Chapter 2

DECEPTION VS. CONVICTION

A trickster's chief aim is to deceive his audience about the way his tricks are done. With rare exceptions, a stage director makes no attempt to deceive and could not hope to succeed if he tried. Everyone knows that actors wear makeup, that the scenery is painted canvas, and that the offstage thunder, battle, or train wreck is merely a sound effect. Nevertheless, the fact that the whole audience recognizes these things as fakes does not keep them from being convincing.

Conviction differs fundamentally from deception. Successful deception results in unquestioning belief. Conviction requires only what is called "suspension of disbelief." The playgoer never regards the events of a drama as real; he merely fails to disbelieve in them. This may seem like a weak basis for illusion, but the result can be overwhelming. If the minds of audiences did not permit a suspension of disbelief, there would be no drama.

Although conviction normally vanishes within a few seconds after the routine ends, this need not be the case. Many people accept *Dial Information* as evidence of telepathy, and *The Strong Man's Secret* will leave most observers with the belief that you can hold two pieces of string together no matter how hard spectators pull on the outer ends. A trick which lacks meaning rarely achieves any conviction at all.

Conviction can occur without deception. When someone is shot in a play, the spectators are convinced that the *character* is killed but they are not deceived into believing that the *actor* is dead. A ventriloquist's audience is never deceived; it does not think the dummy is alive. Nevertheless, the conviction of life is irresistible.

Conviction without deception is not confined to actors and ventriloquists. Thousands of fortune-tellers and spirit mediums

do nothing more deceptive than speak in a normal tone of voice. In spite of this, they are able to convince their dupes that they are oracles of fate or that they can make contact with the happy dead.

Unlike these illusionists, the conjurer must employ some deception. He needs it to disguise his device. Thus, Robert-Houdin deceived the Arabs when he made them think his hollow balls of wax were solid lead. But he merely convinced them that he was bulletproof.

Even when an illusion requires no trickery, we must deceive the audience in order to disguise the fact that no device exists. For example, most bridge players are convinced that singletons (only one card of a suit in a hand of thirteen) are comparatively rare. Actually, at least one singleton will appear in five deals out of six. If you merely demonstrate your ability to deal singletons, astute spectators will realize that they were wrong in believing singletons to be rare. We can avoid this by applying the principle of conservation and weakening the effect through hinting at other explanations. In such cases, I like to suggest two possibilities, one magical and one rational. Even though the magical one is incredible, it helps to divert attention from the true solution.

THE SINGULAR SINGLETONS

This is based on an idea by George Blake which first appeared in *Magic Magazine*, an English publication. The routine is wasted on those who do not play bridge. They would not be surprised if a singleton appeared in every hand. However, those who do play bridge usually find it completely astounding.

After a card game, take a small object from your pocket and finger it. When someone asks about it, explain that it is a "toad stone" and quote Shakespeare's words from *As You Like It*,

> Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.

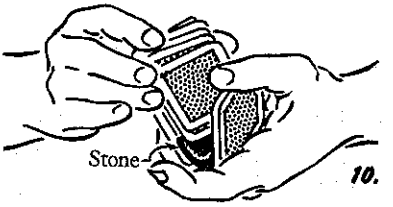
Actually, the "stone" is a flattish pellet of plastic wood dyed green with food color.

Inform your listeners that such "stones" are extremely rare. "Not one toad in ten thousand has one." Sorcerers used to call such a stone "stelon," "crepaudia," or "batrachos," and wealthy noblemen had them set in rings as "antivenins" or defenses against poison. You doubt if they gave much protection, but they undoubtedly bring luck and have helped you to win money on bets.

At this point you say, "For example, how often do you deal a singleton? Once in ten hands? A dozen? Twenty?" Let everyone guess. Few will

THE SINGULAR SINGLETONS

Place stone on back of deck. Take packet of cards from the face. Shuffle some on top of stone and some under it. Do this several times. Whenever stone works its way to face of deck, return it to the back and continue shuffling.



10.

guess under ten, and some may guess over twenty. When they have given their opinions, offer to bet that with the aid of your toad stone, you will deal at least one hand with a singleton.

Without waiting for the bet to be covered, shuffle the deck around the stone using an *overhand shuffle* (Fig. 10). Return the stone to your pocket. Hand the deck to the person who showed the strongest belief in the rarity of singletons. Tell him to deal four hands, face up. While he does so, remind him that he claimed a singleton would turn up, say, in only one out of fifteen deals and that he should therefore be glad to give you odds of at least ten to one.

Once in six deals, there will be no hand with a singleton. When this happens, say, "That was just a come-on. Would you like to bet now?" and repeat the process. Occasionally, no hand will show a singleton, but one will have only three suits. In this case, remark that the shuffle must have rubbed too much luck off onto the cards.

Although the "stone" has no effect on the cards, it has a profound effect on the minds of the audience. It deceives even the shrewdest spectator into believing that the singleton appeared because of something that you did during the shuffle. No one who thinks along those lines has any hope of discovering the true secret.

Realism vs. Fantasy

Conjuring imitates the impossible, but some impossibilities are plausible enough to make at least part of the audience accept them as true. Few people who witness *The Strong Man's Secret* doubt that the performer is really holding two strings against a strong pull. Such illusions are *realistic.* They are offered as authentic phenomena, and the spectators may take them seriously without being unduly credulous.

Plausibility varies with the performer, the situation, and the individual spectator. People may be so impressed with Dunninger's personality that they accept his telepathic powers, whereas they would be highly skeptical if a less commanding *mentalist* presented precisely the same act. You can convince many spectators with *Dial Information* in your own home, but only the most gullible would take it seriously as part of a club performance that included taking a rabbit out of a hat and *Sawing a Woman in Half.* Again, some spectators who accept

The Strong Man's Secret without question may be merely entertained by *Dial Information* or vice versa.

Realistic illusions are comparatively rare. Most routines come under the head of *fantasy*. Fantastic conjuring lulls an audience into the frame of mind in which we view fantasy in the theater. No one questions the magic in Shakespeare's *Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We simply accept it. Spectators cannot be expected to take fantastic conjuring seriously, but they should be entertained rather than incredulous.

In many cases, you can present the same basic illusion as either fantasy or realism. The choice depends partly on your personality and partly on the type of audience. The two routines that follow employ the same device and have the same fundamental pattern. In spite of this, they will impress the layman as two separate illusions—although you should not offer both at the same sitting.

I SCRY

Place the cards in front of a spectator and tell him to give you approximately one third. Take this packet, but do not look at it. Tell your victim to lift off another third and to count the cards in the remaining pile. Count your own cards one at a time onto the table so that their order is reversed. This leads the helper to count in the same way. Have him put his packet beside the one on the table. Place yours so that his packet is in the center (Fig. 11). Tell the spectator to turn the cards on the end packets face up.

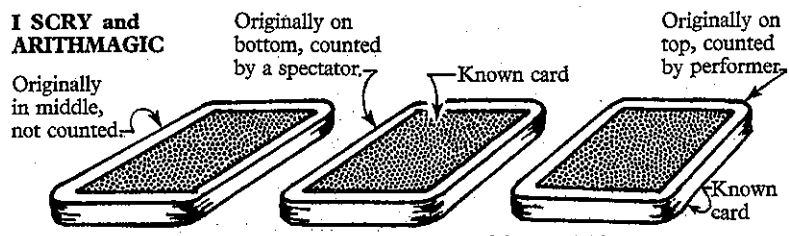
Announce that you are a "scrier," one who is able to divine unknown facts by staring at a drop of ink. Scrying originated in Scotland and is a kind of poor man's crystal gazing. It works just as well and costs almost nothing.

Squeeze a drop of ink from your fountain pen onto a white saucer. Stare at it while you put your fingers lightly on the two outside packets. Mumble to yourself for a few seconds and then name the top card of the center packet.

Have someone choose either outside packet. If he selects the one with the second known card on its face, "scry" the card. If he takes the other packet, turn it face up, rest your fingers on the exposed card and "scry" the second known card.

To work this you merely note the top and bottom cards before you begin. The *business* of counting the cards confuses the spectators and keeps them from remembering the location of the cards in the deck. As you know the top card of the middle packet and the bottom card on one side packet, you are able to "scry" both cards.

I Scry will be regarded as fantasy unless your audience is unusually gullible. The next version is realistic and will be



11. ARRANGEMENT AFTER COUNTING

taken seriously by many people—especially those who stand in awe of mathematics. It requires some mental agility and a little talent for mental arithmetic. However, it employs an extremely useful principle and one which has been entirely neglected in modern times. Casanova, the great lover, supported himself in luxury for years by using arithmetic to spell out the answers to the questions of his dupes. If you learn to handle such calculations in your head, you will be able to invent illusions on the spur of the moment. All you need is five or more numbers to start with and an answer which is known to you and which can be expressed in numerical form.

ARITHMAGIC

Proceed exactly as in *I Scry* until the cards are in the positions shown in Fig. 11. Talk constantly while the cutting and counting are being done. Explain that no matter how well the cards are mixed, they are related to each other by mathematical formulas. Announce that Jacks count as 11, Queens as 12, and Kings as 13. Let us assume that one end packet contains 16 cards and has a four face up on top. The other face up card is a Jack, and there are 19 cards in its packet. You then have eight numbers that you can use:

4 for the four.	17 for the uncounted pile.
11 for the Jack.	52 for the whole deck.
16 for the pile with the four.	4 for the four suits.
19 for the pile with the Jack.	3 for the three piles.

These numbers can be added, subtracted, multiplied, or divided. If necessary, you can halve one, double it, or take its square root. With all these possibilities, you can always arrive at any result from one to thirteen. This lets you appear to determine the denomination of the card on the center packet by arithmetical calculation. Thus:

IF KNOWN CARD IS:	SAY:
Ace	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtract this from 16 for the four pile. That leaves 1."
2	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtract this from the 17 for the center pile. That leaves 2."
3	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtracting 3 for the three piles

gives you 12. Divide by 4 for the four suits, and you get 3."

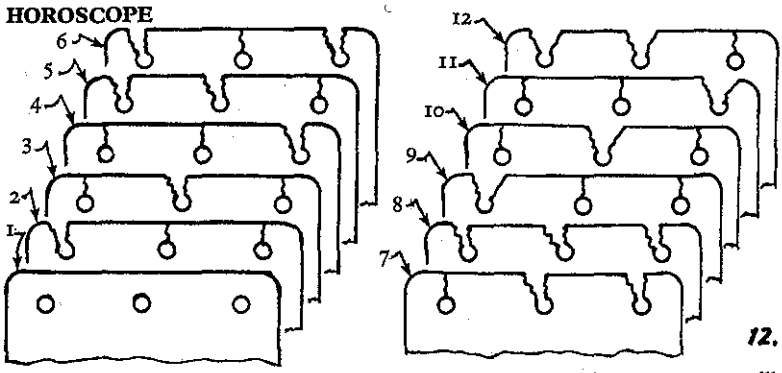
4	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtract this from the 19 for the Jack pile. That leaves 4."
5	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Divide by 3 for the three piles, and you get 5."
6	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtract 3 for the three piles. That leaves 12. Half of 12 is 6."
7	"4 from 11 is 7. Adding 3 for the three piles makes 10. Subtract that from the 17 in the uncounted pile, and you get 7."
8	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtract 4 for the four suits and 3 for the three piles. That leaves 8".
9	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Divide by 3 for the three piles and add 4 for the four suits. That gives you 9."
10	"4 from 11 is 7. Add 3 for the three piles, and you get 10."
Jack	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtracting 4 for the four suits leaves 11."
Queen	"11 plus 4 equals 15. Subtracting 3 for the three piles gives you 12."
King	"11 times 4 is 44. 19 plus 16 equals 35. Subtracting that from 44 leaves 9. Add 4 for the four suits to get 13."

After you announce the denomination of the known card, have a spectator turn over the top card of the center pile to prove you are right.

Offer to repeat. Tell a spectator to choose either of the end packets. You know the card on the bottom of one of these. If he picks it, say that you will compute the denomination of its bottom card. Then have him turn the other outside packet face up to reveal its bottom card. If he chooses the outside packet with an unknown card on its face, tell him to turn this over. Then proceed to compute the denomination of the card on the bottom of the remaining outside packet. You cannot use the same "formula" that you did before. If anyone notices this, say, "There are twenty-six different cases depending on which cards are exposed, and you have to remember them all. That's why so few people do this stunt. Theoretically, I could name the suit, too, but that requires a hundred and four different formulas. I never took the trouble to memorize them."

Conviction Aids Deception

Conviction not only makes your performance more impressive, it makes deception much easier. This is why Frederick Tilden was able to fool the conjurers who saw him in *The Charlatan.* Their conviction that the lawyer was trying to expose Cagliostro kept them from suspecting the actor who played the lawyer of being Tilden's assistant.



Code notebook sheets by tearing small bits from around certain holes. Make a central tear at each hole to avoid ripping off bits of paper by accident. Dog-ear the unprepared sheet behind the last one coded. That makes it easy to locate the first uncoded sheet. Tear out this uncoded sheet along with the coded ones. As the first and last sheets are actually torn, no one will suspect preparation. Distribute sheets to the spectators in the order of their seats. This is natural and makes it easy to remember which person got which sheet. Note that each sheet can be identified even if some spectators write on the backs of their sheets.

When a conjurer performs a trick, he usually says, or at least implies, "I'll bet you can't guess how I do this." That presents the trick as a puzzle and challenges the spectators to solve it. Some spectators accept the challenge. The harder they try to find the answer, the more likely they are to succeed.

On the other hand, when we claim a supernormal power, we deny that a secret device exists. If we can convince the audience of this, even momentarily, all suggestion of a puzzle disappears and there is no thought of a challenge.

In the following example, many people will accept the astrology as genuine. Even the skeptics will not regard the routine as a challenge. They may begin to feel puzzled after you have given a few "readings." But, by that time, it is too late for them to have any chance of penetrating your secret.

HOROSCOPE

This goes best with a party of eight or ten people, including some whom you have just met. It should be introduced at a moment when conversation lags.

Mention the subject of astrology. Remark that you have no faith in its ability to predict the future, but it does seem to provide a good deal of information about a person's character. "For example, I've never known a Sagittarian who wasn't a bit odd. No two of them were odd in the same way. Some were geniuses, some were screwballs, but each one was peculiar in his own fashion."

If you are asked to give astrological readings at this point (and you probably will be), say, "I know most of you so well that you'd think I was cheating if I just asked your birthdays. So let's work it this way. Each of you write your birth date on a slip of paper." Distribute slips from your notebook and add, "Mix them so that I can't tell who wrote which slip."

Take the leaves from the person who shuffled them. Pick up one at random and say, "May 3rd, that's Taurus the Bull—about the middle of the sign."

Go on to describe the person's character. If you are doing this before a group of friends, they will recognize the person after the first few items that you mention. If the person described is a stranger, he will soon begin to show signs of self-consciousness. Grin at him and remark, "You're May 3rd, aren't you?"

Give several more "readings" but stop as soon as your audience will let you. After three readings, everyone except the person who is being "read" begins to be bored.

The secret lies in the fact that the leaves from the notebook are coded as shown in Fig. 12. This lets you identify each spectator with his sheet, and you can read his birthday from the sheet. Once you have that information, you merely describe the person concerned and dress up the description in astrological terms.

Sign	Starts	Sign	Starts
Aries, the Ram	Mar. 21st	Libra, the Balance	Sep. 23rd
Taurus, the Bull	Apr. 20th	Scorpio, the Scorpion	Oct. 24th
Gemini, the Twins	May 21st	Sagittarius, the Archer	Nov. 22nd
Cancer, the Crab	Jun. 22nd	Capricorn, the Goat	Dec. 22nd
Leo, the Lion	Jul. 23rd	Aquarius, the Water Bearer	Jan. 20th
Virgo, the Virgin	Aug. 23rd	Pisces, the Fishes	Feb. 19th

Ascribe any quality you like to any sign. If you state that generosity is typical of those born under Leo, and someone says, "I thought Leos were supposed to be stingy," reply loftily, "You've been misled by the nonsense of the Neapolitan school. Read Anstruther's *The Stars in Their Courses*. He'll set you straight." Few people will argue against a printed authority—even one that you invent on the spur of the moment.

When a birthday falls near the beginning or end of a sign, ascribe some influence to the nearest sign. Thus, August 27th is in Virgo, but it is near Leo. You can therefore say that the spectator's character is basically determined by Virgo but affected by Leo. This avoids problems in case two people are born under the same sign. If a man and a woman have the same birthday, give a different reading for each sex. If they are both of the same sex, do not give either one a reading if you can avoid it. When you are forced to say something, try to find qualities which they have in common.

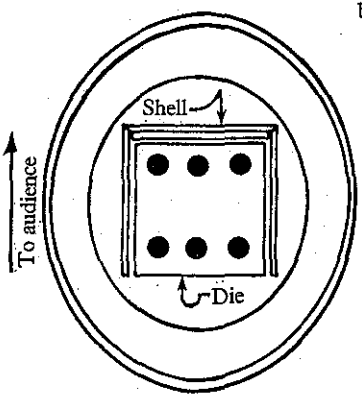
The most superficial conviction is enough to keep spectators from feeling challenged and to divert their minds from the puzzle. Furthermore, when you dramatize a routine, people

are so absorbed in what you are doing that they have little or no attention to spare for how you do it. Obviously, an audience which is not trying to see through your deceptions is easier to fool. Compare the trick in the next section with the illusion which follows it.

PASSE-PASSE DICE

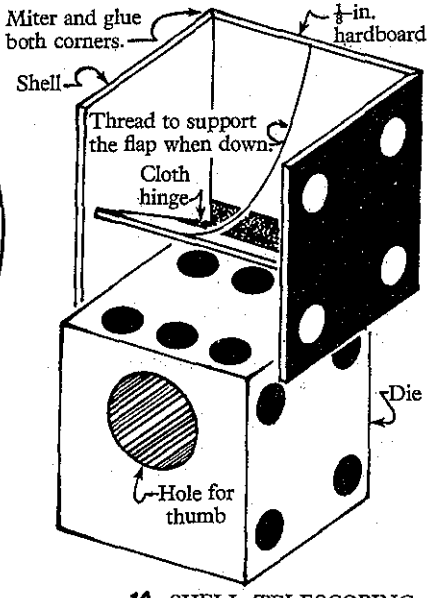
The performer displays two silk hats and two large dice. One die is black with white spots, and the other is white with black spots. The dice are so large that they just fit the hats. The performer raps them together to prove that they are solid. He places a die in each hat, says a few magic words, and removes the dice. They have changed places. He again raps them together to show their solidity. Figs. 13 and 14 reveal the secret.

PASSE-PASSE DICE



13. DIE AND SHELL IN HAT

There is a solid die in each hat from the start. The two shells are shown and then placed into the hats where they telescope over the solid dice. Thumb holes are necessary so that you can lift the solid dice easily.



14. SHELL TELESCOPING OVER THE SOLID DIE

In this trick, the performer seems to have achieved the impossible, but the impossible is rather dull. The only real interest lies in his implied challenge. The spectators feel that they are engaged in a contest with him; he tries to fool them, and they try to detect his method. If they succeed, they are disappointed in the trick; if they fail, they feel frustrated.

Let us now convert this into an illusion. The conviction will not be very deep. Nevertheless, it minimizes the puzzle, denies

the existence of a challenge, and keeps the spectators so busy wondering what is going to happen that they are not even curious about how it will be achieved.

Our new version will not stand by itself. The whole act must be built around a single idea of which this is only one example. However, that is an asset, not a liability. Each routine will strengthen both conviction and interest. That will make the later illusions much more impressive than they could possibly be as separate items.

THE HAUNTED CONJURER

The stage is set for a second-rate conjuring act with conventional apparatus. Present your opening number in a hesitant manner as though expecting something to go wrong any minute. Something does go wrong in a funny way. Grin sheepishly and apologize for your nervousness. You have a good excuse for it. Last night, you attended a musician's jam session and criticized the horn player. Unfortunately, he turned out to be a voodoo obeah man from New Orleans, and he put some sort of mumbo-jumbo whammy on you. "Of course," you insist, "I don't really believe it, but . . ."

Soon, a trick goes wrong in a way which must be due to the obeah man's magic rather than to your simple conjuring. You struggle valiantly on, getting more and more upset and funnier and funnier. Do not let the obeah man interfere with every trick, but he should play at least three jokes on you. This version of *Passe-Passe Dice* is typical:

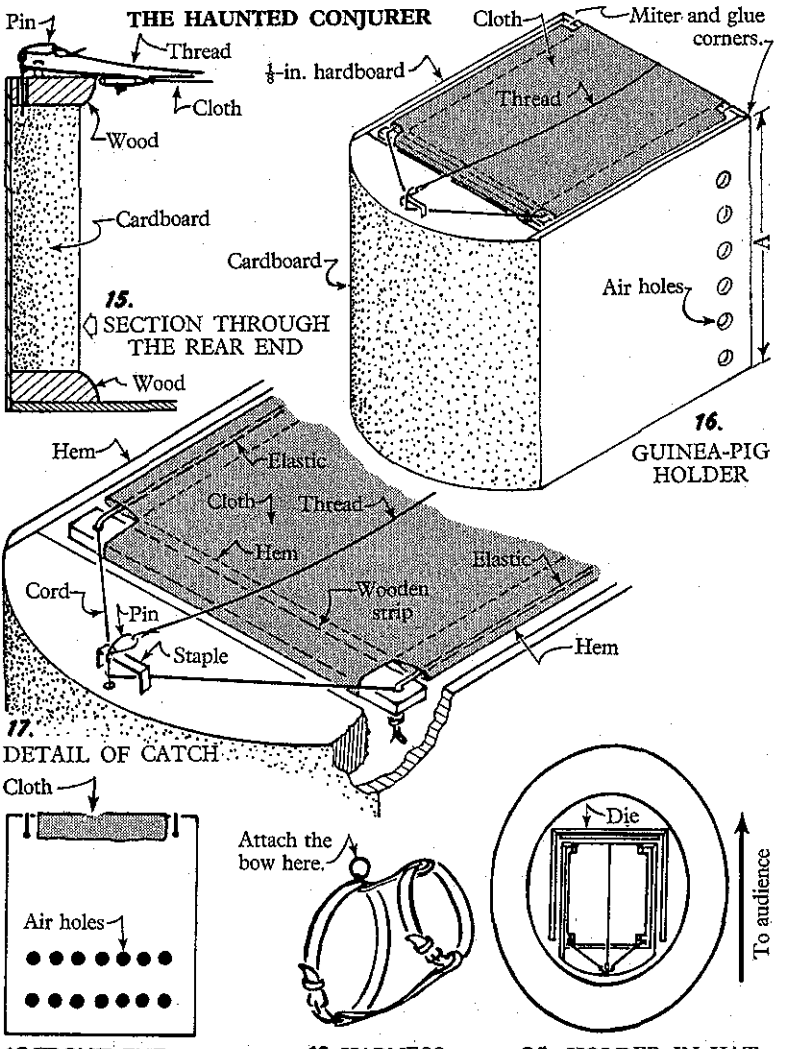
Proceed as in the earlier version up to the point where you put the dice into the hats. Make sure that the audience remembers which die is in which hat by saying, "White on your right." Or you might have one white hat and one black one.

Announce that you will make the dice change places. Mumble your magic words. Glance apprehensively into the hats to make sure that the dice have really changed. Raise your head with an assured smile. Reach into both hats at once without looking and bring up—two guinea pigs! The one on the left of the audience is a white guinea pig with black spots and the other is a black guinea pig with white spots. You changed the dice, but the obeah man turned them into guinea pigs.

The guinea pigs take the places of the solid dice and are in the hats from the beginning. You will need to make little containers for them (Figs. 15–20). Otherwise they will not be in the right positions for you to slip the *shells* over them (see Fig. 14).

ATMOSPHERE

The first step toward conviction consists in inducing a suspension of disbelief. That is done by establishing an *atmosphere* in which the illusion will seem plausible. In a play,



15. SECTION THROUGH THE REAR END

16. GUINEA-PIG HOLDER

17. DETAIL OF CATCH

18. FRONT END

19. HARNESS

20. HOLDER IN HAT

Dimension *A* is ⅛ in. greater than the height of the shell. When the threads are lifted, they pull the pins clear. This releases the cords, and the elastics flip the cloth tops back giving instantaneous access to the guinea pigs. These must wear harnesses like that in Fig. 19 so they can be lifted out of the containers without fumbling. Hide the harnesses with bows of ribbon.

the scenery and lighting provide atmosphere almost automatically. However, unless a conjurer is fortunate enough to have a big stage production, he must supply his own atmosphere.

Atmosphere controls the state of mind in which the spectators view your performance. Anything that makes them think about the strange power you are about to manifest will help to create or maintain the proper atmosphere. Thus, talk about freak shows prepares your audience for a strong-man stunt, and a discussion of telepathy, even by a skeptical group, establishes a mental attitude that finds *Dial Information* hard to resist.

Length

Obviously, you cannot create atmosphere in a moment—especially for a realistic routine where you hope to secure fairly deep conviction. This means that illusions are normally much longer than tricks. *The Wizard* rarely lasts over three minutes. *Dial Information* may run for twenty, counting from the first mention of telepathy to the moment when the "telepath" hangs up and the spectators turn to some other topic.

Many conjurers will regard this as a fault. In fact, "the briefer the better" has become a maxim with both professionals and thoughtful amateurs. Hence, anyone who advocates greater length must be prepared to present powerful arguments.

To some extent, the belief in brevity is based on a failure to distinguish between the nature of a routine and the nature of an act. I agree that most acts are too long. However, we can remedy this by using fewer routines; it does not follow that the individual routines should be shorter.

The brevity-is-best rule seems to be supported by a much sounder maxim which reads: "Always send them away wanting more." But that is a one-sided view. We can observe this maxim by giving them less than they want; we can also observe it by making them want more than we give them. The latter policy is clearly better.

Finally, I agree that most tricks are too long. However, this does not mean that length is bad in itself, but rather that the length of a dull trick is due to padding it with dull material. If all the material were interesting, it could be ten times as long and still make the spectators want more. One of the best ways to make them want more is to eliminate padding and add meaning. Atmospheric material adds meaning. It can also be interesting in its own right.

As far as "impromptu" routines are concerned, I submit that *The Strong Man's Secret* and *Dial Information* prove my

point. If you have enough interesting material to contribute, you and your friends can discuss a subject like freak shows or extrasensory perception for ten or fifteen minutes merely as conversation and find it pleasant and stimulating. This would be true even if you stopped without doing the string stunt or calling your "telepathic" friend. In both cases, the conjuring adds an exciting climax. Nevertheless, the fact that the conversation can be thoroughly entertaining without the conjuring shows how little reason we have to cut our routines short at all cost.

Horoscope proves the same point. In this case, the character readings come after the conjuring. Nevertheless, they can hold your audience spellbound. Of course, the readings must interest everyone. If they are dull, or appeal only to the individual whose character is being analyzed at the time, you will be a bore.

Far from feeling that routines should be as short as possible, I am convinced that we should try to find interesting material which will make them longer. No really short routine can arouse a high degree of interest. Suppose I could perform a genuine miracle. Suppose I could bring a troop of elephants into each ring of a circus and then make them all vanish in the twinkling of an eye. That would be astounding. No one who saw it would ever forget it. But it would not be entertaining. The crowd would watch the elephants come in. It would wonder what was going to happen. Then, suddenly, the elephants would be gone. The whole thing would be over before anyone had time to work up much interest.

Interest, like atmosphere, must be built up. If you need more proof, get a volume of *The Best Plays* series from your local library. This contains synopses of all plays produced in New York. Read the synopses of a few hit plays. You will find that although the plays themselves ran for years and entertained thousands, the synopses are deadly dull. The reason is that a synopsis gives only the bare bones, and the bare bones of a play are no more attractive than an X-ray picture of a beautiful girl.

Most tricks strip a routine to the bare bones. An illusion rounds these out with flesh. However, the flesh must be firm and smooth. Padding and digressions should be thought of as fat and warts, and should be ruthlessly eliminated.

Creating Atmosphere

The process of establishing the appropriate atmosphere for an "impromptu" illusion can almost be reduced to a formula. Arouse interest in some topic connected with the illusion. Encourage spectators to increase their interest by contributing to the conversation. Try to start an argument between the spectators. Bring the discussion around to the specific power that you plan to exhibit. If possible, lead someone to challenge you. *Although conviction is weakened when you challenge the spectators to see through a trick, it is strengthened when one of them challenges you to display your powers.*

All the "impromptu" illusions described so far follow the formula. *Dial Information* begins with a general discussion of extrasensory perception and leads up to a specific experiment designed to test the "telepath's" ability. *The Strong Man's Secret* introduces the broad topic of freak shows and works around to a point where the performer is urged to exhibit his stunt. In *Horoscope,* the preliminary conversation first deals with fortune telling in general and becomes more and more specific until the "astrologer" consents to give character readings.

This formula for building atmosphere has many virtues. It tends to lull spectators into the frame of mind which suspends disbelief. It helps to conceal your devices by focusing attention on *whether* you can achieve the promised result rather than on *how* you will achieve it. The formula also provides interesting conversation and permits you to test the mood of your audience before committing yourself. If you mention, say, fortune telling and no one shows an inclination to pursue the topic, you would be foolish to present *Horoscope.* On the other hand, if the spectators seize on the idea, *Horoscope* can become the climax of the conversation and may render it memorable.

Although the same principles apply to stage and club conjuring, practical difficulties arise. Conversation, the main atmosphere-builder in "impromptu" work, cannot be used. With rare exceptions, the style of presentation must be fantastic —which makes the suspension of disbelief more difficult. Finally, a formal act must maintain a faster pace. An expert comedian may talk for several minutes before he actually does anything, but he must be really expert.

Many performers are so conscious of these handicaps that they make no attempt to create atmosphere but start immediately with some trick. Without atmosphere, there can be no suspension of disbelief and hence no illusion.

In a silent act, for example, the performer may enter in the black and white of evening dress. A cigarette suddenly appears in his right hand. As he places it between his lips, a gesture with his left hand provides a burning match. He lights his cigarette. When he waves the match to extinguish the flame, it becomes a white silk handkerchief. A touch transforms this into a rose, which he attaches to his lapel. He pushes the cigarette into his left fist leaving half of it in full view. He snaps his fingers and draws out the cigarette which has now become a black wand with white tips.

This is hardly baffling, but it is not intended to be. The very fact that it is not spectacular weakens and may even eliminate any suggestion of a challenge. At the same time, it establishes the performer as poised, competent, and polished. It also establishes him as a magician rather than a mere conjurer. He is not doing tricks for the audience. He is magically supplying his own wants by creating things from nothing or transforming them from something else.

This is the way audiences expect a magician to behave, and the way a "real" magician would be presented in a well-staged play like *The Charlatan.* By living up to the expectations of the spectators, the conjurer has caused them to suspend disbelief and has prepared them to accept the more important illusions which will constitute his main act. Finally, the appearance of the wand announces that the preliminaries are over and that the real show is about to begin.

The above opening is not everyone's meat. If you doubt your ability to be poised and polished, you will be wiser to establish your personality and your atmosphere with a brief, amusing talk. For example, you can bow and remark that you have the world's finest job: "Plenty of opportunities to travel, and it doesn't cost a cent. I do it all with my little magic wand."

Display the wand. Then take a road map from your pocket and open it. Say, "When I want to go anywhere, all I have to do is to spread a map on my trunk, find the town that I plan to visit, and place the tip of my wand on that spot." Start to touch the map by way of demonstration. Jerk back the wand

and exclaim, "Oops! Have to be careful though. If I'd touched the map that time, I'd have been in . . ." Peer at the map and add, "Montana!"

This takes twenty-five seconds. It presents you as a pleasant, amusing personality, creates an atmosphere of fantasy, and lulls the audience into a state of mind which suspends disbelief. Also, it is clearly marked as a prologue. As soon as you say "Montana!" the audience is prepared to have you offer some magic.

The Ethics of Conjuring

Realistic illusions raise the question of ethics. Conjuring, like poker, has its own code; some deceptions are permissible, others are unforgivable. No one expects a poker player to tell the truth about the cards he holds. However, if you try to deceive by dealing from the bottom of the deck, you may get shot and you will certainly be shunned. A conjurer is allowed to lie about his methods but not to leave his audience with the belief that he really possesses supernatural powers. Men like John Scarne and Frank Garcia spend much of their time exposing dishonest gamblers, and the magical profession as a whole has done more to combat fake spiritualism than all other groups combined. The difference between a charlatan and a conjurer is comparable to that between a real-life faker and an actor who plays the role of a faker.

Even if ethics were not involved, you would be foolish to delude people about your powers. If you present *Horoscope* and leave your audience with the belief that you are a genuine astrologer, you get no credit for performing an illusion. Furthermore, some spectator will buttonhole you later and bombard you with questions that you cannot answer. When some trusting soul asks, "Is my husband true to me?" or "Should I make this investment?" you have no advice to give. But if you refuse to give any, your questioner is sure to think you lack the will to help him and cannot be convinced that you lack the power.

The conjurer needs both deception and conviction. Where does the deception cease to be legitimate and become both unethical and a source of future embarrassment? Fortunately, the answer is easy. We should deceive our audiences about our devices but merely convince them about the supernormal

powers we imitate. The deception should be permanent; the conviction should never be more than temporary.

When you give a realistic presentation, by all means convince the spectators as thoroughly as possible. However, disillusion them at the end of the session. As you are about to leave, make some remark like "Don't tell anyone that my friend is a long-distance mind reader. They won't believe you. Besides, it was all done with mirrors." This eliminates any deceit, but it reveals nothing about how the effect was achieved. On the contrary, it creates a new mystery. You have amazed your friends by presenting a strange phenomenon. You now astonish them by divulging the fact that they cannot credit what they saw.

Another, and perhaps better, method is to end the evening with some simple trick which is unmistakably conjuring and which can delude no one into crediting the existence of supernatural powers. Then say, "I give you my word that this is just as much real magic as the telephone stunt was real telepathy.

Of course, illusion-breaking devices are unnecessary after fantastic routines which only a fool would believe or for cases like *The Strong Man's Secret* where you claim no exceptional power but give the illusion of doing one trick when you are actually performing another.

Although none of these movements has much significance or is especially interesting, they give the audience something to watch. They also break up the speech and keep it from being an uninterrupted flow of words. This is the sort of thing an actor does in a well-staged play. Without it the long speeches in Shakespeare would be unbearable.