the age of 20, Carl began performing his own magic.

Carl had a very likable personality with a distinguished charisma. He learned to project his voice, where even at a very large opera house, people sitting way in the back could hear him.

Carl moved to Paris and began performing his magic at assembly rooms and schools, as well as private performances.

Carl eventually worked at theaters. He invested his money wisely by purchasing large illusions. Once he collected enough illusions to perform a full evening show, he took his show to London. There he billed himself as the first professor of magic in the world.

It was 1848. Carl was 32 years old and got very good reviews from the London newspapers. Now he was ready to go back to Germany, as well as Austria, Portugal and Italy.

By this time, Carl learned to become friends with those people who could introduce him to royal families, so that they could arrange for him to perform his magic for kings and queens. Just to name a few of the kings and queens that Carl entertained, there was Emperor Franz Josef the First of Austria, King Ludwig The First of Bavaria, King Dom Pedro V of Portugal, King Frederick VII of Denmark, Queen Isabella II of Spain, and Czar Nicholas of Russia.

From each royal performance, Carl got a little gift from the Kings and Queens. Carl used these gifts on his advertisements to promote himself as the royal performer.

By the time Carl Herrmann was ready to go to South America, he got rid of some of his big illusions, so that he could travel light. He began performing sleight of hand magic. This worked for him very well, because most of the magicians competing with him were using stage props and not enough sleight of hand. People appreciated the skills of cards appearing from mid-air, producing large coins one after the other and dropping the coins into the metal bucket, where people way in the back of the theater would hear the dropping of coins into the bucket.

Carl traveled through Brazil, Argentina, and Cuba. In 1861, Carl traveled to the United States. The first stop was New Orleans. He performed one month at the Saint Charles Theatre. This was the beginning of the American Civil War. Carl was smart enough to travel to New York, where it would be safe from the war.

In New York, he used his publicity materials that he got from the Kings and Queens to land himself into the Academy Music Theatre. His jewelry with diamonds and sapphires that he received from the Kings and Queens was displayed in a glass box at Tiffany's jewelry store for the newspapers to photograph and publish. What a brilliant idea to promote his show,

by using the kings' and queens' jewelry and billing himself as the royal performer.

Carl also printed hundreds of posters and thousands of handouts. On September 21, 1861, this promotion brought the largest crowds to the theater, where more than 4,000 people were turned away because the tickets were sold out.

Carl was so skilled with playing cards that he could throw cards to any corner of the theater. People were eager to catch one as a souvenir.

Carl took his show to Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and Newark to sold-out theaters. One of his favorite tricks was showing an empty bottle and then pouring from it an endless flow of different drinks that the audience requested.

His "second sight act" was so well done that it earned him the title of "first professor of magic in the world".

For those of you who are not familiar with the second sight act, this is where a magician's assistant is blindfolded. The magician walks through the aisles of the theater, then people hand him different objects. The blindfolded assistant describes the objects in detail, sometimes even the serial numbers on money.

On the strength of his success in the United States, Carl went back to England and opened his show in 1863 at the Princess Theatre in London. In England, Carl had amazing success and made a tremendous amount of money.

After England, Carl purchased a mansion in Vienna, which he furnished with the most expensive furniture, antiques, and collectibles. Carl began inviting all the celebrities to his beautiful home. This also created major PR in newspapers. As always, people loved to hear success stories in their homes with photos of them with celebrities. You can say it took a magician

to come up with this type of promotion. Later on, Hollywood copied this formula.

Carl continued to perform throughout the world. In 1870, he announced that this would be his farewell tour of the United States and that he will return home to Vienna and retire from show business.

However, that's not the end of the story. In 1874, the financial panic wiped out his entire savings and all of his investments. This forced Carl Herrmann to go back to work at the age of 57.

He traveled and performed for the next 15 years and saved over \$200,000. Then he went back to retirement.

On June 8, 1887, Carl Herrmann died at the age of 71. The London newspapers called him the greatest of all time.

Chapter 9

Alexander Herrmann



Alexander Herrmann joined his brother Carl Herrmann's show at a very young age and studied from his brother to become a great magician.

Alexander was eight years old when he was performing with his brother Karl. In 1852, Alexander was levitated by his brother, when they performed for Czar Nicholas of Russia in St. Petersburg.

Later in his teenage years, Alexander was his brother's medium who could identify objects chosen by the audience while he was blindfolded. This was basically the second sight act.

In his adolescent years, Alexander left his brother's show and went on to have his own show. He was extremely good with the sleight of hand magic. He was able to palm large cigars, eyeglasses, a box of cards, silver cigarette cases, and

many other objects as well as being able to produce them from people's beards and hair.

He was able to throw playing cards all the way to the balconies and way back into the audience. Some people said that he was better than his brother with his sleight of hand magic.

Alexander was performing in London when his brother

Karl Herrmann died in Karlsbad on June 8, 1887, at the age of 71 and was buried in Vienna, Austria.

Alexander Herrmann, by then a famous magician in his own right, claimed to be the successor of his brother.

Alexander was performing throughout England when he decided to go back to the United States on a cruise ship. There he met Adelaide Scarcez, a 22-year-old dancer on her way to New York to marry an American Broadway actor. However, Alexander won her heart, and they got married in Manhattan by the city's mayor.

Alexander decided to make the USA home. He applied for US citizenship in 1876. He continued touring the United States. He also continued touring the world, and his show got larger and larger. He added more illusions. By 1890, he had at least four large scenes in his shows.

Alexander found opportunities during his travels to entertain mayors, governors, senators, and even US president, Ulysses S. Grant.

In 1883 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Alexander entertained the Emperor Dom Pedro II at least 18 times.

In 1885, Alexander performed in Madrid, Spain for King

Alfonso XII.

In short, Alexander never missed an opportunity to perform for important people and getting lots of good newspaper publicity. He even went the extra

mile to expose fake mediums who claimed that they could communicate with spirits. Alexander offered \$20,000 to any medium who can create any mystery that Alexander cannot recreate on stage. Needless to say, no one collected the \$20,000. This, too, got him lots of newspaper publicity.

In those days, there was no air conditioning. As a result, the great Alexander's show was on hold during the summer months. In the spring and fall, Alexander and his wife Adelaide traveled from theater to theater in their luxurious private railroad car which cost him over \$40,000. It was previously owned by a famous British actress, Lily Langtry.

In the summers they settled in their mansion at Whitestone Landing on Long Island. It was known as Herrmann Manor. Around the large property was an 8-foot-tall spike wire fence. Inside the property there were cows, goats, and other farm animals. Through the winding road, which was surrounded by trees, you could find your way to the mansion. On the waterfront side of the property was their luxury yacht, the Fra Diavolo. This was where Adelaide and Alexander found refuge from people outside.

One summer day, a woman reporter came to interview Alexander and his wife at their mansion. The reporter brought up their luxurious lifestyle. Alexander admitted that he was making between \$70,000 to \$100,000 a year. But he also talked about losing a great deal of money on bad investments in theaters and other industrial investments. He also brought up how he lost a half million dollars on cotton futures on Wall Street.

Alexander also talked about losing money on playing cards. With friends and coworkers, he talked about how he didn't mind losing money at card games because he felt those people needed money and it was his way of giving them money. He also talked about lending money to those who needed it the most.

Keep in mind those days a hundred thousand dollars was equivalent to over a \$1 million dollars today. Those days most people earned between \$5,000 and \$7,000 per year.

Alexander and his wife Adelaide had dinner with friends at Genesee Valley Hunt Club. During the dinner, he performed card tricks, joked with his friends, and told amazing stories about his adventures. He also mentioned that after he retires, his nephew, Leon Herrmann, who was in Paris at the time, would be his successor.

After dinner, the Herrmanns boarded their private train car on their way to Bradford, Pennsylvania, where he was to open his show the following night. In the early morning hours of December 17, 1896, the train was approaching Great Valley, New York. Alexander had a massive heart attack and died on the train. He was 52 years old.

His wife, Adelaide, succeeded her husband and became known as the Queen of Magic.

Chapter 10

Harry Kellar



Harry Kellar, America's greatest magician, was born on July 11, 1849, to German parents in Erie, Pennsylvania. His birth name was Heinrich Kellar.

Before he became America's greatest magician, he traveled to five continents and performed in hundreds of cities. He went through so much hardship, disappointment, and struggle.

Since I am not writing his full biography, I will spare you from reading hundreds of pages. I will give you the important historical facts and the journey of a great man.

At the age of 10, Kellar got tired of his stepmother's constant abusing him and showing no love or sympathy to him. So, he ran away from home by jumping on a freight car at the nearest railroad. On the train in the freight

cars, Kellar saw other homeless hobos. He got off the train in Cleveland, Ohio, where he managed to get a job at a dry goods store.

After saving up a little bit of money to travel again, Kellar jumped onto another freight car. This train was bound for Cincinnati, Ohio. He managed to get odd jobs in Cincinnati and made enough money to get onto the next freight car heading for New York. Kellar felt that New York City was big enough, where he could get better jobs and be prosperous.

In New York, Kellar got a job at the Earle Hotel, where he cleaned the floors and slept in the basement of the hotel. In his spare time, he sold newspapers on street corners.

Visiting New York City was Robert Harcourt, a clergyman from Canandaigua in upstate New York. Harcourt took pity on the young newspaper boy and offered to adopt him, and pay for his education, if the young boy would study for the ministry.

This encounter with the clergyman was meant to be. There was a traveling magic show at a nearby town: Penn Yan, New York. The clergyman and young Kellar went to see the magician Fakir of Ava. It was during this show that Kellar fell in love with magic and made up his mind to spend his entire life performing magic.

Kellar began buying magic books and tried to learn as much magic as he could. Eventually, he made up his mind to move to Buffalo, a big affluent city in upstate New York. There he felt he would have a better chance of meeting other magic hobbyists and learn magic from them. Kellar told the clergyman that he had to follow his heart.

In Buffalo, Kellar got a job at a family farm of Henry Fiske, where he had room and board, as well as pocket money. Kellar was working at the farm for about a month, when he read an advertisement in the newspaper that

the Fakir of Ava was looking to hire a boy assistant. Kellar immediately ran 2 1/2 miles all the way to Fakir of Ava's home.

Fakir of Ava was an Englishman from Essex, England. His birth name was Isaiah Harris Hughes. He told young Kellar that there were 15 other young men applying for the job. So, Fakir of Ava told Kellar to come back in three days and he would have an answer for him.

Kellar was afraid that someone else might get the job. So, he tried to convince Fakir of Ava by telling him his entire life story, including how the Fakir of Ava was the first magician he ever saw and how he fell in love with magic and wanted to spend the rest of his life doing magic. Then Kellar said, "If you give me this opportunity, I will be the best assistant you will ever have. And if I cannot be the best magician's assistant, you don't have to fire me. I will quit myself." Fakir of Ava was so impressed with the young man's desire and persistence to be a magician that he decided to give Kellar the job.

With that, Fakir said, "Listen young man. fifteen other people came here to get this job. My dog didn't like any of them. You're the only person, from the moment you entered my house, that my dog began wiggling his tail for you. Therefore, I'm going to listen to my dog and give you the job."

After working for the Fakir for over fourteen months, Kellar asked for permission to go and do his own performances. So, at the age of 16, Kellar performed his first show in Dunkirk, Michigan. He went on to perform all the small towns, only to return back to Fakir of Ava and admit that he was a failure as a performer. Kellar continued working for the Fakir for the next two years.

Eventually, Kellar went out performing again, just to try his luck again. Sometimes, he made money. Other times, he lost money. Sometimes, he tried to convince printers to print his handbills on credit in between performances. Kellar got odd jobs, such as paving the streets or working

in hotels. All the while, Kellar persistently continued performing. Sometimes, he made good money. Other times, he barely made ends meet.

Eventually, Kellar made the decision that he had to go back and work with the other magicians to learn more, so he could become a better magician.

Right about this time, he heard about the Davenport Brothers from Buffalo. At the time, Ira and William Davenport had their first successful stage medium show. Since Kellar got his first break in Buffalo, and since the Davenport Brothers are from Buffalo, Kellar felt very comfortable to approach the Davenport brothers and ask them if he could work for them as an assistant. Since the Fakir of Ava was a reputable magician, and Kellar worked for him almost 4 years, The Davenport Brothers hired Kellar immediately.

In August 1864, Kellar traveled to England with the Davenport brothers, where he spent the next four years traveling through England and Europe. Kellar learned new skills, including advertising and managing. He was promoted as the Davenport Brothers' promoter and business manager.

In 1868, the Davenport Brothers and Kellar came back to the United States. Eventually, Kellar decided to go back on his own and pursue his childhood dream. Kellar went back to traveling smaller cities and performing on his own again. This time he knew how to promote and sell tickets. Also, he had a better show.

In the summer of 1873, Kellar decided to take his show internationally. He took the show to Canada by December. He traveled to Havana, Cuba. In Cuba, Kellar learned to speak Spanish. One of Kellar's gifts was that he could actually pick up foreign languages fairly easy.

From Cuba, he took his show to Veracruz, Mexico, where he performed over 200 shows to packed theaters. He then traveled to Mexico City, where he sold out almost every night.

From Mexico, he traveled to Panama, Ecuador, and Peru.

Then he sailed to the East Coast of South America.

In Teatro de Opera in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Kellar had even more success. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Emperor Dom Pedro II came to see the show three times.

From Rio de Janeiro, Kellar and his crew boarded the Royal Mail Steamship enroute to England. Two weeks later, on August 13, 1875, the ship struck rocks in the Bay of Biscay. Three people drowned. The rest of the crew and passengers were saved by a French warship and were taken to the island of Molene.

In the shipwreck, Kellar lost everything, including all his illusions and the money he made, which was more than \$30,000 worth of silver, gold coins, and uncut Brazilian diamonds. Kellar was left with just the clothes on his back and a gold ring with diamonds on his finger.

His gold coins and all of his other valuables were hidden in one of the illusion's hidden compartments. This illusion was securely packed in a shipping crate, which is now lying on the bottom of the ocean.

Upon arriving in London, England, Kellar checked into the Craven hotel and immediately sent a telegram to Duncan Sherman Banking Company in the USA, where he had all his savings. Kellar asked them to wire money to him in London. To his shock and disbelief, he was told that the bank went out of business and was bankrupt.

Desperate and in need of money, Kellar approached the famous banker Junius Spencer

Morgan, JP Morgan's father. It was a known fact that Junius Spencer Morgan never lent money to anyone without good collateral. Kellar convinced Mr. Morgan to lend him the money without collateral. This made

it possible for Kellar to return back to New York and hire Henry Stone, an Illusion builder, to build Kellar new illusions and conjuring equipment. Then Kellar hired a new cast and crew and was back in business.

With the new show, he sailed to Australia. The show arrived in Sydney in September 1876. The show traveled through small and large cities throughout Australia. Then it traveled to Indonesia in 1877 through large and small cities. From there, the show traveled to Malaysia and Singapore. Afterwards, the show sailed to China, playing the major cities, including Beijing and Shanghai, finally the show traveled to Hong Kong.

By 1878, the show was traveling throughout India in such cities as Mumbai, Calcutta, Delhi, and lots of small cities in between. From India, he took the show to Africa, again traveling between large and small cities. By then, Kellar was 30 years old, and he saved up enough money and got lots of new illusions. From Africa, he sailed to England. There, too, he took the show to small and large cities all the way to Scotland. On April 29, 1880, in Edinburgh, Kellar performed for Queen Victoria in Balmoral castle.

From England, Kellar decided to go around the world a second time, this time in reverse order, taking his show to such countries and cities: Gibraltar, Malta, Portugal, and Egypt. In South Africa, he traveled through the diamond prospect cities, where Kellar sold out night after night and made lots of money. From South Africa, the show crossed the Indian Ocean and arrived at Mumbai, then to Delhi, and then Calcutta.

From there, Kellar took the show to Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and then back to the USA. During his world travels, he learned to speak Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and French. He got sick many times with high fever. He survived malaria and a shipwreck. By this point, Kellar was 35 years old and ready to stay in the USA and settle down.

It should be mentioned that back then traveling was very difficult. The road conditions were not what they are today. This goes to any other form of transportation, especially shipping those large illusions, costumes, props, cast, and crew. It was remarkable that he was able to travel the world with such a large-scale show back then.

Kellar leased the old Masonic Hall on October 23, 1884, in Philadelphia. He spent lots of money fixing and renovating the hall into a theater and gave it a new name: Kellar's Egyptian Hall. He opened the doors to the public on December 15, 1884.

For the first time in his life, Kellar performed 270 consecutive shows. He knew he was home to stay.

In New York at the Comedy Theatre, he performed 180 sold-out shows. Then he took the show cross-country and became America's greatest magician. On May 16, 1908, at the end of the show in Baltimore, at the Fort Theatre, Kellar announced his retirement and delivered his farewell speech. Then he called Howard Thurston on stage and announced that Thurston would become his successor and wished him the best of luck.

After his retirement, Kellar and his wife, Ava, moved to Los Angeles, where Kellar had built a large villa with a large workshop for Kellar to keep busy experimenting with new magical apparatus. Within two years after moving to Los Angeles, Ava died.

Houdini, who idolized Kellar when he was young, became good friends with Kellar. Houdini was a frequent visitor at Kellar's house. While Houdini was shooting his Hollywood movies, Houdini asked Kellar to come back to New York and star in a show that the Society of American Magicians was organizing as a benefit show for the families of the first Americans who died in World War I.

On October 17, 1917, Kellar performed his favorite tricks, including escaping from ropes and the famous spirit cabinet at the end of the show. Kellar took his final bows to a standing ovation of 6,000 people and began to walk off the stage when Houdini ran onto the stage and said America's greatest magician should be carried off in triumph after his final public performance. The magicians there ran onto the stage to help Kellar on a big, upholstered chair, while other magicians ran onto the stage to shower him with roses and flowers. As they raised the chair to carry him off the stage, the 100-piece orchestra played "Auld Lang Syne", as the world's greatest magician was carried off the Hippodrome stage.

Kellar died five years later at his Los Angeles home on March 10, 1922, at the age of 73.

Chapter 11

Howard Thurston



Howard Franklin Thurston was born on July 20, 1869, in Columbus, Ohio. His father was a carriage builder. Thurston had no desire to learn to work with tools.

Thurston's ambition was to work at the racetrack and become a horse jockey. This way, he could travel from racetrack to racetrack in different cities. His height was only 5'6" and he felt that this would qualify him to become a jockey.

From a young age, Thurston worked at racetracks doing all kinds of jobs, from shoveling horse manure to walking the horses.

Growing up, Thurston has seen several magic shows. He got interested in magic and purchased a used copy of Professor Hoffman's magic instructional book entitled, "Modern Magic" and began to learn simple and easy magic tricks.

In Boston, Thurston met Dr. James William Elliott, a medical doctor and magic hobbyist. Doctor Elliott was very good with card tricks and coin manipulations. He could vanish a card in his hand and show both sides of his hands empty.

Dr. James William Elliott taught Thurston his fine techniques. This was the beginning of Thurston's career in magic.

Thurston practiced card manipulations day and night and got his first job as a magician in Nelsonville, Ohio at the Great London Sideshow of the Sells Brothers' Circus.

The starting salary was six dollars per week. Thurston began getting jobs at different venues, traveling from town to town. At one of the variety shows, Thurston met his first wife, Grace Texola, who was a singer and dancer. Thurston was 28 years old, and Grace was 15 years old. They got married August 21, 1897, in Sparta, Mississippi. Grace began to work with her husband as his assistant.

In August 1899, Thurston signed up with a New York Show at the 14th Street Theatre. His wife Grace went on the road with the butterfly sisters singing and dancing act.

Thurston hired a 10-year-old black male child to be his assistant. The show got good reviews. Thurston was in demand. He signed up with the Keith circuit in the East and the Orpheum circuit in the West.

Thurston went to England and got a four-week contract to perform in London at the Palace Theatre in November 1900. The review was very good. The British liked his style and originality.

Thurston showed great skill by throwing playing cards to all corners of the theater with great accuracy.

His four-week contract was extended to six months. By this time, Thurston and Grace got divorced.

In London, The Prince of Wales visited Thurston backstage at his dressing room.

After six months of working at the Palace Theatre, Thurston traveled to Europe to perform his magic in France, Denmark, Belgium, and then back to England.

Around this time in his life, Thurston felt that his act would become stale, since by then everyone had seen it. As a result, Thurston decided to change his act.

In London, Thurston rented a large storage room, where he could build new props. He found a good carpenter and a good painter, as well as other talented people. Together, they worked with due diligence and finished the new act.

Thurston then rented the Princess Theater for rehearsals. After they completed their rehearsals, Thurston sent invitations to show-buyers. Among them was Paul Keith, the owner of the Keith Vaudeville Theaters in the USA.

Paul Keith signed Thurston to Keith Vaudeville shows in April of 1903. Thurston opened his show in Boston. The show consisted of the floating ball and many other productions from a small egg to large items from a top hat.

His grand finale was changing a statue into a beautiful live woman.

Thurston toured with Keith theaters all the way to New York. Along the way, he kept adding more magic into his act.

In the spring of 1904, Thurston signed with the Willow Grove amusement park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In the spring of 1905, Thurston sailed to Australia with his own full show, "The Wonder Show of The Universe."

Thurston opened at the Palace Theatre in July 1904. The reviews were excellent. For the next 11 months, he toured Australia. Then he took the show to the Philippines and Hong Kong. After that, he took the show to Vietnam, Singapore, and India. Thurston managed to travel through India, when the bubonic plague was spreading fast. The dead bodies were lying in the streets when Thurston decided to go back home to the United States. By this time, Thurston had made a lot of money. So, he felt it was time to go back home, open up his own show and travel throughout the United States.

Upon arriving in the United States, Thurston found out that Kellar was thinking about retiring.

Thurston made an offer to Kellar to purchase his show. Actually, Thurston was not interested in Kellar's illusions; he was interested in getting Kellar's blessings and to become known as "Kellar's successor." This made Thurston an instant success in the United States.

Also, Thurston wanted to get Kellar's route, meaning that the theaters Kellar performed at would automatically hire Thurston. This meant a lot of money to Thurston, and he figured the money he would pay Kellar would be earned back in about two years. It was a good business move and a good investment.

Thurston met Kellar and offered Kellar a good deal of money. Kellar accepted Thurston's offer.

One year after Thurston purchased Kellar's show, Thurston replaced most of Kellar's illusions with new illusions, except the Kellar levitation and the spirit cabinet.

The new illusions that replaced Kellar's illusions were:

- 1- A trunk is shown empty and a lady immediately appears from it.**
- 2- The lady assistant was strapped inside of a thin box. The doors were closed and then opened. The lady assistant was then strapped upside-down.**
- 3- An empty platform was shown. The curtain dropped in front of the platform. When the curtain dropped to the floor, a lady with a wedding gown appears.**
- 4- The metamorphosis: a lady is placed in a mail bag and locked inside a trunk. A male assistant would stand on top of the trunk. And within seconds, the lady was outside of the trunk and the male assistant is inside the mail bag inside the trunk.**
- 5- A lady was placed inside a mummy box. Then the mummy box was lifted high above. When Thurston fired a pistol, the mummy box was opened and the lady disappeared. There was a different box that was hanging all along. When the second box was opened, inside was another box, and inside of that box was another box; when the last box was opened, the lady that just vanished had reappeared from the four boxes that nested into each other.**

Each season, Thurston added more illusions into the show.

- 6- In 1912, Thurston introduced the Phantom Piano, where the piano and the piano player vanished in mid-air.**
- 7- A new levitation of princess Karnak.**
- 8- The lady without middle: After blades passed through the box, the audience saw the lady's head and the lady's legs, but the lady's middle was missing.**

Around this time, Thurston got married to his principal assistant, Beatrice Foster.

Thurston took his show to Broadway, New York in September 1919. The show was spectacular.

His water fountain illusion was nothing like anything ever seen on Broadway. Anything Thurston touched with his magic wand turned into a water fountain. Thurston touched his assistant's fingers and water began shooting from her fingertips. The same took place with someone else's shoes and flowers. Everything turned into water fountains all over the stage. And for the big finish, Thurston had levitated on the tips of the water fountains.

Thurston continued traveling throughout the country. At the same time, he was writing his life story. By 1929, Thurston completed his autobiography entitled "My Life of Magic."

Thurston purchased a large home in Beechhurst, Queens near Manhattan. There, Thurston built a large workshop, where he continued developing and building new illusions.

His vanishing horse in mid-air was advertised as the \$50,000 Illusion. Actually, this Illusion cost \$2000. (Basically, it was the black-art principle.)

It took a magician to create a major publicity campaign by over-hyping the price of the Illusion. Hollywood copied that principle by over-hyping the cost of movies or the movie stars' salaries.

The "Wonder Show of The Universe" continued touring in big theaters with his big illusions and animals, including many doves, rabbits, and ducks.

Then the big financial crash came in October 1929, when many people lost their jobs and the economy was in rough shape. By 1931, the shockwaves reached every corner of the country.

In 1931, Thurston downsized the show, so that it would work in movie theaters.

By then, people could not afford big-price live shows.

By incorporating his show with a movie, people could afford to go see a movie and a live show. So basically, Thurston tried to adapt to the trends and changes.

In 1932, Thurston got another opportunity to become a radio host.

On October 6, 1935, Thurston performed his last show at the Kearsse Theatre in Charleston, West Virginia.

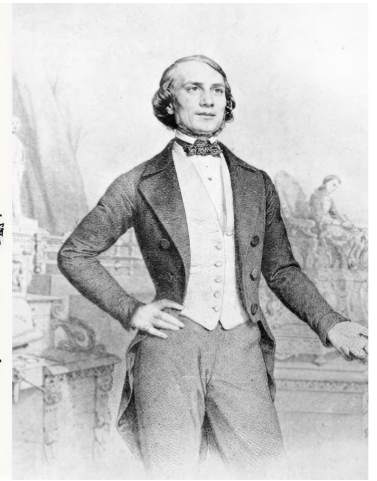
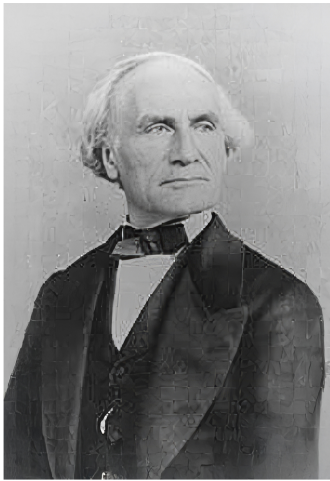
After a late dinner, Thurston suffered a paralytic stroke. He had a slow recovery and had to walk with a cane. He was then stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage. Then things got worse. After that, he came down with pneumonia.

Thurston died on April 13, 1936, at the age of 67.

If you think about it, he had an amazing life, where he started out doing small magic with cards and coins and was a very good sleight of hand artist, before he became a great illusionist.

Chapter 12

Robert Houdin



Robert-Houdin, the father of modern magic, was born on December 7, 1805, in Blois, France and his birth name was Jean Eugene Robert.

Jean Eugene's father was a watchmaker, so he was groomed to follow the family tradition.

His father sent Jean Eugene to college. Upon graduating, Jean Eugene got a job at one of his cousin's clock shops. It was during this period that Jean Eugene wanted to study Ferdinand Berthoud's treatise on horology. The bookseller made a mistake and gave him the "Illustrated Encyclopedia Dictionary of Scientific Amusements."

Upon returning home, Jean Eugene sat down to study the book. To his disappointment, he realized that the book did not contain any clocks or clock mechanisms. It actually showed secrets of magic.

Jean Eugene began to turn the pages. As he continued turning the pages, he found himself totally fascinated with magic. After he read the book from cover to cover, Jean Eugene began taking magic lessons from local

magicians and learned mostly sleight of hand magic which the book did not cover.

Jean Eugene began practicing his newly found hobby and entertained his friends. However, he had no desire to become a professional magician

At the age of 23, Jean Eugene met 17-year-old Josephe Cecile Eglantine Houdin at a party, where he entertained her with his magic. She actually took a liking to him and they became friends. Shortly thereafter, Jean Eugène was working for her father, who was a well-known clockmaker and owner of four well-respected clock shops in Paris.

On July 8, 1830, Jean Eugene married Josephe Cecile Eglantine Houdin. Ten months later, their first child was born, a beautiful healthy boy Jean named Jacques Emile. After the birth of their first child, Jean Eugene's father-in-law helped Jean Eugene financially to open his own clock shop in Paris.

To capitalize on the family name and four well-respected Houdin clock shops that his father-in-law owned, Jean Eugène decided to adopt his wife's family name, so that his shop would be under the same name of Houdin. Thereafter, Jean Eugène became known as Robert-Houdin.

As his shop began to do good business financially, Robert-Houdin was able to afford visiting the local magic shops periodically and purchasing magic apparatus.

Also, Robert-Houdin enjoyed meeting some of the local amateur and professional magicians at the magic shop. He found out all the news about magic and any visiting magicians. He made an effort to see every visiting magic show in Paris. He tried to learn as much as he could.

Robert-Houdin began to build unusual, mysterious objects that he sold to wealthy people. Just to name of few of his new inventions, he designed a round piece of glass in the shape of a clock. The glass was supported on a

long glass rod. Attached to the base on the round glass were the numbers of the clock and the hands of the clock. There were no visible mechanisms to make those hands turn precisely. Basically, he built a glass clock with no visible working mechanisms, yet the clock kept perfect time.

Another very entertaining novelty piece he built was a beautifully designed automaton. It was a doll that would pick up a cup from the table. The first time the doll picked up the cup, there was nothing under the cup on the table. Then the automaton placed the cup on a table and lifted it up, and magically a ball appeared under the cup. The automaton kept repeating this until it had three balls. The fourth time the cup went down and up, all the balls disappeared.

Another beautiful mechanical wonder was the mechanical bird that would sing and wiggle its tail and wings. These kind of mechanical wonders provided additional income to Robert-Houdin, which also made the name Robert-Houdin famous with the wealthy people in Paris.

Robert-Houdin's wife had been ill for about 15 months. She died on October 19, 1843, at the age of 32, leaving behind her husband and her three children. Their oldest son Emile was only 12 years old.

In the meantime, Robert-Houdin managed to take care of the children and continued working.

In August 1844, Robert-Houdin married Francois Marguerite Olympe Bracconier. With his new wife, helping with the children and managing his business, Robert-Houdin began seriously thinking about finding a suitable location, such as a meeting room or assembly room that he could rent and renovate it into a small theatre where he could perform magic nightly.

However, opening his own magic theatre had to wait until he built all of the necessary magical apparatus where he could perform at least a

two-hour show. So, he spent a great deal of time in his shop building magic apparatus for his show.

Occasionally, Robert-Houdin accepted invitations from wealthy people to perform magic in their homes for private parties, which earned him additional monies. Soon he found the perfect place for his theatre near the Comedie Francaise in the old Palais-Royal.

The main floor of the building had merchandise shops and a coffee shop on the second floor. There were assembly rooms, meeting rooms, and restaurants. He leased the assembly room at 164 Galerie Valois and began to remodel the place, totally changing the walls with fresh paint, installing new carpets, and building a beautiful stage with trimmings that looked like the inside of the Royal Palace with gold trims and new candle operators.

He was almost 40 years old, when Robert-Houdin opened up his theater on July 3, 1845. At the opening night with stage fright and stress, he lost confidence and began speaking fast and rushed through the magical apparatus. By the end of the show, he had a nervous breakdown.

The next day, he had no desire to go through the agony again. So, he sent one of his helpers to take down the sign and the billboards. For the next two days, he slept most of the time. On the third day, one of his friends, who was at the opening night at the theater, stopped by to congratulate him for having the common sense to close down the show.

Robert Houdin's answer to his friend was, "I have no desire to close down the show. When the show doesn't work, you don't close it down. You just stop and step back to figure out how to fix it and open it again."

True to his word, Robert-Houdin reopened the show, bigger and better. Although his magic was better and more modern than previous magicians, he had a hard time attracting customers.

When he walked onto the stage, he didn't look like previous magicians. He looked very elegant, dressed in a beautiful tuxedo with ruffles and a bow tie, neatly ironed trousers, and freshly shined shoes. All of the magic that he presented was new and different than all of the magicians who came before him. Yet he struggled to sell tickets.

To support his theatre, keep it open, continue paying his helpers, and paying the rent, Robert-Houdin had to sell three homes that he inherited from his mother.

The persistence paid off. The ticket sales got better day by day. In early February 1846, he added another new amazing magic act to his show: the second sight act. His teenage son Emile was blindfolded by a blindfold that was examined by the audience. Sitting on a chair near the front edge of the stage, Emile was able to describe each item that was given to his father in detail. As Robert-Houdin walked through the audience, he would sometimes borrow money from the audience and Emile would correctly describe the money and how much it was worth, as well as the serial numbers on the money. This was a totally amazing act that boosted the ticket sales.

Another one of his amazing tricks was the mechanical orange tree. He would borrow a pocket handkerchief from one of the ladies in the audience, then magically make the handkerchief disappear. At his command, a mechanical tree would begin growing oranges on the branches. In one of the oranges, he would find the handkerchief that was borrowed from the audience member which disappeared moments ago. Robert-Houdin did not touch the orange with his hands. At his magical command, the orange would split into four pieces. As the orange began to open, there would be two butterflies coming out and showing the handkerchief in full view.

He would then show an empty basket. From it he would produce dozens of beautiful flowers and hand them out to the ladies in the audience.

Another amazing trick was the Magic Chef. Robert-Houdin would first display a small cabinet. At his command, the little door would open, and a miniature chef would come out on a table, holding a small tray with all kinds of treats, such as cookies and pastries. The miniature chef would go in and out of the cabinet bringing more pastries as requested from the audience. Then the miniature chef would go back in and come out with a tray with all kinds of ices and licorice for the audience to sample. At one point, the chef would bring out a small French bread. Inside the bread, the audience would find a wedding ring that was borrowed earlier by Robert Houdin.

Just when things could not get any better, Robert-Houdin introduced his next amazing Illusion on center stage. He would have a small stool. His son Emile would be standing on the stool. Robert-Houdin would then place a metal rod under each armpit of Emile, who would hold the rods with both hands. Robert-Houdin would remove the small stepping stool away, letting his son Emile dangle on those two metal rods.

The first reaction from the audience was OKAY. The boy holding onto the metal rods and leaned onto the metal rods with his armpits but then came the magic. Robert-Houdin removed one of the metal rods, leaving the boy holding onto the only remaining metal rod directly under his armpit.

Next came the biggest surprise. When Robert-Houdin touched Emile's hand, Emile released his grip and raised his arm to shoulder level, showing that he was not holding onto the metal rod. At this point, the magician moved away from his feet and started raising Emile until he was parallel with the floor, suspended on this metal rod.

Robert Houdin's new illusion was the talk of the town and the rest of Europe.

Another amazing illusion was presented each night: Robert Houdin's Enchanted Portfolio. The portfolio was a notebook about 2 inches thick, not big enough to haul any large items other than the pages. The portfolio was placed on an easel, the back of the book facing the audience. The magician would take a page from the book, which had a sketch of a well-dressed lady. Then Robert-Houdin reached into the book and produced a beautiful lady's hat that matched the lady's dress.

Next, he took another page which showed a sketch of a dove. Then he reached into the book and produced a real-life dove flapping its wings. The next page he took from the book was a chef holding a large wooden spoon. The chef's other hand was closed into a fist, as if he were holding the handle of a large pot, but the pot was missing where it was supposed to be. Then the magician reached into the book and pulled out a large cooking pot.

The next page showed Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, without her crown. Robert-Houdin then reached into the book and pulled out a beautiful large crown. This illusion was the favorite of Queen Victoria. She loved the part when Robert-Houdin produced the Egyptian crown full of diamonds and emeralds.

Keep in mind that during the summer months, since there was no air conditioning available in those days, when Paris was very hot, it was almost unbearable to pack the audience into the theater. Because of these conditions, Robert-Houdin closed the theatre every summer and reopened it in the fall. During the summer months, he took his show to the Scandinavian countries and also to England, where the summers were not as hot.

During the French Revolution, due to small audiences, Robert-Houdin moved his show to London in May 1848 and opened up his show at the St.

James Theater. It was during this period that Robert-Houdin was invited to entertain Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace.

During his trips to England, he traveled to large cities all the way to Scotland.

Unlike his small theater in Paris, Robert-Houdin worked in large theaters and made more money than he would ever make in his small theater in Paris.

When he returned back to France, Robert-Houdin invested his money wisely. He purchased a large estate near Blois, where he had a large house and a workshop where he could relax, design and build new mechanical and electrical magical apparatus. He was also blessed to have four more children from his second wife.

In October 1849, Robert-Houdin returned to his beautiful Theatre Soirées Fantastiques and performed for next three years. As his 50th birthday approached, Robert-Houdin decided to retire from performing. Henceforth he began to search for a good magician to take his place at his theater. Through his search for a successor, he found Hamilton, whose birth name was Pierre Étienne Chocat. Robert-Houdin made the announcement that Hamilton would be his successor. Then Robert-Houdin began training Hamilton and taught him all of his magic.

In January 1852, Hamilton began performing at the Theatre, giving Robert-Houdin free time to travel throughout Europe and England, which he announced as his farewell tour. This announcement got the largest crowds with packed theaters. In England, Robert-Houdin performed for Queen Victoria again.

At the end of each tour, Robert-Houdin would always return home and spend a great deal of time in his workshop, experimenting with electricity and building different devices. In 1855 at the universal exposition, he

displayed some of his inventions, one of them was to control electricity with extreme accuracy. He built a regulator that could keep the current at a constant level.

Robert-Houdin also wrote lots of books on magic, including his autobiography. His many textbooks included sleight of hand magic, human psychology, misdirection, and so much more.

Periodically, he went back on the road to perform in large theaters.

In England, Robert-Houdin performed over 500 shows from November 1851 until April 1853. Then he moved to London and opened up at the Egyptian Hall in 1862. For the following six months, he kept himself busy, without a dull moment.

On June 13, 1871, Robert-Houdin passed away at the age of 65 from pneumonia. He became known as the father of modern magic.

Chapter 13

Harry Houdini



Harry Houdini was born on March 24, 1874, in Budapest, Hungary. His birth name was Ehrich Weiss, which was pronounced “Erik Weisz”.

When he was a small child, his parents moved to the United States and settled down in Appleton, Wisconsin. Houdini's father, Mayer Samuel Weiss, became the first rabbi of Appleton. Later on, the family moved to East 69th St. in New York City. Mayer Samuel Weiss got a job as a religious teacher. Ehrich got a job at the H. Richters' Sons necktie factory.

Sometime along the way, Ehrich got interested in magic. He told his friend who was working at the necktie factory, Jacob Hyman, that possibly they could work together by creating a magic act. Ehrich worked at the necktie factory for almost three years. Then he left his job, even though he was earning a steady salary.

At the age of 17, Ehrich and his friend Jacob Hyman (who was referred to as Jack Hayman) worked out a magic act and began performing at bars and

dime museums with many specialty acts, such as human curiosities, fire eaters, and snake charmers. Money was not good, so Jack Hayman gave up on show business and quit.

Ehrich's brother, Theodore Weiss, joined his brother as the other half of the act. The brothers worked together and traveled from town to town all the way to Chicago to work during the 1893 World's Fair.

Ehrich was studying famous magicians and their life stories. He liked Harry Keller's name. He also liked the name of the famous French magician, Robert-Houdin.

He decided to change his name to Harry Houdini and hoped to someday become a great magician like his idols.

Houdini was good with card manipulations. He made a poster and called himself "The King of Cards". It didn't get him anywhere. That's because there were so many other magicians doing card manipulations.

The illusion that actually helped Houdini to be recognized was the Metamorphosis. Here's a brief description: The magician gets into a wooden trunk. Then the trunk is padlocked. The magician's assistant stands above the trunk. The magician then changes places with his assistant.

The concept and the illusion were not Houdini's idea. It was invented by the British magician, John Nevil Maskelyne. However, Houdini improved the Illusion by having audience members tie his hands with a rope behind his back. Then they placed Houdini into a burlap mail bag. The opening of the mail bag was securely tied, which made it seemingly impossible for Houdini to get out of the mail bag.

His brother Theo, with the help of the audience members, lifted up the mail bag with Houdini inside and placed the mail bag into the heavy-duty wooden crate, which was examined by the audience. Then Theo closed

the lid, padlocked the wooden crate, and tied heavy ropes all around the wooden crate, making it impossible for Houdini to escape.

Theo lifted up 4 large curtains around the wooden crate to create a cover for the wooden trunk. Theo explained to the audience that when he clapped his hands three times, the magic would happen. Theo pulled one of the curtains and entered inside. Then he clapped his hands three times. Immediately the curtains dropped, and Houdini was standing next to the trunk, which was still secured with padlocks and ropes. Houdini untied the ropes, unlocked the padlocks, and opened the trunk lid. Lo and behold, the mail bag remained tied. Houdini untied the top of the mail bag, and his brother Theo was inside the mail bag with his wrists tied behind his back.

Houdini was 20 years old when he met an attractive catholic singer named Beatrice Rahner (Bess). They soon got married and moved in with Houdini's mother, Cecilia. Bess became Houdini's assistant. Theo went on his own with his own show.

In 1895, Houdini and his wife Bess got a job in a family-owned small circus, the Welsh Brothers Circus. Houdini and Bess were performing magic and mind-reading acts. To make extra money, Houdini was selling all kinds of side items, including combs, toothpaste, and soap. The circus job lasted for 27 weeks.

Houdini was always looking for something new and different to help him be different than the other magicians during this period. He began playing with handcuffs when he realized he could have a duplicate key or small piece of wire bent to create lock-picks. Houdini concealed the picks somewhere in his body, where he could get them quickly and open the handcuffs.

With this new discovery, he started to read everything on handcuffs. Houdini began purchasing all different types of handcuffs. He took them apart

to study the mechanisms. Soon he had a half a dozen different lock-picks concealed on his body. He began experimenting to escape from different handcuffs and got very good at it.

He approached the local police department and told them that he could escape from any handcuffs. Several policeman handcuffed Houdini with two pairs of handcuffs. Houdini, true to his word, was able to escape from the handcuffs. With that, Houdini got his confidence and began putting handcuff escapes into his act. This was different than other magicians and it was new.

With magic, mind-reading, and escaping from handcuffs, Houdini continued performing all the way to Canada. During his performance in Canada, he became friends with a medical doctor, who was working in a mental institution.

One day, Houdini and his medical doctor friend went together to the mental institution. Houdini watched the hospital crew trying to put a disturbed mental patient into a strait jacket, then placing the man in a softly padded cell. The man was trying to get out of the strait jacket by rolling all over on the floor and trying his best to free himself from this strait jacket, but he was unable to free himself.

This is where Houdini got the idea of using a strait jacket on the stage. Not only would Houdini escape from handcuffs, but he would also escape from a regulation strait jacket.

In 1897, things slowed down for Houdini and his wife Bess. Houdini decided to get a job with a traveling medicine man, Doctor Hill, who sold snake oil that cured everything. Dr. Hill had entertainers working for him. The entertainers travelled from town to town and put on free shows on street corners and town squares. People would gather to watch the free show. Right after the show, Dr. Hill began his sales pitch, which was very convincing. Dr. Hill talked about how he discovered medicine for his ailing mother

and how the pharmaceutical stores didn't want people to know about this amazing medicine that could cure just about anything and possibly put the pharmaceutical companies out of business.

During this tour in the Midwest, Houdini performed his magic act, including card manipulations, escaping from handcuffs, and spiritualism with his wife Bess.

After the medicine show came to an end, Houdini and Bess went back to work at the Welsh Brothers Circus. By this time, Houdini was 24 years old and continued having a hard time securing jobs as a headliner. The struggle began to take its toll with his wife. There were times when he saw his wife sad. He promised his wife "just one more year." If things didn't work out, he would get a regular job or try a different business.

Around 1899, a chubby little fat man with a German accent approached the stage. He asked Houdini if he could escape from any handcuffs or was it just the ones he had on the stage. Houdini's answer was there had been no handcuffs invented yet that could hold him down. With that, the stranger took his own handcuffs, placed them on Houdini's wrists, and kept the key. True to his word, Houdini was able to escape from the stranger's handcuffs.

The stranger introduced himself as Martin Beck, the Talent Agent for the Orpheum Vaudeville shows all over the country. Martin Beck offered Houdini a job, if Houdini would stop doing magic and perform only escapes, challenging people to bring their own handcuffs. Then Mr. Beck told Houdini that the job would start in Omaha at \$60 a week.

Houdini jumped at the opportunity and began in Omaha. By the time Houdini reached California, he was able to escape from anything people offered to him and was making \$90 a week, which was more money than he ever made. He was now in the big leagues. Houdini began escaping from police handcuffs, regulation leg irons, and mental institution strait jack-

ets. Houdini realized this was a good job and a very good opportunity. He needed to figure a way to build his name and become a very big attraction.

In San Francisco, Houdini challenged the police department that he would strip all of his clothing off, so that detectives could search him. Naked as a jaybird, Houdini escaped from ten pairs of handcuffs and a regulation strait jacket. Naked Houdini in the Police Department was thoroughly searched by the sergeant. Then the ten pairs of handcuffs and a strait jacket were secured on him. He then went behind a closed door into a small closet and was able to escape. To everyone's surprise, he opened the door and walked out. All of the handcuffs, and the strait jacket were on the floor. Neither the police nor the reporter from The Examiner had any idea how Houdini was able to escape. What the newspaper reporter didn't know was that Houdini went to the police department the day before to examine the area in the small closet, where he was going to do his escapes.

Escaping from handcuffs and a strait jacket in the police department got lots of newspaper articles and major publicity for him. Hundreds of people waited in long lines to go and see Houdini's shows.

By this time, he was making \$150 a week. Keep in mind that during that time, most people made less than \$10 a week. So \$150 a week was a lot of money back then. Houdini began buying advertisements in trade papers to promote his accomplishments to show buyers.

In July 1900, Houdini traveled to England and began performing his amazing escape acts. In London, Houdini challenged Scotland Yard. As always, Houdini was able to escape and that got him lots of publicity from the British newspapers.

On March 17, 1904, four thousand people came to see Houdini at the London Hippodrome. From England, Houdini traveled further into Europe. There, he also challenged the police departments all over Europe.

Houdini was in such big demand that he sent for his brother Theo to come to Europe and work on his own show with a new name "The Great Hardeen." Houdini shared all his secrets with his brother and got him a lot of work in Europe.

Houdini traveled from Europe to Russia. In Russia, Houdini challenged the Russian police and was successful. Houdini came back to the United States and began touring the country. On January 6, 1906, he staged one of his most famous prison breaks, which was at Washington D.C. Houdini was locked naked into a jail cell in the murderer's row. He was locked into the same jail cell that once imprisoned Charles J. Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield. Within twenty minutes, Houdini was able to escape from the famous jail cell. He found his clothes locked up in a different cell, where he was able to unlock the second jail cell, get his clothes, get dressed, and walk over to the warden's office and knocked on the door. This jailbreak got Houdini a tremendous amount of publicity in the newspapers.

Forty-five days later, Houdini staged another big publicity stunt by jumping from the Bells Island Bridge in Detroit into freezing waters and was able to escape from handcuffs. This was tremendous, because thousands of people came to watch these dangerous daredevil stunts. Houdini got a great deal of publicity from these stunts and a tremendous amount of newspaper publicity.

By this time, Houdini understood human psychology and how the power of performing outdoor dangerous experiments to very large crowds was the ingredient to make him famous.

In January 1908, Houdini introduced his new escape in St. Louis, where he was locked inside of a large metal water canister filled with water. Houdini entered the canister with his feet first. As his body started to go down into the canister, water started spilling from the edges of the canister. Houdini

took a deep breath and his head went under the water, leaving no room for him to breathe. Immediately, his assistant covered the canister with a metal cover and placed six padlocks all around it, making it impossible for Houdini to escape. Houdini's assistant pulled the cloth cabinet around the canister and closed the front curtain. Three minutes went by. The audience was tense. One of Houdini's assistants ran to the stage with an ax, getting ready to tear down the curtain and break the padlocks. At about this time, Houdini pulled the curtain down and stepped forward, dripping wet with water.

Houdini was fascinated with the Wright Brothers flying machine, which was called the biplane. While Houdini was touring Hamburg, Germany in 1909, Houdini purchased a Voisin Biplane for \$5000. He paid the pilot to teach him how to fly the plane. Before leaving Germany, Houdini had the plane taken apart and packed into shipping crates to take the plane with him.

When Houdini arrived in Australia to perform at the new Opera House in Melbourne, he organized another big outdoor publicity event. Over 15,000 people were on the Queens Bridge and another 20,000 people were along the Yarra River to see Houdini attempt to escape from handcuffs and leg irons, as he was thrown into the river.

Twenty days later, Houdini announced he would be the first pilot to fly a biplane over Australia. Early in the morning of March 18, 1910, when the weather conditions were right, Houdini piloted his Voisin Biplane from Digger's Rest Field. The plane soared up into the sky, flew about 2 miles, turned around, and flew back to a perfect landing. Houdini went into history as the first pilot to fly over Australia.

To set the record straight, there were others who attempted to fly over Australia. None were successful. A famous Australian sportsman, Ralph

Banks, had purchased a Wright Brothers plane. Mr. Banks was able to get his plane off the ground about 12 feet high before crashing.

Houdini's water can escape was copied by many magicians, both in the USA, Europe, and Australia. As a result, when he was in England in 1911, Houdini invented a better and bigger Illusion: the Chinese water torture cell.

Each city Houdini performed in, he organized an outdoor daredevil dangerous escape attempt to gain publicity and increase ticket sales. Sometimes, Houdini was shackled with handcuffs and leg-irons and thrown into the river to escape from the handcuffs and leg-irons. Other times, Houdini would be handcuffed and placed into a heavy trunk, which was locked with padlocks and heavy metal bands around it, so that the trunk would sink fast. As always, Houdini managed to escape and rise to the surface, as thousands of people gathered to watch and cheer for him.

His other outdoor daredevil stunts in cities where there might not be lakes or rivers, Houdini was strapped into a regulation straitjacket. Then hanged upside down from a rope and hoisted to about 100 feet high, then dangled like a fish on a fishing line, where he attempted to get out of the straitjacket. As always, he was able to free himself. The local newspapers and radio stations covered the event.

Because of his dangerous daredevil death-defying escape attempts, which attracted a great deal of publicity, Houdini was in high demand for the Vaudeville shows, where he was always a headliner and always getting the biggest money of all the other entertainers.

For those of you who are wondering what Vaudeville was, let me give you a brief description. From 1880 to 1930, the Vaudeville circuit was the most popular form of live entertainment. Vaudeville was a venue with a wide variety of acts, such as popular and classical musicians, singers, dancers, comedians, trained animals, magicians, Ventriloquists, strong-

men, female and male impersonators, acrobats, clowns, jugglers, one-act plays, all scenes from plays, lecturing celebrities, and films. Obviously, Houdini was the biggest attraction.

Although Houdini built his Chinese water torture cell in England, he first introduced it in 1912 Germany. Here's a brief description of the Chinese water torture cell: It was about an 8-foot-tall square water tank with a glass plate on the front, so the audience could see inside the tank that it was filled with water. Houdini would lay on the stage floor, handcuffs were placed on his wrists, and heavy wooden stocks would be locked around his ankles. Then they hoisted Houdini above the stage floor, hanging from the wooden stocks upside-down way above the Chinese water torture cell. Houdini would then be slowly lowered headfirst into the water. There he was in the water tank upside down, and only his ankles were sticking out of the water above the wooden stocks. The assistant pulled the four curtains around the Chinese water torture cell, creating a cover.

In front of the curtain coverings, there were two assistants, one on each side holding big axes. In case Houdini could not make it out safely, the assistants might have to break the glass with the axes to get him out. Normally in about two minutes, Houdini was able to escape and pull the curtains open and step out. This was always the highlight of the show, where he got a standing ovation.

After Germany, Houdini went back to the United States to perform at the Hammerstein's Roof Garden in New York City. Houdini's 72 year old mother Cecilia Weiss came to see her son's show at the opening night. Houdini didn't know that this would be the last time his mother would see his show.

After one month of performances in New York, Houdini went back to Europe to continue performing. When a telegraph came that his mother had

passed away, Houdini canceled all of his engagements to return back to the USA for his mother's funeral. Houdini was very close with his mother. This was a devastating blow. He could not work for the following six months, grieving over his mother's death.

In 1914, the first World War broke out. Houdini could not work in Europe. Houdini put his efforts into major promotions in the USA. Each time, more than 10,000 people gathered to watch him hanging from a rope upside-down over a hundred feet above the ground, dangling and struggling to get out of a straitjacket.

During the war years, Houdini debunked the mediums who claimed to communicate with the dead. Also, he was elected as the president of the Society of American Magicians. Houdini did a fantastic job helping grow the society.

Houdini never gave up on an idea of wanting to become a great magician, like the magicians he had studied and admired. He wanted to have his own show, without any other side performers. Houdini accomplished that dream on January 7, 1918, at the New York Hippodrome. He created the biggest illusion ever performed, the vanishing of a 10-ton elephant. Night after night, he vanished this very large elephant. He also included other large-scale illusions with big productions.

Houdini originally was booked for six weeks of performances, on the strength of the vanishing elephant. His contract was extended to 19 weeks. This was the longest contract he ever had.

Right after the Hippodrome contract, Houdini was signed to a movie contract with Hollywood's B.F. Rolfe of Octagon Films to star in a 15 film serial called "The Master Mystery." In 1919, Houdini also made a full-length movie for Paramount pictures called "The Grim Game".

As a movie star and a live performer, his salary jumped to \$3500 a week, the most money ever paid to any single performer in the Vaudeville circuit.

In 1918, World War I ended. Many people lost their loved ones. It was during this period that people believed they could communicate with their loved ones through spirit mediums. Spiritualism became very popular. Among the wealthy people, even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, was a believer in spiritualism. Also, James Hewat McKenzie, president of the British College of Psychic Science was a believer. These people actually believed that the mediums could communicate with the dead.

Houdini felt that he had to debunk and expose these psychics and their fraud. Houdini wrote books, describing the methods of these so-called psychics. He exposed all the famous mediums, by name, and the description of their methods, including how they used darkened rooms.

Houdini continued to expose fake mediums through newspaper articles and in theaters. After his Hollywood movies, he projected images and described the methods of the fake mediums. At the same time, he was exposing the fake mediums, Houdini was performing in Vaudeville shows.

On September 14, 1925, Houdini opened his own full evening show at the Schubert Alvin Theatre in Pittsburgh. In his full evening show, he was the magician, the escapologist, and the exposé of the fake mediums. From Pittsburgh, the show traveled across the country. In every city he traveled to, Houdini offered \$10,000 to any person who could exhibit a spiritualistic manifestation which Houdini could not duplicate.

Houdini eventually became that great magician he once dreamed of when he was a young boy. He continued performing in legit theaters with his own full evening show.

Houdini's second season full evening show began in Paterson, New Jersey and continued traveling throughout the cities of the United States.

In Albany, a freak accident occurred during the Chinese water torture cell. Houdini broke a bone in his left leg, which caused him to wear a leg support.

Rather than postponing the shows for several months until his leg healed, Houdini continued working with the aid of the leg support. The show traveled to Schenectady and Montreal.

On October 22, while he was in his dressing room, relaxed and going through his mail, two college students from McGill University came backstage to Houdini's dressing room at the Princess Theater. One of these students was drawing a portrait of Houdini, when a third visitor from the same university, J. Gordon Whitehead, came into the dressing room and began talking to Houdini about the ancient magic of how some magicians can hold their muscles tight on their stomach and if someone was to punch them, they won't feel any pain. With that, Whitehead asked Houdini if he could punch him in the stomach. Houdini gave him permission to punch him in the stomach. Whitehead moved in with the speed of lightning and punched Houdini in the stomach with four powerful and quick punches. As Houdini realized what was going on and pushed him away, the other two students also pulled him away.

By showtime, Houdini's pain in his stomach got worse. When Houdini got back to his hotel room, he did not tell his wife Bess what had happened. At his dressing room, Houdini told her that he had stomach cramps. She didn't think much of it. She thought it was maybe something minor.

The next day on Saturday, after the show, Houdini told Bess what had happened in his dressing room with the university students.

When the show's shipping crates were being loaded onto the train, everyone got onto the train, which was heading back to Detroit. Houdini went to the Garrick Theatre and began helping the assistants set up the show. His pain was getting worse and Bess called for a doctor. Dr. Leo Dretzka arrived at the theater and examined Houdini in the dressing room. The doctor told Houdini that he must go to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy. Bess was not in the dressing room and did not hear the doctor's recommendation.

The theatre manager came in and told Houdini that the theater was full and was sold-out. Houdini said, "They are here to see me. I am not going to disappoint them." With that, he did not go to the hospital and continued working.

The curtains went up 30 minutes late. Houdini walked on the stage with a slight limp and said, "We had a 1000 mile journey and the show must go on." He began making large silver coins appear on his fingertips and then vanished them. He continued with the sleight of hand, producing cards from thin air. From the sleight of hand magic, he went on to large illusions where he vanished a lady assistant on stage and she reappeared in the audience. Then he began producing glass bowls full of water and goldfish. After the second bowls of goldfish, the pain was severe. Houdini stepped aside. His chief assistant continued the show.

When the curtain closed for intermission, Houdini was in severe pain. His assistants helped him to the dressing room. He was sweating. His temperature was 104° Fahrenheit. Rather than being rushed to the hospital, Houdini returned back on stage after the intermission to complete the show.

That evening, Houdini was taken to the hospital. The surgeon removed Houdini's ruptured appendix, but it was too late. For the past three days,

the poison had been seeping through his system. Houdini's condition had gotten worse.

On Sunday afternoon, October 31, 1926, Houdini died. He was only 52 years old.

Since his death, there have been so many books written about him. Several Hollywood movies were made about his life story. If you ask the average person in the street to name five magicians, probably one of those magicians will be Houdini.

My opinion about his death is different than previous historians. I believe he was murdered. Those who orchestrated and planned that backstage dressing room incident where Houdini was wounded severely on his appendix got away with murder.

Let's look at the situation. Houdini debunked the fake mediums, some of whom made over \$10,000 a week from the wealthy families who believed the mediums could communicate with their dead loved ones. Houdini exposed their trickery and exposed the most famous names in the industry. Surely, they wanted Houdini to go away.

If you think about it, any good legal document needs to be signed by two witnesses. Even just a simple last will and testament must be signed by two witnesses.

The incident in Montreal, Canada, which was outside of United States jurisdiction, took place where two students from McGill University were in the dressing room to witness the so-called permission from Houdini.

What were the chances that another student from McGill University, J. Gordon Whitehead, to walk in, punch the magician in the stomach four times, and have two students from the same university as witnesses to testify that Houdini gave him permission to punch.

I am basing my logic on Houdini's past behavior. Houdini was a very careful man. He carefully calculated everything in his life, from jumping off bridges to getting locked in a tank of water. So why would Houdini give permission to some stranger to punch him in his stomach? But if the two witnesses said that they heard the whole conversation and Houdini give Whitehead the permission, then it's an open and shut case.

The conspirators knew that Houdini would not go to the hospital right away, because they knew that after Houdini broke his leg, he continued working with a cast on his leg. Whitehead punched Houdini precisely on his lower right below the belly button, where the appendix is. You don't have to be a medical doctor to know that when an appendix is busted and the poison drips into your system, unless you get help, you could die from it.

Chapter 14

P.T. Selbit



P.T. Selbit was an English magician, who invented some of the most fascinating stage illusions.

P.T. Selbit was born on November 17, 1881, in London, England to an English father and a Scottish mother.

His birth name was Percy Thomas Tibbles. When he was about 13 years old, Percy got a job in a wholesale silversmith shop, where he learned to work with tools. Percy actually

became very good at designing and building silver ornaments and other products.

The silversmith wholesale shop was in the same complex as the famous Egyptian Hall, where John Nevil Maskelyne had his Maskelyne's Theatre of Mysteries.

Percy, from time to time, managed to buy tickets to see the Maskelyne's Magic and Mysteries show. This is where Percy fell in love with magic and began learning sleight of hand magic. At the same time, he was curious to learn stage magic.

Charles Morritt, an English magician and hypnotist, was working in the Maskelyne's Magic and Mysteries Show, when he decided to rent a storage room in the basement directly underneath the silversmith shop. Charles was using the basement storage room as a workshop to build his new illusions.

Percy was curious about what Charles was building in the basement. So Percy managed to get a duplicate key for the basement door. Periodically in the late evening hours, Percy sneaked into the basement room to draw sketches of a new illusion being built, which was the mirror principle of the large cage.

At about this time Percy decided that he would become a magician and that he needed a better name that was more magical. After serious thinking, he decided to take his last name "Tibbles", reverse it, and get rid of one of the B's, which was how he came up with the name "Selbit". His first two names' initials stayed the same, so his name became P.T. Selbit.

When the Illusion in the basement was completed and Charles Morritt put it into Maskelyne's show, it was a phenomenal success. The illusion was a large cage on 4 legs. The cage's base was about 12 inches off the floor. Charles would raise a cloth inside the cage. When he dropped the cloth, there was an assistant inside the cage. The assistant would exit from the front door and Charles would raise the cloth again. When he dropped the cloth, the audience saw a second assistant had appeared inside the cage.

Since the audience could see under the cage, that eliminated the possibility of assistants coming up from a trap door. Furthermore, since the audience could see each side of the cage, that eliminated the possibility of

anybody coming from either side of the cage. That's what made this illusion phenomenal. What the audience didn't see was the mirror running from the cage at 45° to the side wall.

When Selbit actually saw the Illusion in action, he was just as thrilled as the audience, except he knew the secret.

By age 17, P.T. Selbit began entertaining in bars and private parties with a sleight of a hand magic and hypnotism.

By 1905, Selbit began performing at the St. George's Hall with Maskelyne and Devant as the Wizard of Sphinx. Selbit performed in an Egyptian costume and dark beard to make him look older and more mysterious.

After 19 months at the St. George's Hall, Selbit went on the road as a traveling magician. He took his show to France, Germany, and all the way to Russia. Selbit returned to England and continued performing as the Wizard of Sphinx.

In 1909, Selbit got rid of the Egyptian costume with black beard and began promoting himself as the Selbit Mysteries at the Oxford Theatre in London. By this time, he had built quite a bit of his own original illusions and was gaining lots of recognition.

In 1911, Selbit performed in vaudeville shows across the United States, from coast to coast.

In 1913, Selbit created his sensational new illusion, the Haunted Window, at Maskelyne's theatre. Here's a brief description of the Haunted Window illusion: On the stage was a large picture frame. On the frame was attached a white cloth. Behind the cloth in the distance, there was a spotlight. When the spotlight was turned on, images of men and women came alive with a dance sequence and exotic moves. However, audience members were invited to examine the frame, the white cloth, and the spotlight. No one could find anything out of the ordinary that could create

this amazing illusion. As a result, this Illusion got lots of publicity from the newspapers. With the strength of this Illusion, Selbit went back to the United States for his second tour.

In 1914, Selbit invented another amazing illusion: Walking Through a Brick Wall. He introduced this amazing new Illusion at the Maskelyne theater. Here's a brief description: the stage assistant would bring a large canvas cloth and lay it onto the stage floor, making sure that there was no trap doors used. Then they would push a brick wall mounted on a metal frame with metal wheels on top of the canvas. The brick wall was placed in the center of the canvas. One edge of the wall would face the audience. This way the audience could see both sides of the brick wall.

At this point, Selbit invited audience members to come on the stage and examine the brick wall. These audience members were also invited to stand back on the stage to be the eyes and ears of the audience.

Next, Selbit introduced a Japanese trifold screen. A female assistant stood on one side of the wall and Selbit placed the trifold screen around her. The other assistant placed the second Japanese threefold screen on the other side of the wall.

Selbit clapped his hands. One of the assistants removed the screen where the female assistant was standing, and to everyone's amazement, the lady assistant vanished instantly. The other assistant on the other side of the wall removed the other trifold screen. The lady assistant then appeared on the other side of the brick wall. She could not go from under or over the wall. It was an amazing mystery.

On January 17, 1921, Selbit performed one of his greatest inventions: Cutting A Lady In Half.

Here's a brief description:

Selbit's female assistant was tied with five soft cotton ropes.

One rope was tied around her neck. Two ropes were tied on her each wrist. And the remaining two ropes were tied around her ankles. The ends of these ropes were threaded through the holes on the box from inside to outside. As she laid inside the box, the ropes were held by five audience members.

Each audience member holding the ends of the ropes are told by the magician to hold the ropes taut, so that they can feel the lady assistant's movements.

Then Selbit pushed two solid metal plates through the box, cutting the lady in half. But that's not all. He then took a crosscut saw and one of his male assistants took one end of the saw, while Selbit held on to the other end of the crosscut saw. They began sawing the box into two pieces, obviously cutting the lady inside the box into two pieces.

At this point, the audience was either horrified or amazed. Selbit put the crosscut saw aside. Then he took the two metal plates out and handed them to his assistants, opened the top of the box, and the lady assistant stood up to thunderous applause from the audience.

Sawing through a woman gave Selbit another new and amazing illusion to draw more people to his shows.

This illusion was new and different. As a result, many magicians copied it, and some even improved it.

In New York, USA, Horace Goldin built the cutting the lady in half illusion with the circular buzzsaw.

In Istanbul, Turkey, Zati Zuger built and improved the thin model cutting the lady in half.

Building new and original illusions opened more opportunities for Selbit to get more audiences, as well as opened up opportunities for him to work in so many different venues.

As a result, Selbit created and built so many new illusions. Just to name a few:

1- The Crushing Illusion.

An assistant lays on a flat table. Over the assistant, there were two small boxes. In each box, there was a female assistant sitting cross-legged and their heads sticking out from the top of each box. Now the magician slowly lowered down the two boxes, crushing the assistant lying on a flat table. When the two boxes are lifted up the assistant is unharmed and stands up to take their bows.

2- The Wrestling Cheese.

A large round cheese was rolled and moved onto the stage. The magician invited three or four strong men and asked them to lay the cheese down on its side. There was no way they could tilt the cheese sideways. It didn't matter how hard they tried, yet the magician could move the cheese onto its side.

3- The Stretching Illusion, otherwise known as The Elastic Lady.

A lady sat on a stool. In front of her was a large panel about 8 feet tall and 8 feet wide. Her head, hands, and feet stuck out from the holes cut out on the panel. The magician could move her head about 8 feet up and down. The magician could also move her hands and feet about 8 feet in different directions.

4- The Man Without A Middle.

A male assistant stepped inside a box, standing up facing the audience. There were three doors. All three doors were closed. The magician did his

magic and opened the middle door, so the audience could see the man's middle missing. The magician opened the back door, so the audience could see light going through. The middle was actually missing. He then opened the lower door. The man's legs were visible. Finally, the magician opened the top door and the man's head was visible. Where did the middle go?

5- The Cane Cabinet.

A female assistant stepped into an upright cabinet. The door was closed. Then the magician stuck 40 walking canes into the cabinet from front to back. It was impossible for anyone not to be impaled and be still alive in the box. When the canes were removed, the lady stepped out unharmed.

6- Teleporting A Lady, otherwise known as Teleportation.

On the stage were two cabinets hanging from the ceiling.

One of the cabinets was lowered to the floor. A female assistant stepped into the cabinet, which was raised in mid-air. The lady vanished from one cabinet and reappeared in the second cabinet.

Selbit created and built many other illusions. He was in such demand and very busy that in 1924, he had five road companies touring the United States, where he personally trained the cast and crew, each member of the road traveling company and managed them from England.

He also had four other road companies touring Europe. To take such a huge undertaking, he had to build duplicate illusions for each road company.

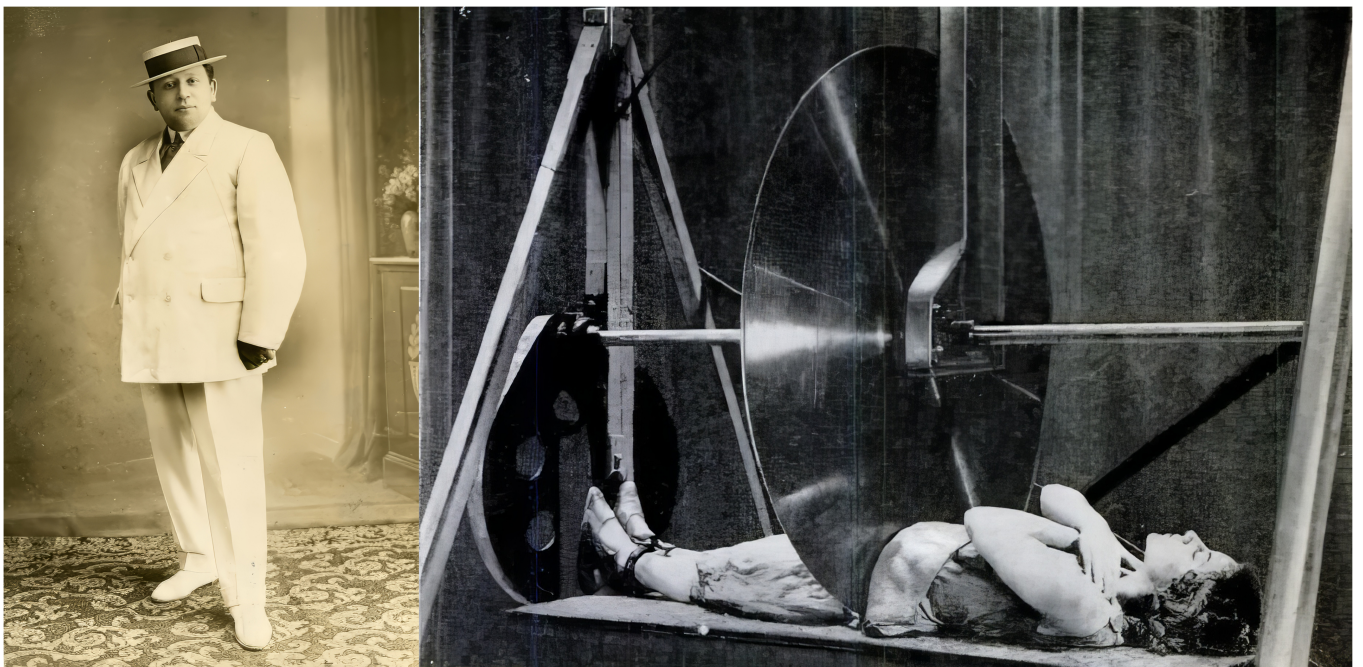
On November 19, 1938, P.T. Selbit died at the age of 57. He was one of the hardest working magicians in history.

Since his death, just about every professional illusionist has used at least one of Selbit's illusions.

Chapter 15

Horace Goldin

The Inventor of Cutting A Lady In Half With A Buzz-saw



Horace Goldin was born on December 17, 1873. His birth name was Hyman Goldstein. His birthplace was Vilnius, Lithuania, which was part of the Russian Empire at the time.

When he was 16 years old, Hyman Goldstein moved to the United States with his parents and settled down in Nashville, Tennessee, where he began working for his uncle at his uncle's grocery store. Once Hyman began learning English, he quit the grocery store job and went to work for his other uncle as a traveling salesman. Hyman's second uncle owned and operated an inexpensive custom jewelry manufacturing business. It was during this time that Hyman went to see Albini's Magic Show and fell in

love with magic. Thereafter, Hyman began learning simple sleight of hand tricks.

Hyman Goldstein gave up the custom jewelry salesman job, because of his thick Russian accent. He got a job as a draper's assistant and moved to New York. I guess it was meant to be for Hyman to meet his magic idol Albini in New York and become friends with him. Hyman told Albini that he was his idol, and made Hyman started learning magic. With that, Albini began teaching Hyman magic tricks. At this point in his life, Hyman decided to become a professional magician. With that, he wanted to change his name to a more magical name. So, he chose the name Horace Goldin.

In the late 1890's, there were a lot of dime museums with standing audiences only, who were watching variety acts for the price of a dime (10 cents). Horace Goldin began performing in as many dime museums as he could. He knew that the more he performed, the better he would get. Horace learned the egg bag trick from Albini and became very good at performing this incredible trick. Even today, many magicians are performing the egg bag trick the way Horace performed it.

Here's a brief description of the egg bag trick: The magician shows a small cloth bag about 10 inches by 10 inches. He places an egg inside the soft cloth bag and then waves his hands over the bag. He then turns the bag inside out and the egg has vanished. He uses his hand to bang on the bag to prove the egg is totally gone. At this point, he turns the bag inside-out several times to prove beyond a doubt that the egg has vanished. Finally, he waves his hand over the bag, asks one of the audience members to reach into the bag and take out the egg which is unharmed.

When this trick is performed well, the trick can be done over and over again. The more it's performed, the more the audience is totally baffled. As a result, Horace Goldin became an expert on this trick, and he was

in demand. Horace performed at least 20 performances in a day and managed to earn \$15 dollars a week, which was good money back then.

Eventually, Horace Goldin began buying larger magical props and made more money. As he got better and better, he began telling jokes in between the tricks. However, because of his thick accent, his jokes did not work, and no one was laughing. After realizing this problem, Horace then dropped the jokes, hired a couple of assistants and started performing larger illusions. He began performing at a fast pace to create a very exciting and quick-moving show.

By 1888, Horace was 24 years old and became a truly professional magician. He was being booked into theaters and meeting halls, always working with other variety acts. By 1900, his act was 15 minutes long and packed with so much magic. I will give you a brief description of some of his magic.

Horace showed both sides of a 36-inch square scarf to be empty. Then with lightning speed, he produced a large bowl full of fire from the empty scarf. Then he showed an empty top hat and produced a live rabbit from the hat.

Next, he showed a small empty bathtub made of galvanized tin. His assistants poured buckets of water into the bathtub until it was full. With showmanship and finesse, Horace made five eggs appear, which he then threw into the water and immediately five ducks jumped out of the water and walked all over the stage. The assistants needed to use brooms to guide the ducks off the stage into the wings.

Next, Horace took a fishing pole with a fishing line dangling from the pole. On the tip of the fishing line was a fishing hook. Horace walked to the audience and instantly caught a fish with the fishing pole from mid-air over the audience's heads. As the fish dangled from the end of the fishing line, Horace ran back to the stage to continue the show.

Next, he placed his female assistant into a wooden frame. He then pulled a cloth up to the assistant's waist so that she could be in full view at all times. Then Horace stepped into a large metal cage which was on four metal legs. While he was still in the cage, Horace pulled up the back cloth and the front cloth, as well as the side cloths, to hide himself from the audience's view. Obviously, since the audience could see underneath the cage and all around the cage, there was no way Horace could escape from the cage. His male assistant was dressed up in a red robe and put on a devil's mask. This devil-masked assistant pulled out a pistol and fired it into the air. Instantly, the female assistant vanished from the wooden frame and reappeared way back in the audience with a whistle in her mouth, whistling to get the audience's attention. As she ran from the back of the audience to the stage, the male assistant in the devil costume raised the pistol and fired one more time. Then all four cloths covering the metal cage dropped, showing that Horace has vanished. The assistant with the devil's mask pulled off the mask and it was Horace himself.

Next, Horace walked to a birdcage hanging from a metal stand. He opened the cage door and took out two canaries. He placed the canaries into a paper bag, then closed the cage door. He walked to center stage, took out the pistol, and fired into the air. Instantly, he ripped the paper bag to pieces showing that the two canaries had vanished. He turned his head and looked at the cage. The canaries were back in the cage.

Next, his assistant was holding a silk cloth about 10 feet long by 12 inches wide. Horace cut the silk in half with large scissors and magically restored it back to one piece.

Next, Horace used his hands against a spotlight to create shadows on a white paper mounted onto a frame. At first, he created the shadow of a flying pigeon. Then he reached into the paper, broke the paper, and pulled out a live pigeon from the paper. The assistant replaced the frame with new paper. Horace then created a shadow of a rabbit and again he broke

the paper and produced a live rabbit from the paper. He continued doing this to produce other animals, including a dog.

For his grand finale, Horace took a cloth held between his hands and raised it above his head. The cloth was large enough to cover his entire body. At about this time, three policemen ran onto the stage. They pulled away the cloth and the magician had vanished. One of the policemen took off his hat and his fake mustache. He took off his coat, and to everyone's surprise, it was Horace himself dressed up in his evening clothes.

At this point, I must tell you that with all of the illusions I just described, Horace was able to perform them with speed, perfect timing, and great showmanship. This is because his Russian accent was so thick that he had to make up for his bad English.

Horace became known for his rapid-fire presentation. So, he earned the nickname "The Whirlwind Illusionist."

Up to this point in his career, Horace primarily worked in variety shows, such as Vaudeville theaters. Horace became a headliner in the Vaudeville circuit.

In July 1901, Horace signed an agreement to a five-year contract to perform in England and began performing at the Palace Theatre. The following year, 1902, Horace was invited by King Edward VII to the Sandringham Palace to entertain the royal family and the visiting Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany. Because of his royal performances, Horace billed himself as "The King of Entertainers and Entertainer of Kings."

By 1904, Horace had many other large and incredible illusions added into his show, including the levitation of an assistant and vanishing a lion in a cage.

Horace expanded a small paper cube into a large cube, where a female assistant appeared from it; also producing all kinds of objects, including international flags from empty top hats.

Here's another strong and visual illusion. A trunk was hanging above the stage from the moment the show started. Horace placed a female assistant into a canon. He pointed the canon to the trunk above. He fired the canon. The trunk is lowered onto a platform on the stage. When the trunk was opened, the female assistant emerged from the trunk.

Horace's grand finale was a hot air balloon with a basket underneath for carrying passengers. Horace climbed into the basket and the balloon would rise. After a drum-roll, the basket dropped onto the stage showing that the magician had vanished. Seconds later, Horace reappeared and walked out from the side of the stage.

Horace's Large Lavish Illusion was introduced in Paris in 1909, when he opened up in Alhambra. Four male assistants carried a sedan chair with a lady sitting on the chair. The assistants placed the chair on center stage. The lady would step down from the chair. Then the assistants would raise the cloth to cover the chair. When the cloth came down, Horace would be sitting on the chair.

In 1911, Horace introduced his vanishing piano at the Theatre Royale in Brighton, England.

Horace toured Africa in 1912 and returned back to the United States in September 1913 opening up on Broadway at the Palace Theatre. After his Broadway show, he toured the United States with 35 assistants and 15 truckloads of his illusions.

In 1915, Horace took his show to Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan.

In 1916, Horace took the show to Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. He returned back to the United States in 1918. As always, Horace was experimenting with new and novel ideas. At first, his "Film to Life illusion" did not work because of the lip-syncing to film. The timing was not good enough. However, by 1923, he improved it and gave this illusion new life.

In 1926, Horace returned back to England where he included new illusions into his show, including the Indian Rope Trick.

Horace had an illusion which was essentially drilling a large hole into a male assistant's chest. Then he proceeded to push his arm through from the back to the front of the assistant's chest. This was phenomenal.

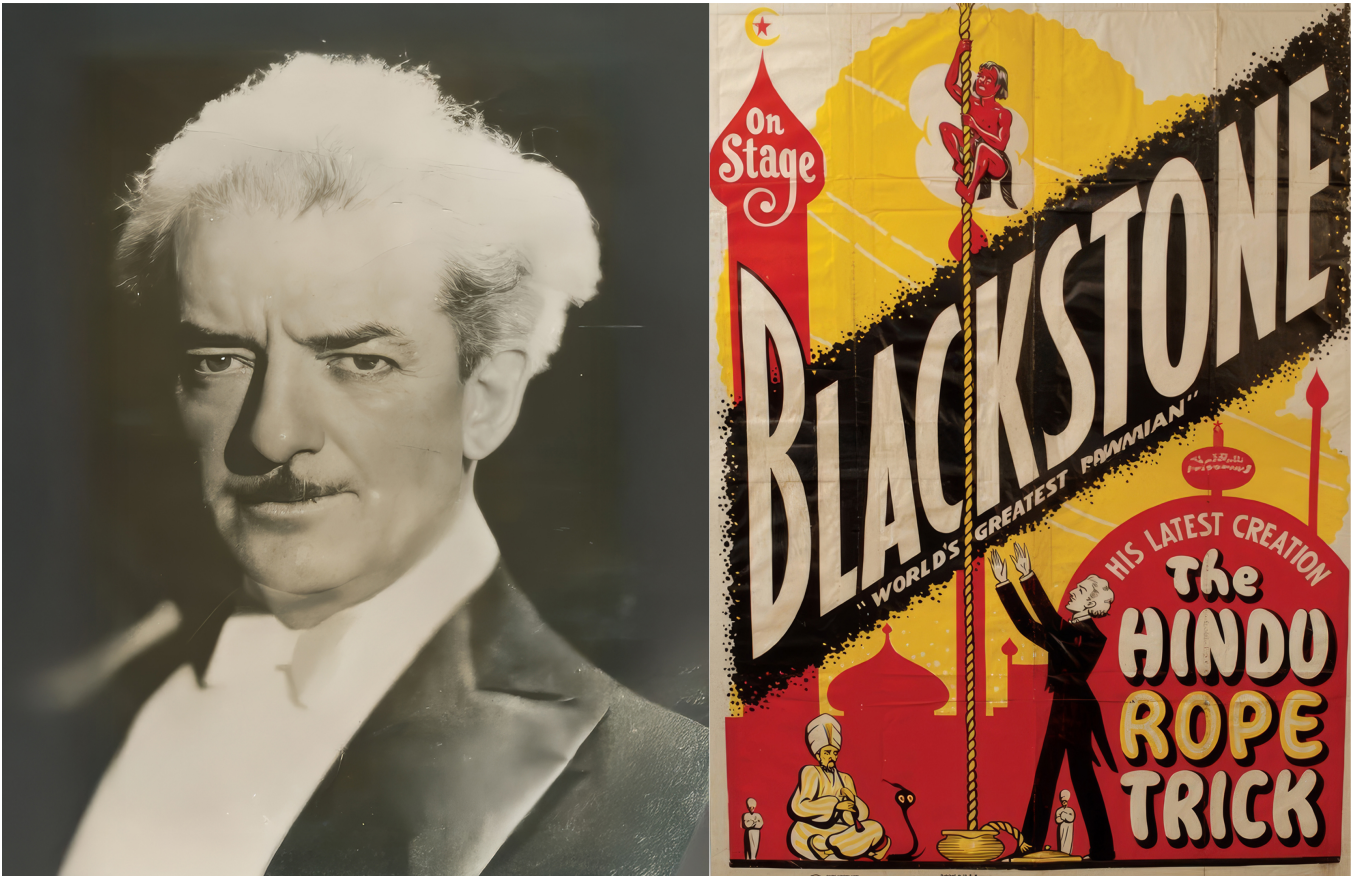
In 1931, Horace introduced his best invention, Cutting A Lady in Half without a box, using a large circular saw. He named this illusion The Living Miracle. This was a totally new concept of cutting a lady in half. Perhaps this was Horace's greatest contribution to magic.

On August 21, 1939, Horace opened his show in London at the Wood Green Theatre. Horace performed his greatest illusions on this stage, including the dangerous bullet catch illusion, which had already killed numerous other magicians. Incidentally, this was the same theatre where Chung Ling Soo died on the stage performing the bullet catch.

Horace Goldin died peacefully in his sleep in New York on August 21, 1939, at the age of 65 years old.

Chapter 16

The Great Blackstone



The Great Blackstone was one of America's greatest magicians. He was born on September 27, 1885 in Chicago. His birth name was Henry Bouton.

Henry Bouton worked as a newspaper boy to make pocket money. He later got a job as a cabinet maker's assistant. It was during this time that he saw Keller's magic show at McVicker's theatre and fell in love with magic.

Using his carpentry skills, Henry managed to get a job making magic apparatus for August Roterberg's Magic Shop in Chicago. Periodically, as Henry was delivering the magical apparatus that he was building to the

magic shop, he met local magicians and became friends with some of them. This was good networking, where Henry could exchange ideas with other magicians.

Henry was quite confident that he could start his own magic show and earn money working as a magician.

Henry Bouton had a very charming and friendly personality. He was able to get a job at vaudeville shows. It was during this time that his brother Peter joined him as the funny man dressed up as a clown. Their act was a fairly good straight-man funny-man ("Crooked and Straight") magic act.

Albini became famous for his incredible egg bag magic routine. Later on, Albini kept adding more illusions to where he had a large illusion show with over 10 big illusions and six assistants.

In 1913, Albini suddenly died at the age of 53 in Chicago.

Henry Bouton immediately purchased four of Albini's large illusions at a very good price. Henry began to perform as an illusionist with these large illusions.

Henry had a keen eye for opportunities. There was a German magician who spent a great deal of money printing posters and handbills known as "The Great Fredrik". This German magician decided to go back to Germany. Henry immediately purchased all of the posters and handbills for an extremely cheap price and began to perform as "The Great Fredrik" making very good use of those beautiful posters and handbills.

This did not last very long. By 1915, Henry couldn't use the German name Fredrik because of the World War I, where the USA was at war with Germany.

That's when Henry became Harry Blackstone. I have to give Blackstone credit. The man knew what he wanted and went after it with every opportunity that came along.

By 1917, Harry Blackstone was traveling across the USA with 12 assistants. He was known as "Blackstone, the Master Magician". He mostly performed in Vaudeville theaters and occasionally created his own full evening show and performing at larger theaters. His brother Peter continued working with him as his main assistant, as well as his stage manager.

Blackstone took a page from Houdini and began doing outdoor stunts to promote his full evening shows. Some of these outdoor stunts included being nailed into a large crate, which was lowered into the river. Blackstone had to escape from the sealed wooden crate underwater on time before the oxygen ran out inside the crate. Blackstone performed this stunt, and other stunts, in multiple cities.

Both Houdini and Thurston had a head-start over Harry Blackstone. As a result, Blackstone had to work harder and try to be more creative to attract audiences to his shows.

Here is one example of Blackstone's creative mind. In 1925, Houdini was performing his full evening show at a Broadway Theatre while Blackstone was performing his full evening show in Brooklyn. Blackstone made a deal with the management of the Claridge Hotel on Broadway which was near Houdini's show. Blackstone attached a large hot air balloon to the hotel's building which was advertising Blackstone's show in Brooklyn.

In 1936, Thurston died. This left a big void in large scale theatrical magic shows. Harry Blackstone managed to fill that void and became the number one magician in the United States.

Harry Keller made a statement during the height of his career. He said, "America will recognize only one great magician at a time." I suppose that statement was true back then and it's true today.

After Thurston's death, Harry Blackstone was the greatest magician in America.

Not too far from Colon, Michigan was the beautiful Blackstone Island. This is where Blackstone and his crew spent the summers building new illusions, raising rabbits, ducks, and doves for the shows ahead.

In the evenings, Blackstone, his family, and crew would have barbecues and music. There was a real family atmosphere between Blackstone and his crew.

By October, the rest of the cast would arrive at Blackstone Island and began rehearsing for the upcoming new show. Everyone was excited, as if they were having a reunion while getting ready to hit the road again.

Keep in mind that back then theaters did not have air conditioning. This made it very difficult to have shows during the summer months.

Here's a brief description of Harry Blackstone's show: His most unforgettable trick was the dancing handkerchief, where he would borrow a handkerchief from the audience and make it come alive making it dance on the stage, jump to his hand, continue dancing on his hand, then jump from one hand to the other hand, and continue dancing. At the end of the routine, Harry would give the handkerchief back to its owner.

His other signature illusion was the floating lightbulb, where the lightbulb would light up without electricity and float over the audience's heads. Blackstone would invite people to examine the lightbulb and then continue making it float over the audience in the theatre. The lightbulb would continue flying all the way to the balcony and back to Blackstone's hand.

Among the large illusions was the Indian Rope Trick, where a rope would wiggle and move like a snake, rising up to 20 feet in height. Then a young boy would climb up the rope and vanish in mid-air. Only the boy's clothing would fall down. Blackstone would gather all the boy's clothing and put it into an empty bamboo basket. The boy would reappear from the basket fully dressed in his clothes.

In this next illusion, the stagehands rolled onto the stage a rack that held about 10 automobile tires, the kind of display rack that could be seen at tire stores. One of Blackstone's female assistants crawled into the tires. Blackstone reached into the tires and tried to pull her out, but he would accidentally pull off her dress. This was a bit of comedy which got the audience excited.

The male assistants began removing the automobile tires one at a time, showing each tire empty. Then the assistants stacked the tires up one on top of the other, proving that the girl had vanished. Blackstone took the assistant's dress that he just pulled off her and threw it over into the stack of tires. A rope was lowered from above into the stack of tires. Immediately, the rope was pulled up and the girl was hanging onto the rope, and she was fully dressed in her dress.

Blackstone built Horace Goldin's "Cutting The Lady In Half Illusion" with a buzzsaw. There was only one difference between the Horace Goldin version and the Harry Blackstone version. In Horace Golden's version, the female assistant would lie down on her back and get cut with the circular saw at her stomach. In Blackstone's version, the girl would lie down on her stomach face-down. Then she would be cut with a circular saw at her back. I'm sure Horace Goldin must have been furious about this, but my research did not show any lawsuits.

Harry Blackstone and his assistants loaded gun powder into a canon. Blackstone stood in front of the canon. One of the assistants would light

the fuse on the canon. In a big explosion with a puff of smoke Blackstone disappeared. Moments later, Blackstone reappeared from the wings without any burns or scratches.

Blackstone's levitation of a lady was one of the finest, almost as good as Keller's levitation.

There were many more large additions to Blackstone's show, too many to mention. However, I do want to talk about Blackstone's most unforgettable moments.

In one moment, Blackstone took a piece of newspaper, rolled it into a cone, and produced a beautiful white rabbit. Blackstone asked the parents if they wanted to take a pet home at every show and a child got a free pet rabbit.

In another one of Blackstone's classics, he would hold a small bird cage in between his hands. Inside the cage was a beautiful canary. Blackstone invited about 30 children from the audience while his hands were extended straight out holding the birdcage in between his hands. All the children would put their hands over, under, and all four sides of the birdcage. Blackstone then counted from one to three. In a blink of an eye, the birdcage vanished to the total amazement of those children on the stage. All the children were giggling, smiling, laughing, and wondering where the cage and canary went, which drove the audience into the same awe and amazement.

During the Second World War, Harry Blackstone managed to keep his show going. He made a deal with the USO to take his show to more than 200 army bases in the United States to entertain the troops.

After the war years, Blackstone continued taking his full evening show into theaters across the United States.

In 1941, Blackstone began his comic book career. The first comic book was Super-Magician Comics, where Blackstone would travel the world, perform his amazing magic, and battle exotic villains. This comic ran from 1941 to 1946. Then in 1946, a new comic book series “Blackstone, Master Magician” began being published.

Harry Blackstone was one of the few magicians to have his own comic book character and series of comic books.

In 1948, Blackstone managed to make a lucrative deal with a major radio broadcaster, WOR-Mutual, and have his own radio show, which was called “Blackstone, The Magic Detective.” Every week, Blackstone solved mysteries and would teach a trick to the children at home.

By the mid 1950s, Blackstone began appearing on all of the major television networks,

including CBS, NBC, and ABC. During these years, the recording studios of the networks were located in New York City, so Blackstone moved to New York and made good use out of representing major corporations at their trade shows performing at the big corporate events.

In 1960, Harry Blackstone flew to Hollywood to be on Ralph Edward’s “This Is Your Life” television show. This was actually a great tribute to 74-year-old “The Great Blackstone.”

While he was in Los Angeles, Blackstone liked the weather and moved there. He was always a child at heart and continued to love magic. He often carried new tricks in his pocket. He visited the Hollywood Magic Shop periodically to give advice to some of the young magicians.

In September 1961, Milton P. Larsen (Milt Larsen) found an old rundown mansion on Franklin Avenue by the hillside and made a handshake deal with the owner, Thomas Glover, to begin renovating the old building into the Magic Castle. As the castle began taking shape, Milt Larsen’s older

brother, William Larsen Junior, joined him and they created the Academy of Magical Arts. The Magic Castle opened its doors in 1963 as a private magic club. Harry Blackstone was one of the regulars at the castle, enjoying the attention from the visiting magicians and Hollywood television and movie stars.

Harry Blackstone died on November 16, 1965, at the age of 80. However, that was not the end of the Blackstone dynasty. His son, Harry Bouton Blackstone Jr., had show-business in his blood. His mother, Mildred Irene Rose Phinney, was the lead assistant to Harry Blackstone and married Blackstone on July 13, 1933.

Chapter 17

Harry Blackstone Jr.



Blackstone Jr. was born on June 30, 1934, in Three Rivers, Michigan.

Although he had been involved in magic from a very young age, making appearances in his father's shows as early as six months old, Blackstone Jr. did not want to go into magic at first. It's very difficult for children of famous performers to fill the shoes of their parents. But, just like his father, Blackstone Jr. had a career in radio broadcasting as an announcer.

In 1971, Harry Blackstone Jr. decided to follow his father's footsteps and began his professional career as an illusionist.

Throughout his career, Blackstone Jr. became renowned for reviving and modernizing many of his father's classic illusions. He also gained prominence through television appearances and live performances, including a successful Broadway run of "Blackstone! The Magnificent Musical Magic Show" in 1980.

Harry Blackstone Jr. died from medical complications on May 14, 1997, at the age of 62. His wife, Gay Blackstone, continues the family legacy as a magic director and producer for TV shows and live shows.

Chapter 18

David Devant



David Devant was one of the greatest magicians in England. No one can dispute that Devant was the master performer of his time. Just to give you a brief description of his character, he had the ability to speak

with such an impeccable manner where he created the mysteries in the audience's minds. His patter was well-written and well-rehearsed. His stage presence and timing were second to none. He had a very creative mind, and he invented many stage illusions, both small and large.

Devant was born in Highgate in London, England on February 22, 1868. His birth name was David Wighton which he later changed his last name to Devant. His father was James Wighton. A Scottish artist and painter who had his studio in his home and sometimes used the family as models.

Devant went to school at age 10. When he began going to school, he didn't know his ABCs.

On an artist's salary his father didn't always make enough money to support the family.

By age 12, Devant quit school and got a job in a private home as a servant and cleaning boy. His salary was five shillings a week, which he used to help his mother with the groceries. Devant was the oldest of four children: 2 sisters and a baby brother.

One afternoon Devant was walking down Oxford Street when he came upon Joseph Bland's Magic Shop. In the window there were many magic tricks with written teasers. One of those items was an egg in a red cup. It read "This egg will disappear."

Out of curiosity, Devant walked into the magic shop and asked the guy behind the counter, "how could the egg disappear?" The gentleman behind the counter performed the trick and made the egg disappear and reappear several times. At one point, the gentleman put the egg in his pocket and made it magically reappear in the cup.

Devant could not believe that such a miracle can be purchased. So, he gladly paid the guy and purchased the trick. Before leaving the magic shop

the owner of the magic shop, Joseph Bland, taught the trick to Devant step by step.

When Devant came home he went into the backyard and practiced the trick. At the dinner table he performed the trick to his parents, sisters, and brother. There was so much excitement that everyone loved it. That was the day Devant got hooked into magic.

Thereafter, Devant frequently visited the magic shop and purchased other magic tricks and small magic books.

After eighteen months of working as a house cleaner Devant decided to get a better job with better pay.

Devant was able to get a job at the Euston Train Station Restaurant as a vending boy wearing a blue uniform with silver buttons. He also wore a red cap marked "refreshments." He carried a silver tray full of fruits, refreshments, and candy. His job was to sell these items to the passengers. In between the trains Devant had to clean the restaurant and serve food to the customers. The job hours were brutal and long. He had to work from seven in the morning till nine o'clock at night.

After seventeen months of working serving food, Devant got caught in the wine cellar practicing his magic tricks. The restaurant manager fired him. One of the customers at the restaurant was the director of the nearby telephone company. He was a regular at the restaurant, and he overheard the conversation that Devant was fired from the job. He offered Devant a job as a telephone operator. The salary was 10 shillings a week and no food. It wasn't that great, but it was a change of pace. Devant accepted the job. His working hours were from nine in the morning till six at night.

The telephone was a new technology at the time. His job was to speak to customers and connect them on the switchboard.

It was during this time that Devant learned a great deal of diplomacy by talking to customers in a manner that made them feel comfortable. This skill came in very handy when he became a performer.

After two years at the phone company, Devant decided to get a job that would give him more flexible hours, where he could have time to practice his magic.

Devant got a job as a salesman at the Albo Corbon Light. He was selling gas lights and other lighting devices. The job paid a salary along with sales commission and had flexible hours. He only had to report at the office once a day to fill out the sales forms.

The job gave Devant plenty of time to practice his magic. Working as a salesman and installing gas lights helped him make a decent salary where he gave his mother more grocery money and spent the rest buying magic books and magic apparatus. It was during this time that Devant purchased two of the best magic books of that time: Professor Hoffman's "Modern Magic" and Robert Houdin's "Secrets of Conjuring". He read both books cover to cover more than once. The knowledge from these books took him to the next level.

By now, he made up his mind to become a professional magician when he was good and ready. Therefore, he practiced his magic at least four hours a day in front of a mirror with the proper patter. He spent a great deal of time writing and rewriting his patter. He knew this would be his best asset and would separate him from the rest of the magicians.

After nineteen months working at the Gas Lighting Company Devant quit the job. By then he had purchased all the magic he needed to work as a professional magician. Devant begin performing magic at all kinds of venues.

In his autobiography "My Magic Life", Devant wrote, "after thousands of hours of practice, making a decision to become a professional magician was followed by countless scores of agents, hours spent in reading and castle-building, and hours spent in giving free entertainment and travel shows in five shilling entertainments and penny entertainments, all of which seemed fruitless in feeding my ambition. I had a hand-to-mouth existence for about a year, until at last the tour was booked, which led on to a fortune."

What Devant described was those years struggling to build a career, make a living performing at freak shows, penny arcades, meeting halls, traveling to different towns and cities all across the United Kingdom, working for so many different agents and show buyers, living in boarding houses, and trying to pay the rent. There had been times in his life where the agent took the money and took off. He was left behind with no money to pay rent to the landlady at the boarding house and got thrown out in a strange city.

One time, Devant was at Victoria Train Station trying to get a train to his next job in a different city when he realized he didn't have enough money to buy the train ticket, and the train was leaving in twenty minutes. So, he rushed to a nearby pawn shop to pawn his silver watch to get enough money to get on to the train.

In addition to financial problems, there were problems with the performances at different venues. For example, when performing at sideshows, the problem wasn't what kind of magic he was performing. The real problem was trying to get people to watch his performances. If he couldn't get enough people to watch his magic, the management would fire him. So that was the struggle trying to get a better venue to do a better job. Sometimes better jobs came along, but the management thought he was too young for the job.

One of the jobs that lasted two years was performing with the Royal American midgets. The midget show came from the USA to the United Kingdom one year earlier and it was a success. Now the second time around it lost its popularity. The management of the midgets took the show on the road to other cities and smaller towns. Devant got the job because he was willing to travel under difficult conditions for a very small salary. He would perform magic when the midgets were tired and off the stage. Devant would also lecture about the midgets before they entered the stage. This job paid him only 2 pounds per week for two-hour shows and they had to perform two shows a day.

The pay was not much, but this job gave Devant the opportunity to become a good presenter and communicator. Devant also created new acts during this time.

The pianist for the midget show was a brilliant musician, Brakespeare Smith, who helped Devant have his own original music for each magic act. Devant soon realized how important it was to have your own original music for your acts. The music sheets had the proper cues for the future piano players. This was a great lesson, and it helped Devant have better shows than the other magicians.

It was during this tour through big cities and small towns that Devant met many magicians. Some of them became his lifelong friends. It was H.B. Lodge, a famous close-up magician, that wrote a long letter to John Neville Maskelyne who had a variety show at the Egyptian Hall. H.B. Lodge described Devant's magic in detail to Maskelyne in his letter. This was the first time Maskelyne heard of David Devant.

After two years on the road with the midgets, Devant's wife advised him to walk away from the midget show because there was not a chance for Devant to perform his better illusions.

After quitting the midget show, Devant approached an excellent manager and agent, Mr. Augustus Pereno. They agreed upon an arrangement that would be beneficial for both parties. Mr. Augustus would get one third of Devant's earnings.

Mr. Augustus Pereno spoke seven languages including Chinese. He could approach show buyers and venues easily. On the other hand, it would have been impossible for Devant to approach these places and tell them how good he was.

The first order of business was Mr. Augustus Pereno approaching Maskelyne to arrange for Devant to perform at the Egyptian Hall at Maskelyne and Cook Mysteries. After Maskelyne listened to the manager and acknowledged that Devant was a very good performer and magician, Maskelyne told the manager that Mr. Charles Moretti had a permanent engagement with him and that there are no possible hopes for Devant to engage in his services.

Most show agents and managers approaching Maskelyne are used to getting turned down. Mr. Augustus Pereno accepted this outcome gracefully and continued going on trying to create other jobs for Devant. Most of the music halls were all booked in advance. As a result, Augustus Pereno came up with a brilliant idea for Devant to perform in mental hospitals and asylums. This was an un-tapped market. As a result, Devant performed at just about every mental institution in England and got paid well.

Next, Augustus Pereno came up with another fantastic idea. He arranged with hotel managers at five star hotels for Devant to perform at their hotels. The magician's fee was not coming from the hotel management. It was coming from the hotel guests who came to see the magic shows. This idea was also very successful. It provided a platform for Devant to perform at high class hotels to high society guests.

Very soon other magicians began copying this idea. The hotel market became diluted with so many amateur magicians trying to sell themselves as professional shows.

Devant's manager managed to book shows in prestigious places like the London Pavilion, Royal Harbor, and Alhambra Theatre.

Then came Devant's first trip outside of England to Vienna. This was a one-month engagement with a salary of 25 pounds a week. Eventually, Devant's manager was offered much more lucrative business offers. So Devant was left alone without a business manager.

Devant's friend, G. Gordon Powell, financed a 3-day venture where Devant performed his new invention: an illusion called "Vice Versa". This is where a man will change into a woman in a thin upright cabinet that was so small there was no way you could hide another person. Furthermore, the assistant's mid-section was tied and sealed by ribbons. Then the ends of the ribbons were held by two audience members on each side of the box. When Devant closed the front curtain and opened it, there was a female assistant with the ribbons still tied around her waist with the seal intact and the volunteers still holding the ends of the ribbons.

This illusion caused a sensation with lots of good newspaper reviews. On the third night, the manager of the Crystal Palace, Mr. Gillman, came to see Devant's sensational illusion. After the show, Mr. Gillman offered a contract to Devant to perform at the Opera House Crystal Palace for two weeks.

It was at this time that Charles Morritt left Maskelyne and was setting up a show on his own at the Prince's Hall in Piccadilly. Devant felt the timing was right. The very next day Devant went to see Maskelyne and invited him to the Crystal Palace to see his new show. Maskelyne came to see the show and told Devant to come by the next morning to discuss the possibility of Devant performing at Maskelyne's show at the Egyptian Hall.

The next morning, Devant showed up at 10 AM. Maskelyne told him he liked the Illusion, but he would prefer for Devant to have more than one original Illusion that could be promoted as a sensational act.

Maskelyne asked Devant to come up with another original Illusion then he would consider him. With that, Maskelyne showed Devant the stage and let him take measurements. Five days later, Devant came back to the Egyptian Hall with a new illusion. He built a small-scale model of "The Artist's Dream" in which a full-length portrait of a woman comes alive. The model was proportioned to the stage at the Egyptian Hall. Devant used the scale of half an inch for every foot.

Here's a brief description of The Artist's Dream: the magician shows an empty picture frame with a blank canvas. The magician then draws a painting of a lady. From the painting he produces a live female assistant.

At first glance to the scale model Illusion, Maskelyne understood the Illusion and liked it very much. He offered Devant a three-month contract. In 1893, Devant began performing at the John Neville Maskelyne Show at the Egyptian Hall. Devant was so motivated and energized that he created so many new illusions. In addition to his masterful magic, Devant was also performing shadowgraphs. This was where a single light projecting onto a white screen and using two hands in front of the light, Devant was able to create all kinds of shadow animals.

To increase tickets sales, Devant purchased a projector and begin showing films in between the magic acts. This new novelty increased ticket sales. As a matter of fact, David Devant was one of the first to introduce cinema to England. Devant convinced Maskelyne to let him produce a traveling show with magic and cinema. At first, Maskelyne didn't think that it would be profitable, but it turned out that the roadshow was more profitable than the show in London at the Egyptian Hall.

Very soon, Devant had three traveling shows, so he had to stop performing in London and managed the traveling shows as well as performing in one of them.

The road shows travelled throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, the rest of Europe, and all the way to the United States. He still found time to write his first book on magic, "Woes of Wizard" in 1903.

Devant spent five years traveling, performing, and managing the road-shows. In the meantime, back in London, in 1903 and after 35 years, Maskelyne's lease had expired at the Egyptian Hall.

Maskelyne then signed a long-term lease at Saint George's Hall. In 1904, he began renovating and rebuilding the entire hall.

While Devant was managing three roadshows, he kept providing the money for the new construction at St. George's Hall.

At St. George's Hall, Maskelyne's intention was to open up with a play, which he found in Lord Lytton's novel "The Coming Race". This was a serious play with lots of professional actors and many expensive sceneries and costumes. The play was to run twice daily and was scheduled to open on January 2, 1905. Maskelyne was hoping that this play would become a big hit and surpass his former style of entertainment.

Unfortunately, the show failed to attract an audience, and it kept losing money. After eight weeks of losing thousands of pounds, Maskelyne closed the show down on February 25, 1905. On the same day, Maskelyne sent a telegram to Devant and let him know that the play failed miserably and asked him to come back to London immediately.

Devant was in Edinburgh, Scotland with the traveling show. He finished his tour and immediately travelled back to London.

After coming back to London, Devant told Maskelyne that his name was synonymous with magic. Therefore, the public expected to see magic not a Broadway show. Devant urged Maskelyne to consider opening a bigger and better magic show with new illusions.

Maskelyne told Devant that he would have to be the managing director as well as creating the entire show. As a result, Maskelyne offered Devant a partnership.

After ten years of working for Maskelyne Devant became a partner and the top billing on the billboards.

For the new show, Devant invented his best Illusion, a masterpiece, and named it "The Mascot Moth". The illusion was so amazing that Maskelyne described this illusion as "the trickiest trick". Here's a brief description: On a fully lit empty stage without any special props, except a lady dressed up in a moth costume and small wings on each shoulder and she is walking all around the stage. As the magician approached the lady and attempted to embrace her, she instantly vanished leaving only her costume with the wings shriveled into a ball.

With this incredible new Illusion and many others, the new show was opened on August 7, 1905, under the banner of "Maskelyne and Devant's Mysteries". On opening night, the press was invited, and all the critics wrote the best complementary reviews for the show. It was an instant hit. Thereafter, it was sold out, and they had to turn the people away.

Devant's Magic was the talk of London. The critics gave him the highest ratings. Devant was one of the true visionaries in magic.

Another amazing illusion from David Devant was "New Page". Here's a brief description: A male assistant steps into a thin upright box and gets strapped onto a post inside the box. Then the front door is closed. The other assistant pulls the entire box up about 2 feet off the stage floor.

Devant took a wooden doll and showed it to the audience and then turned the doll upside-down. When the box door is opened and to everyone's amazement the assistant was also upside-down and still tied and strapped to the pole.

Whenever Devant had new ideas to create a new Illusion he first built them in miniature small models on a scaled stage. He then placed the lights where they were supposed to be. He also used small figurines to represent the magician and the assistants. If it looked good with a scale model. Then he built the full-size illusion with inexpensive materials. If all went well he would go ahead and build the actual Illusion. This was a very cost-effective way of avoiding costly mistakes.

Early on in his career, Devant decided not to perform trick after trick. He began developing elaborate sketches with a storyline, creating the magic and illusion in the audience's minds before the Illusion even began.

Fred Culpitt, a young English magician, was auditioning to work for David Devant at the Egyptian Hall in the early 1900's. When Devant asked young Fred how many tricks he knew, Culpitt, in an effort to impress Devant, said "About 300." Devant, with his usual wit, replied, "Is that so? I only know eight. But I perform them well." Devant emphasized how important it was to master a few tricks and perform them well, instead of learning hundreds of tricks and spreading oneself too thin. Culpitt took this lesson to heart.

One of Devant's trademark phrases was that his magic was done "All by Kindness".

Not only did Devant have to perform two shows a day, but he also had to be the managing director for the entire operation, from advertisement to the creative department. Devant was also trying out new skits and rehearsing new acts. As if that wasn't enough, he was doing outside jobs performing at exclusive shows and performing magic to some of London's wealthiest people in their own private parties.

David Devant was chosen by the royal family to represent the world of wizards on July 1, 1912, at King George V's command performance at the Palace Theatre in London.

One of Devant's greatest illusions was his magnificent "Mental Magnetism", an exhibition of thought transference, which was a hundred times better than the second sight act. Devant and his younger sister Dora had performed this act hundreds of times before. The magicians who have seen it so many times could not figure it out. How could this be possible?

Here's a brief description: Devant apparently hypnotized his sister into a deep sleep and then blindfolded her. Devant asked members of the audience to suggest to him in a whisper any action that his sister could perform. Without saying a word, making any hand gestures, or making any sounds, his sister would slowly make her way to the person who had made the request and carry out the action, whatever it might be.

One of the guests whispered into Devant's ear for his sister to reach into his left jacket pocket and remove the silver cigarette case and the third cigarette from the left has to be removed and stuck behind the men's left ear. Then she had to close the box and place it into a different pocket which Dora was able to do precisely.

King George whispered into Devant's ear for his sister to kiss Lord Beresford who was sitting next to the king. Devant's sister kissed her own fingers and touched them to the lips of Lord Beresford which got lots of laughter from the audience.

Mental Magnetism was so well-done that even professional magicians were baffled.

Devant was the first president of the Magic Circle.

Devant was still at the peak of his profession when his health began to fail. One December night in 1919, during his performance in Manchester, he looked down at his hands. To his horror he realized that his hands were shaking. Devant was found to be suffering from paralysis agitans, a nerve disorder which got worse as he got older. Paralysis agitans is now known as Parkinson's Disease. He retired from performing in 1920.

After retiring from performing magic, Devant continued teaching and mentoring many magicians. He also wrote many magic articles in magic publications.

He also wrote the following books:

"Magic Made Easy" in 1921

"Lessons In Conjuring" in 1922

"My Magic Life" in 1931

"The Best Tricks and How to Do Them" in 1931

"Secrets of Magic" in 1936

Devant once said that the trick is not the main part of the performance; the presentation of the trick is everything.

Among Devant's signature routines was his "magic kettle," which produced on demand any alcoholic beverages called for by the audience.

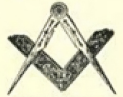
David Devant died on October 13, 1941, in Putney, London, England.

Chapter 19

Richard Potter

America's First Magician

VENTRILOQUISM.

Mr.  POTTER,

The VENTRILOQUIST.

*Begs leave most respectfully to inform the Ladies
and Gentlemen of that he intends to give an*

Evening's Brush to Sweep away

CARE; Or, A Medley to Please.

At Mr.  Ball-Room,

On Evening instant.

In the course of the Evening will be offered up cards of

100

CURIOUS BUT MYSTERIOUS

Experiments.

A SONG,

with Cards, Eggs,

Money, &c.

(For Particulars, see small Bills.)

by Mr. POTTER.

PART SECOND.

VENTRILOQUISM.

Mr. P. will display his wonderful but laborious powers of Ventriloquism. He throws his voice into many different parts of the room, and into the gentlemen's hats, trunks, &c. Imitates all kinds of Birds and Beasts, so that few or none will be able to distinguish his imitations from the reality. This part of the performance has never failed of exciting the surprise of the learned and well informed, as the conveyance of sounds is allowed to be one of the greatest curiosities of nature.

PART THIRD.

THE WHOLE TO CONCLUDE WITH A RECITATION AND SONG IN CHARACTER OF TIMOTHY NORFORD

* Tickets
Cents, to be had at the place of performance. Children under 12 years of age, half price. Performance to commence at early candle-light. The
able may rest assured that the Room will be in single order for the reception of Visitors, handsomely illuminated, with good music & ring the Interludes. Ladies or Gentle-
men desirous of having seats reserved for them, are requested to send their names.

By 1895, the United States was a young country with only 106 years of existence. During this period, there were no American magicians. All of

the magicians that came to work in the United States were from England, the rest of Europe, China, India, and Japan.

The first American magician, Richard Potter, was born in Boston in 1783. His father was Sir Charles Franklin, a tax collector for the King of England. His mother, Dinah, was a black slave at Sir Charles Franklin's mansion in Boston.

Richard Potter did not look either black or white. He looked more like a Native American.

After graduating school, Richard Potter got a job as a cabin boy on a ship bound for England.

In England, Richard Potter worked odd jobs. Then he managed to get a job on a traveling circus, which was traveling throughout England and the rest of Europe. As he was working in the circus, he made friends with many of the sideshow entertainers. From these entertainers, he learned many skills, including bird calling, ventriloquism, fire-eating, sword-swallowing, lying on a bed of nails, and many other dangerous stunts.

In France, he managed to get a job with the traveling magician, John Rannie. As the magician's assistant, Richard Potter began learning magic, both sleight of hand and stage magic. He practiced constantly and became very good at doing magic, even better than his mentor.

Richard Potter was 27 years old when he felt confident as a magician and returned back home to Boston, USA.

In 1811, he performed his first show in Boston. He specifically did not do the fire-eating, sword-swallowing, and lying on a bed of nails with someone standing on his belly. He skipped all the circus sideshow stunts because he did not want to upset his mother.

Both his father and mother attended his show. Richard Potter magically produced live animals. He had someone select and sign a playing card. Then he vanished it and made it appear inside an egg. He turned a duck into a rabbit. He showed an empty box and produced all kinds of beautiful items. He performed the cups and balls, where at the end of the routine he produced baby chicks from under each cup. He produced a beautiful red rose and handed it to his mother where she was sitting in the front row. His mother was so proud and happy that tears ran down her cheeks, watching her son performing amazing magic.

Richard Potter traveled and performed his magic all the way to Canada and back to the USA. He went as far as the deep south all the way to Mobile, Alabama.

The Potter show in the early 1800s was amazing. Some of his unusual magic included: touching a red-hot iron on his tongue and putting his bare hands into melted lead.

In 1808, Potter married Sally, a Native American Indian from the Penobscot Indian tribe.

His wife sang tribal songs. So, Potter added tribal dancing into his show.

Although there were European magicians coming to the USA, none of them were comparable to Potter. That's because his show was original and very different. During his show he would do bird calling with such accuracy that you would swear there were birds in the room. Other times he would use his ventriloquism to throw his voice as if the sound was coming from a box on the floor. Potter was making over \$3000 per month, which in those days was a lot of money.

In 1809, Potter purchased 200 acres of land in New Hampshire and built a big, beautiful home with the finest furniture. Potter and his wife raised three beautiful children: one boy and two girls.

On Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, he invited those who were less fortunate and laid out lots of food for everyone to enjoy. From time to time, he would use his ventriloquism techniques: as he carved the turkey. Each time he touched the knife to the turkey, he made the turkey scream. Some of his guests were laughing and giggling, while others looked on with disbelief. Overall, he entertained his guests.

In between his performances, he found time to raise horses, cattle, pigs, and chickens. He also grew vegetables, such as tomatoes and cucumbers.

Potter continued performing until he fell ill.

On September 20, 1835, Richard Potter, America's first magician, died at the age of 52. His wife Sally died the following year.

They were both buried on his property. The gravestones can be seen to this day from highway 11.

Chapter 20

Chung Ling Soo



Chung Ling Soo was the most successful Chinese magic show of the century.

His birth name was William Ellsworth Robinson. He was born on April 2, 1861, in New York City to Scottish parents.

Robinson impersonated a famous Chinese magician named Ching Ling Foo. He did it for 17 years, and better than any other impersonator of Chinese magicians.

Just like most magicians, Robinson got into magic after seeing another magician's performance. At a young age, he managed to get a job as an apprentice to work with magic prop and Illusion builders. Later, Robinson landed a job working for two of the greatest magicians of that era: Harry Keller and later on Herrmann The Great. Working with these great magicians Robinson learned staging and promotion.

Robinson introduced the first black art show in the United States and used the stage name Achmed Ben Ali. Black art magic was invented by a German magician Max Auzinger, who used the stage name Ben Ali Bay.

For those of you who are not familiar with black art magic, let me tell you a little about it. With black art magic, anything is possible. Whatever you can imagine you can accomplish with black art magic.

At the International Magicians Society's Magic Academy, we have an entire course on Black Art Magic. For those of you who might be interested in learning black art magic, the Academy would be a good place to start.

Around the late 1800's, several Chinese magicians toured Europe and America. Back then they were referred to as Oriental magicians or magic from the Orient.

It was during this time that Chinese magic was very popular. There was a demand for Oriental magic. The talent buyers and showbiz agents were looking to hire Oriental magic acts.

An international Vaudeville agent, Ike Rose, offered Robinson an opportunity to create an Oriental magic act with a guaranteed four-week contract to work in Paris at the Folies-Bergere.

Robinson shaved his head, purchased Chinese costumes, a long ponytail, and began building his Chinese act.

On May 17, 1900, Robinson opened at the Folies-Bergere in Paris with his new name Hop Ling Soo. This was an imitation act of Ching Ling Foo, the original Chinese magician from Beijing.

After one month of successful performances of the Oriental act in Paris, his agent Ike Ross got him a job in London at the Alhambra Theatre with his new name, Chung Ling Soo. This was the name that he would use for the rest of his life.

In London, Chung produced two beautiful white doves from flames in an open pan. Then he proceeded to produce long, colorful ribbons from his mouth. As a big surprise, he produced a long pole from his mouth, as if the long pole was the climax. When showing the long pole with his left hand, the right hand immediately produced a beautiful open parasol. This was just the beginning.

Chung continued producing glass bowls full of water and a live goldfish one after the other. Eventually, he produced a very large glass bowl full of water and lots of goldfish. His big sensational trick was to catch four live goldfish at the end of a fishing line over the audience's heads. This incredible trick got him so many good reviews in London newspapers.

What the London audience didn't know was that this catching of live goldfish from the end of the fishing line was not a Chinese trick. It was actually invented by a U.S. magician from New Jersey who went by the name of Professor Mingus. After the goldfish production, Chung shot an arrow attached to a long ribbon. The arrow went right through his wife, Suee Seen, and into the bull's eye target board behind her.

Chung hired a Chinese juggler, Mr. Fee Ling, who spoke English and Mandarin Chinese. Fee Ling was juggling with all different items, including flaming torches, during Chung's shows.

Whenever Chung was interviewed by the newspapers, the Chinese juggler would translate Chung's answers. This was a great act on its own. As the reporter

asked Chung questions, Chung would pretend to speak Chinese, giving the Chinese juggler enough time to figure out how to answer the question in English.

For the next 17 years no one knew that Chung was not Chinese, except his closest friends.

As a good Illusion builder, he was able to build over 30 large illusions in his London workshop, including the cannon, where his wife Suee Seen would be lowered into the barrel of the cannon and fired all the way to the back of the audience. Suee Seen, without a scratch on her body, would run back to the stage.

Another big Illusion was a very large cooking pot filled with water. Underneath the pot the gas burners caused the water to boil. He would throw dead chickens and a dead duck into the boiling water and change them to live chickens and a live duck. For his big finish for this trick, his wife Suee Seen would emerge unharmed from the boiling water.

Chung Ling Soo had the largest and most successful Oriental magic show ever seen anywhere. He traveled all throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, and just about every country in Europe. Back then, it was not called Europe. It was simply called the continent. From the continent, he traveled to Australia and performed all over the large cities in Australia, before going back to England.

He was planning to go back home to the United States. During the Great War, which was the First World War, the German submarines and torpedoes made it too dangerous to travel back to the USA. It was easier and safer to continue working in England.

For 17 years his biggest attraction was the death-defying bullet-catch. He used two Civil War type old-fashioned musket rifles. These are the ones that you load the gun powder into the nozzle, then load a ball bearing bullet into the nozzle.

Chung rarely saw his wife Suee Seen, other than on the stage when they worked together. Chung lived with another woman.

On Saturday night, March 23, 1918, at the Wood Green Empire Theatre in London, the show was coming to an end with a big finale, the death-defying bullet catch. Chung entered the stage wearing his Chinese warrior outfit. Across the stage were the two assistants, who were also dressed up as Chinese warriors. As the drums rolled, they raised the rifles creating excitement. They aimed the rifles toward Chung, just the way he had done for the past 17 years. He raised the China plate up to his chest ready for the bullet catch. The loud gunfire trembled. Chung then staggered back and fell to the floor and rolled over, which was exactly 10:46 P.M. His assistants ran over to Chung. With agonized pain in his voice, he said, "My God, I've been shot. Close the curtains."

The next day, Sunday morning, Chung Ling Soo died from a bullet wound that went through his right lung.

The Monday morning newspaper headlines read: "Tragedy. A Chinese Magician Shot On The Stage During A Trick."

Thereafter, so many rumors started surfacing. One of them was that Chung's jealous wife had him killed.

Another was that he was heavily in debt.

Yet another rumor was that Chung was suffering from an incurable disease, and he staged his own suicide.

The inquest started on March 28 with a seven-man jury. His wife Suee Seen testified that her husband was an American and that he was going to be 57 years old on his next birthday. This was the first time the British public learned that he was not a real Chinese person. This led to other rumors, such as the Chinese Emperor had ordered his assassination.

The real truth exposed the working mechanics of the bullet-catch trick to the general public by the attending newspaper reporters.

Mrs. Robinson told the jury that each night she walked into the audience with two bullets for audience members to mark the bullets. Then place the bullets into a metal cup. This was a special metal cup that concealed two other bullets which were previously marked. They can be easily switched with the actual marked bullets.

After the audience members marked their two bullets, these bullets were placed into the metal cup.

There was a secret section on the bottom of the cup that would slide open and drop the marked bullets into Suee Seen's hand, where she would conceal them. When she came back on the stage, she would give the cup to the waiting audience members to examine the bullets making sure they were marked before placing them into the barrels of the guns.

When she walked over to her husband to hand him the China plate, she secretly dropped the marked bullets into his palm.

After the bullet catch, Chung would drop the bullets that were actually marked by the audience into the China plate to be taken to the audience, which could then be verified by the persons who marked them.

That was only one half of the trick. The other half of the trick was exposed by Mr. Robert Churchill, who was a gun expert and owned a large gun shop. He was hired by Scotland Yard to examine the guns and determine if there was any foul play.

Mr. Robert Churchill testified to the panel and to the jury that the guns were muzzle-loading muskets. Directly underneath the gun's barrel there was a ramrod tube which housed the ramrod. On these guns the ramrod tubes were removed and replaced with hardened steel barrel tubes. Except the diameter of these steel tubes was much smaller so that you could not put bullets into them. The purpose of these steel tubes was to be used as the firing barrels.

The magician put gunpowder into the lower tubes each night before the show. So that in reality when the gun was fired, it was the lower tubes that fired not the guns' main barrels.

To cause this effect, the firing pins on each gun was altered so that it could not fire the upper gun barrels and would only fire the lower barrels.

During the show, the magician's assistants would load the guns' main barrels with the gun powder and the marked bullets which could not be fired because of the custom-tailored firing pin. As a safety, where the firing pins normally would hit, they were sealed so there was no way that these gun barrels could fire.

"Then what went wrong?" Mr. Robert Churchill, the gun expert, explained that in order to build the special firing pins and alternate the firing mechanism, there were holes drilled and tapped so that the screws could be placed to hold the plate and the spring in their places.

After 17 years of firing these guns one of the screw's threads deteriorated and rotted away. This created a smaller space each time gunpowder was loaded, so that very small amounts of gun powder dripped into the screw space and made the space a little larger over time. Eventually, this space became large enough for the gunpowder to drip from the upper chamber to the lower chamber. So that when the gun was fired, it ignited the gunpowder in the lower barrels which in turn ignited the gunpowder in the main barrels.

This was also verified by the assistant who fired the gun. He noticed the gun had a much stronger kick on his shoulder when he fired the gun that fateful night.

The cause of death was ruled an accidental death.

Chung Ling Soo was not the first magician to die from the bullet catch.

The first was Madame DeLinsky, who died in 1820. She was the wife and assistant of a Polish magician.

The second was Arnold Buck, who died in 1840.

And the third was Professor Adam Epstein, who died in 1869.

Chapter 21

Servais Le Roy



Servais Le Roy was one of the greatest magicians and inventors.

Le Roy was born on May 4, 1865, in Belgium. His birth name was Jean Henri Servais Le Roy. His father was Belgian and his mother was English.

At age 9, Le Roy went to England to live with his grandparents. It was there that he saw several magicians performing sleight of hand magic, which requires skill and practice.

Young Le Roy had a charming personality and made friends with these magicians, which got some of these magicians to teach him sleight of hand magic. By the age of 16 he was doing sophisticated card manipulations and impressing other magicians.

By age 20, while other magicians produced one card at a time, Le Roy was producing four cards in between each finger and thumb. Then he would throw the cards away and instantly produced another four cards. He repeated this six times. He was hired by traveling illusionist Henry Worsely Hill.

Le Roy became a magician's assistant and a sleight of hand performer.

In those days, magicians didn't have to have a full evening show to get a job. If a magician had one very good act, he could get a job working at the variety shows, which was known as Vaudeville.

Le Roy quit working for Henry Worsely Hill and went on his own to create his own act in order to work at the variety shows.

He built an amazing act using an old principal which is the mirror principal production box.

The original mirror box illusion used two mirrors hinged inside of a square box. When the mirrors were in position, they reflected the side panels of the box creating the illusion that the box was empty.

Behind the mirrors the magician could have all kinds of loads or a person that could be produced magically.

To conceal the edges of the two mirrors meeting in the center of the box, there was a vertical wooden pole going from top to bottom of the box and positioned where the mirror edges would meet.

Le Roy's improvement to this illusion was to run the wood pole from top to bottom, extending the pole down an additional 3 inches, which attached the pole to a thin platform base lying on the floor.

On the bottom of the box, Le Roy mounted 4 casters, so that he could spin the cabinet on the axle of the wooden pole to show the inside of the box empty and all around the outside as well.

One look at this box showed there was a reason why the wooden pole was sticking out like a sore thumb in the middle of an empty box running vertically through the center of the box.

Le Roy's other improvement to this Illusion was making the box taller, so he was able to hide three assistants behind the mirrors.

Once he completed building this illusion, he hired three female assistants. One of them was Mary Ford, a beautiful English girl who had a charming personality. Le Roy married her and gave her an exotic stage name: Mercedes Talma.

Here's a brief description of this Illusion: After spinning the box, showing the inside and outside of the box empty, Le Roy showed a yellow cloth empty on both sides. He stood in front of the box and raised the cloth. At this precise moment, one of the hinged mirrors would open and one of the female assistants wearing a yellow dress would come out, closing the mirror back, and crawled behind the yellow cloth.

Le Roy would lower the yellow cloth over the female assistant and create a round shape of something underneath the cloth. He would make magical gestures, and the cloth would move forward to the left side of the stage.

Le Roy repeated this with a blue cloth. He would have an assistant wearing a blue dress hiding under the blue cloth. Le Roy would make his magical gesture and the shape underneath the cloth moved forward and to the right side of the stage.

Le Roy would repeat the same move again with a red cloth. This time, an assistant in a red dress under the red cloth would magically move to center stage.

Basically, he just produced three objects from an empty box and then magically moved them onto the stage from left to right.

When Le Roy clapped his hands, the lady assistants stood up and threw the cloths away, magically revealed that all three ladies appeared wearing the same color dresses as the cloth covers from which they appeared.

Le Roy created what is known today as the “Bumps In The Night” Illusion. This illusion is widely used by many famous illusionists today.

He received great reviews from London newspapers. On the strength of these reviews, he got his first American tour, which started a trans-Atlantic voyage on a steamship.

Le Roy and his wife Talma traveled six days and arrived in New York in 1892. In the USA, they hired two female assistants, so they could perform the “Bumps In The Night” Illusion.

They began performing and traveling with the “Boston Howard Athenaeum Star Specialty Company”. After completing the American tour, Talma and Le Roy returned back to England.

In 1894, Le Roy introduced his second invention “The Flying Visit” at the London Pavilion.

Here’s a brief description: Le Roy dressed in very tightly fitted red pants, pointed red shoes, and a tightly fitted red jacket. Le Roy carefully waxed his goatee beard and mustache, to give it that pointed look which made him look almost devilish. To give it the final touch, he put on a red cap with two small horns.

As the curtains opened Le Roy walked forward. With a presenter’s voice he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to introduce you to our flying visit.”

As he was making the announcement, Talma walked on stage, took a bow, entered the center cabinet, and closed the front curtain so she was out of sight.

Le Roy then squeezed into another small box and pulled the front curtain closed. Almost immediately, the curtain opened, and Talma jumped out of that box giving the audience a second or two to observe the transposition. Then she looked around, as if she were looking for Le Roy. Then she yelled, "Where are you!?" Immediately from another box, Le Roy popped up, opened his arms, and said, "Here I am!"

What made the Illusion incredible was that the second box which Le Roy popped up from was high above on four legs, and at least 20 feet above the stage.

Talma ran over and began climbing up the ladder. As Le Roy dropped back into the box, Talma reached the top and pulled the curtain open. To everyone's surprise, Le Roy was no longer there. He had vanished.

Talma climbed down to the stage, looked around, and asked, "Where are you?"

Immediately from the back of the audience, Le Roy popped up and said, "Here I am!" and began running down the aisle touching the audience on his way back to the stage.

This magical act was so original and so amazing people had never seen anything like it. It got so many good reviews that it made them a box office demand and quite often sold-out shows.

At this point, I would like to point out that Servais Le Roy was the first magician that used doubles for transpositions. I normally don't like to expose illusions unless they are very common. In this case, credit is due for acknowledgment.

The act consisted of two doubles. A female that looked like Talma with the same hairdo and the same dress, and another person who looked like Le Roy with the same clothes and fake mustache with a beard.

At the opening of the show, when Talma walked on the stage and entered the center cabinet, it was actually the double who looked like Talma that entered the cabinet.

The person who jumped out of the box twenty feet above the stage was the double who looked and dressed like Le Roy. I'm sure you can figure out the rest.

It was during this time that T. Nelson Downs was America's most famous coin magician. He was working as a headliner in variety shows. He was billed as the "King of Coins".

Although Talma had small hands, she was practicing coin magic. She wanted to have a more permanent role on her husband's show. So, she asked her husband about the idea of her doing coin manipulations on stage.

Le Roy loved the idea. He immediately began teaching her coin magic and coin manipulations. Talma was a quick learner and very natural. She became very good at performing coin magic.

Talma was booked on August 1899 at the Oxford Music Hall. She was billed as the "Queen of Coins".

After Oxford Music Hall, Talma traveled throughout England, France, and Germany as the headliner the "Queen of Coins".

Both Le Roy and Talma were headliners. Le Roy realized that all he needed to get was one more headliner and they could form their own full evening show.

After a long search for his third headliner, Le Roy found Leon Bosco, a heavy-set bald comedy magician. Together they formed a new trio which they were billed as "Le Roy, Talma, & Bosco, The Monarchs of Magic".

The new show toured throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, the rest of Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, North America, and South America.

Along the way, Le Roy kept inventing new illusions, including "Stolen Jam".

Here's a brief description: An ancient Egyptian palanquin, which was originally used by Cleopatra the Queen of Egypt. A palanquin is a portable couch and is a covered vehicle without wheels (the cover protects the passenger from outside weather), mounted on two long poles which were carried at each end by four slaves. The palanquin was later used in China by the nobility, as well as in Japan, India, and Rome.

Le Roy would slide open the front curtain and the back curtain showing that the couch was empty and very thin. Underneath the couch was just the supporting legs. The audience could clearly see there were no passengers inside the palanquin.

After closing the curtains, Le Roy clapped his hands three times and opened the curtains. At that point, two beautiful ladies were sitting on the couch.

Another one of his inventions was the Costume Trunk. Here's a brief description:

Le Roy showed a trunk with drawers. He opened the drawers and pulled out a bunch of different costumes. He asked audience members to choose one of the costumes. He then placed the costumes back into the drawers and closed the drawers.

As soon as one of the audience members named a costume, at that instant, a female assistant popped up from the trunk wearing the costume that the audience member selected.

Another one of Le Roy's inventions was the Devil's Cage. Here's a brief description:

A tall cage was examined by the audience members, so that once the cage is locked the audience would know that no one could go in or out of the cage. Then the magician's assistant locked the cage and wrapped a bunch of ropes around the cage, to make it impossible for anyone to go in or out of the cage.

Le Roy would enter into a thin cabinet near the cage. The assistant would drop a cloth drape over the cage to cover it. Once the drape was lifted, the magician would be inside the cage. One more time the assistant would drop the drape again and raise it. At this point, the magician was now standing outside the cage.

Perhaps Le Roy's greatest invention was the Asrah.

Here's a brief description: Le Roy hypnotized Talma and caused her to float in mid-air. To prove that she was freely floating, Le Roy passed a hoop over her horizontal body. Then he caused her to rise higher into the air. In the blink of an eye Talma vanished into thin air.

This Illusion was one of Le Roy's greatest contributions to magicians.

By 1910, many magicians began copying his illusions. Le Roy did the next best thing. He purchased the City Magic Company in London and changed the name to "Servais Le Roy's Magic Company".

Le Roy began manufacturing his illusions and sold them to many famous magicians.

This was a smart move. By building beautiful looking original illusions and selling them to famous magicians, Le Roy put a stop to imitators, because their illusions were cheaply made and looked like homemade props that

could not attract the audience. As a result, this stopped the copycats, and Le Roy made good money from the sale of his illusions.

Le Roy hired a good craftsman and good painters to produce the illusions at his factory.

At the same time Le Roy continued touring with his company "Le Roy, Talma, & Bosco".

By 1914, the show got very large. With over twenty persons in the cast, it was a very large and extravagant show, which included lions.

After touring England and the rest of Europe, they sailed to Australia and New Zealand. From there, they sailed to the United States. From the United States they traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina. From Argentina, they traveled back to New York, USA.

By 1921, Le Roy was exhausted from traveling with a mega show with large illusions. He held all of his big illusions in a storage facility in Keansburg, New Jersey, USA.

Le Roy made a deal with Horace Goldin to use his "Buzzsaw Cutting A Lady In Half" illusion. Le Roy began touring with a much smaller show, using smaller props. Of course, Le Roy performed his impeccable sleight of hand productions with cards. His wife Talma did her coin manipulations and productions.

Their big finish to close the show was using Horace Goldin's "Sawing A Lady In Half" with the buzzsaw.

Rather than wearing stage costumes, Le Roy and his cast wore hospital uniforms to create the drama of cutting a person in half, as if they were performing an operation. Actually, his presentation of sawing a lady in half was much better than Horace Goldin's.

In October 1930, the 65-year-old great magician was struck by a speeding car near his home at Keansburg, New Jersey. Le Roy was badly hurt with a broken shinbone in his left leg, three broken ribs, and a fractured skull. After a long recovery Le Roy was never the same.

Servais Le Roy died on June 2, 1953, at his home in Keansburg New Jersey at the age of 88.

Chapter 22

Dante



Dante was a tall, handsome, and very charming master magician. He was probably the last of the great illusionists of his era.

Dante was born in Copenhagen Denmark, on October 3, 1882. His birth name was Harry Alvin Jansen.

Harry Alvin Jansen and his parents moved to the United States to Saint Paul, Minnesota when he was only 6 years old.

Two years later, Jansen watched his first magic show at age eight. Hermann The Great was performing in Saint Paul. This was when Jansen's fascination with magic began.

Jansen's parents moved to Chicago for better opportunities. Chicago was a major city with so many opportunities. It was here in Chicago that Jansen found magic shops, where he met local magicians and made friends with them. Along the way Jansen learned difficult sleight of hand moves and trick shots from his newfound friends.

With a great deal of practice, Jansen was soon able to do sophisticated sleight of hand magic.

It was in Chicago that young Jansen saw The Great Blackstone's show.

In 1899 Jansen was building his own illusions. By 1902, he had his own 50-minute magic show with both sleight of hand and illusions.

With his good looks and charming personality, Jansen managed to get jobs with variety shows traveling all over the Midwest United States.

In 1906 Jansen opened up his own magic-building company in Chicago. The following year, he took Charles Halton as a partner so that he could continue performing at Vaudeville shows while the manufacturing business continued.

In 1910 Jansen got offers from a Vaudeville agent to tour China and Australia.

After completing his contract Jansen returned back to the United States in December 1915.

Jansen continued performing with his magic and illusion show at Vaudeville shows until 1921.

Horace Goldin offered Jansen a traveling roadshow deal to perform with Horace Goldin's sawing a woman in two with a buzzsaw illusion. Not only did Jansen accept the deal, but he ended up building Horace Golden's buzzsaw illusion even better with improvements.

Jansen was traveling with Golden's roadshow for about a year when Howard Thurston made Jansen a much better offer than Horace Golden.

Howard Thurston gave Jansen the stage name "Dante" in 1923 with a very lavish show featuring most of Thurston's illusions and sent him out on a roadshow to cities where Thurston was not performing. Basically, Thurston wanted to cover the entire country by having roadshows at places where he had no desire to perform.

In the beginning, this arrangement worked out well for Dante. However, after four years Dante realized that he could make more money if he took the show overseas on a world tour.

So, Dante convinced Thurston that there could be a lot more money to be made if the show would go on a world tour.

Thurston agreed to this arrangement as long as Dante was not competing directly with Thurston.

Dante's show sailed to Puerto Rico. On June 28, 1927, the show opened in San Juan. From there the show sailed to South America. The first stop was Venezuela. Then the show sailed to British Guiana, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina.

From South America the show sailed to Russia. On December 15, 1928, Dante's show opened in Moscow. It was a big success. From there the show traveled to Leningrad.

From Russia Dante and his show traveled to Europe and played in the major cities, including Rome, Naples, Barcelona, Madrid, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, and Paris.

From Europe Dante's show traveled to India and played the major cities, such as Calcutta, Mumbai, and New Delhi. Then Dante's show continued traveling to Australia and New Zealand. From there, the show traveled to Singapore, Japan, and China.

Dante must have read "The Art of War" written by Sun Tzu, a Chinese general from 2,500 years ago. One of the chapters in Sun Tzu's book talks about "not bringing everything to the country you are going to invade. This would be costly and could tire out your soldiers. It's best to use the resources in the country that you are invading."

Dante utilized this idea by having props built in every country he visited. His biggest and most beautiful props, illusions, and backdrops were made in Japan and China.

In Japan he got the most beautiful silk backdrops printed, which were the finest technology at the time.

In China he bought the most beautiful Chinese costumes and had Chinese builders under his direction build his stage props and illusions in a Chinese style.

One of Dante's wishes was to play London, England. This desire became a reality. After the China trip, he sailed to England. On August 10, 1936, Dante's show opened at Alhambra Theatre in London with a new show title "The Sim Sala Bim Show". Dante grew a goatee beard, and with his well-groomed mustache he actually looked the part of a magician.

With the new silk backdrops and very colorful stage props this was a totally new and original show.

In addition to his big illusions, Dante made some changes that would suit the British audience. One good example was his backstage story-telling skit, which was different and had a surprise ending.

Here's a brief description: Dante supposedly showed the audience how the trick worked, as if the audience was watching the show from behind the stage.

Dante and his assistants stood on the stage facing the curtains with their backs facing the real audience.

The music began and the curtains started opening, revealing a very nice backdrop painting covering the entire stage. This backdrop painting showed a painted audience seated in theater chairs watching the magician perform.

On the stage there were two large boxes without tops or bottoms. The boxes were separated about three feet apart. Behind one of the boxes the real audience saw a female assistant crouching on her hands and knees hiding from the painted audience.

Dante took the other box and showed it empty to the painted audience. Then he placed this box right next to the box with the hidden female assistant. Dante walked from one side of the boxes to the other side of the boxes. This gave time for the hidden assistant to crawl from behind one box to the other box and open the spring-loaded door to enter the other box. Once that was done, Dante took that box and also showed it empty to the painted audience. Then Dante placed that box over the first box to nest both boxes together.

Since the real audience was watching as if they were watching the performance from the back of the stage, and they could see the girl hiding behind one box and crawling into the other box, the real audience knew the secret. However, the real surprise was when Dante lifted the boxes. Instead of the girl coming out of the box there was a heavy-set man with a mustache and beard. This was just the tip of the iceberg at the Sim Sala Bim Show.

Since I'm describing some of Dante's illusions, let me give you a few more so you can have the flavor of the Sim Sala Bim Show.

Dante showed a large top hat empty, which was sitting on a table that the audience could see through and underneath which also proved that no trap doors were being used. From that top hat Dante produced all kinds of objects, such as animals and beautiful female assistants.

Next was a large hot air balloon floating on the stage. Underneath the balloon was the passenger's basket. A few assistants climbed the rope ladder and into the basket. With a flash and a puff of smoke the basket fell down showing that the assistants disappeared. To the audience's surprise, the assistants reappeared from the back of the theater behind the audience and ran down the aisle back to the stage.

For his closing act you would see the most beautiful Chinese silks and Chinese scenery backdrops. Dante and the entire cast wore colorful Chinese costumes.

Wherever Dante touched with his magic wand water started spouting like a fountain. He would touch the shoes of his assistants and water spouted up from their shoes. Then he would touch somebody's finger and water would begin spouting up from that finger. Then he would touch a small vase, and water would begin spouting from the vase. Before you knew it, there was a large water fountain with at least 22 spouts of water shooting

high on the stage. This was the most unique closing for a magic act that an English audience had ever seen.

If you just close your eyes and imagine the orchestra music and the water fountains lit up by beautiful colored lights, then you will be able to imagine what a grand finale this was.

The Sim Sala Bim show was an instant hit. Every newspaper in London had a very good review of the Sim Sala Bim show.

Dante traveled throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland for the next three years.

From England the Sim Sala Bim show traveled to Belgium and then to Germany. Dante was performing in Berlin when he found out that Hitler was going to invade Poland. Using his common sense, Dante took his cast and crew, plus all of his illusions, across the border to Sweden. The very next day the border was closed. Lucky for him, Dante made it out in time.

In Sweden Dante disbanded the cast and crew, which were people from all different countries. He paid them their salaries plus bonuses and wished them all good luck.

Dante, his wife, three sons, and two daughters sailed back to the United States. Dante decided to make his home in California. He purchased a ranch at Northridge in the San Fernando Valley, where he built storage facilities for his illusions and a swimming pool for his family. He also totally renovated the inside of the main house.

After sixteen months of building and renovating the ranch Dante was back on the road with his show.

His first Sim Sala Bim show in the USA opened on September 9, 1940, in New York City at the Morosco Theatre. The critics totally loved the show.

The New York Times said Dante was a blend of Mephistopheles and Monte Woolley, “an echo of the Palace when the world was young and kind. Marvelous, in short.”

There were so many other good reviews from other newspapers that it's too much for me to report.

As an example of Dante's likable personality there were times he would flirt with the audience but never acted like a wise-guy or authoritarian figure.

When he was only 55 years old, he would joke with the audience after performing some amazing magic. He would say, “Not bad for an old bird of 70.”

After New York Dante traveled with his show across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

After the Second World War, he traveled back to Europe and continued with his amazing Sim Sala Bim show. Dante traveled and performed his amazing magic in five continents.

Dante returned back to the United States in 1949 and semi-retired. From time to time, he performed shows and appeared on television shows, but nothing like the Sim Sala Bim show.

Dante died in his sleep at his ranch on June 16, 1955. He was 73 years old.

Chapter 23

Cardini

One of the greatest manipulation acts in the world



Cardini was born on November 24, 1899 in Mumbles, Wales.

His birth name was Richard Valentine Pitchford.

During the First World War, Pitchford was drafted into the British Army and found himself in trenches in France against the Germans. In between trying not to get killed, he was practicing his card tricks. The weather was extremely cold. To prevent his fingers from freezing he wore gloves. It was during this time that he began practicing card manipulations while wearing gloves which later became his trademark.

After the war, Pitchford went back home to Wales and tried to work as a magician. Things didn't work out for him. So, he traveled to London and tried to make a living working as a magician. It was during this time that he changed his stage name to Professor Thomas. When that didn't work out, he changed his stage name to Valentine. When that didn't work out, he changed the name again, this time to Val Raymond. At this point, things

were getting better. He was getting jobs periodically, but it wasn't what he expected. He decided to get a job on a steam ship and traveled the world to possibly find a country that might be more accepting of a manipulation act.

Pitchford worked as a steward on a passenger steamship, and he traveled the world. Eventually the ship arrived at Sydney, Australia.

This is where he decided to try his luck again as Val Raymond. He began performing at small venues. A local agent liked his act and tried to get him engagements in larger venues. The agent suggested that since there was an Australian magician by the name of Raymond, it was best for Pitchford to change his name to something like Houdini which was catchier.

Since his card manipulations were his strength, he decided to change his name to Cardini.

In Sydney, Cardini got better jobs, and his act got much better. In addition to his card manipulations, he was producing and vanishing lit cigarettes, making thimbles appear and disappear on his fingertips, and then working with beautiful silks, vanishing a silk from one hand and making it appear in a wine glass, among many other beautiful magic manipulations.

From Australia Cardini went to Canada. After performing throughout Canada, he entered the United States from British Columbia. He began performing throughout the United States. In Chicago, he met his future wife, Swan Walker.

He then went to New York, USA and opened up at Regent theatre in 1926. Nine months later, he opened at the Palace on Broadway. This time he changed the show. He got rid of his normal stage clothes and wore an elegant tuxedo with tails, a cape, white gloves, bow tie, and a top hat. Cardini's act was billed as "The Suave Deceiver".

In New York Cardini also performed at Radio City Music Hall and the famous Copa Cabana.

He played the part of an English gentleman who had a little too much to drink. He walked tipsy, like a slightly drunk gentleman. When he produced or vanished objects, he would act surprised at his own magic. Each time he produced or vanish lit cigarettes, multiplied billiard balls, and produced and vanished thimbles, his body language and facial expressions as a drunken man was one of being surprised. Whenever magic happened it was fun to watch.

He wore a round monocle on his eye. The monocle was attached to a fancy string and the string was attached to his jacket near his breast pocket. Whenever he took the monocle off, he would place it into his jacket breast pocket.

During his act, he wore white gloves on his hands, and he would produce billiard balls between his fingers. Then he multiplied the balls or change the colors of the balls.

When Cardini acted surprised, he almost jerked back, and he would open his eye. The monocle would fall off, dangling on a string. This was perfect misdirection. Because when his hand went to pick up the monocle to bring it back to his eye, his other hand would steal the next load.

The act was brilliant. There was no need to speak. Therefore, during the entire act he did not speak. It was a silent act, and it was very powerful.

He got so many good newspaper reviews that he was an overnight success.

This new act was so well-planned and was high class. It was so classy that many magicians copied the act. As a result, this almost destroyed magic. Whenever a magician called up an agent and said he's a magician the agent replied, "Call me next week." All of the copycats were not anywhere near as good as Cardini.

Cardini traveled throughout the United States and performed for many celebrities including President Harry Truman.

When Cardini went to Europe there, too, he was a big success. In 1933, in London, Cardini performed for King George V.

After Cardini's world tour, he returned back to the USA and made the state of New York his home, He continued working mainly in the United States. He had an amazing career, almost half a century.

In 1945, he became the president of the Magicians' Guild. In 1957, at the age of 62, he appeared on one of the few magic television shows, including the Festival of Magic which was a network broadcast.

Cardini was a heavy smoker. He suffered from peptic ulcers and died from a stomach related condition.

On November 13, 1973, Cardini died in Gardiner, upstate New York.

Chapter 24

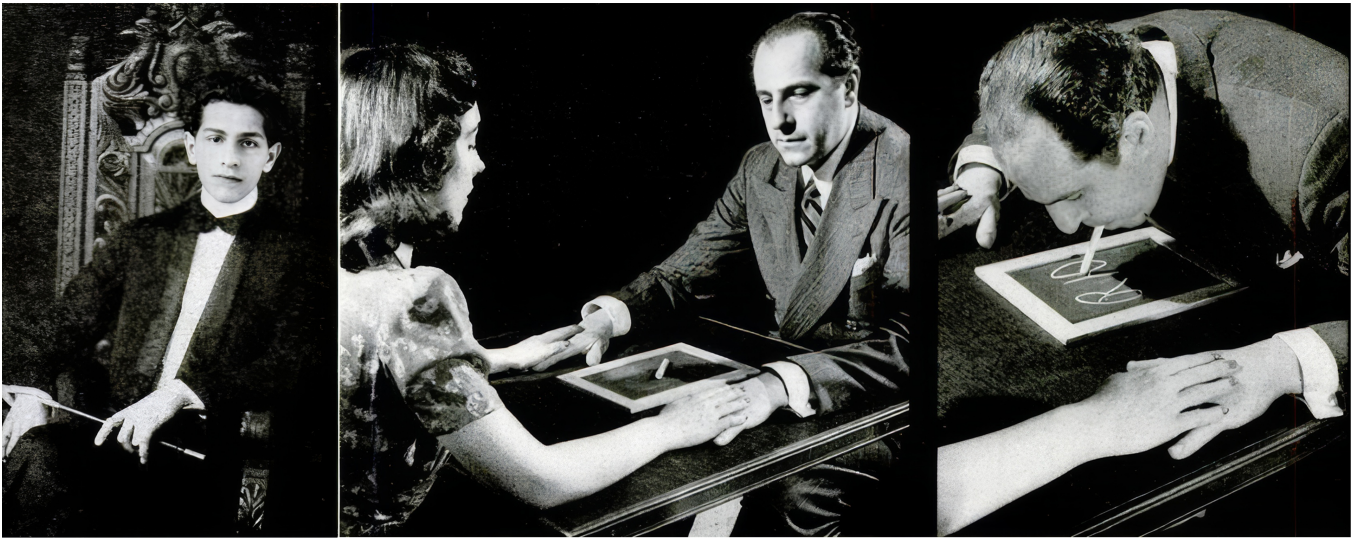
Randy Pitchford



On November 13, 2013, which was 40 years after Cardini's death, Cardini's grand-nephew, self-made millionaire Randy Pitchford financed the Cardini memorial which is located at the famous Magic Castle in Hollywood. Randy Pitchford purchased the Magic Castle property and the surrounding properties in Hollywood in 2022 to ensure that major developers would not get their hands onto these properties. He protected the Magic Castle from ever being torn down. The magic community owes Randy Pitchford a debt of gratitude for promoting and preserving the art of magic.

Chapter 25

Dunninger



Dunninger was “The greatest mentalist of the 20th century”.

He was one of the pioneer performers of magic on radio and television.

He was more famous than Houdini.

He had his own television weekly show on all three television networks: NBC, CBS, and ABC.

At the end of the 1940s, the era of great illusion shows was winding down. A new era of a single magician presenting a solo magic act was kicking into vogue. Dunninger was one of them.

Joseph Dunninger was born on April 28, 1892, in New York City to German immigrant parents.

At age 7, Dunninger’s parents took him to see his first magic show at the Academy of Music on 14th St. The magician was not just any magician. It

was Harry Keller with his grand illusions. The show made a big impact on young Dunninger. From that day on, he wanted to become a magician.

Dunninger soon discovered one of New York's oldest and biggest magic shops, the Martinka's Magic Shop, where he began buying magic tricks and magic books. Magic became his obsession.

By the way, Martinka & Company was founded in 1877 at 493 Sixth Avenue in New York City by two brothers Francis and Antonio Martinka, who immigrated to New York from Prague, Czechoslovakia. The brothers were skilled magic-makers.

Martinka's Magic Shop had three sections. The manufacturing and storage area was the largest. The showroom was filled with wall-to-wall display cases. This was where customers came in to purchase their magic tricks and apparatus. The meeting room was a back room where magicians got together; you had to be privileged to enter this area.

The Society of American Magicians was founded in 1902 in the meeting room of Martinka's Magic Shop.

After the brothers the company was owned by many owners, including Houdini and Al Flosso. It was the oldest continuously operating magic shop in the USA until 2004, when the shop closed its doors after 127 years.

Now back to Young Dunninger. His parents encouraged him by giving him weekly allowances so he could continue his newfound hobby.

At the magic shop Dunninger met many amateur and professional magicians and learned magic from them.

At 13 years old, young Dunninger got a job at John Wanamaker's Department store as a messenger and stockroom boy.

When Dunninger was 16 years old he began performing his sleight-of-hand magic act at the Lenox Club.

When he was 18 years of age Dunninger began getting better jobs at places like the Masonic Temple and other private lounges.

In 1917, Dunninger was doing three shows a night at Bond's Restaurant. He performed his sleight-of-hand with cards, coins, and billiard balls, as well as escaping from a regulation straitjacket.

Dunninger was eager to make a name for himself. He realized the opportunity when he volunteered for the American Red Cross to help raise money by performing magic shows in Hartford, CT. All the proceeds would go to the American Red Cross. For a publicity stunt, and to publicize the event, he offered to drive a car while blindfolded. This stunt got him lots of newspaper writeups.

The following year, Dunninger offered to help raise money for the New York Library Bond Committee by performing a magic show.

Once again, to create publicity, Dunninger drove a car while blindfolded in the Bronx.

In New York, Dunninger got twice as many newspaper write-ups and his photos were on the front page.

This was when Dunninger realized that mentalism was giving him more newspaper coverage than magic.

He began studying mentalism by learning all the secrets of the field.

By 1919, there had been many good mentalists for the past 200 years. That meant Dunninger had to do a lot of research.

In chapter 11 of this book, I described Robert Houdin in 1846 performing mentalism, especially the second-sight act with his son.

This was where spoken codes were the key to the act.

In chapter 16 of this book, I described David Devant performed mentalism in 1912 with a much-improved version of the second sight act without any spoken codes.

Dunninger had to do his homework, go back and study most of the successful mentalists, and improve most of the techniques that were used before him.

After a great deal of research Dunninger's persistence paid off.

Dunninger went from being a magician to becoming a mentalist. He understood the power of newspaper publicity and used it to his advantage.

In 1920, Dunninger claimed that after very long research he discovered tremendously important facts. He offered to demonstrate to the Press Club in Boston where there were twenty-six columnists. For 90 minutes, nonstop, Dunninger performed one of the best mentalism shows ever. He was able to tell most of the columnists some things about themselves that only their close friends or family would know. Dunninger's Q&A test was second to none.

Boston Post columnist, Newton Newkirk, wrote a column about the 90 minutes of demonstrations. Then he followed up by saying that mind-reading is a science. In the future when more people become proficient at it, telepathy will be a boon for mankind. Law-enforcement officers will know the plans of the criminals the moment the plans are made. Prospective buyers of goods will be able to tell immediately if a profiteer had marked up his goods by 500 percent or only 200 percent. Streetcar passengers on their way to work can share one another's thoughts without speaking.

Soon after the press club success, Dunninger began predicting the headlines of the newspapers. These got him tremendous amounts of write-ups.

Next, the newspapers announced that Joseph Dunninger, the mental expert, will be demonstrating mind-reading and mental telepathy experiments at the Boston Steinert Hall. It was a packed house.

The very next day the Boston American reported, "The brilliant young investigator gave the uncanniness performance I've ever seen in the city. His mental marvels would have convinced any skeptic that Dunninger was supernaturally endowed." Dunninger admitted that "the phenomena are based upon simple scientific facts."

Basically, Dunninger was promoting the idea that what he was doing was just scientific facts. Quite often when you give people some convincing explanation of how things are working, it's easier to get them to go along with you.

It is easier to get those people who are willing to believe to agree with you by giving them scientific explanations.

Dunninger promoted his shows as research experiments. Quite often he said, "I'm not sure if it's going to work. This is not one hundred percent guaranteed, but let's give it a try."

Dunninger was only 29 years old, well-established, and on his way to become the greatest mentalist.

Dunninger made an effort to join the Masonic Temple, Kiwanis Club, and other fraternal organizations, where he could meet influential people.

Quite often Dunninger amazed his new friends with his mentalism.

It was in one of these meetings that he met a college professor from Columbia University and offered to write a telepathy course, breaking it down to scholarly text explaining his theory of the mind. This was welcomed by the university. It made great headlines for the newspapers.

In New York Dunninger made even greater headlines. In one of the headlines, Dunninger would read a judge's mind. This was regarding Dunninger parking his car at the New York theater district. He left it there overnight and then got a parking ticket in order to show up at the traffic court.

The traffic court judge, Andrew Mackey, recognized Dunninger and asked him if he knew what the judge was thinking about.

Dunninger replied, "Yes, your honor. You are thinking I should not park my car at the theater district, and I should not leave it there overnight."

The judge said, "Correct. Perhaps you can tell me the sentence I am about to give you."

Dunninger replied, "Yes, your honor. It is five dollars or two days in jail."

The judge said, "You are right again. The great mentalist will pay the five-dollar fine."

With all that publicity Dunninger was performing his amazing mentalism at the homes of New York's wealthiest and most elite families. Just to name a few, there was the mayor of New York City, John F. Hylan, the Vanderbilts, the Astors, Tiffanys, the Wanamaker family visiting New York, the Prince of Wales, President Warren G. Harding, and former president Theodore Roosevelt.

This is just for my mentalist friends. Yes, Dunninger was using the Q&A test. From hundreds of 3 inch by 3-inch pieces of papers with questions written by the audience. Dunninger only took about seven or eight papers which were folded into small pieces and destroyed by fire, or by placing them into one large envelope and have someone step on the envelope. When Dunninger was able to tell what each paper contained and answered the questions of those who wrote the papers, each person stood up and acknowledged that the mentalist was correct.

Dunninger also used muscle-reading. Where he'd find a hidden object. One of the audience members would be holding onto his arm and send Dunninger mental messages for him to be able to find the hidden item.

He also made good use of swami gimmicks, envelopes, and notebooks. Of course, there were many other techniques and objects that he used.

In April 1926, Dunninger signed a very lucrative contract with Vaudeville as the headliner "The Amazing Dunninger".

In July 1929, Dunninger entered into an agreement with WJZ radio from New York. He began broadcasting his "Ghost Hours" radio show. Unfortunately, the audience didn't find it interesting.

In as much as the radio station was going to cancel the show, Dunninger convinced the radio station manager to cut back his salary and let him continue because the show would pick up.

Dunninger's selfish interest was to keep his name on the radio and newspapers.

The show never caught on. However, Dunninger learned a great deal of what not to do so that he would be ready for another radio station offer.

The next radio station offer came in 1943 with KYW Radio Station out of Philadelphia. This time Dunninger had a new format of having an audience in the broadcast room, very similar to his shows. The home audience could listen to the studio audience telling Dunninger that he was able to read their minds.

The show was an instant hit.

The National Broadcasting Company offered Dunninger a very lucrative contract. Dunninger moved the show to the NBC Radio station and began

broadcasting Sunday evenings at 6:30 PM. The show was being broadcast all over the country from New York all the way to California.

The radio show was so successful that the March issue of Life Magazine in 1944 devoted eight pages to Dunninger proclaiming that he's as famous as Houdini.

Some of the magicians were out to destroy Dunninger's reputation. They claimed that Dunninger was defrauding the public by not telling the public that he was doing tricks.

Here's my opinion. I don't remember any magician ever telling his audience that he's doing a double lift when he's performing the Ambitious Card. If the magician were to tell his audience that he's doing a double lift the magic would be gone.

Whenever a magician becomes successful there will always be a few magicians who will go out of their way to debunk him or to spread rumors to defame the famous person. I believe they do this for their ten seconds of fame. I'm sharing my thoughts with you because this has happened to so many magicians, and it has happened to Dunninger.

At one of Dunninger's radio shows, Richard Himber, a magician who was the inventor of the Himber Wallet, managed to get into the audience at the radio station. During Dunninger's performance Richard Himber jumped up and with a loud voice said, "I bet you cannot read my mind!"

Dunninger replied, "I am wagering one thousand dollars if the heckler in the audience can prove that he HAS a mind!"

One of Dunninger's gifts was being able to come up with the right answers in difficult moments and win over the audience.

By 1948 Dunninger was one of the very few famous celebrities that had his own television series on all three major television networks.

In those days even for celebrities trying to get onto NBC, ABC, or CBS television networks it was almost impossible. Yet,

Dunninger had his own weekly television show on these networks. This goes to show you how famous he was.

Dunninger continued broadcasting his weekly television show on WPIX New York television station until December 1967. I met Dunninger in 1968. I was introduced to him by Louis Tannen. At first Dunninger had no intention of becoming friends with me. Later on, at one of our luncheons, Dunninger told me how much he disliked what the magicians did to him in trying to destroy his career. As a result, he was careful with whom he made friends.

By 1969, old age and illness caused Dunninger to retire.

On March 9, 1975, Joseph Dunninger died in Cliffside Park, New Jersey. He was 82 years old.

Chapter 26

Richiardi Jr.



Richiardi Jr. was probably the most influential magician of the 20th century.

He was born November 24, 1923, in Peru.

His birth name was Aldo Izquierdo Colosi.

As a teenager, Richiardi began performing as an assistant to his father, but had no intention of becoming the third-generation magician in his family. So, he followed his dream of becoming a singer and dancer.

His father was born in Peru in 1895 and died in the USA of a rare immune disease in 1937. He was a magician and a ventriloquist known as the great Richiardi.

His mother was a flamenco dancer and worked with her husband as the female assistant.

His grandfather was a magician who also used the name Richiardi.

Although Richiardi had no intention of becoming a magician, he was pressured by the family and the public to follow in his grandfather's and

father's footsteps. So, in the 1940s he adopted the name "Richiardi Jr" and began his magical career.

His illusions and magical apparatus were not new or original. Most of them were over a hundred years old yet he performed all of them better than anyone else.

Richiardi dressed like a matador in a bull fighting arena and his movements were more like a flamenco dancer.

Richiardi traveled around the world with the most amazing magic show. People couldn't get enough of it. He appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show on network television more than any other magician. To be exact, he performed on 24 different episodes.

In 1949 Time Magazine wrote that Richiardi was one of the top-earning stage shows in New York.

In the 1970s he started his own television show "Chamber of Horrors" which was introduced and narrated by famous Hollywood actor Vincent Price.

Richiardi was a charismatic and electrifying performer. So many magicians were influenced by him.

David Copperfield wrote, "Richiardi was one of the finest magicians I have ever seen."

Criss Angel said on The Late Show with Greg Ferguson, "Richardi was one of my greatest influences."

Doug Henning once told me he got into magic when he saw Richiardi on The Ed Sullivan Show and wanted to become a magician after that.

It is fair to say that Richiardi influenced David Copperfield, Doug Henning, and Criss Angel to become original and different from other magicians.

I saw Richiardi's show numerous times and never got tired of watching him. I will now describe some of his performances.

His broom suspension Illusion was invented in 1846 by French Magician Robert Houdin. Rather than performing the broom suspension illusion in a normal fashion Richiardi created a skit.

Here is the brief description of the broom suspension: Richiardi walked on the stage with his female assistant, which was his daughter Rina, as if they were going to rehearse. Rina was carrying a small foot stool. When Richiardi saw two stage assistants sweeping the stage floor with brooms he was surprised to see them on the stage. They were not supposed to be there. He chased them off the stage only for them to come back within seconds. This time the assistants were dancing with the brooms and pretending to sweep the floors.

Rena placed the stool on the floor. Richiardi grabbed one of the brooms and placed the edge of the broom handle on the floor near the stool. Rena reached over and held onto the broom stick handle so it wouldn't fall down. Richiardi got the other broom and placed it on the other side of the stool. The edge of the handle was on the floor with the broom side up. The two male assistants helped the female assistant climb up on the stool where she rested her armpits over the tops of the broom on each side of the stool.

This was where the showmanship came into the scene. Richiardi began moving like a flamenco dancer around the female assistant. At one point he bent down and took away the stool from underneath Rena. He didn't just hand the stool to his assistants. He threw it over his shoulder and his assistant was ready to catch the stool.

She was hanging in between the two brooms. Basically, her armpits were over the brooms and her hands were holding the broom sticks. She was balancing on the brooms. Richiardi moved gracefully and slowly took

away one of the brooms from underneath her armpit. She was now hanging on one broom. Richiardi tossed the broom to one of the assistants to catch. Then Richiardi reached down and took her feet and began raising her body sideways until she was 90 degrees horizontal and leaning against the broom. Richiardi, before letting her feet go, kept his index finger directly under her feet supporting her entire body. Then he slowly removed his finger away. She was suspended on the edge of the broom.

Richiardi moved gracefully, as if he were dancing around her, waving his hands, showing that there were no strings attached, and that she was suspended on the tip of the broom. As the music began to fade Richiardi brought her down. As soon as her feet touched the ground Richiardi removed the broom from underneath her armpit. Together they held hands and walked forward to take a bow for the cheering audience.

His vanishing lady from the chair was invented in 1878 by French magician, Buatier de Kolta. Here's a brief description:

Richiardi showed a simple chair to the audience and invited Rena to sit on the chair. He took a large cloth and put it around

his shoulders as if he were protecting himself from the rain. He very gracefully moved forward and covered Rena with the cloth from head to toe.

At this time two male assistants pushed onto the stage a platform on casters. On the platform there was a trunk. The assistants spun the platform around, showing the audience that they can see right through and underneath the platform.

Richiardi looked at the audience and said, "She wants to see you one more time." He walked over to the chair and raised the cloth all the way up to Rena's forehead. At this point, Rena waved her hand to audience and yelled, "Yooahoo!" Richiardi covered Rena with the cloth one last time. He

walked over to the trunk, opened the lid, and tilted the trunk forward to show the trunk empty. With a cane he banged into the trunk all over showing there were no mirrors and that the trunk was completely empty.

Richiardi turned to Rena and said, "Rena, move your hands!" She did. Underneath the cloth Rena was moving her hands. Richiardi walked over to the cloth and yanked it away. Rena vanished instantly. The two male assistants opened the trunk door and Rena appeared in the trunk.

Cutting the Lady in Half with the electric buzz saw was his main attraction. This illusion was invented in 1931 by American magician, Horace Goldin.

Here's a brief description of the Buzz Saw Illusion:

Richiardi first explained to the audience, "The next illusion I'm about to perform will be very graphic, cutting a woman in half. If anyone in the audience is squeamish, please leave the theater."

Richiardi and his assistants were dressed up with white hospital lab coats. Rena was dressed up in a light blue hospital gown as if she were going for an operation. At the back of the stage and on the floors were white papers covering the floors to soak up any blood.

Richiardi took out a white handkerchief as if it were soft and wet with chloroform. He pressed the handkerchief on Rena's face, and she went into a deep sleep. The assistants lifted her up and laid her on the bench underneath the electric buzz saw. The switch was turned on and the saw began spinning. As Richiardi began cutting her blood started shooting out of her. As he cut deeper with the buzz saw the audience saw more blood, guts, and intestines being caught on the blade; some pieces shot out to the back wall and floors where the white papers on the floors collected the blood and guts. It looked horrifying.

Most of the audience was grimacing. Their faces were in disbelief. After the cutting was completed, unlike other magicians, Richiardi did not restore the lady back to life.

Then Richiardi invited the audience to lineup and come up to the stage where they walked by the lady who was cut in half. The audience walked by her and then walked back to their seats.

The Buzz Saw Illusion was the last act in the show. At the end of the illusion Richiardi told the audience that he could not afford to cut a lady in half at every show and that the whole thing was an illusion.

Then he told the audience, "You have to admit. The illusion was well done." It never failed and always got tremendous applause from his audience.

In fact, every piece of magic that Richiardi performed had his own style. The body language, facial expressions, smiling at the right moment, raising his index finger, and touching underneath his right eye, then pointing his finger to the object almost as if he were saying "Look at that object. I am about to do magic with that object."

I met Richiardi in 1978 in New York at The Village Gate. The show was billed as "The Incredible World of Magic and Illusion." Soon after, we became friends. At one of our lunches, I said to him, "Aldo, why do you use blood and guts during the Buzz Saw?" He looked me in the eye and said, "Americans love blood." I was taken aback. I said, "What makes you think so?" He said, "You're driving your car down the expressway. Traffic slows down. Hardly any cars are moving. The traffic is bumper-to-bumper. As the traffic moves slowly you come to a point where you see a car accident. Everybody slows down to see the blood."

I think about Richiardi every time I'm in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Sure enough, just before traffic starts moving again, I see a car accident. People

slow down to see the blood. After the cars pass the accident the traffic begins moving normally again.

Richiardi was diabetic. In 1985, he was performing in the Bahamas at the casino. Richiardi accidentally dropped the stool onto his foot. The next day he realized that his foot bruised black and blue. He didn't think much of it. He felt that it would get better by itself. (This is extremely dangerous with diabetic people. The feet quite often will not heal because of the blood flow going all the way to the feet and pumping back to the heart. It makes it difficult for smooth blood flow to any damage of the foot which can be fatal to diabetic people.)

The black and blue bruises on his feet did not get better. They got worse and worse. Within days his black and blue bruises turned into gangrene which was moving up his leg. He went to the hospital in the Bahamas. The local doctors told him that they had to amputate his foot.

Richiardi could not accept this. He felt that if he could fly back to Peru, where most of the doctors were his friends, then they would be able to save his foot. So, he closed the show and took a flight from the Bahamas to Miami. In the Miami airport there was a seven hour delay. Eventually, he boarded the flight to Lima, Peru. During this

long journey the gangrene traveled up to his knee.

Richiardi's doctor friends in Lima, Peru cried. They were trying to explain to Richiardi that there was no chance of saving the leg. After some very tough decision-making Richiardi agreed to the amputation. The doctors rushed him to the operation room and his leg was amputated above the knee. Unfortunately, the wound wasn't healing and turned gangrene again. After several surgeries the doctors could not save him.

Richiardi Jr. died on September 6, 1985 at the age of 62.

Chapter 27

Mark Wilson



Mark Wilson reintroduced large illusions to his generation.

Mark Wilson was born on April 11, 1929 in Manhattan, New York City. His birth name was James Mark Wilson.

His television show "The Magic Land of Allakazam" aired from 1960 to 1964.

Mark Wilson's father was a salesman who traveled regularly moving from city to city. As a result, young Mark Wilson spent most of his youth traveling with his parents; sometimes renting homes, other times staying in hotels.

Mark was eight years old and staying with his parents in a hotel in Indianapolis. It was in this hotel that Mark Wilson saw Tommy Martin performing his magic show. It was at this time that Mark Wilson got bitten by the magic bug and magic became his life.

His parents eventually settled down in Dallas, Texas. Very soon after Mark Wilson found the Douglas Magick Land Magic Shop. Mark began visiting periodically and eventually got a job working at the magic shop. Actually, there was no better way to learn than working in the magic shop.

As he got better and better, demonstrating the magic tricks to customers, he saw an opportunity to work as a magician. Sometimes customers would come in looking for a magician for a birthday party. Mark was the perfect choice. From being a birthday party magician he continued getting better jobs, such as working at weddings or other events.

His parents insisted that he go to business school. This way Mark could become a salesman like his father.

So, Mark Wilson attended the School of Business at Southern Methodist University where he majored in marketing. This decision proved to be very fruitful later in his career.

In 1955, using his marketing skills, he convinced the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company to sponsor his television show at a local television station in Houston, Texas.

In early 1960, when videotaping became a popular format for television broadcasting, Mark Wilson began videotaping his new show "The Magic Land of Alakazam". Mark Wilson also managed to convince Kellogg's to sponsor the show. His father's salesmanship certainly rubbed off on him.

The first episode aired in the first week of October 1960 on CBS television.

The show was designed for children's hours. As a result, the show was in syndication every Saturday morning on CBS network for the next four years. His wife, Nani Darnel, was his main assistant.

Producing a weekly show is not an easy task. Mark hired Bev Bergeron as a writer to write the show. Bev did an incredible job in writing the show as well as creating a new character "Rebo the Clown." Guess who played the Rebo the Clown? Yes, it was Bev Bergeron.

As the show began picking up popularity new writers were brought into the production. Bobby Towner, Leo Behnke, Bobby Fenton, Lin Searles, and Johnny Daniel were the creative writers. Carl Owen was building the illusions.

In the first season they had 39 episodes. Which was very impressive.

For the second season CBS brought in more creative people including Francis Martineau and Johnny Gaughan.

In 1962 The Magic Land of Alakazam moved from the CBS television network to the ABC television network and continued running on Saturday mornings.

In 1965 The Magic Land of Alakazam left the ABC television network and began syndicating internationally.

In between videotaping for weekly television Mark Wilson, Nani Darnel, and Bev Bergeron managed to find time to squeeze in public appearances at state fairs and other television shows.

Mark Wilson convinced General Cigar Corporation to sponsor his Magic Show "Hall of Magic" at the New York World's Fair in 1964 and 1965.

Mark Wilson extended his creative team to include the very talented Don Wayne. Mark began packaging shows to theme parks such as Six Flags and many more.

Mark Wilson and his talented team assisted and provided magic to so many television shows, too. Just to name a few: The Magician, Circus of The Stars, Hollywood Place, The \$6 Million Man, The Incredible Hulk, and Columbo.

In 1977 I was creating all of the magic and special effects for the Burger King commercials featuring The Marvelous Magical Burger King.

Mark Wilson was providing, hiring and training people to play The Marvelous Magical Burger King as well as managing the live Burger King shows across the United States. At the peak of this campaign, we had over 100 Marvelous Magical Burger King characters. These guys were actors as well as magicians. They had to be trained to the script and only perform selected magic for children at Burger King restaurants and children's hospitals as well as many other places. Mark Wilson was able to orchestrate all of this. It was not an easy task.

The Burger King campaign came to an end in 1981 when Burger King corporation decided to take the money from the children's commercial budget and spend it towards the adult commercials budget to go head-to-head with the newcomer restaurant Wendy's. I was glad when the campaign came to an end. Creating new television commercials and working around the clock for five years was taking a toll on me. I was burned out.

In 1981 Mark Wilson began syndicating his new television show “The Magic of Mark Wilson”. As always, his wife Nani Darnel was beside him along with a new addition to the show, their youngest son Greg Wilson.

Mark Wilson’s incredible 360-page book “Mark Wilson’s Complete Course in Magic” is a testament to share magic with the next generation. I believe the book is still in publication. I highly recommend it.

Without a doubt, Mark Wilson brought back the grand illusions to the American audiences through his television shows and his live shows.

It is fair to say that he influenced the next generation of magicians.

Mark Wilson died on January 19, 2021, in Los Angeles, California.

He was 91 years old.

Chapter 28

Greg Wilson

(in progress)

Chapter 29

T. Nelson Downs

The Greatest Coin Manipulator



Thomas Nelson Downs was born on March 16, 1867 in Marshalltown, Iowa.

Downs got interested in magic at a very young age. His primary interest was cards and coins.

By age 12 he was as good as anybody at coin and card manipulations.

At age 16 Downs got a job working as a railroad telegraph operator. This was a perfect job for him. Since there was free time in between telegraphs he was able to practice many hours on the job.

In September 1895 Downs quit his daytime job from the railroad telegraph office, went out on the road and began working as a magician. Very soon he gave up the card magic and concentrated one hundred percent on coin magic. He soon became known as the "King of Coins".

By 1898 he was a headliner at Vaudeville shows. One of his trademarks was his "Miser's Dream." To execute this amazing trick, he managed to palm 50 coins and seemingly keep producing coins from thin air dropping them into a metal bucket.

His ability to vanish borrowed coins and make them reappear somewhere else or walking into the audience and keep producing coins from under their chins and from thin air was an instant hit. The audiences couldn't get enough of it.

Downs began performing at famous places like Tony Pastor's Theatre in New York and Londo's Palace in London, England to sold-out audiences.

He was in demand to perform at royal family gatherings as well as the wealthiest families' homes and parties.

Downs made enough money to live ten lifetimes. At the age of 42 he went back home to Marshalltown, Iowa. In 1912 he opened up a Vaudeville

theatre on Main Street. He continued performing and inviting some of the best acts to perform for him at his theater.

Downs purchased a big, beautiful home at 7 S. 3rd Ave. Some of the greatest magicians at the time came to visit him. Just to name a few: Harry Houdini, Dai Vernon, and Chung Ling Soo.

In 1937 Downs suffered a stroke which paralyzed his left side. He died on September 11, 1938 in his hometown of Marshalltown Iowa. He was 71 years old.

He was by far the greatest coin magic manipulator. His book "Modern Coin Magic" is one of the best coin magic books ever published. I believe it's still in publication. I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to learn coin magic.

Chapter 30

Channing Pollock

The Revolutionary of Dove Magic



Channing Pollock was born on August 16, 1926, In Sacramento, California.

Channing, unlike most magicians, was not interested in magic in his early years.

Channing got interested in magic in his twenties. He wanted to buy a magic book so he could learn from it. He got lucky. The first book he purchased was a classic magic teaching book "Professor Hoffman's Modern Magic."

During the Second World War, he served in the United States Navy. After the war Channing used the G.I. bill to study magic at the Chavez School of Magic in La Verne, California. In 1952, Channing graduated from the Chavez Magic School but continued working there as a teacher.

After thousands of hours of learning and teaching magic and card manipulations, Channing and his first wife, Naomi Phelps (a preacher's daughter), began working on an act so they could go out and perform together. Naomi's contribution to the act was priceless.

In addition to card productions, they began to work with doves and tried to routine it into a classy act. Although doves and cards were used by hundreds of magicians throughout the centuries, Channing's act was new, original, and very classy.

Channing and Naomi had to borrow money from friends and relatives to purchase an expensive tuxedo and a classy evening dress for Naomi. They began performing at all kinds of venues on the West Coast. They performed just about anywhere they could get a job including rundown places.

In 1954, their luck changed when they were invited to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. They knew that millions of people would be watching including some show buyers.

That night watching the Ed Sullivan television show people across America witnessed the six foot-four inch extremely handsome well-dressed young man performing an elegant electrifying magic act that had never been seen before.

Here's a brief description:

Channing began his dove productions by taking a silk handkerchief, showing it empty, and gracefully squeezing a dove from it. Naomi walked over with a magic wand on which the dove would perch as she began to walk away. Channing plucked a small silk scarf from her dress. She took the dove to the standby cage and placed the dove into the cage. The whole thing looked seamless and graceful. As she placed the dove into the cage, Channing used the silk that he just got from her to produce another dove. He continued this with several other doves. Then he produced two doves, one in each hand.

As Naomi took the doves to the cage, Channing switched gears to card productions. He began producing one single card at a time on his fingertips and dropped them into a silk top hat. All of this was done very gracefully. There were no suspicious or quick moves.

Then Channing began producing entire fans of cards. He plucked the cards from mid-air and as soon as he threw them into the top hat another fan of cards appeared at his fingertips.

To finish the card productions, for the finale, he began producing fans of cards in both hands and threw them into the top hat. At this moment Naomi brought him one very active dove wiggling its wings. Without any suspicious or quick moves Channing gracefully threw the dove into mid-air only to change the dove into a white silk handkerchief.

By the time the silk slowly floated into his hand Naomi carried over the cage with six doves inside it. Channing covered the cage with a black

velvet cloth. He picked up the cage and walked forward. Then he flicked the cloth, and to everyone's surprise, both the cage and the doves had completely disappeared.

This act was the most beautiful and gracefully done. The next day everyone was talking about it.

(By the way, you can watch this video from the Ed Sullivan Show on YouTube. Just search for Channing Pollock on Ed Sullivan.)

After the Ed Sullivan Show they became a phenomenal success. There was great demand for their act. They began working in prestigious theaters such as the London Palladium, and prestigious nightclubs all over the world. They also performed for the Queen of England, Prince Rainier & Princess Grace Kelly, as well as President Eisenhower in the White House.

Channing Pollock was extremely handsome. When he entered a restaurant, women almost snapped their neck trying to turn around to look at him.

Channing was soon discovered by the movie industry and became a movie star.

These are some of his movies:

European Nights (1958)

The Red Sheik (1962)

Musketeers of The Sea (1962)

Judex (1963)

Rocambole (1963)

He also appeared on many television shows such as:

The Great Adventure (1964)

The Rogues (1965)

Daniel Boone (1966)

Bonanza (1971)

In 1959, Naomi and Channing got divorced. Naomi got custody of their son, Russell.

On January 13, 1960, Channing got married to his second wife,

Josephine (Jozy) Bolton from England. Soon she became his assistant and they began performing together. That marriage ended in 1968.

In January 1969, Channing got married to his third wife, Corinne Shoong (Cori). Corinne's previous husband was a very wealthy Hollywood plastic surgeon. When he died, he left millions of dollars to Corrinne.

Channing Pollock retired from show business in 1969, right after he got married to Cori. They purchased a beautiful home with lots of land on California's Pacific Coast with a 180-degree view overlooking the Pacific Ocean. They lived happily thereafter.

Channing Pollock died on March 18, 2006, in Las Vegas, Nevada. He was 79 years old. The cause of death was cancer.

Chapter 31

David Berglas

The International Man of Mystery



David Berglas was born on July 30, 1926, in Berlin, Germany. His birth name was David Gert Heinz Berglas.

His father Alfred Berglas ran the family textile business which had factories throughout Europe. In order to manage the business properly his parents had to move periodically to different countries. As a result, David Berglas was educated in six different countries.

David Berglas' first encounter with magic was through his Uncle Alex. A businessman who knew more law than most lawyers and more medicine than average doctors. Uncle Alex was also an amateur magician who knew more magic than magicians.

David Berglas recalled his Uncle Alex's sleight of hand and remembered an animated ventriloquist's dummy called Micky.

Uncle Alex was the type of uncle every boy wished to have. His magical influence on David Berglas was profound.

By 1938, Nazism took hold in Germany. Life for Jewish families became difficult. The Berglas family left Germany for the last time dispersing to different parts of Europe. David's mother, Emmy, took his younger sister, Gaby, to Holland. His older sister, Ellen-Ruth, went to Switzerland. While an eleven-year-old David Berglas travelled by himself to England. At the time he didn't speak a word of English.

David Berglas was met at Victoria Station in London by a business friend of his father. The friend took David to a co-educational school in Surrey called Frensham Heights where David became a boarder. David quickly learned English and spent the next four years at Frensham.

It was some time before the family could get together again to settle in London. Here David attended University Tutorial College, an affiliate of Cambridge University.

After graduation David Berglas joined the British Royal Air Force and got his training but was not allowed to fly because of his age.

Then he learned that American Army Intelligence wanted to employ people who had military training and could speak at least two languages, including German.

David Berglas passed the physical and intelligence tests and was soon on his way to Poissy in France. He got the job with American Army Intelligence.

After the war David Berglas was expected to go into the family business. He attended Bradford Technical College in Yorkshire to study textiles. This was where his father's textile factory was located.

Near the textile factory was Alan Milan's Magic Shop that David Berglas occasionally visited. He was then invited to a meeting of the Bradford Magical Society which would change his life. At the meeting David Berglas met Ken Brooke. Ken was entertaining everyone with the latest miracles in magic. Right there and then David Berglas fell under Ken Brooke's spell. David Berglas knew that he wanted to spend his life performing magic. He became friends with Ken Brooke who soon became David Berglas' mentor. David Berglas in his writings credited Ken Brooke as the reason why he got into magic.

By the way, for my readers, I met Ken Brooke in 1962 in London at Harry Stanley's magic shop. It was known as Unique Magic Studio. Ken Brooke had a similar effect on me. He was the most amazing demonstrator at magic shops that I have ever seen. The only other person today that compares to Ken Brooke would be Magick Balay. He has his own magic shop in New York City called "Don't Blink Magic Shop".

At this point, David Berglas had less interest in textiles and much more interest in magic, much to his father's disappointment. David Berglas attended all the magic meetings that he could including the Zodiac Magical Society, the Unique Magicians Club, the Institute of Magicians, and the London Society of Magicians. David also watched all the magic shows that he could.

Before entering magic as a professional David Berglas worked as a physical fitness instructor at the Polytechnic in Regent Street as well as taking classes in psychotherapy at Tavistock Clinic.

In 1949, a cousin of David Berglas' father from South Africa invited David to visit Cape Town, South Africa. On the cruise ship heading to South Africa David Berglas had a captive audience for two weeks. He performed for everyone on the ship. He gave free lectures on hypnosis which he learned from the Tavistock Clinic.

When David Berglas arrived in South Africa he got his first taste of press reviews. They were interviewing him regarding his hypnotism adventures on the ship. On the strength of the press reviews, David began performing professionally as a hypnotist in Cape Town.

Publicizing the event was difficult because the editor of one of the newspapers, "The Cape Argus", believed that hypnotism was fake. As a result, David Berglas offered a personal hypnotism demonstration to the editor. It was during this demonstration that David Berglas hypnotized the editor and had him sign ownership of The Cape Argus newspaper to David Berglas. When the editor woke up, David Berglas asked politely for the editor to leave the building. The editor wondered why he would have to leave his own building. That's when David Berglas asked him to look at the signed agreement. It showed that David Berglas is the new owner. The editor was absolutely amazed. This event gave David Berglas better newspaper reviews. This was the beginning of a career that would span decades.

In addition to his hypnotism show, David Berglas performed magic including vanishing a lit cigarette in a puff of smoke, the Devano rising cards, and color-changing knives.

In 1950, David Berglas returned to England. Using the money he made in South Africa, David Berglas created an act called "All in a Flash". It had its debut at The Magic Circle. It was an elaborate act with a pretty

blonde assistant and specially designed costumes and props; all decorated in black and silver. A carpet on the stage hid a complex electrical circuit which was used to activate flash boxes and special props.

The members of the Magic Circle were very impressed with his efforts to create an original act that involved elaborate wiring and special effects techniques. However, David Berglas knew better than to proceed with this act because of how complicated it was to set up.

David Berglas spent much of his time in London performing in local night-clubs during the early 1950's. He was a regular at the "Jack of Club", which was run by former American actor and amateur magician Harry Green. David Berglas and his close-up magic were very popular with the guests.

A lot of celebrities were coming to the Jack of Club. One evening, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis came to the club. Dean Martin was very impressed with David Berglas' performance. At the time, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were performing at the London Palladium.

Dean Martin was a very passionate performer. He believed every good artist should have a chance to make it. He helped many performing artists become famous, including Tony Bennett.

Dean Martin introduced David Berglas to a big-time show agent, Burton Brown. David Berglas impressed the agent with his magic. Burton Brown had David Berglas perform in one of the most famous clubs in London, "The Windmill Theatre". It was London's most notorious theatre, featuring naked ladies. Between the nude acts there were comedians and variety acts. David Berglas had to perform six shows a day, six days a week. It was a hard job, but David Berglas felt this was a good experience to iron out his routines and work on new magical routines.

David Berglas' act consisted of cigarette manipulations, the vanishing cane, and a clever stunt where he would strike a match lighting it on a

match box that was thrown by the audience. His big finish was vanishing liquid in a newspaper.

Here's a brief description:

David Berglas would pour Coca-Cola into a folded newspaper. He then tore the newspaper apart page by page and handed pieces to the audience until only one page remained. He then tore that piece into two halves. Someone from the audience would choose one half. David Berglas threw the other half away and then continued to tear the remaining half to bits and pieces squishing them together, only to pour the Coca-Cola from the torn papers into an empty glass. Then he drank the Coca-Cola from the glass and vanished the glass in a paper bag.

It was about this time that the UK magicians began to recognize David Berglas. *Abracadabra Magazine* did a very good review on David Berglas' show in their August 1953 issue.

After six weeks of performing at The Windmill, David Berglas got a better offer to perform at the Savoy which had better shows and their own orchestra. At The Savoy David Berglas told the orchestra conductor, Carol Gibbons, that he was considering taking elocution lessons. He wanted to mellow his unusual European accent. Carol couldn't believe it. He told David Berglas not to change his accent since his accent was part of his attraction. David Berglas thought coming from an orchestra leader this advice was worth listening to him. So, he kept his accent.

At The Savoy, David Berglas continued performing the same act from The Windmill, except he put new additions in such as his fast-paced pickpocketing routine.

After The Savoy, and with the help of his agents, David Berglas began performing at the Variety theaters all the way to Switzerland. After Switzerland David Berglas was supposed to return to England and perform at the

Blackpool Palace. This was when he came up with an idea to create a publicity stunt to promote the Blackpool Palace. He sent a sealed envelope from Switzerland to Blackpool. This envelope contained the prediction of the results of the local football match. The captain of the winning team opened the sealed envelope at David Berglas' performance at the Blackpool Palace. Not only was the prediction of the outcome correct, it also predicted the score, the penalties, and the judges' decisions. This gave David Berglas a great deal of newspaper publicity.

After Blackpool, David performed in London at the Finsbury Park Empire. It was considered one of the best variety theaters in London. The variety theater tour took David across England all the way to Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland.

Early in 1954, BBC Radio host commentator, Brian Johnston, wanted to present four radio programs about the paranormal. He called David Berglas in for an interview at the BBC in Portland Place. There were about six people in the room when David Berglas arrived. Much discussion took place about paranormal phenomena. This was the beginning of David's magic career on radio.

Bill Worsley, the producer, was concerned about David Berglas having enough material to fill possibly ten slots. He asked David Berglas and the answer was, "I have enough material to fill twenty."

When the radio shows began broadcasting, David had very clever skits that he worked with such as asking the listeners to each take between 5 and 10 objects at random and place them on a table. The listeners would choose an object. David would predict the objects with 90% accuracy. He then explained to the listeners that these experiments were never 100%.

This raised David Berglas' profile among his listeners. Henceforth, he became known as "Radio's Man of Magic."

David Berglas continued his radio performances with many presenters. In between, David Berglas continued touring the variety show circuit. As the radio variety shows were coming to an end the new medium of television provided opportunities for David Berglas.

In 1953, David Berglas appeared on The Charlie Chester Show. However, rather than dress like a magician, David Berglas wore a short-sleeved shirt with no pockets and performed his cigarette manipulations, including producing lit cigarettes without the use of any steals.

Because of his bold moves of not using sleeves or pockets David Berglas gained new respect from his peers and the public.

With the television audience David would read the minds of the audience without any visible props on stage or written notes. He also borrowed wrist watches from the audience and caused the watches to stop and make time stand still without the use of any magnets or electronics. He performed a stunt where he teleported a bank note across the country. The bank note serial numbers were verified between both locations. He even bent spoons with his mind.

To stay on television David Berglas had to invent new material for every show. The material needed to be strong visual effects. He then became known as "Television's Man of Mystery". He appeared on many shows, including his own shows "Focus On Hocus" and "Modern Magic".

I promised you that we would go into David Berglas' mind and thought process. By now, I'm sure you realize that the man was always thinking big and sometimes controversially to get the public talking about him.

Everything about the shows were on a huge scale and the resulting publicity was enormous. The public argued about whether David Berglas was a clever magician or a genuine psychic.

In addition to capturing the UK television market, David Berglas expanded his television horizons to the rest of Europe. In the mid 1960's, David Berglas had his biggest television show in Holland called "Opus 13".

In Germany, David's involvement on a television show called "Border of Knowledge", was produced by Helmet Schreiber, better known as Kalanag, gave life and excitement to the show.

Here's a brief description of the show: The series looked for Europe's top psychics and asked them to demonstrate their powers in the studio. Psychometrists, dowsers, and spirit painters, among others, gave their performances before a panel of experts. This panel included a lawyer, a doctor, the chief of police, court judges, a parapsychologist, a priest, and knowledgeable magicians who knew about the paranormal.

David traveled throughout the world and performed his miracles. David became known as "The International Man of Mystery".

David Berglas was one of the longest-serving presidents of The Magic Circle. It is one of the world's most prestigious magic fraternities.

Under his presidency, The Magic Circle finally acquired a permanent home of its own.

David helped realize a long-held dream of the Magic Circle, purchasing a permanent home for the organization. Through his efforts, and a £300,000 grant from the Foundation for Sports and the Arts, along with generous member support, "The Centre for the Magic Arts" was established in central London. The building venue includes a library, museum, meeting rooms, and theatre. David coined its motto: "Promoting Excellence in Magic."

I had the honor and privilege of visiting David Berglas at his home and talked with him about magic, his life, and his career. We enjoyed English

tea with biscuits. I did not know until that afternoon, while sipping my tea, that Tony Corinda, who wrote the famous book "13 Steps to Mentalism", had studied and learned from David Berglas. The same goes for Darren Brown, the most famous mentalist in the UK today. I also learned that Uri Geller and David Berglas were good friends. I can't help thinking that David Berglas helped shape Uri Geller's paranormal developments.

David Berglas had such a rich history that if I were to write about all the different places he performed, and all the events, it would take well over 100 pages. Therefore, I would prefer to get into David Berglas' mind and share with you his thought process and the way he was thinking that allowed him to come up with so many amazing performing ideas and effects.

Without any further delay let me describe to you some of David Berglas' genius thinking.

Rather than doing ordinary thought-reading he went the extra mile by reading the mind of the local mayor as he flew above Southport beach in an airplane. The punchline was people in the airplane could see the prediction way down on the ground written really big in the sand. This was how large David Berglas' mind worked.

To promote the Magic Circle's Golden Jubilee David drove a car while being blindfolded.

Also, David Berglas while blindfolded raced in a sled down a mountain of snow called the Cresta Run, vanished a piano during his performance at the Park Lane Hotel's ballroom, and hanged a prediction in a box high above Regent Street so that he would have a large crowd, including members of the press, as the box was lowered down and the prediction was read. Let's not forget his prediction of the outcome of the F.A. Cup Final where the prediction itself was actually in the trophy.

One of David Berglas' greatest publicity stunts was the Picture Post Challenge. This was one of his earliest challenges back in 1953.

Here's a brief description: This included three challenges wrapped into one. First, there was a hidden secret object that he had to find somewhere in London. Second, there was a prediction given to the Picture Post magazine which was the secret route from the starting point of the challenge to where the secret object was hidden in London. Third, David Berglas was blindfolded by members of the press and was in the passenger seat of a car telling the driver where to navigate in London. Finally, when all of this was completed, and to everyone's amazement, David's route that he drove from Point A to Point B was fairly close to the route given in advance to the Picture Post magazine. The second high point was that he did find the hidden secret object. He did all of this while blindfolded. You can imagine the newspaper write-ups the next day.

The stunt I'm about to describe was probably the most dangerous of all stunts, The Russian Roulette. Keep in mind that in London, Chung Ling Soo performed the bullet catch and died from a gunshot wound through his lungs. As a result, David Berglas' closest friends advised him not to do it. Not only did David Berglas do it, but he also did it in the following manner, which was incredible.

A six-shooter revolver was handed to an Olympic marksman. The marksman loaded the chambers with five real bullets and one blank bullet. Now to make sure no one knew where the bullet was the barrel of the revolver was spun. Then came the dangerous part. Members of the audience told the marksman to either fire at any one of the five China plates on the stage or fire at a large photo cut-out of David Berglas.

You might think this is a joke because it's a picture cut-out. But wait until I tell you the finale. After the marksman fired two shots at two plates which shattered, the audience told the marksman to fire at the cut-out photo of

David Berglas. Right before the marksman pulled the trigger David Berglas yelled out, "Wait!" He walked over, stood in front of the photo, and told the marksman to fire. Rather than prove the point that he knew in which chamber the blank bullet was and then take his bows, David Berglas put on his best acting which probably would have earned him an Oscar. After the marksman pulled the trigger, David Berglas immediately brought his arms to his chest and flinched and yelled in pain. At this point the audience was horrified only for David Berglas to smile and say, "I'm alright." The marksman then fired the remaining three bullets at the remaining three plates. This got a burst of applause from the audience.

I can honestly tell you that there are hundreds of the most amazing and very clever effects created by David Berglas that I can write about. Let me go to two of my most favorite effects.

The "Do-It-Yourself" and "Any Card At Any Number" are my favorites. Allow me to describe them to you.

For "Do-It-Yourself" David invited three volunteers to the stage which was made to look like a woodworking workshop. All of the volunteers were given a piece of wood to work with. The first volunteer was given a saw to cut the wood to any length he wanted. The second volunteer was given a hammer and nails to hammer his piece of wood with nails. The third volunteer was given a drill in order to drill holes into his piece of wood.

Before asking them to start working David brought out three carpenter aprons for the volunteers to wear. He also showed them a first-aid box, just in case.

He told the volunteers when the music from the live band starts to play that they must begin their chores with their wood. The first man had to cut his wood to the length he wanted. The second man had to hammer nails into his wood. The third man had to drill holes into his wood. Then

David Berglas told them that when the music stopped that that would be the cue for them to stop whatever they were doing.

To make the long story short, when the music stopped David Berglas opened up the first-aid box. Instead of taking out a piece of paper as a prediction he pulled out a piece of wood, which turned out to be the exact same length that was cut by the first man, had the same number of nails as the second man's wood, and had the same number of holes drilled into the third man's wood.

Now the holy grail of card magic. David would introduce a deck of cards. He asked anyone in the audience to name any card. Let's suppose someone named the King of Diamonds. David asked another member of the audience to name any number from 1 to 52 where the chosen King of Diamonds would be found. In this example someone called out thirty. At this point no one has touched the deck. David then invited a third person to take the deck and count thirty cards one at a time. The 30th card turned out to be the King of Diamonds.

(At this point, I'd like to share my thoughts with my readers. This is specifically for my magician friends. Yes, there were Any Card At Any Number tricks that were floating around before David Berglas. One was published in 1902 by Erdnase in *Expert At The Card Table*. However, none of them were anywhere as good, as clean, or as cleverly thought out as David Berglas' version which became known as The Berglas Effect.

I must say that the magic community owes a great debt of gratitude to Richard Kaufman, who took many flights from New York to London, to work with David Berglas and write a book called "The Berglas Effects". It teaches this amazing legendary miracle to those who want to learn it. The book is also a master class in mentalism. I highly recommend it.)

David Berglas retired from performing professional magic on December 20, 1993, to spend more quality time with his wife Ruth, their children, and their grandchildren.

After retiring, David managed to mentor many magicians and mentalists. So, he did not just fade away. He had a great life and passed away on November 3, 2023, in London. He was 97 years old.

Chapter 32

Marvin Berglas



His son, Marvin Berglas, followed his father's footsteps. But filling those giant shoes was not possible. Therefore, Marvin went into the

business end of magic and formed his company: Marvin's Magic. He manufactures and distributes the finest magic tricks in numerous different magic sets and distributes them all over the world. I had seen Marvin's Magic Sets in so many countries including my hometown of New York at Costco stores as well as in Las Vegas.

Periodically, I get fan mail from young magicians telling me how they started their magic career with a Marvin's Magic Set. While I write this book Marvin Berglas is serving as the current president of the Magic Circle in London. He did fill his father's giant shoes.

Chapter 33

The Magic Castle and the Larsens



William Larsen Sr. was a trial attorney (mostly representing racketeers) and a semi-professional magician. He wrote several magic booklets on mental mysteries. He was also a regular contributor to Sphinx Magazine. He wrote articles to several magic publications.

By 1935, William Larsen Sr. tried to purchase Sphinx Magazine. When that deal did not happen, he founded his own independent magic magazine for magicians called Genii Magazine. The first issue was released in September 1936.

By 1945, William Larsen Sr. retired from practicing law and began performing as a professional magician. Together with his wife Geraldine (Gerry for short), who was a magician in her own right, they began touring hotels and resorts with their own evening magic shows. Their sons, William Larsen Jr., and Milt Larsen, were part of the show as onstage assistants.

In 1942, William Larsen Sr. purchased Thayer Magic Manufacturing Company from its founder, Floyd Thayer.

In the April 1952 issue of Genii Magazine, William Larsen Sr. announced the creation of the Academy of Magical Arts and Sciences (AMAS). Everyone who was currently subscribing to Genii Magazine automatically became a "fellow" of AMAS.

In the fledgling organization, William Larsen Sr. explained that there will be classes and degrees of membership: "teaching fellows", "master fellowships", "literary fellowships", "inventive and design fellowships", etc. He also explained that there will be many awards.

The first "Interim Awards for Merit" were announced in Genii Magazine's June issue. Then the first ever fellowship, a "literary fellowship", was presented by the Academy of Magical Arts & Sciences to Harlan Tarbell.

Many other interim awards and certificates were announced in Genii Magazine's January 1953 issue.

On July 5, 1953, William Larsen Sr. unexpectedly died at the age of 48. He was struck by a cerebral hemorrhage while sitting in his parked car, which was parked in front of their home in Brookledge.

After William Larsen Sr.'s death, his wife Gerry and his son William Larsen Jr. struggled to keep it going. In the meantime, there were subscribers to Genii Magazine who began writing in and questioning whatever happened to the Academy of Magical Arts & Sciences.

In Genii Magazine's September 1958 issue, William Larsen Jr. dropped the bomb. He wrote "What happened to the Academy of Magical Arts & Sciences, many of you write. We have just let it drop for the time being. We have neither the time nor the money to develop it as Dad had planned."

Then the following year, again, William Larsen Jr. responded to the letters with the same question of whatever happened to the Academy of Magical Arts & Sciences. Jr. wrote "We discontinued it about a year ago for the simple reason that until it could be enlarged in scope with new ideas, etc., it was worthless."

In the meantime, Milt Larsen was an established television writer at Ralph Edwards Productions in Hollywood. Milt Larsen was writing for the popular TV show "Truth of Consequences".

In 1961, at 30 years old, while Milt was sitting in his office at the corner of Highland Boulevard and Hollywood Boulevard, he saw the old house on the foot of Hollywood Hills, which was once the glamorous Victorian mansion owned by a very wealthy Hollywood banker and real estate developer.

By this time, the house was rundown with overgrown weeds and no occupants. Looking at this old house, he thought about his father's dream of having a magic clubhouse. Milt found the owner, Thomas Glover, and pitched him the idea of turning the place into a magic clubhouse. Mr. Glover liked the idea. And there was a handshake deal, no written contracts between Milt Larsen and Thomas Glover.

Milt Larsen explained later on that "To a Texan, a handshake is as good as a 20-page contract. He liked my idea, gave me the key, and said 'Have a good time.' I went to work. He let me do almost anything I wanted to do with the place. This was September 1961. I had about a year to make something of it."

Milt worked very hard and used up all his favors from the Hollywood studios' prop builders. He was able to renovate the old house and turn it into a beautiful magic castle.

On the other hand, Milt was not very good with dealing with Los Angeles restrictions and licensing requirements, such as the fire code, liquor licensing, and everything else.

Milt Larsen's brother, William (Bill) Larsen Jr., was an excellent executive. Milt said "Bill was the ultimate executive. He was an associate producer at CBS. Bill could do in 20 minutes what would take me 24 hours."

William Larsen Jr.'s best administrative move was restructuring the Academy of Magical Arts. And he attached the non-profit status to the social order of the private club. This was the key step that helped them address state and local zoning regulations and secure the liquor license required for the still-unnamed clubhouse to open.

In the newly found clubhouse, Bill Larsen Jr. and his second wife, Irene Larsen, were the perfect host and hostess, who greeted everyone coming in. And for the next three decades, he was the principal cheerleader with his beautiful wife Irene as the goodwill ambassador. They traveled to many magic conventions both in the USA and abroad, promoting Genii Magazine, the Magic Castle, and the Academy of Magical Arts.

Bill Larsen Jr. was also the president of the Academy of Magical Arts.

In 1961, the Magic Castle property was leased to Milt Larsen, who wanted to make his father's dream into reality and begin construction of renovating the old rundown building into a magic clubhouse.

About ten years after William Larsen Sr.'s death, on January 2, 1963, The Magic Castle opened its doors for business and his dream became a reality by his sons.

Milt Larsen's older brother, William Larsen Jr., came in as the head of the Academy of Magical Arts. Together, they created what is known today as the Magic Castle.

One of the early attractions to the Magic Castle was Harry Blackstone Sr. (The Great Blackstone), who had already retired and lived in Los Angeles and became a frequent visitor, which attracted many Hollywood celebrities and visitors to rub shoulders with him.

Later on, Dai Vernon became the resident magician of the Magic Castle.

William Larsen Jr. died on February 11, 1993 at the age of 64.

Milt Larsen died on May 28, 2023 at the age of 92. From the inception of the Magic Castle until his death, Milt Larsen was the lifelong president of the Magic Castle.

I had the honor and privilege of presenting Milt Larsen with the Merlin Award.

(photo of Tony and Milt with Merlin Award)

The Magic Castle was a vulnerable target for real estate developers. And it was a matter of time before one developer would purchase the properties from the Glover family and demolish the Magic Castle.



Along came a descendent of Cardini: his great nephew Randy Pitchford, the CEO of the Gearbox Entertainment Company and magic enthusiast. In April 2022, the Magic Castle real estate properties were purchased from the Glover family by Randy Pitchford and saved the Magic Castle.

Today, Erika Larsen, daughter of Bill Larsen Jr., runs the Magic Castle on behalf of Randy Pitchford.

Chapter 34

Doug Henning

Rejuvenating Magic



Henning was born on May 3, 1947, in Fort Gary District in Winnipeg, Canada.

Henning's fascination with magic began when he saw Richiardi on the Ed Sullivan show. He began learning simple tricks to entertain his family and classmates at Oakenwald School in Fort Gary. Later, his family moved to Oakville Ontario for a few years. Afterward, he was better at doing magic, and he took on a stage name: "The Astounding Henson". He started advertising himself in the local newspapers as a magician for hire.

After graduating from Oakville Trafalgar High School his mother advised him to go to college and get an education. In case magic didn't work out at least he would have a day job.

He took his mother's advice and enrolled at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and studied psychology in preparation for a medical degree.

At the university Henning met and became friends with Ivan Reitman, who would later become a show producer and film director.

To help pay the bills Henning got a job at Toronto International Airport, loading and unloading crates. This job did not last too long. It was very exhausting.

Henning partnered with Mars Barrick and began performing at local bars and night clubs.

Henning graduated with a degree in science and psychology. His mother was happy that he could try magic but if that failed, he could get a job.

Henning realized that to become a good magician and performer he needed to get a formal education in show business. So, he approached Canada's Council for The Arts which gave him a grant of \$4000.

Henning used this money wisely. He studied pantomime and choreography under Adrian Pecknold. He also traveled to Los Angeles to study with Dai Vernon and Tony Slydini at the famous Hollywood Magic Castle.

Henning had a vision. He wanted to return magic back to its glory days. As soon as he returned to Canada, he borrowed \$5000. To show good faith by putting up his own money, he began talking to show biz investors to raise money to create a big, beautiful magic show.

After pitching the idea to so many investors, Henning eventually found an investor in Toronto who invested \$70,000 for the project.

Henning began assembling his creative team. He convinced David Cronenberg to write the screenplay. He got his college friend Ivan Reitman to direct the show. He convinced Howard Shore to compose the original music and got Jennifer Dale to be his costar.

Henning created his masterpiece: "Spellbound",

a musical combining his magic with dramatic storytelling.

At the opening night of Spellbound, at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto, the show was sold-out and thereafter broke all the box office records.

Producers of New York Broadway shows began knocking on Henning's door to take the show to Broadway.

Henning reworked the show with original music and songs composed by Stephen Schwartz. He also changed the title of the show to "The Magic Show", It opened up in 1974 at the Court Theatre on Broadway and ran for 4 1/2 years.

Based on his Broadway success, Henning approached the NBC television network executives with an idea to broadcast a live magic television special, also featuring Houdini's famous dangerous Chinese Water Torture Cell.

For the NBC executives to have a live magic show broadcast was too good to be refused. They signed up Henning.

On December 26, 1975, more than 50 million viewers tuned in for the NBC network broadcast of "Doug Henning's World of Magic". It was the most watched show on network television. It broke all the records of broadcasting.

Doug Henning's second live television special was broadcast in December 1976. The theme for this show was "fire, water, and air". The show also included Henning's "Vanishing An Elephant."

Henning's third live NBC television broadcast was aired on December 15, 1977. This show also included "Walking Through A Brick Wall."

Doug Henning's fourth live NBC network broadcast aired on December 14, 1978. The theme of the show was "A Magical Journey Through Time."

Doug Henning's fifth NBC Television network special was filmed in Las Vegas at the Las Vegas Hilton. It aired on February 15, 1979.

Doug Henning's sixth NBC network special was filmed at Donny and Marie Osmond's Studio in Orem, Utah. It was broadcast on February 22, 1980.

Doug Henning's last TV special of the "World of Magic" was broadcast in 1982.

At the end of each television broadcast Doug Henning closed the show with the same monologue, "Anything the mind can conceive is possible. Nothing is impossible. All you have to do is look within and you can realize your fondest dreams. I would like to wish each one of you all of life's wonders and a joyful age of enlightenment."

After eight television specials, Henning continued appearing as a guest star in many other television shows. There are too many for me to list.

Henning continued touring throughout the United States and Canada performing his live shows.

By the mid 1980's, Henning decided that he had accomplished all his goals of bringing magic to its golden age. He retired from magic and moved to India, in order to devote his time to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's transcendental meditation.

In 1992, Doug Henning and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi announced that they were planning to build a \$1.5 billion project entitled "Maharishi Vedda Land" near Niagara Falls, Ontario. This project was going to be the biggest theme park featuring astonishing, unique, and visual sensory effects, as well as state-of-the-art 3-D imagery. One of the main attractions was going to be a building suspended above water. Unfortunately, none of these came to pass.

Part of me wonders if this was a big scam to get money from Doug Henning.

On February 7, 2000, Doug Henning died from liver cancer at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He was 52 years old.

Chapter 35

Siegfried & Roy

Masters of The Impossible



Siegfried Tyron Fischbacher was born on June 13, 1939 in Rosenheim, Germany.

Siegfried purchased a second-hand magic book at the age of 8 and began learning and practicing magic tricks. By age 10 he was entertaining family and friends with his magic.

After finishing elementary school, Siegfried got a job in a carpet factory as a carpet weaver.

At age 17, in 1956, Siegfried moved to Italy and worked as a waiter and bartender. In between those two jobs he also performed magic for the customers in a hotel on Lake Garda.

In 1958, Siegfried got a job on a cruise ship as a waiter.

Roy Horn was born on October 3, 1944 in Nordenham, Germany. His birth name was Uwe Ludwig Horn. His nickname was Roy. He

loved animals. His dog named Hexe was his best friend.

Roy's parents' friend was the founder of the Bremen Zoo.

At age 13 Roy dropped out of school and got a job in the zoo caring for the exotic animals.

At age 15, in 1959, Roy got a job on a passenger cruise ship as a cabin boy. So it was on this cruise ship, the T.S. Bremen, that they shared the same cabin as roommates.

Siegfried began entertaining Roy with his magic. Very soon they decided to put on a magic show for the passengers. The captain welcomed the idea. Siegfried took a stage name "Delmare"

Siegfried was The Magician. Roy was the magician's helper.

Siegfried was producing and vanishing white doves and white rabbits along with other typical magic props.

Eventually, Roy told Siegfried, "Why are you playing around with little animals? Why don't you use exotic animals, like a tiger or cheetah?" It took a while for Roy to convince Siegfried to consider performing with exotic animals.

At the ship's next visit to Europe, Roy got off the ship, went back home, and took one of the cheetahs from the zoo. Roy went back to the ship and smuggled the cheetah into the ship.

In their small cabin they worked out an illusion for how to produce the cheetah from a large empty top hat. Once they worked out the mechanics, they began practicing with the cheetah.

At the New Year's Eve party they performed their magic show with the white doves and rabbits as well as the other magical apparatus. For the closing finale they produced a real-life cheetah from an empty large top hat.

The audience was thrilled, but the captain was not amused. He was actually upset because these guys put the passengers' lives in danger by smuggling a cheetah onto the ship. So the captain fired them.

Lucky for them the entertainment director for another cruise line was at the New Year's Eve party and loved their show. He hired them for another cruise line operating out of New York.

By 1964, Siegfried & Roy decided to go back to Europe and work the nightclub circuit. This is where they got more exotic animals, like tigers.

In 1966, Siegfried & Roy were invited by Princess Grace Kelly to perform at a Red Cross charity event in Monte Carlo.

In 1967, while performing in Paris, they were discovered by show promoter, Tony Azzie, who offered them an opportunity to work in Las Vegas.

In June 1967, Siegfried & Roy with Tony Azzie traveled to Las Vegas. The casino owners had no interest in a magic show. They said, "Magic is not going to make it in Las Vegas. This is the town where people come to see famous comedians, famous singers, and celebrities from Hollywood as well as the famous show-girls."

Tony Azzie managed to get them small parts in the "Folies Bergere" at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Siegfried & Roy were 14th place in the show. They performed in front of the curtains as the stage hands prepared the next act behind the curtains.

By 1975, Siegfried & Roy became the biggest part of the show and they were the grand finale.

In 1978, the show was moved by Frank Rosenthal to the Stardust Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. At the Stardust, Siegfried & Roy were the main attraction. Their names and photos were on the main marquee in front of the casino.

In 1981, Irving Feld and his son Kenneth Feld (the owners of Feld Entertainment), concert promoters, and the owners of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus offered

Siegfried & Roy a great deal of money to be the stars of the "The Beyond Belief Variety Show" at the New Frontier Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

At the Beyond Belief Variety Show, in addition to their tigers and lions, Siegfried & Roy got a large elephant from Feld Entertainment and began producing and vanishing the elephant. This was another added attraction to the show.

In 1988, Feld Entertainment took the show on a world tour, mostly major cities, including New York and Tokyo.

In 1990, the owner of the Bellagio and Mirage Resort & Casino, Steve Wynn, offered Siegfried & Roy a 5-year \$56.5 million contract.

The Siegfried & Roy Show opened up in The Mirage Hotel and Casino in a custom-built \$30 million dollar theatre.

In 1990, the average show ticket price in Las Vegas was around \$20. Siegfried & Roy's tickets were selling for \$80. Quite often, the show was sold-out.

In the year 2000, I had the honor and privilege to present Siegfried & Roy the prestigious Merlin Award at the Mirage Casino. Steve Wynn spared no expense. It was the biggest party in Vegas. A lot of VIPs and Hollywood celebrities including the media, were invited.

Thereafter, every time I was in Las Vegas, Siegfried & Roy invited me and my guest to see the show. Quite often I was given the VIP table in the front. There was a moment when Roy vanished from the stage and appeared in the audience. Each time Roy would run over and give me a big hug and run back to the stage. Those audiences were looking at me like, "who the hell is this guy?" I must admit that it felt good.

By 1999, the show had grossed over \$500 million and Siegfried & Roy were the highest paid entertainers in Las Vegas. That year their names were added to the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Siegfried & Roy proved beyond any doubt to casino owners that magic was a big attraction and magic would work in Las Vegas. As a result, Siegfried & Roy paved the way for other magicians to come to Las Vegas and have permanent residencies. Today, Las Vegas magicians owe a great debt to Siegfried & Roy.

October 3, 2003 was Roy's 59th birthday. During the show, as usual, Roy was walking Montecore, a seven year old 400 pound white tiger, on the stage. During the show, Montecore was not behaving as he was supposed to act. Montecore began pulling the leash and wanted to go towards the audience. As a good animal trainer, Roy did what he was supposed to, which was correct the animal. Because if you don't the animal will misbehave more often.

When Roy tried to pull Montecore back, Montecore bit Roy's sleeve. At that moment, as an impulse decision, Roy bumped Montecore on the nose with the live microphone. The noise from the microphone startled the tiger. Montecore jumped and bit Roy on the neck. Roy was losing lots of blood. In the ambulance, on the way to the hospital, Roy told Siegfried and the emergency doctors that he didn't want any harm to Montecore. Roy said, "Montecore is a great cat. I must've startled him when I hit him with the live microphone."

As a result of this accident Roy lost a great deal of blood and suffered a major stroke. He severed his spine and suffered permanent impairment to his motor and verbal abilities. He also suffered paralysis on the left side of his body.

Roy spent over a year in hospitals and rehab clinics. When he returned back home, his home had to be rebuilt for a wheelchair patient.

It is a shame that Siegfried & Roy didn't have the opportunity to have a farewell final show for curtain goodbyes to their audience.

The show was closed down immediately.

On March 19, 2014, Montecore died at the age of 17 after a brief illness.

On May 8, 2020, Roy Horn died from COVID-19 at Mountain View Hospital in Las Vegas. He was 75 years old.

In 2019, Siegfried had heart surgery. On January 13, 2021,

Siegfried Fischbacher died in a hospice from pancreatic cancer. He was 81 years old.

Chapter 36

David Copperfield



David Copperfield was born in 1956 in Metuchen, New Jersey. His birth name is David Seth Kotkin.

He was the only child in a middle class family. His mother was an insurance adjuster. His father owned a men's clothing and accessories store in Warren, New Jersey.

Because both of his parents worked, at a very early age David was attending Harmony Day Camp in Warren not too far from his father's store.

When David was eight years old his parents purchased a Jerry Mahoney ventriloquist puppet for him. After about six months of practicing he was able to communicate with the puppet without moving his lips. By the time he was 10 years old he was practicing magic and

ventriloquism as well as entertaining his friends at school. At age thirteen he adopted the magic name "Davino, The Boy Magician. "

His parents, Rebecca and Heiman, were very supportive of David's love for magic. They took him to New York City to visit Tannen's Magic Shop, the largest magic shop in the world. Each visit they purchased magic books and magic apparatus for David so that he could advance his magical talent.

In 1974, David graduated from Metuchen High School and his luck was about to change.

Tony Spina, one of the partners at the Tannen's Magic Shop, got a call from the management of Pagoda Hotel and Resort in Honolulu, Hawaii. They were looking to hire a magician for ten months to perform six nights a week (Mondays were the day off).

Tony Spina got his good friend Mike Goldberg to finance the illusions for David. In return, Mike Goldberg received a percentage of the income for the hotel payments.

The deal was very simple. At the end of the ten months David was going to keep all the illusions. Furthermore, during the ten months of performances, he was to get a small salary with room and board at the resort.

For David this was a dream come true: enjoying beautiful weather in Hawaii, performing grand illusions, getting a small salary, and at the end of the ten months, he would have enough illusions to start a career. It was during this time that he adapted his stage name to David Copperfield.

It was during the Hawaii show that a visiting show producer from Chicago offered David a lucrative contract to star in a new musical "The Magic Man."

After the ten month run in Hawaii, Copperfield returned to New Jersey to prepare for "The Magic Man". It was to open soon in Chicago.

It was during the "The Magic Man" musical that Copperfield developed and sharpened his dancing skills. He got great reviews from the press.

After Chicago, Copperfield returned to New Jersey and decided that he was going to find a manager or an agent and take his career to the next level.

At this point, I would like to share with my readers my thoughts about Copperfield. I believe Copperfield from a very young age knew what he wanted to do with his life and persistently followed his dream. Every step along the way he became better and better. It takes more than just talent. It also takes understanding business and careful planning. I suppose he learned business dealings from his father. Of course, he got lucky breaks, but many people get lucky breaks and very few of them know how to handle it and proceed with it. The old saying goes "You have to be at the right place at the right time." That might be true, but if you are not ready that opportunity will pass you by like a gentle breeze in a summer evening. Anyway, enough with my opinion.

Copperfield was in search of an agent or manager. He was in the building on Broadway, New York City, where most of the writers, producers, directors, managers, and agents have their offices. Young Copperfield was knocking on doors, when an agent who specialized in comedians told Copperfield that he should try Joe Cates across the hall. That's because Mr. Cates was producing the ABC network television circus specials.

Long after Copperfield became a superstar I was introduced to Joe Cates by my friend, Stanley Moger, who owned the SNF film syndication company.

Joe Cates and I became friends. We both have many things in common, including keeping things simple and not complicating things. Joe Cates and I had lunches from time to time at the Friar's Club in New York City.

It was at one of those lunches that I asked Joe Cates, "How did you meet David Copperfield?"

He told me the whole story. You are about to hear firsthand the complete story from the guy who got it from Joe Cates himself.

By the way, for those of you who don't know Joe Cates, let me tell you a little bit about him. He was a very talented Broadway show producer and a television network special TV show producer. He paired Jackie Gleason and Art Carney for The Honeymooners.

Joe Cates' brother, Gilbert Cates, was the producer of the Oscars. Gilbert Cates produced 14 telecasts of The Oscars.

Joe Cates's daughter, Phoebe Cates, is a very talented actress who starred in some of Steven Spielberg's movies. She got married to Oscar-winning actor Kevin Klein and got out of show business to raise two beautiful kids: a daughter and son. Joe Cates' grandson, Owen Kline, began learning magic from me at the age of seven. I'm still close with Joe Cates' family.

Now back to the story of how David Copperfield met Joe Cates.

As Copperfield was knocking on doors, he came across an agent that was managing comedians. This agent told Copperfield that Joe Cates was producing ABC's circus specials across the hall.

Copperfield walked over and spoke to Joe Cates' secretary and kind of suggested that the agent across the hall was his friend who recommended Copperfield to see Joe Cates.

The secretary went in to Joe Cates office and announced the news.

Joe Cates told her to send Copperfield into his office. When Copperfield came into Joe Cates' office he stuck out his hand and said, "Mr. Cates, I am David Copperfield." Joe Cates without missing a bit said, "Like hell you are!" Copperfield replied, "Oh well sir, my name is David Kotkin. Copperfield is my stage name." Then he proceeded to tell Joe Cates that he was looking for an agent. Joe Cates said, "You guys are all the same. You're all doing the same tricks, except with different faces. What is it that you're going to do different than anybody else?"

To David's credit he said, "You're right, sir. We are all doing the same tricks, but I am going to take those illusions and wrap them up into famous movie skits. For example, I will take the shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's movie "Psycho". I will have the female assistant step into the shower, close the curtains, and create the same atmosphere with a knife. When the curtains open up, she will have disappeared."

Copperfield continued describing different famous movies, where he would use popular skits from each movie and present the illusions in that fashion.

Joe Cates told me that he was impressed with Copperfield. He liked the way Copperfield thinks. Joe Cates signed David Copperfield to a 10-year contract.

Joe Cates called his friend Fred Silverman, who was the president of ABC television network and told him that he had an idea by using a magician and creating different skits to introduce the new season's shows magically.

Fred Silverman liked the idea and Copperfield's first TV show was born. It was called, "The Magic of ABC, starring David Copperfield" in 1977.

The show was good. Everybody liked it. On the strength of the TV show, Copperfield hit the road and began performing in country fairs, casino towns, and everything in between. He wanted to keep his name in the public arena.

Joe Cates was having lunch with Fred Silverman and wanted to know if they could continue the show every year.

Fred Silverman told Joe Cates that it was good. It was a novelty, but he didn't want to do it every year. So he told Joe Cates that he had no intention of renewing Copperfield's contract.

Immediately, Joe Cates approached the other two big TV networks. On the strength of Copperfield's first TV show, Joe Cates was able to sell the show to the CBS television network. This time, the show was called "The Magic of David Copperfield" and aired in 1978. This was Copperfield's opportunity to show his

skills as a sleight of hand artist in this episode. There were fewer illusions and more sleight of hand magic.

“The Magic of David Copperfield” was a success. The Nielsen Ratings were good and Copperfield knew he was on his way to achieve his dreams.

He continued performing live shows traveling across the USA. Sometimes Doug Henning was performing in one casino and Copperfield was performing in another casino in the same city.

Traveling across the country in buses with cast and crew was not an easy task. Lots of sacrifice had to be made. They had to live and sleep in the buses. It was not as glamorous as it sounds.

The second “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1979. In this special he featured lots of grand illusions and escapes.

The third “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1980. In this special the big finale was levitating a Ferrari.

The fourth “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1981. In this special his finale was to vanish a Learjet at the airport in front of a live audience.

The fifth “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1983. In this special he vanished the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island, which was witnessed by a live audience.

The sixth “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1984. On this special the finale was Copperfield floating over the Grand Canyon.

The seventh “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1985. On this special he focused on magic with movies, like making a woman disappear in the shower scene from Psycho and making a movie come to life.

The eighth “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 1986. The big attraction on this special was “Walking through the Great Wall of China. This

was the last show produced with Joe Cates. The 10-year contract was over and David Copperfield and Joe Cates went their separate ways.

The ninth "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1987. In this special Copperfield escaped from an Alcatraz jail cell.

The tenth "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1988. In this special Copperfield performed at the Bermuda Triangle with many challenges, including teleportation and vanishing.

The eleventh "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1989. In this special the finale was for Copperfield to escape from a building that was going to be demolished by explosives.

The twelfth "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1990. In this special Copperfield was chained and padlocked onto a raft, where he had to escape before the raft goes over Niagara Falls.

The thirteenth "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1991. This special was about the mysteries of the Orient Express. Copperfield vanished an Orient Express train car.

The fourteenth "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1992. In this special Copperfield was flying on stage, as well as flying through hoops, flying inside a glass box, and flying while holding a lady in his arms.

The fifteenth "The Magic of David Copperfield" was broadcasted in 1993. Copperfield was tied in a straitjacket and hung many stories above the ground by burning ropes. He had to escape the straitjacket before the ropes burned, where he could fall onto a bed of spikes on the ground.

The sixteenth "The Magic of David Copperfield." was broadcasted in 1995. This special featured many paranormal effects like conjuring spirits and ghosts.

The seventeenth “The Magic of David Copperfield” was broadcasted in 2001. This was David Copperfield’s final television network special. In this special Copperfield stood in the center of a tornado of fire.

In between TV specials Copperfield continued touring with his live show throughout the world.

If you think traveling with buses is difficult, think again. Airlines have their own problems. For example, packing and shipping the Illusion crates require lots of paperwork, which is called carnet. It helps clear customs to enter into a foreign country. When the crates return again, the crates can clear customs to enter back into the USA.

This process has its own problems. In certain countries, the customs agents always find something wrong with carnet paperwork. And the customs agents threaten not to release the crates until additional fees and duties are paid. Basically, it’s blackmail. Please keep in mind that this kind of delay can jeopardize the entire show. The customs agents can delay the release of the crates for months and months putting the advertised show date in jeopardy. Quite often, after negotiating and bargaining, you can get the illusion crates released just in time for the show.

Copperfield found a way to make this process work. Regularly, he offered the customs agents free tickets for his show. Sometimes he had to give away as much as sixty tickets just to clear customs! That’s just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the amount of problems a world traveling show will experience. It is not as glamorous as most people think.

By this time, David Copperfield became the greatest magician in the world. Everybody knew his name.

Copperfield’s seventeen TV shows were nominated for 38 Emmy Awards and won 21 Emmys for his combination of storytelling and illusions. Also, Copper-

field got 11 Guinness World Records, the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and the Merlin Award for Magician of the Century.

Overall, he has sold over 40 million tickets and grossed over \$5 billion dollars. This is more than any other solo entertainer in history.

The 2015 Forbes listed his earnings at \$63 million for the previous 12 months, ranking him the 20th highest-earning celebrity in the world.

Last time I was at Copperfield's home, I asked him if he's planning to retire. He looked me in the eye and said, "Never." Then with a flirting smile in his eyes he said, "Find something you love to do and you will never work a day in your life."

Based on this I suspect he'll continue performing as long as he is physically able. He enjoys what he's doing.

Chapter 37

David Blaine



David Blaine was born on April 4, 1973, in Brooklyn, New York to a single mother, Patrice Maureen White, a school teacher.

His birth name is David Blaine White. At a young age he saw a magician performing in a New York subway and got interested in magic. With the help of his mother, he got magic books from the public library and began learning magic and practicing with a deck of cards. With his newfound hobby, Blaine began getting lots of praise from total strangers. They encouraged him to go out and perform any place he could. Along the way, he began performing his magic in local restaurants. Then he discovered Robert De Niro's famous restaurant, Tribeca Grill in New York City. There he performed his magic.

Robert De Niro enjoyed watching David Blaine going from table to table and performing his close-up magic. One night, ABC television network executives came to the restaurant. Robert De Niro introduced David Blaine to the ABC Television executives and suggested a TV special for him. As a result, David Blaine's first television special was born.

At the age of 23, David Blaine's first TV special "David Blaine's Street Magic" was broadcast on May 19, 1997, on the ABC television network.

The show was filmed in the streets of New York. To David Blaine's credit, he took ordinary close-up magic from the usual tabletop and brought it up near his face so that the television cameras could see his face as well as the audience reactions surrounding him. This was a simple concept, but very powerful. It created a new format of performing close-up magic.

David Blaine's second TV special "The Magic Man" was broadcast on January 16, 1998, on the ABC television network. Unlike the first TV special, Blaine traveled across America performing street magic in different towns and cities to different audiences. His low-key mannerisms without the polished professional magician fast talk made him attractive to average working Americans.

After his second TV special he became famous and got lots of job offers, mainly performing magic in rich families' private parties or big corporate parties. Quite often he performed for the Hollywood elite.

David Blaine understood that outdoor publicity stunts created by Harry Houdini were very powerful ways of getting media attention.

On April 5, 1999, David Blaine began his first endurance performance.

A major publicity stunt was being buried alive for 7 days at one of Donald Trump's properties across from Trump's Palace on 68th St. and Riverside Boulevard.

David Blaine was placed into an open coffin and lowered 6 feet into an open grave. Over the grave was a see-through plastic water tank filled with 2 tons of water, which made it impossible for Blaine to come out at nights, so that he might return back early in the morning.

For the next seven days, visitors lined up in long lines to get close enough to look down through the water tank to see David Blaine lying in an open coffin.

On the final day, April 12, which was the seventh day of the buried alive endurance stunt, hundreds of news media personnel were stationed at the site

waiting for the coffin to be raised so they were then able to ask questions of David Blaine.

BBC News stated the 26-year-old magician has outdone his hero Harry Houdini, who had planned a similar feat but died in 1926 before he could perform it.

On November 27, 2000, David Blaine performed his second endurance performance. It was videotaped and became his third TV special "Frozen In Time". It was also in New York City at Time Square.

David Blaine stood on a platform with blocks of large ice placed all around him and on top of him. Basically he was in a box of ice. Plastic tubes provided him the necessary oxygen and water. His urine was taken out by a separate plastic tube.

This endurance stunt was supposed to be for 72 hours. However, 62 hours and 42 minutes later the standby safety guards had to cut the ice with a chainsaw to get David Blaine out and rush him to the hospital. Some news outlets claimed that he failed, that he didn't stay in for 72 hours. Others claimed it was a big success. He was able to stay alive in the ice for almost 72 hours.

David Blaine's next endurance stunt was on May 22, 2002. A large crane picked Blaine up and placed him on the top of a 100-foot tall by 24-inch-wide stone pillar in Bryant Park, New York City. David Blaine stood on the top of the 100-foot-tall stone pillar for 35 hours before jumping down onto the safety landing, which was 15 feet high and made of empty cardboard boxes.

David Blaine's next endurance stunt began on September 5, 2003, in London, England.

He was placed into a transparent Plexiglas box, which measured 3 feet wide by 7 feet long and 7 feet high. The Plexiglas box was raised by a crane to 30 feet off the ground. The location was at Potter's Fields Park on the South bank of the Thames River.

Inside the box was a video camera so that the viewers could watch his activities. David Blaine drank approximately one and a half gallons of water a day but did not eat anything. The endurance stunt came to an end on October 19, 2003, exactly 44 days later.

This endurance stunt gained David Blaine a great deal of media attention, which turned out to be major publicity both in Europe and in the USA.

The Times reported that 1,614 articles in the British papers have made reference to David Blaine's endurance test.

David Blaine's next endurance stunt began on May 1, 2006, in front of Lincoln Center in New York City. The Drowned Alive stunt involved an 8-foot diameter sphere filled with isotonic saline. David Blaine had to stay in this solution for seven days wearing a diverse underwater helmet attached to a thick hose providing him with oxygen.

After seven days in this liquid solution, David Blaine managed to free himself from handcuffs and chains. After he came out, he signed the agreement with Yale University to be monitored by the medical staff in order to study human physiology reactions to prolonged submersion. This, too, got great a deal of publicity.

David Blaine's next big stunt called Revolution began on November 21, 2006. Blaine was shackled to a rotating gyroscope with the intention to escape within 16 hours without having any food or water. Fifty-two hours later, Blaine was able to escape. I am not sure how much publicity he got from this escape stunt because it was not an endurance test. It was an escape, and many magicians were already using escapes in their performances.

David Blaine's next endurance stunt began on April 30, 2008. On Oprah Winfrey's show he attempted to break the Guinness World Record for oxygen assisted static apnea. David Blaine was in a large water tank filled with 1800 gallons

of water. He was able to hold his breath for 17 minutes and 4 1/2 seconds, thus breaking the record.

On September 18, 2008, David Blaine was hanging upside down in Trump Tower at the atrium where Donald Trump talked about how David Blaine hanging upside down without a safety net for 60 hours which would begin in 4 days.

On September 22, David Blaine began his 60 hours of upside down hanging over Wollman Rink in Central Park, New York.

At this point, I'd like to share with my readers my opinion. Most medical experts will agree that humans are not meant to hang upside down. Any long periods of being upside down may cause blindness and other health issues. So, I don't know why David Blaine attempted this stunt. Besides right out the gate, within the first few hours, David Blaine was seen standing on the platform near the crane. Some of the spectators were complaining and claimed that he was cheating. What they didn't understand was that David Blaine needed to come down once an hour to get a medical checkup and drink some liquids and maybe go to the bathroom. Overall, he did manage to hang upside down for the next 60 hours.

David Blaine's next big effect was on April 18, 2010. On a 23-minute television special, David Blaine performed the dangerous bullet catch. A .22 caliber bullet was fired from a rifle into a small cup that was in his mouth.

David Blaine's next endurance stunt began on October 5, 2012 on Pier 54 in New York City. David Blaine stood on a 22-foot-tall pillar for the next 72 hours, where he did not eat or sleep. Surrounding the pillar were seven Tesla coils producing electric charges that kept bouncing off David Blaine.

Visually this was very attractive, and it was streamed live on YouTube.

Basically, there was never any danger to David Blaine. At first, he was using Tesla coils that would work in harmony when the person was wearing a special conductive suit. The electricity goes to the suit but does not penetrate the

body. Therefore, there is no harm to the person inside the suit. Overall, this experiment looked very dangerous and visual.

On October 8, 2012, at 8:45 PM and after 72 hours, David Blaine came down from the post without any harm caused to him. Just the same, he was taken to the hospital for a checkup.

Another David Blaine TV special on the ABC television network was 90 minutes and was broadcasted on November 19, 2013. On this episode David Blaine performed his magic to celebrities and public figures. The Nilsson ratings were very good for the time slots from 9:30 PM to 11 PM.

In 2014, David Blaine for the first time began his live world tour in the Middle East and North Africa.

David Blaine's next TV special aired on the ABC network on November 15, 2016. This 42-minute program featured David Blaine performing magic for various public figures. His big trick was the bullet catch. This was videotaped in a live show with 20,000 spectators in Las Vegas.

In 2019, David Blaine took his live show to England, Ireland, and Scotland.

David Blaine's next TV special aired on the ABC network on April 1, 2020. On this episode, David Blaine performed lots of close-up magic with a deck of cards. This episode also includes a performance by David Blaine's daughter.

On September 20, 2022, David Blaine began his first ever Las Vegas residency at Resorts World Hotel and Casino. The show was extended to June 2023.

In 2025, David Blaine walked away from the ABC television network and made a new performance deal with Hulu and Disney. For this series entitled "David Blaine: Do Not Attempt This", we see David Blaine doing death-defying stunts around the world.

At the time I'm writing this book, David Blaine is performing at the Wynn Encore Casino in Las Vegas.

Chapter 38

Penn And Teller



The best way I can describe Penn & Teller is this. They are two real oddballs with incredible talent who managed to keep themselves in the public eye for over 40 years and laughed all the way to the bank.

Teller was born in the city of brotherly love Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on February 14, 1948. His birth name is Raymond Joseph Teller.

In 1965, Teller graduated from Philadelphia Central High School. In 1969, he graduated from Amhurst College with a Bachelor of Arts in classics.

After college, Teller became a high school teacher at Lawrence High School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, teaching Greek and Latin.

Teller began performing with his friend Weir Chrisemer in 1974. They met Penn Jillette and began performing together as a trio.

In 1981, Weir Chrisemer left the group.

Ever since then Penn and Teller have been performing together. During their performance Teller doesn't speak. This silent character works for him very well. He developed the character during his college years. Teller was performing his magic silently at college fraternities, due to the college students noisy talking and drowning his speech. He found the silent style much more workable. Because Teller didn't speak the students paid more attention. This became his trademark.

At this point, I must tell you that Teller is very good with the English language and he does talk in interview shows.

During the early years Teller performed magic and did his own stunts, such as hanging upside down for a long period of time. This took a toll on his physical condition. Between 2018 and 2019 he had three back surgeries over 18 months. In September 2022, he went into the hospital for quadruple bypass heart surgery.

Penn Jillette was born on March 5, 1955, in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

His birth name is Penn Fraser Jillette.

At the age of 18, Penn saw James Randy's magic and illusion show. Unlike some magicians who claim to do real magic, Randy talked about how he's employing trickery for entertainment purposes rather than mysterious supernatural things.

This got Penn's respect. He soon became friends with Randy and learned a great deal from him.

Penn became an atheist in his teen years after reading the Bible and began asking questions during the church ceremonies, from which he was thrown out.

Later on, he wrote his New York Times bestselling book "God, No!: Signs You May Already Be an Atheist and Other Magical Tales". To-date, he has written eight books which are all good.

I once asked Penn to tell me why there is no God. He said, "They tell you that God is very powerful. He created the entire universe. He's everywhere and he sees everything. Well if he's everywhere and he sees everything, how come he sits back and let's a serial killer go to a college campus and slaughter young, innocent, beautiful girls who have their entire lives ahead of them, or how come he sits back and let's a terrorist strap a bomb around his chest, put on a motorcycle jacket, get on his bike, drive to a marketplace, and blow up innocent people, including woman and children. If he's so powerful, if he's everywhere, and if he sees everything, then why doesn't he cause the motorcycle to have an accident go off the road and blow up the explosive vest by blowing up this stupid suicide bomber?" Penn continued.

It gets worse. "If he is so big and powerful, why does he need you to worship him? Do you have a need for the little ants crawling down on the ground to worship you?"

Well, I must tell you that Penn does have a very convincing argument. I don't know if the priest at the church has an answer for all of those questions.

Anyway, Penn and Teller have a great deal in common with each other. They both love playing music. They both have a great sense of humor. Both are innovators and good entertainers. I will say it's a match made in heaven, but Penn will disagree with me!

They've been performing together since 1980. Throughout the years they always managed to stay in the public eye by having their own TV shows or being very controversial and entertaining.

Early in their career, they decided to do magic differently than other magicians. At their early performances they exposed several card tricks.

They showed the audience the working technique of the trick. Then they continued using the same technique by changing the routine and fool the audience again. This was very entertaining

However, the old timers at the Society of American Magicians got very upset about their exposing tricks and expelled them from the society.

Years later the Society of American Magicians honor them for their genius.

In addition to their many TV appearances, Penn & Teller had, and still have, their own TV shows such as:

The Unpleasant World of Penn & Teller, which aired in the UK in 1994.

Penn & Teller's Sin City Spectacular, which aired in 1998-1999.

Penn & Teller's Magic and Mystery Tour, which was a three-episode mini-series in 2003.

Penn & Teller Bullshit (AKA "BS"), which aired from 2003-2010.

Penn & Teller: Tell A Lie, which aired in 2011.

Penn & Teller: Fool Us, which began airing in 2011 and is still airing at the time I'm writing this book in 2025.

Penn & Teller understood the power of television. They worked very hard and creatively to be on television. They understood the way to sell tickets to the general public is through television.

Their public appearances are too many to list, but I will give you highlights:

Penn & Teller - Off Broadway in 1985.

Penn & Teller - Broadway run at The Ritz (now known as the Walter Kerr Theatre) in 1987.

When Penn & Teller decided to settle down, they made a sweet deal with The Rio Hotel and casino in Las Vegas. They opened up their permanent show in 2001, which, as of today, is still running.

Chapter 39

The Pendragons



The Pendragons came out of nowhere and took the magic world by surprise. They took classic illusions to the next level with their elegance and speed. They performed so many amazing illusions, as well as introduced several new illusions for the first time in the world of magic.

Jonathan and Charlotte Pendragon were so competitive that they always tried to outdo each other. It was this competitive edge that drove them to be the best they could be.

Jonathan Pendragon was born in 1953 in the USA. His birth name was Claude Douglas Yarbrough.

Charlotte was born in Kalispell, Montana. Her birth name was Charlotte Ann Brown.

(We are not publishing the actual birthday for privacy reasons.)

Jonathan was a gymnast, martial arts expert, and a springboard diver. With his athletic skills he was able to get a job in the Hollywood motion picture studios as a stuntman. His big break came when he became John Belushi's stunt double, as well as a stunt coordinator.

Charlotte was a gymnast and bodybuilder studying dance at the University of California under choreographers Eugene Loring and George Balanchine.

At the University of California, Charlotte met Jonathan, who was studying theatre. Soon after, they got married

and formed the magic duo "The Pendragons".

They begin coordinating with extremely talented Illusion designer, Jim Steinmeyer.

The Pendragons became world famous because of their national and international television appearances in so many TV shows.

They took the old Houdini Metamorphosis illusion to the highest level it will ever go. Between their choreography and speed, this illusion became one of the world's most watched illusions.

Here's a brief description:

Jonathan gets tied up in a mail bag inside of a trunk. The trunk was securely locked up with a padlock. Charlotte got on top of the trunk and raised the curtain over herself and the trunk. A split second later, they changed places. I have never seen anything that fast and that well done. I realize it takes a great deal of physical discipline and stress to make it look so smooth and great.

For my readers, I will suggest going to YouTube and watch the Pendragons' Metamorphosis. Then you will know what I'm talking about.

The Pendragons performed this illusion so fast that they earned a place in the Guinness Book of World Records for the Fastest Transformation Illusion.

Another perfect example is Robert Houdin's Suspension Illusion. This is where the magician's assistant gets suspended on the tip of a metal rod. Up until Charlotte came along, the magician's assistant who were suspended on the tip of the rod had to wear long and bulky customs to hide the gimmick.

Take a look at the videos on YouTube. Charlotte was wearing very little clothing making it look impossible to have a gimmick. Those of us who know the secret of this illusion understands the physical strength Charlotte had in order to endure and make it look effortless.

The Impaled illusion is where a female assistant is placed on the tip of a sword by the magician and two other assistants, so they can carefully place her exactly on the right section of the tip of the sword.

Jonathan picked up Charlotte without any help from any assistants and slowly placed her onto the tip of the sword to balance her perfectly. After he spun her on the sword, Charlotte was impaled on the sword, which went right through her. This illusion never looked better then when it's performed by the Pendragons. I will suggest checking it out on YouTube.

Here are some of The Pendragons' signature illusions, which they took to the next level:

Interlude. This is also known as Body through Body where Charlotte goes through Jonathan's body from back to front.

Artist's Dream, where Jonathan brings a painting of Charlotte to life.

Many suspensions and levitations performed in many different ways.

Many vanishes and reappearances and transpositions.

Clearly Impossible, which was Jonathan's brainchild, taking the classic Sawing A Woman in half, but using a see-through glass box.

Just to name some of The Pendragons' TV appearances:

ITV's (British Broadcasting) The Best of Magic, which had 9 episodes and aired in 1989 to 1990.

ITV's The Magic Comedy Strip, which aired in 1991.

Disney's Night of Magic, which aired in the 1990's.

PBS's The Art of Magic, a three-hour special which aired in 1994.

PBS's Cincinnati Pops Orchestra Special, which aired in 1994.

NBC's World's Greatest Magic, which aired from 1994 to 2000.

ABC's Champions of Magic, which aired in 1996.

NBC's The World's Most Dangerous Magic, which aired in 1998.

NBC's The World's Most Dangerous Magic 2, which aired in 1999.

Jonathan and Charlotte's competitive drive, which fueled their stage performances, gradually spilled into their everyday lives. After 15 years, their marriage became strained leading to a separation in 2009 and a divorce in 2012. They went their separate ways leaving behind a legacy of illusions and performances that may not be matched anytime soon.

Chapter 40

Lance Burton



Lance Burton is one of the icons in the world of magic. He was born in 1960 in Colombia, Kentucky. His birth name is William Lance Burton.

When he was 5 years old, he volunteered at a magic show. The magician, Harry Collins, pulled coins out of Lance's ears and nose, and that was it. Lance was hooked.

For my readers. I got to know Lance well and we became friends. I can share with you some of my observations. Lance, from an early age, learned to ask. He asked Harry Collins to teach him magic. Harry Collins became Lance's mentor during his teenage years.

Later on in his career, when Lance wanted to do dove magic and card manipulations he approached Channing Pollock. At the time, Channing Pollock was retired and definitely did not want to take his craft to the grave. So, he was more than happy to share his secrets and methods with Lance Burton. Channing Pollock became Lance's next mentor. I believe this is Lance Burton's gift. He's not afraid to ask.

Many times, I asked Lance Burton for favors. He never said no. He knows. It's in the Bible: Ask and you shall receive.

In 1977, Lance competed in his first magic competition at Abbott's Magic Get Together and won first prize.

Three years later in 1980, he was 20 years old and won a Gold Medal of Excellence from the International Brotherhood of Magicians. This gave Lance the wind under his wings to fly which took him to Southern California, where he showcased on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. It aired on October 28, 1981. It was Lance's first television appearance. This was an iconic performance, and I highly recommend you check it out on YouTube.

On the strength of his first performance on television, Lance landed a job in Las Vegas at the Folies Bergere which lasted for the next nine years.

In 1982, Lance competed at the Federation Internationale des Sociétés Magiques competition. This is known as FISM. It took place that year in Lausanne, Switzerland. He won the grand prix. He was both the youngest magician to ever win and the first American to ever win.

When Lance returned to the USA, he wore the FISM medal around his neck. He purchased the largest trophy from a local trophy shop and made publicity photos with that trophy as the magic champion of the world. Actually, Lance helped promote FISM in North America with this publicity.

After the Second World War, Europe was struggling financially and socially to get back to normal. None of the European magic fraternities could afford to have magic conventions like we have in the USA, such as Abbott's Get Together, Tannen's Magic Jubilee, both S.A.M. and I.B.M. conventions. So, for the Europeans to try something similar to the American conventions the only option for them is to do it altogether and do it every four years under the banner of the Federation Internationale des Societes Magiques or FISM.

In 1991, through his hard work and persistence, Lance landed a lucrative contract where he produced, directed, and wrote his own show at the Hacienda Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas which ran for five years.

In August 1994, Lance signed a 13-year contract with the Monte Carlo Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas where the Monte Carlo built a custom theater with 1,274 seats to Lance's specifications for a cost of \$27 million. The show opened on June 21, 1996. Entertainment Today magazine listed the show as the number one family magic show.

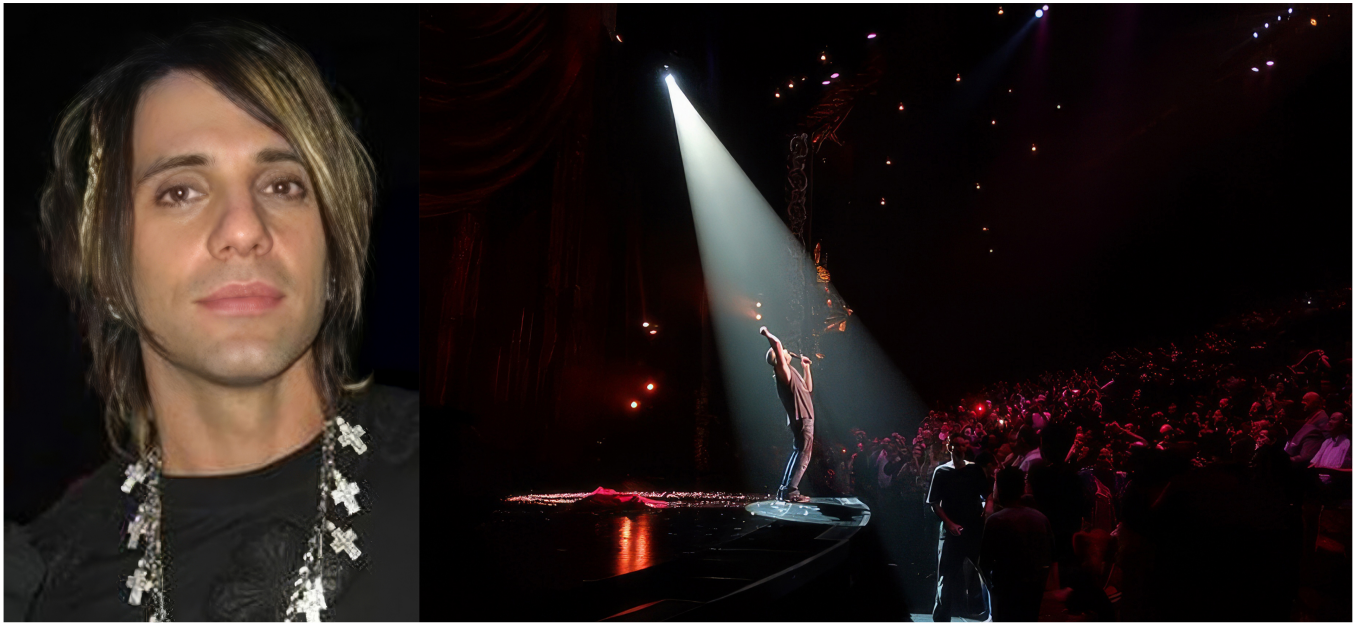
During the 13-year run at the Monte Carlo, Lance Burton earned about \$110 million.

To summarize, Lance Burton performed more than 15,000 shows in Las Vegas for over 5,000,000 people until he retired in 2010.

Lance retired from the Las Vegas hustle and bustle, performing 5-7 shows a week, so that he could enjoy quality time to enjoy nature and perform shows on his own terms with his own friends.

Chapter 41

Criss Angel



Criss Angel's birth name is Christopher Nicholas Sarantakos. He is one of the world's most successful magicians/illusionists.

Criss was born in 1967, on Long Island, New York at Hempstead General Hospital.

In his early years Criss attended Elmont Elementary School. When he was nine years old his family moved to East Meadow. His father, John Sarantakos, owned a restaurant.

Criss Angel was seven years old when he saw a local magician performing at his father's restaurant and he got interested in magic.

I first saw Criss Angel at the Hicksville Magic Shop. He was about six years old, and his mother brought him in to get some magic books for the young boy.

Actually, I couldn't help noticing his mother; she was extremely good looking. Criss Angel got his looks from his mother.

Criss Angel grew up with a passion for magic and music. His older brother, John, owned a music store in Levittown, Long Island. The music store was quite large with two floors, where you could find all types of musical instruments, as well as take music lessons.

As Criss Angel was learning magic he spent a great deal of time learning music and writing songs.

At an early age Criss began performing magic to friends, family, and school-mates. As he got older, he began borrowing illusions from his good friend Scott Enterante, who played Houdini in a movie for Paramount Pictures.

During these magic years Criss spent equal time on music and magic. In the mid 1990's, his first magic show with music was "Angeldust".

Back then, Criss Angel produced his first music album by the same name, "Angeldust".

Criss Angel's home was less than two and a half miles from my house.

Occasionally, I would see him, and we would talk magic. One time when we were having lunch at a Greek diner I asked him, "Why don't you attend magic conventions?" He told me he didn't want to be influenced by other magicians' performances. He wanted to create his own style.

He got his first break in 1994 when he appeared in a one-hour ABC prime time TV special. His next television appearance was in a 1997 television movie "The Science of Magic."

By the year 2000 Criss Angel made up his mind. He was going to build a first-class Broadway show. His mother borrowed money from the bank using her home as collateral. With the borrowed money Criss Angel created his own original show.

In 2001, Criss Angel convinced the WWE Corporation, which owned "The World Underground Theatre" on Broadway and 43rd street, for Criss Angel to open up his off-Broadway show at The World Underground Theatre.

In the beginning the ticket sales were slow. This is quite understandable in New York City. Unless you have lots of money for promotion, your show can suffer.

Criss Angel approached the International Magicians Society and wanted to be considered for the Merlin Award with the title of Magician of the year. He knew that if he could get this title his ticket sales would improve, and the title would give him an opportunity to promote the show.

The Merlin Award Committee Chairman, Max Toth, a member of our Board of Directors, Vincent Alleluia, and myself went to see Criss Angel's show at The World Underground Theatre. We were totally blown away. It was a very good and original show.

Fifteen days later I had the privilege to present Criss Angel his first Merlin Award for the title of Magician Of The Year 2001. Right after the Merlin Award presentation, Criss Angel's ticket sales went through the roof. The lines were around the block and quite often they had to turn people away because it was sold out. The New York off-Broadway show ran for three years.

In 2005, Criss Angel became the Creative Director and Executive Producer of the A&E network television show entitled "Criss Angel Mindfreak".

The first episode went into production on January 20, 2005, at the Aladdin Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. This was a weekly TV show. Unlike other magic shows, Criss Angel Mindfreak was different and exciting. He included members of his family into the show. There was always a challenge and a cliffhanger that the audience could not wait to see.

The show was an instant hit, and it had over 1.5 million viewers. A&E renewed the contract for season two. Criss Angel was the Director, Producer, and Writer who created all the music for the show as well as being the star of the show.

With no break in between production of seasons one and two, Criss Angel and his crew continued shooting the show at the Aladdin Hotel and Casino.

A&E renewed the contract for season three. By this time Criss Angel was a household name and had the negotiating power to get a better deal from any casino to shoot his weekly TV show at their properties, which was a major promotion for the casino.

On the strength of the success of Criss Angel Mindfreak seasons one and two, Criss Angel managed to get a very good deal from The Luxor management and moved the production from The Aladdin to the Luxor Hotel and Casino.

Criss Angel Mindfreak ran from 2005 to 2010. During that run, Criss had been featured for more hours on prime-time television than any other magician in history.

In 2006, Criss Angel partnered with Cirque de Soleil to have his own mega show the Luxor called "Criss Angel BeLIve".

As the old saying goes, "Too many chefs spoil the broth." That's what happened during the production of Criss Angel BeLIve. The Cirque de Soleil people put too much emphasis on hopping bunnies and flying fairies. So, the show was delayed until it opened on October 31, 2008.

There were mixed reviews from the press. They felt the show did not have enough magic. I agreed with the press. Criss and I talked about this. Eventually, Criss got his way and changed the show to the way it should have been from the start.

The show was much better. It got better reviews. It ran until 2019. It had earned over \$150 million in ticket sales.

By 2019, Criss decided to have total control over the creativity. Therefore, he opened up his own show "Mindfreak Live" at Planet Hollywood.

Among his awards, Criss Angel received the Merlin Award for Magician of The Year in 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2008. In 2009, Criss Angel received the Merlin Award for Magician of the Decade. In 2018, Criss Angel received a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the International Brotherhood of Magicians.

In 2024, Criss Angel received the Merlin Award for G.O.A.T., Greatest Of All Time.

At the time I am writing this book, "Mindfreak Live" is still playing at the Criss Angel theater in Planet Hollywood five times a week and is one of the most successful shows in Las Vegas.

Chapter 42

Women in Magic Introduction

For the most part, and throughout the history of magic, women were not allowed to participate outside of being just assistants. Overall, magic was a male-dominated field.

I think women are smarter than men. When I made this statement, a man stood up and asked me how I came to that conclusion. I told him, "Behind every successful man there is a woman." As for my own observation, little girls are so much smarter than little boys. Little girls are expressive, talkative, and full of ideas. I believe as time goes by, society finds a way to hold women back. However, I believe this is no more. In today's society there are more women holding high positions than men.

By the 17th century onward women became part of magic initially supporting their man behind the scenes, working out the secrets, preparing and aiding with the magical apparatus.

Eventually, women became the magician's assistants. Quite often they got cut in half, cut in three or four pieces, got diced, burned, cremated, blown out of cannons, impaled by spikes, etc. If you didn't know any better, you will assume you are watching a masochistic show.

Chapter 43

Adelaide Herrmann

The Queen of Magic



One of the first women who broke the barriers of magic was Adelaide Hermann.

She was born on August 11, 1853, in London, England. Her birth name was Adelaide Scarcez.

As a teenager, Adelaide studied dance and aerial acrobatics. She also learned to ride the velocipede (an early version of the bicycle) and began traveling as a trick-rider with Professor Brown's velocipede troupe.

In 1874, she was on her way to New York City on a cruise ship to work as a dancer at a Broadway Theatre. There she met Alexander Herrmann, the very famous magician on both sides of the Atlantic.

Adelaide was a very attractive young lady. Alexander Herrmann put on his charm and began entertaining her. He swept her off her feet. The following year, 1875, they got married at New York City Hall. This was a fairytale story. New York City's mayor, William H. Wickham, performed their ceremony.

Adelaide worked with her husband as the main assistant. They performed most of the grand illusions together. They traveled the world as the Herrmann the Great show. In addition to performing the grand illusions, she also performed escape stunts and the human cannonball, where she was shot fifty feet into the air out of a cannon then landing onto a safety net. She was also a bicycle trick rider, carrying two assistants on her shoulders. As if all of that wasn't enough, she was also the main dancer in the show.

Together as a husband-and-wife team they made a great deal of money. They purchased a mansion outside of New York on Long Island. They also purchased a large private yacht where they entertained friends. They also purchased their own train carriage.

While Adelaide played the great hostess for their guests, she found time to practice sleight of hand magic, including multiplying balls. She had this desire to be the best she could be.

In December 1896, her husband Alexander suffered a major heart attack and died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 52.

Adelaide's fairytale marriage and lavish lifestyle came to an end when she became a grieving widow and only to discover that her husband's extravagant spending had left her with significant debts to repay or face bankruptcy.

Adelaide immediately sent for her husband's nephew, Leon Herrmann, an accomplished magician in his own right, to come to the USA from Europe. Soon

after Leon's arrival in the USA, they begin rehearsing and working together to keep the show going. This arrangement did not last long. It ended after three seasons.

Leon's work ethic was not to Adelaide's standards, so she fired him and went on performing a large-scale illusion show on her own. She even performed the dangerous bullet catch with six bullets. Adelaide Herrmann became extremely well known as a magician. Very soon, she was named the Queen of Magic.

For the next 25 years, she toured the world playing in big cities such as London, Paris, and New York. In 1903, she opened up her Broadway show at the Circle Theatre. The New York Times called her "The World's Only Woman Magician."

At the height of her career, Adelaide had one of the largest magic and illusion shows.

Let me describe one of her illusions: Noah's Ark. She showed the ark empty. Then she began producing all kinds of animals from the ark. At first, she produced beautiful cats, such as black, white, and calico cats. Then she produced dogs with colorful costumes, followed by beautiful birds, including white doves. Then she produced other animals, such as tigers, lions, leopards, zebras, and an elephant. What a magnificent production show.

Adelaide continued performing into her 70s. In 1926, the theatrical warehouse on West 46th St. in New York City burned down, destroying her illusions, props, costumes, and her animals.

Rather than giving up magic, she tried to rebuild her show. Harry Blackstone loaned her some magic, too. She made a comeback and continued performing.

On February 19, 1936, Adelaide passed away from pneumonia. She was 79 years old.

She left behind a legacy and a path for the next generation of female magicians to follow.

Chapter 44

Dell O'Dell



Dell O'Dell was born on October 20, 1897. Her birth name was Odella Newton.

Odella's mother left when Odella was just a little girl. She grew up with her five older brothers and their father. She had no choice but to become a tomboy.

Her father, Lucky Bill Newton, owned a small midwestern circus, and the family travelled a lot.

Odella learned lots of skills from the circus performers, including juggling, climbing, balancing, and fast talking.

At an early age, Odella began performing. She developed a strongwoman act where she balanced heavy objects on her chin, while she climbed up one side of a ladder and down the other side.

Her talking style using snappy patter and cute rhymes became her signature style.

After the 1929 depression started and the circus business changed, Odella adapted to the changes and began performing in vaudeville. For those of you who don't know much about vaudeville it was born out of necessity. When big traveling shows and individual acts could no longer afford rising prices, vaudeville became popular. Vaudeville was a variety show, where comedians, musicians, dancers, magicians, acrobats, and other headliners performed in the same show.

Odella had the smarts to purchase the rights of the comedy magic act from the famous comedy magician, Frank Van Hoven. She went on to perform as a comedy magician under the stage name Dell O'Dell.

In 1931, Dell married a famous juggler from Switzerland, Charles Carrer. This was a good marriage. Both understood the ups and downs of show business. Charles was a perfect husband. He helped Dell by assisting in her show as well as rebuilding and repairing her props.

Throughout her career Dell worked constantly. Sometimes, she worked two shows per evening. As she finished one show, her assistants set up another show in a different venue prior to her arrival. She was a big believer of advertising and promotion. She invested in print advertisement. Quite often she said, "If they don't know you, they won't hire you."

To give you some insight into her schedule quite often, during the day, she performed at children's parties and schools. In the evenings she performed at private parties at hotels and nightclubs.

Dell was a New Yorker, and she took advantage of all the trade shows coming into New York City. Quite often, she worked at the booths of trade shows and gathered the onlookers with her magic around the booth. She turned the microphone over to the salesperson once the crowd had gathered.

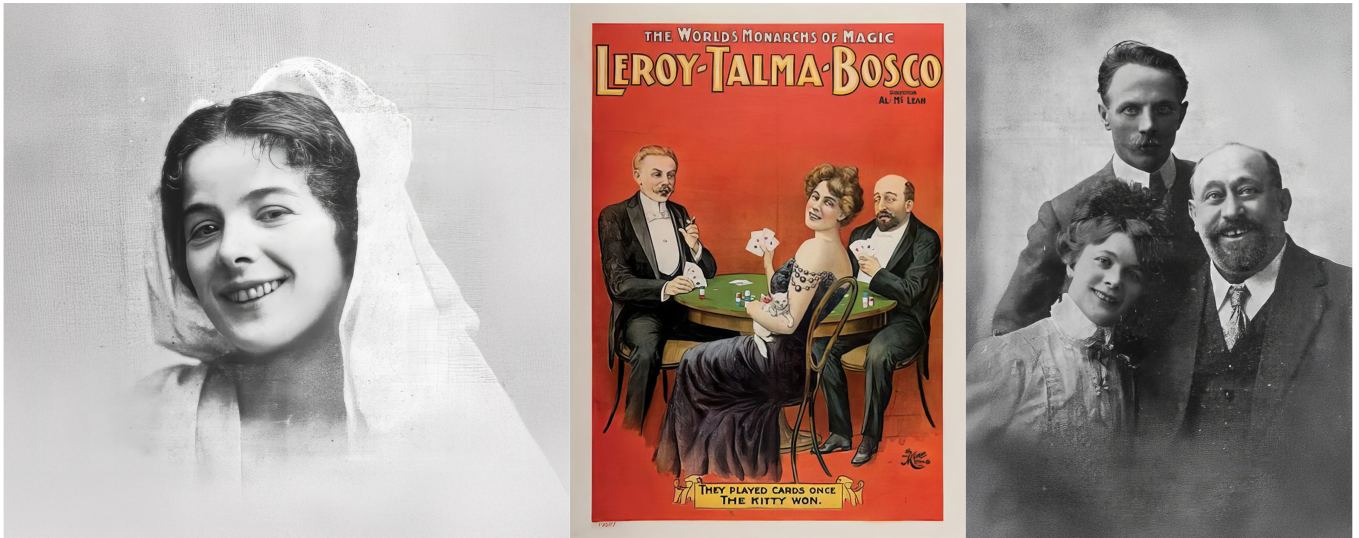
In the 1950's, when television was new, Dell moved to Los Angeles in 1951. There she was given her own weekly TV show by one of the early licensed TV stations. Her show, "The Dell O'Dell Show", continued airing successfully for the following two years. That made her one of the early pioneers of magic on television, predating most of the other TV magicians.

Dell continued working diligently, even though she was battling cancer. Her last show was two days before she passed away on February 5, 1962, with her husband Charles by her side.

She died at age 64 of multiple myeloma. She left her body to UCLA Medical Center for research purposes.

Chapter 45

Talma



Talma was born in 1861. Her birth name was Mary Ann Ford.

Mary Ann got her introduction to magic when she was hired by a professional magician in London. She was trained to perform the two-person mental act and began performing as the mind-reader's assistant.

During her performance, she met another magician who came to see the show. His name was Servais Le Roy. He was an accomplished magician and sleight of hand artist.

Servais talked Mary Ann into quitting her mind-reading act and working with him as the leading assistant. During this time, Servais Le Roy gave her the stage name Mercedes Talma, but she was mostly known as Talma.

In 1890, Talma got married to Servais Le Roy and they travelled the world together.

For her, being a magician's assistant was not enough. She already enjoyed an experience being a solo performer when she was doing the mind-reading act.

With her husband's help, she was trained in sleight of hand magic. At one point, she was able to palm 30 coins in her little hands. Since she specialized in coin manipulation, she was often billed as "The Queen of Coins."

In September 1899, Talma opened her own show at the Oxford Music Hall in London as "The Queen of Coins". At her opening night, a show critic from the Daily Telegram was in the theater. After the show, he wrote that the beautiful brunette female magician offers strong competition to her male counterparts. The show critic was actually referring to T. Nelson Downs, who was a famous coin magician and was billed as "The King of Coins".

Talma's hard work, due diligence, and countless hours of practice paid off. She was performing in large venues throughout England, Germany, and France.

After performing for several years as the lead female magician, Talma decided to work with her husband. This was when they created the trio of star magicians. Servais Le Roy performed as the illusionist. Talma performed as the female magician. They hired Leon Bosco, a fat comedy magician. They created the team of "Le Roy, Talma, and Bosco, the Monarchs of Magic."

Together, they traveled through England, Scotland, Ireland, and throughout the rest of Europe. Then they travelled to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and North and South America.

Le Roy and Talma purchased a home in Keansburg, New Jersey. On the property there were enough storage houses for them to store their illusions and props.

In October 1930, Le Roy got struck by a car near his home. It left him in bad shape with a fractured skull and broken ribs. Talma took care of him until she passed away on July 13, 1944.

Chapter 46

Melinda



Melinda was the first female magician to have her own mega Illusion show in Las Vegas. She paved the way for the next generation of female magicians to perform in their own shows in Las Vegas.

Melinda was born in 1965 in a small town in Tennessee. Her father, Richard Saxe, was a band leader and music show organizer. Melinda's mother, Bonnie Saxe, was a dancer and showgirl. It is fair to say Melinda had show business in her veins.

When Melinda was three years old her mother Bonnie got a job as a showgirl in Las Vegas at the Folies Bergere show at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino. So, the family moved to Las Vegas. When Melinda was five years old her mother enrolled her into dance classes.

In 1982, Melinda graduated from Bonanza High School in Las Vegas.

When Melinda was 17 years old, she got a job as a dancer in the Siegfried & Roy show.

After 2 years with the Siegfried & Roy show, Melinda felt she knew enough magic to open up her own show at the Bourbon Street Hotel and Casino. She was 19 years old when she opened her first show "Magic with Sex Appeal."

In May 1988, Melinda moved her show from Bourbon Street to the Landmark Hotel and Casino. She changed the show to a more family-friendly show. Her mother Bonnie was the producer, director, and choreographer. Melinda's sister, Suzanne Saxe, was the lead dancer. Melinda's brother, David Saxe, was the sound and light engineer. Basically, it was a family owned and operated show catering to families visiting Las Vegas. With her new show she was honored by the Society of American Magicians.

In October 1989, she moved the show to the MGM Marina Hotel.

In 1991, Melinda opened a bigger and better show with large illusions at the Lady Luck Hotel and Casino.

In 1993, Melinda got married to Lance Burton, master magician and

Las Vegas headliner. It was the biggest thing in magic. The magic community was excited and treated the wedding as a magic royalty wedding. So many gifts came in from all over the country. It was the biggest news in the magic community. I guess the expectation was very high. The marriage didn't last. They got divorced a year later in 1994.

After the divorce, Melinda met Steve Zadrack, a very creative businessman and show producer. Steve Zadrack negotiated television deals in Europe and got an Italian TV company to pay \$300,000 USD to Melinda to produce a new and original show. Steve Zadrack hired some of the best minds in magic. Just to name a few: Garry Oullette, Don Wayne, Andre Kole, and David Mendoza had created new illusions for Melinda. Steve Zadrack called them the dream team

because all of these guys previously had worked as magic consultants for David Copperfield.

Some of these new illusions were used in the Italian TV show, which was syndicated throughout Europe.

After coming back from Europe, Melinda and Steve Zadrick managed to get big shows at Trump Castle in Atlantic City and Caesars Palace in Lake Tahoe.

In 1995, Gary Oullette was producing the World's Greatest Magic TV specials for NBC television network. Gary Oullette chose Melinda to be one of the magicians on the World's Greatest Magic, where Melinda was impaled by a large drill and picked up on the tip of the drill twenty feet high into the air. As the drill was rotating, she was spinning on the tip of the drill. It was sensational. During this time, she also toured across the country with the live version of "World's Greatest Magic."

In 1997, Steve Zadrick and Melinda managed to get Disney to produce two one-hour TV specials starring Melinda, the First Lady of Magic. This was broadcast on the CBS TV network at a prime-time slot.

In 1998, the International Magicians Society named Melinda "The Magician of The Year." I had the privilege to present Melinda the Merlin Award in her own 3000-seat theatre in Branson, Missouri.

In 1998, Melinda was featured in another of Gary Oullette's TV specials. This one was titled "The World's Most Dangerous Magic". This is where Melinda had to escape from a glass tank filled with snakes.

In 2000, Melinda retired from show business to get married and raise a family. She got married to Mark Evensvold, a managing executive and partner in the P.F. Chang's restaurant chain.

With her husband, they have two children and are living happily ever after.

Melinda was the first female magician to have her own show with large illusions in Las Vegas. Thus, she paved the way for the future female magicians to have their own shows in Las Vegas.

Chapter 47

Juliana Chen



Juliana Chen was born in a small town in the Hunan Province in China. She was selected at the age of ten to enter the Hunan Academy for the theater arts, where she learned acrobatics, juggling, and ballet.

At the age of 15, Juliana was traveling with the acrobats of China from Guangzhou. After a serious injury from a fall, she was told she could no longer perform with the traveling troops. So, the director of Guangzhou Acrobats encouraged Juliana to take up magic.

Juliana was ambidextrous and began practicing magic by using both hands to perform. She practiced card manipulations and did it very well. Four years later in 1986 she entered a competition in China and won first place.

She received a scholarship to learn English in Canada; she arrived in Vancouver in 1988.

As she was learning English, she found a job working in a furniture store. Later, she started her own graphic business.

In 1990, Juliana joined the Magic Circle of Vancouver. Very soon, she gained the respect of her colleagues with her skills. In the following years she entered many magic competitions throughout Europe, Japan, and the USA. In 1992, she won Magician of The Year at the annual convention of the International Brotherhood of Magicians in Salt Lake City, Utah.

In 1997, she won the competition and became the champion of manipulations at the world congress of magicians Federation Internationale de Society Magicue (FISM) in Dresden, Germany. Juliana was the first Chinese magician to win the FISM award for her solo performance. She was also the first female magician to win the FISM award.

Juliana appeared on the front cover of many magazines, including Linking Ring Magazine and Magic Magazine.

Upon returning to North America, she was approached by many show producers and show buyers. She traveled the world as a headliner and performed in so many prestigious venues including the London Palladium, Princess Grace Theatre in Monte Carlo,

Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, Tiger Palace in Frankfurt, Germany, NHK Theatre in Tokyo, Japan, and the Wintergarden in Berlin, Germany.

She also appeared on many TV shows including The World's Greatest Magic NBC TV Specials and Champions of Magic ABC TV Specials.

In 2002, Juliana moved to Las Vegas. In the same year she was awarded by the Society of American Magicians with the Chavez Memorial Cup and inducted into the Society of American Magicians Magic Hall of Fame.

In 2003, Juliana was nominated for Stage Magician of The Year by the Academy of Magical Arts in Hollywood, California.

In 2003, the International Magicians Society honored Juliana Chen with the Merlin Award for Most Original Magician.

In 2025, Juliana was inducted into the International Magicians Society's Magic Hall of Fame.

At the time I'm writing this book, Juliana has two homes: one in Las Vegas and the other in Germany. She is traveling the world, still performing, and mentoring many young female magicians.

Chapter 48

Dell O'Dell



Dell O' Dell was born on October 20, 1897. Her birth name was Odella Newton.

Odella's mother left when Odella was just a little girl. She grew up with her five older brothers and their father. She had no choice but to become a tomboy.

Her father, Lucky Bill Newton, owned a small midwestern circus. The family travelled a lot.

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Chapter 49

Dorothy Dietrich



Dorothy Dietrich was born in 1948 in Erie, Pennsylvania. She grew up in a dysfunctional family with five brothers and an alcoholic father who was abusive to her. Dorothy's mother was desperate and helpless trying to do her best under the circumstances.

By the time Dorothy was ten years old she made up her mind to run away from home and escape from her abusive father and helpless mother.

Dorothy began working all kinds of jobs and saved money for her getaway.

By the time Dorothy was 13 years old she managed to save \$3000 and ran away from home. Her girlfriend's brother Billy was going to deliver a car to a New York company, and he offered to drive Dorothy to New York.

When Dorothy arrived in New York she checked the newspaper listings for apartment rentals. She found one in the Village Voice paper. Three young ladies were seeking to find another lady to share the rent and share the apartment. Dorothy's portion was \$60 a month.

She moved into the 97th Street third floor apartment sharing the place with three young ladies. One of Dorothy's roommates was working for Tommy Laird who owned the Magic Shop and a dime Museum on 42nd St. and Broadway.

On a personal note, Tommy Laird was my best man at my wedding. He was a good friend who always tried to help people.

Tommy Laird gave Dorothy her first job at the Dime Museum. Some of New York's magicians were performing at the Dime Museum grinding 10 to 15 shows a day.

At the Dime Museum Dorothy met a very talented black magician named Earl Johnson. He was known as 'Presto'. He was an excellent sleight of hand magician. Presto could vanish lit cigarettes in his bare hands and reproduce them behind people's ears. Presto taught Dorothy sleight of hand magic. Dorothy also met Lou Lancaster, a very knowledgeable magician and Illusion builder. He took Dorothy under his wing and taught her stage illusions, including Keller's rope tie, Houdini's straight jacket, Houdini's milk can escape, and many other good magic routines.

(For my readers, Lou Lancaster made six magic tutorial videos for us at the International Magicians Society.)

Dorothy also met Bobby Baxter, a very good New York magician. Bobby taught Dorothy how to produce and vanish live animals especially doves and rabbits.

Along the way Dorothy learned magic from all of the performers at the Dime Museum.

Dorothy developed her Flash Act performing with doves, rabbits, a duck, and two poodles.

By the time Dorothy was 17 years old, she was working as a professional magician as a leading dove magician.

By age 20, Dorothy was performing at resort hotels, nightclubs, schools, college auditoriums, and trade shows. She was the favorite of several New York booking agencies.

Her popularity and work ethic earned her respect from some of the famous magicians in New York and all of them were more than happy to help Dorothy become an even better magician. Just to name a few: Frank Garcia, Tony Slydini, Russell Swan, Walter B. Gibson, Jack London, and Coney Island faker Al Flosso.

Dorothy was one of the early members of the International Magicians Society and the first woman magician to join the IMS.

She rose to fame when she escaped from a strait jacket dangling from a burning rope.

In 1988, Dorothy gained more popularity and respect from her fellow magicians when she performed the dangerous bullet catch at one of Donald Trump's resorts in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

She performed the bullet catch again for the International Brotherhood of Magicians in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Dorothy performed the bullet catch under test conditions on the Canadian television show "Autobus du Canada" and was paid the highest salary ever paid to any magician.

Here's a brief description of the bullet catch:

This was done under test conditions. The bullets were brought in by the committee with guards. An independent marksman fired one of two chosen bullets into a concrete backstop. The second bullet was fired into a metal cup in Dorothy's mouth. Dorothy challenged anybody who could prove that the bullet did not leave from the gun by offering a \$10,000 reward. Many newspapers including the New York Times and TV Guide featured articles on Dorothy Dietrich.

Dorothy went on to TV shows to cut men in half. Sometimes Dorothy cut the TV host in half.

New York City is one of the biggest trade show capitals in the world.

Dorothy got her share of performing at industrial events and trade shows. Quite often, she created special shows custom-tailored for the client's needs.

Dorothy was co-editor and publisher of Hocus-Pocus Magazine, alongside her partner, magician/mentalists Dick Brooks.

In the mid 1970s, Dorothy and her partner Dick Brooks established the famous New York Magic Townhouse. It provided opportunities for many magicians to perform at the Magic Townhouse. I, too, had the opportunity to perform at the Magic Townhouse.

Dorothy performed alongside many celebrities. Just to name a few: Bill Cosby, Loretta Lynn, Dick Van Patten, and Henny Youngman.

At the time I'm writing this book, Dorothy is 77 years young, still performing, and running the Houdini Museum in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Chapter 50

Closing

While the magicians featured in these pages represent some of the most iconic and influential figures in the history of magic, they are by no means the only ones who have shaped this incredible art form. Magic, like any true craft, thrives on the contributions of countless performers, innovators, and dreamers—each leaving their mark on the world in unique ways. The magicians listed below, their creativity, passion, and dedication to the craft have helped to build the rich legacy of magic that continues to inspire future generations. In honoring these names, I acknowledge that the true greatness of magic cannot be measured by a mere list—it is found in the spirit of every magician or magic creator who has ever taken the challenge, no matter how large or small. My heartfelt thanks go to the magicians below for all they've given to the world of magic.

Al Baker

Albert Gosham

Alexx Alexxander

Allan Ackerman

Andre Kole

Asi Wind

Avon Lee

B.S. Reddy

Banachek

Blaise Serra

Bobby Baxter

Bone Ho

Boridi

Brad Ross
Brett Daniels
Carl Cloutier
Charles Reynolds
Charlotte Pendragon
Chi Ling
Chris Capehart
Christian Farla
Cosentino
Cyril Takayama
Dai Vernon
Dan Sperry
Dani DaOrtiz
Dani Lary
David Mendoza
David Roth
Deddy Corbuzier
Derren Brown
Ding Jian Xong
Dmitry Mosin
Dirk Losander
Don Wayne
Drake Devan
Drake Deven
Eric Eaton
Eugene Burger
Fielding West
Floyd G. Thayer
Frances Willard
Franz Harary
Fred Kaps

Gary Darwin
George Schindler
Gino Mourad
Glen Falkenstein
Gopinath Muthukad
Greg Frewin
Greg Gleason
Hans Klok
Harry Lorayne
Henry Evans
Jamy Ian Swiss
James Dimmare
Jason Byrne
Jay Marshall
Jay Sankey
Jeff McBride
Jeremy Tan
Jim Steinmeyer
Joe Devlin
Joe Labero
John Caluwaert
John Taylor
Johnny Gaughan
Johnny Thompson
Jonathan Pendragon
Jorgos
Joshua Jay
Juan Tamariz
Kalanag
Kevin James
Lee Alex

Lennart Green
Leonard Green
Leslie C. Smith
Lu Chen
Luis De Matos
Louis Tannen
Mac King
Marco Tempest
Mark Kalin & Ginger Leigh
Mat Franco
Matt Hollywood
Max Malini
Max Maven
Michael Ammar
Michael Chaut
Michael Late
Mike Michaels
Milbourne Christopher
Milt Larsen
Moustapha Berjaoui
Mumdo
Palmas Nguyen
Patrick Page
Paul Daniels
Paul Draper
Paul Harris
Paul Kozak
Paul Romhany
Paul Vigil
PC Sorcar
Peter Eggink

Professor Hoffman
Raj Kumar
Rene Levand
Richard Kaufman
Richard Osterlind
Richard Ross
Ricky Jay
Rocco Silano
Robin Channing
Roger Klause
Rudy Coby
Samala Venu
Shimada
Shin Lim
Silvan
Simon Lovell
Simon Pierro
Soma
Sos & Victoria
Stan Allen
Stephane Vanel
Steve Brooks
Tabary
Theodore Annemann
Tim White
Tom Mullica
Tommy Cooper
Tommy Wonder
Tony Clark
Tony Corinda
Tony Slydini

Topas

Topaz

Uri Geller

Vlad Kryvonogov

Will Goldston

Yif

Yu Ho-Jin

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Thank you, my friends. I appreciate you and your friendship. I will never take any of you for granted. I love you all.

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