

[Transcript] The Tim Ferriss Show / #679: Simon Coronel, World Champion of Magic — Quitting the Day Job, The Delights of the Magic Castle, Finding Glitches in Reality, Learning How to Use Your Own Brain, and Worshiping at the Altar of Wonder

This episode is brought to you by Aeropress.

I love Aeropress with more than 45,000 five-star reviews and customers in more than 60 countries. It might be the highest-rated coffee maker on the planet.

Let's rewind just a bit because back in 2010, 2011, I tested the entire gamut of coffee brewing and filtering options alongside a former Barista World Champion.

This was for research for the four-hour chef.

That concluded with a statement that the Aeropress was, quote, bar none, my favorite brewing method, end quote.

I even mentioned it and made a cup of coffee on late night with Jimmy Fallon using the Aeropress.

Here is the back-back story.

Remember the aeroby, the amazing UFO-like disc that you could throw farther than a football field?

Alan Adler, a mechanical engineer in Stanford University lecture, created that.

Then, after conquering the 1980s, toy market, he began to obsess over one thing.

Coffee. The result was the Aeropress, which debuted in 2006.

It was quickly adopted by the specialty coffee community, and it became so popular with the Barista community that someone in Oslo, Norway started a World Aeropress Championship.

Because the Aeropress combines the best of three brewing methods, you get a cup that is full-bodied like a French press, smooth and complex as if you were using a pour-over method and rich in flavor like espresso.

Best of all, it's super small.

You can pack it in your bag when you travel.

It takes literally five seconds to clean.

It is all practical, no fuss, and you don't have to drink mediocre coffee at your office or Airbnb.

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Just use the link aeropress.com slash Tim.

One more time, that's aeropress.com slash Tim.

This episode is brought to you by Allbirds.

It is summer 2023 finally, and this is the summer to explore.

I'm about to do that myself.

And I'm looking at the floor in front of me, literally three feet away.

What do I have?

I have my Allbirds.

So before you set foot out the door, set foot in the ultimate travel shoes from Allbirds.

Super comfortable and sustainable shoes.

Allbirds are versatile enough to go with any outfit, durable enough to wear on any terrain, and lightweight enough to make packing a breeze.

Plus, the tree dashers, runners, pipers, and other Allbirds tree shoes are made from insanely comfortable breezy eucalyptus fiber.

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They're the only shoes your suitcase needs.
I am speaking from experience here.
I've been wearing Allbirds for the last several months,
and I've been alternating between two pairs.
I'm traveling with them right now.
I started with the tree runners in marine blue in case you're curious.
And now I'm wearing the tree dashers, and the tree dashers are my current daily driver.
I wear them for everything.
They're easy to slip on, easy to tie.
Everything about them is just easy, easy, simple, simple.
I stick with the blue hoos, and the dashers in this case are in buoyant blue.
The color pops.
I've received a ton of compliments, but putting the color aside,
the tree dasher is an everyday running and walking shoe that's also great for light workouts.
It's super comfortable, and I've been testing it on long walks in Austin.
I've also been testing it on the trails and pavement in places like New Zealand.
Get in vacation mode before you even leave the house with Allbirds.
Find your perfect pair at allbirds.com today and use code TIM, that's T-I-M,
for free socks.
Just add them to your shopping cart with a purchase of \$48 or more.
That's allbirds, a-l-l-b-i-r-d-s.com and code TIM, T-I-M.
Check it out.
Hello, boys and girls, ladies and germs.
This is Tim Ferriss.
Welcome to another episode of The Tim Ferriss Show.
It is my pleasure, as always, to interview and deconstruct world-class performers
from all different disciplines.
And my guest today comes from a very strange, very mesmerizing, very exciting,
and certainly unique world, and that is the world of magic.
Simon Coronel, that's C-O-R-O-N-E-L, is legally classified as an alien of extraordinary ability
by the United States government for his skills as a magician and illusionist.
Simon discovered magic in 1999 as a first-year student at Melbourne University.
He then spent five years working full-time in management consulting
while juggling his secret performance career.
Now, flashing forward, he's currently a jigsaw puzzle designer for the Magic Puzzle Company,
which is incredible in and of itself, and which also made the number one
fact that is the most backed puzzle of all time on Kickstarter.
He is also a regular performer at the Magic Castle in Hollywood,
and the importance of that will be described in this episode.
Simon has appeared twice on the hit TV show Pen and Teller Fool Us.
He has won more than a dozen international awards for magic,
including being crowned the world champion of magic in 2022 at FISM, F-I-S-M,

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the Olympics of Magic.

And the story behind that is incredible, which we also dive into.

You can find all things Simon at simoncoronel.com, that's S-I-M-O-N-C-O-R-O-N-E-L.com.

He is one of a kind, I promise you that.

And you can find more on the Magic Puzzle Company at magicpuzzlecompany.com.

So now, without further ado, please enjoy a wide-ranging conversation with none other than Simon Coronel.

Why don't you begin with explaining your policy of radical earliness?

Because I think, number one, it's incredibly strategic for Los Angeles.

Yep.

But it makes sense in a lot of other places.

I have noticed LA and LA geography and traffic aside, one of my weaknesses is that I am not great generally at estimating time and planning ahead.

There's almost certainly some kind of executive function disorder going on that I'm trying to, I'm in the process in the journey of trying to figure out my own life.

But I've noticed I historically have been late a lot of my life.

And I went, you know what?

I don't want to be that.

I don't want to be that guy.

I don't want to do that to people.

It's not fun.

And I've finally worked out the only way I can reliably be on time for anything is, say, today.

I know, all right, I'm meeting Tim here at this location.

I Google maps for a cafe nearby that has Wi-Fi and looks nice.

And I get there an hour or two early, at least an hour, ideally more.

Often I end up there like half an hour, 20 minutes early, because of all the reasons.

And I just camp out and either do work or read a book or chill or meditate or whatever.

It's easy to kill time.

And then by the time I set an alarm for 10 minutes before the thing, and they just walk over and I'm exactly on time, reliably.

Low stress.

Yeah.

Works out great.

I love it.

It's the only way that works.

As I was prepping coffee before we started recording, I was saying,

I've never understood my friends who seem to want to set personal records

each time they go to the airport for how close they can come to missing their flight.

Because what I'm going to be doing at the airport and what I'm going to be doing at home, thinking about how soon I need to go to the airport are the same.

So I might as well go there.

Yeah, you're either hanging out doing stuff at home or hanging out doing stuff at the airport.

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I also find a double benefit to that.

I've really, yeah, become a conserve enjoying sitting in departure gates for an hour or two before a flight.

Just relax because I'm exactly where I need to be.

And how rarely are we exactly where we need to be ahead of time with no stress?

And I often find it easier to get work done in those situations because there's not all the distractions of my living space.

Totally.

There's not much I can do except write or think or work or design or whatever it is I'm meant to be working on.

And I'm often really productive there.

So there's another place where I feel like you've demonstrated productivity.

And that is at this bizarre, amazing, enchanting location known as the Magic Castle.

So we met for the first time not long ago at all.

What was it last week, maybe?

At the Magic Castle.

Can you do two things?

One, describe what the Magic Castle is and perhaps also tell the story of how you first heard of the Magic Castle.

So the Magic Castle is, it's a bizarre, completely unique place.

There is nothing like it on earth anywhere.

And the easiest way I think to think of it is imagine two very separate unrelated things mashed together.

Thing number one is a nighttime country club for magicians.

So like take a moment to imagine that.

And when I say magicians, think of them more as like cinematic or theatrical special effects designers but live in person.

That's the good word.

Don't think wizards.

Don't think Harry Potter.

Don't think Gandalf.

Like think engineers, designers, performers, like special effects engineers, you know, who then perform them because that's more the mindset.

It's like craft at skill at sea.

And so it's this club where they can hang out, network, have drinks or dinner together, talk shit, bring guests, private club for magicians to hang out like a professional network.

That's thing number one.

Thing number two is a public focused entertainment venue to take these illusions, these magic effects and then present those to the general public.

Because doing magic for magicians is at best, I don't think very useful and at worst impossible.

Because, you know, the quote unquote magic, the illusion of impossibility happens literally

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in the mind of the observer.

And if you know how it's done, that illusion doesn't happen.

And so, you know, the tree falls in the woods and there is no sound because there is no magic without the mystery.

So you need the Targaryens for magic is the general public.

So the magic castle mashes these two unusual bizarre things together and you get magicians like mingling and hanging out and chatting and like workshopping ideas and, you know, gossiping or whatever it is.

And then you have the general public like yourself coming in to experience the results of this creativity and workshopping and everything.

And it's just, it's fascinating.

It's a fascinating, unique, bizarre place that's the real deal.

It's a genuine, profound part of magic history as an art and a craft and a venue.

It's been around for just over 60 years.

Just over 60 years.

Just like 62nd or something.

Oh, 60th anniversary was a few years ago.

And the number of stories that I was told, the number of stories that caused me to scratch my head as I wandered through this space with the guidance of Jordan and others who were with us blew my mind.

The place is so strange.

It really is.

And unlike anything else I've ever seen, I mean, it really is like you walked into the equivalent of, say, a brilliant mind melded with magic, plus maybe some type of psychomimetic drug plus architecture.

The way the whole place is put together and has developed over time.

And I remember Jordan was mentioning over dinner that the entire place caught on fire or a large portion of it, and it happened to be number one on a Halloween that was themed Inferno. Number two, was it on the date of Harry Houdini's death?

Some people thought it was Harry Houdini's ghost.

Others said, you know, it could be some type of electrical shirt.

Those people are called the fire department.

And it was actually a roofing accident.

It was a roofing accident.

And I was not aware, for instance, that the magic castle had been open seven days a week. Nonstop for the entirety of its existence.

So they've not had the ability to pause, to do repairs, to take a little breather until catastrophe struck.

Incredible.

Yeah, it's one of those rare places, particularly somewhere like LA, that it's the real deal.

So where so many places in LA are kind of trying to pretend to be the thing.

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This is the actual thing.

This is the place.

This is its history and significance in the world of magic is infinite.

There's nothing like it.

It's one of a kind.

It really is.

So when Ilan Lee, usual friend, mentioned that there might be the opportunity to go to a show at the magic castle, I leapt at the chance.

And I did have to find a suit, which is a prereq.

Cannot show zippers.

There are many rules as far as dress code goes.

So Hollywood suits.

Thank you for the \$150 Joker suit that I was able to put together.

It worked out.

And as you put it, the eclectic mix is not Gandalf meets some lord of magic from the Elven Kingdom.

It's more hyper specific, at least on, I want to say the main floor.

I'm not using the right terminology, but the kind of mingling area.

You have technicians and specialists who are the best at what they do.

And one example that comes to mind, and you probably know the name.

I apologize and I'm blanking on his name.

I have a silhouette.

Dave Spafford.

Yeah, the silhouette cutting guy.

Yeah, right.

Who will look at you from the side.

You stand against the wall and cut out a perfect silhouette with his prized scissors.

And you won't travel to do this because he cannot risk the possibility of being separated from these incredible scissors.

And what this man can do is beyond incredible in two minutes or less for each person.

And I don't know.

I imagine he wouldn't mind.

Maybe you can tell me if I need to cut this out.

But he worked at Disney for a really long time.

And I was being told that someone went up to him at one point.

I'm masking names.

Maybe I don't need to.

But and asked him, is it true that there are all these like hidden dicks and so on?

And all of these frames in these Disney movies.

And he said, it's absolutely true.

And they said, well, how do you know?

And he goes, because I did it.

Yeah.

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Just back then there was no freeze frame.

There was no stick on one frame and hyper-examine all the details.

And you could just slip it in.

Just so to speak.

How did you first come across the magic castle, this Mecca?

It's almost impossible to, no matter where you live in the world,

if you get interested in magic, which I did at age 18,

you know, it's a whole different topic we can get to.

But everyone's heard of it.

Its influence extends all over the world.

One of the many reasons for it is,

one of the things that made the magic castle, the magic castle,

apart from being this amazing venue, and again, the eclectic interior,

is back in, I don't even know the decade, my magic history sucks.

There was a guy called Dai Vernon, who a good way to think of him is,

you could say he was to magic in a way what Einstein was to physics.

Not the only person by a long shot, but one of the single ones that had the biggest single-handed influence that changed everything that went after afterwards.

A real paradigm shift.

And Vernon's big contribution to magic, again, I'm oversimplifying this,

is the theory of what's called naturalness, natural action,

that before Vernon, magic was mostly done in these very sort of like overstated, bombastic gestures.

And he, from trying to understand like gambling and card cheating,

which has to be, magic is, again, historically very showy and dramatic, and look at this.

Whereas if you're a card cheat, using some of the similar techniques

of deception and sleight of hand, you have to look the opposite.

You have to be completely unassuming and unnoticeable, draw no attention to yourself.

And Vernon's big innovation, again, oversimplifying,

was to take this concept of unassuming naturalness, hiding in plain sight,

and start to apply it to magic theory.

And this just really changed everything that went after him.

And to this day, pretty much every competent magician that performs

has elements of Vernon's influence in their technique, their approach.

And he basically lived and hung out at the castle for decades.

And he was the main, again, not the only, but the main reason why magicians gradually,

again, practitioners of the craft and students of it and technicians and everything,

flooded from all over the world to visit the place.

And then more people started to move here.

And slowly Hollywood, because of the castle, because of Vernon,

because of the Larson family's vision to like,

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offer Vernon a really sweet deal to live there and stay there,
it became this mecca and this sort of community gathered around it.
And this incubator, this pressure cooker, this critical mass of talent and ability
and creativity that still lingers to this day.
I'm so fascinated by the history of places like that.
These, in some respects, possibly arbitrary locations that gain a tiny critical mass,
and maybe because of one or two people, handful of people,
this is Trish Silicon Valley as well, suddenly develop this momentum
and the snowball rolls and rolls and rolls until you have the definitive mecca of film.
Completely wild.
Yep, that's the castle.
That's the castle.
And it's gone through many shifts in its history, but still it lingers.
It's that reputation stays.
So 18, knowing nothing about magic myself, when I hear 18,
I think that sounds relative to some of the stories I have heard
of the personal histories of people who perform magic.
Pretty late.
Extremely late, yeah, much, much later than average.
It seems like magic for a lot of folks, at least in my mind,
I'm like, yeah, it's kind of like piano or gymnastics.
You start really early.
18.
So how did you become interested in magic at 18?
The first thing to note about it, I think, is that I think I was lucky to get into it late.
We'll sort of get to why, but I was at university in Melbourne.
I'd finished high school.
I was interested in everything.
I was just an insatiably curious, like, sciencey,
engineering, nerdy, brain kid who just wanted to understand the whole universe,
micro all the way to macro, and everything in between.
Under a tiered, small emissions.
Oh, look, I mean, I don't know if I was doing a good job of it,
but I was interested.
Motivation is different from results.
And I had no idea what to do with my life.
I had no real thing I was good at.
I had never really excelled at anything at that point.
I was sort of, I tried a whole bunch of stuff,
but this is a topic I know you're into.
I hadn't learned how to learn yet.
I hadn't figured out how to use my own brain yet.

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And so I was sort of fumbling through most things
and tried a bunch of sports and a bunch of martial arts
and a bunch of creative arts and, you know,
got a couple of small roles in a school play
and just nothing really clicked.
I wasn't really good at anything.
I was like, eh, adequate at a bunch.
And I got okay grades, but again,
it was school was stressful and difficult
and I didn't really find it easy.
And so I was sort of, everyone I knew just,
well, you go to university next, that's what you do.
And to place you geographically, this was in Trenton, New Jersey.
That's the strong New Jersey accent.
Detroit, actually, but yeah, close.
Yeah, Melbourne, Australia.
It was back as down.
I knew it.
I knew it.
It comes through.
And again, in the bubble I lived in that, you know,
I hadn't yet realized it was a bubble
because everyone grows up.
What's normal to you?
You say, yeah, this is what everyone does.
You go to university next.
That's what you do.
And then you get some kind of job
and then you work and retire and die.
Like, that's it.
I'm like, I've got a fuck.
I don't know.
That didn't sound very exciting to me,
but I didn't know any other options.
So I went to university and I failed to get
into the degree I applied for,
which was engineering slash law as a double major
because I don't know.
That's what everyone said was good,
be a doctor or a lawyer if you can.
I didn't have any better ideas.
And I missed out on it.

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I didn't quite have the grades
and I got into engineering arts instead.
And so I did a psychology major under arts
and a software major under engineering.
I started off in a computer major,
but I sucked at the electrical subjects
and did okay at the software subjects.
So I saw the writing on the wall and shifted.
And blah, blah, blah.
Why do you think that was?
There are two things, not counting quantum physics
because no one understands that.
There are two things that I have completely failed
to understand in my life.
One is music.
One is electronics.
And from the hardware perspective.
Yeah.
Well, from any perspective,
like what are the electrons doing?
What's going on?
What happens in a capacitor or an inductor?
Like how do you design a circuit?
All the stuff.
And I think eventually I realized
after many decades of going,
why can't I understand these two damn things
no matter how much I try
and no matter how many people I ask for explanations?
And I think it's because for better and worse,
it's a lot of both.
I don't feel like I understand something
unless I completely understand it
from the ground up,
from the protons upwards,
to the human experience and everything in between.
And I think the way,
because of how electricity and music
in their own very different ways work,
in a way no one understands them to that level.
And it took me a long time to realize that.
And so I was always asking these questions about,

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yeah, but what's actually like going on down there?
And I realized like that's not the way
it's taught or thought of,
because I think actually we really don't know.
And so I was always frustrated.
So I mentioned Jordan's name earlier,
Jordan Gold, for people who want to check him out also.
And that'll probably wrap back around
into the context of puzzles.
But let's bookmark that for now.
Totally.
I want to incorporate a few things.
So first, I think,
and I don't want to put words in your mouth,
but that you've described yourself as neurodivergent,
would that be fair to say?
Something like that, neurodiverse?
Yeah, that's a new thing for me.
I have spent my entire adult life kind of hiding that
and not acknowledging that.
And literally in the past few months,
I've kind of gone,
you know what, maybe it's time to start
being more open about that.
Yeah.
Yeah.
I think it's a service to be open about it.
And I think there is incredible potential
and also a know thyself sort of recommendation
and funny stories all wrapped into one
in the sense that when Jordan was explaining
the many things that make you who you are unique,
idiosyncratic, incredible at what you do,
which we haven't yet made the leap across from where we were,
where we left off in the timeline to that.
But we'll get there.
And he said,
well, there's something you need to know.
And I'm not doing justice to the story,
but he said,
let's say we were going to sit down and make a cake.
And you've probably heard this before.

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And you give Simon the recipe.
And recipe number one is take one egg
and break it into the bowl.
And then there are 10 more steps.
Well, Simon would say, what is an egg?
And Jordan would say, you know, it's an egg.
Everybody knows what an egg is.
Just one egg.
Just that's what it is.
And he said, but what is really an egg?
And then you would disappear for a year and come back
and you would have read all the manuscripts,
the history of the egg and the chicken.
And but what is a chicken?
And it would have gone on and on and on
until to the finest level of granularity
an inch wide and a mile deep.
You would know everything about eggs.
And then be like, okay, step number two.
And if you're aware of that predilection
and that superpower,
but also the risk of doing that all the time,
then you can make better choices in life,
which comes back to your phrasing of learning
how to use your own brain.
So we may come back to that,
but let's resume the timeline.
So you're saying not particularly excellent at anything.
Had trouble figuring out the electronics.
So you shifted to software.
And then what happens?
Shifted to software.
And in first year, like Melbourne University is,
it's about a 30,000 at the time was a 30,000 student campus.
So it's a big, serious university,
one of the big sort of two or three in Australia.
And as with many universities,
I think it's similar in the U.S.
There were lots of like student clubs and societies.
Totally place.
Yeah.
And during orientation week,

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one of the main things they have there,
take a couple of hundred clubs have joined us,
you know, that the fantasy science fiction society,
the chocolate lovers society, the beer connoisseurs society,
the taekwondo club,
like it's everything you can imagine and a lot more
that you, some of them are stupid, ridiculous ones.
Some of them are very serious, special interest ones.
And I was just wandering around trying to join stuff to,
you know, try and get out of my shell and explore a bit
and take advantage of being on a university campus.
And there was a table
for the Melbourne University Magician Society.
And I'd had like a magic kit when I was 10,
but it had as much effect on me
as it did on most 10-year-olds, nothing.
I had no ability.
I was confusing.
And I gave up after two days.
And, but, you know, magic was one of the many things
I was interested in, like everything.
You know, I wanted to learn how everything worked in the world.
Again, wasn't doing a great job of it.
And they was like, magic club, what do you guys do?
And they said, well, you know, magic,
like card tricks and stuff.
And I'm like, oh, I can't do any of that.
I tried, but I sucked.
So gave up as you do.
And they said, well, if you join,
we teach you that we've got a beginner's course.
And I was like, ah, I don't know.
I mean, I don't, I'm not very dexterous.
And I was like, why not give it a shot?
And I remember they had really cool membership cards,
which I thought was cool.
That kind of tip me over the edge.
And so I just kind of joined.
And then I forgot that I joined for the next month
because I had other things going on and was very busy.
And then Tina, the club secretary called me up
on my parents' landline because this is pre,

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I didn't own my Nokia 3310 yet at this point, the story.
And I said, hey, we've got you down.
It's having signed up, but not turned up.
Do you still want to come?
I was like, oh yeah, magic club, right.
That's right.
Oh yeah, when do you meet again?
Wednesday is 1pm.
Great.
And then Wednesday, 1pm rocked around.
And I was like, 1pm.
I was supposed to be somewhere.
I hadn't discovered radical illness yet.
I'm like, I think, oh crap, magic club.
That's right.
Oh God, where is it again?
Damn.
So I turned up about 15 minutes late.
Just in time to see someone, this guy, Brian,
who was one of the special guest sort of teachers,
explaining this trick.
And he was basically going, okay, now via the blah, blah,
blah technique at jargon term, I didn't know at the time.
You know their card is the king of clubs.
And you could just say that, or you could use the blah,
blah technique that we talked about last week.
And then he took a seven of diamonds, waved it on the table,
and it changed like right 10 inches in front of me
into a king of clubs.
And this was the most incredible thing I'd ever seen
in my entire life.
It was just like reality broke down in front of me.
Everything I knew about life and physics and blah, blah, blah,
blah, what the?
It was just this transcendent consuming moment.
And I sort of made semi-incoherent noises of like, wait,
what the heck, what did that?
And Brian not realizing I hadn't been turning up for them so far,
quote unquote reminded me, oh, the blah, blah technique
like this from last week, where you do this and this.
And so in seconds, I went from being profoundly,
transcendently amazed to seeing how it was done.

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And it was like, whose quote is it?
Give me a lever long enough in a place to stand.
Our comedies.
Dark comedies, yeah.
It felt like that.
It was this revelation that from this not easy,
but simple technique, you could do the most profoundly,
transcendently amazing thing I'd ever seen in my life.
And the implication of the leverage of that was just extraordinary.
It's like discovering that you can sort of poke a table
and power the entire city with the energy of that poke.
It was just, I was so fascinated and just started going
to that club every week and just became completely intrigued
by what is this art and craft and what the hell.
And the motivation was purely understanding.
It was just knowledge seeking.
I just want to understand this thing I'd seen.
Yeah.
If you see something amazing intrinsically,
I want to understand it and learn more about it.
So that's where you got your first hit of magic dope.
Oh yeah.
Oh, it's a powerful drug.
All right.
So you get that hit.
And the way I want to play this is I'd love to flash way forward
and then we're going to fill in some of the gaps along the way.
I like it.
I can see the screenplay now.
Exactly.
Let's go.
Writing the screenplay in my head.
Love it.
As we go.
I've already bought your life, right?
I hope you don't mind.
And it's fine.
It's fine.
I wasn't doing anything with them.
Yeah, you sounded really sure.
Yeah, I wasn't doing anything good with them.
All right.

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The name of the show.

That I saw at the magic castle.

What is it?

Glitches in reality.

Glitches in reality.

All right.

So glitches in reality, setting the stage.

I've never heard your name before.

But Elon says, trust me, I'm not sure if we can get space.

But if we can get a seat, you need to come.

And I take that very seriously.

He's an enthusiastic guy, but he's not a bullshitter.

And I wanted to move anything and everything necessary to come to the show.

Just based on pure faith.

Landed the show and Jordan was kind enough to also get a spot for a friend of mine who had never been to a magic show, which will be relevant shortly.

Rule number one, unless you only ever want to go downhill,

do not go to Simon's show first as your only magic show.

You should just quit while you're ahead in that case.

And we go in my favorite magic, not that I have much vocabulary,

much experience, but as a spectator, as an awe seeker, but also a truth seeker.

Maybe we'll come back to that at some point.

I love anything that is reasonably close up,

just like the card changing in front of you 10 inches from your face.

And by far the best magic show I've ever seen.

So I want to say that publicly.

Number one, and we can parse out why that is the case.

But the combination of wonder, explanation, surprise, and also,

for me, your ability to showcase almost a decathlon of magic in terms of,

to my muggle mind, a wide breadth of different skills, if that makes any sense.

And when you, towards the end, began to set up and tell the story of FISM,

and we're going to come back to that, Elon almost ejaculated in his pants.

I don't know how else to put it, and I don't want to make too strong a case,

but I thought he was either having a seizure or ejaculating.

I wasn't sure, maybe both.

He was so excited because you guys are friends.

And he had told me that after the world championships,

which we'll get to in a moment,

he thought you may never perform this trick,

and we'll get to what this trick is ever again.

And it was one of the most spectacular mind bending things I've ever seen in my life.

Thanks.

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You're welcome.

Could you please tell the story of the world championships?

Oh boy.

And I know, there are a million ways this can be told, and guess what?

They're all good.

How many hours have you got?

We have all the time.

I'm still working out how to tell this story,

because again, there are so many ways it can be told.

Let's start with a short version, and then you can unpack,

request unpacking any bits you think are relevant.

And maybe do you mind if I make this sort of participatory journalism?

And I'll give people just a snapshot from the screenplay.

Absolutely.

I defer to your expertise.

All right.

The sort of in media arrests, we start in the middle of the action,

and so to set the stage pun intended,

you can correct me on some of the particulars,

but you're being judged by your peers at this event.

They are watching magic all day long.

You are close to the end.

You perform your trick, and then invite people up to inspect your work

if they don't believe it's real.

And it effectively shuts down the venue,

because there is a rush of 2000 plus people to the stage to inspect this.

To the extent that it becomes a problem for the organizers,

it becomes a safety risk.

It's just the ultimate magical mic drop.

No one had ever seen anything like it.

Okay, now you can start wherever you want.

The only small correction I'd make to that,

I mean, it wasn't quite 2000 people, it was hundreds of people.

Hundreds of people.

Yeah, hundreds of people.

But the thing that made it even more powerful for me personally was that I didn't actually invite them up.

What happened was I had one person on stage who gets given the thing that is created, and they then go back to their seats.

I'm like, thank you very much.

You get to keep that.

That now gets to linger in the world.

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And I just went, cool, thanks, bye, and just left the stage.
And I'm like, thank God that's over.
Oh, my God, that was so stressful.
We did it.
We got there.
And then I was just backstage, decompressing, going, oh, God, thank.
Oh, man, so glad that's over.
Finally, I can relax.
For months, I've been looking forward to this moment
where I could finally stop stressing.
Then a friend comes backstage and goes, you should come look at this.
I'm like, what?
I walk out and I see that this mob has gathered spontaneously.
It wasn't even invited.
I didn't expect this would happen.
That makes it even better.
Yeah, I'm just like, oh, my God, holy, yeah.
End for free.
Add your job and the purple hashtag hiring frame
to your LinkedIn profile to spread the word that you're hiring.
Simple tools like screening questions
make it easy to focus on candidates
with just the right skills and experience
so you can quickly prioritize
who you'd like to interview and hire.
It's why small businesses rate LinkedIn jobs
number one in delivering quality hires versus leading competitors.
LinkedIn jobs helps you find the qualified candidates
you want to talk to faster.
So post your job for free at [linkedin.com slash Tim](https://www.linkedin.com/jobs).
That's [linkedin.com slash Tim](https://www.linkedin.com/jobs) to post your job for free.
Terms and conditions apply.
So as a kid, I was not particularly happy.
I was not having a great time growing up.
Nothing super horrifying, but I just didn't fit in.
Again, I now know neurodivergent.
That tends to not be a good time if you don't know that
and you're a kid in a normal sort of area.
And I realized I was always interested.
I figured this out in hindsight.
This was looking back.
I saw the pattern.

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I was interested in stuff that involved
kind of breaking out of reality, like ESP and aliens
and the X-Files and space exploration
and quantum physics and science fiction
and just ways that life felt just so mundane
and uninspiring and gray and dreary and just ugh.
And all those things for different reasons
weren't accessible to me.
Australia didn't have a space program
so I couldn't be an astronaut.
Quantum physics was real but too hard.
Hypnosis was real but not that interesting to me.
Aliens don't seem to be real, sadly.
As far as I can tell, who knows.
There was just no way I wanted out of reality.
I wanted life to be more extraordinary.
And so when I saw this magic club
and I saw this card trick at age 18,
it was the first time in my life that it felt like,
again, there was like a crack in reality
that I could sort of see something brighter
and more extraordinary through.
And again, I only realized this like a decade later,
looking back and trying to make sense of the path.
It only becomes clearer in hindsight.
So it makes sense now.
I got so captivated by magic.
It was the first time I could kind of engage with that,
with something more extraordinary
and that altered state of consciousness that was profound.
And so I became obsessed.
But again, I wasn't particularly gifted at it.
There was no apparent natural talent
but I loved it so much that I kept going
despite the absence of natural talent.
And as we know, that's what tends to make a difference
is if you love it enough to stick with it
and enjoy the process with no thought as to the destination,
which will become a theme as well, I think.
And so then fast forward a bunch of years,
I'm working full time at a graduate job,
which I don't really like, but it's good experience.

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And some of the people there were great
and I'm glad I did it, but I didn't really fit in.
What was the job?
I worked for Accenture, a big business consulting company.
And again, I met some great people there.
Shout out to Grant and Thomas and Jackie and everybody else.
But it wasn't really my thing.
It didn't play to my strengths.
It played to a lot of my weaknesses,
which I didn't really understand at the time.
And the magic was continuing to grow in the background
as a real passion, but there wasn't really a sense
I could ever do that professionally.
I didn't see much of a market for it where I lived.
And I started to sort of win little competitions locally,
which was amazing.
This was the first time I displayed
any sort of noteworthy skill at anything,
which was kind of addictive.
It's a good feeling.
We want to feel significant and competent at things.
And I hadn't mostly in my life so far.
How did you decide to participate in your first competition?
It was a thing, a guy called Nigel McCullough in Melbourne,
a magician, ran a little one day magic convention
to get together just to have a bunch of workshops and shows
called Melbourne's Magic Malarkey in 2001.
And it had this close-up magic competition.
And at the time, I can't remember why.
I think I'd read something or just this idea
that it's worth trying things even if they fail
because you get an experience from it.
And again, at the time, this was a new idea to me
because I was young and everything.
And I went, yeah, you know what?
Why not? Step into the arena.
Try a thing.
There was a 0% chance in my mind that I had a shot at it.
And I ended up winning it partly because, again,
the thing with competitions, it's often who turns up on the day.
For sure.
And also the theme that I've often not really realized

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how what I'm doing will be experienced or perceived by others.

Again, neurodivergency.

Well, we talked about this.

I don't want to take you off track, so keep your place.

But even before we started, I was asking you...

Interacting journalism.

I was asking you if you had any greatest hits stories

or stories that were really well received by the audience.

And I'm paraphrasing, but that's not a superpower that I have

in terms of identifying what will be interesting to other people.

So that's my job.

I've frequently been surprised by what people have

and haven't found resonant.

So I enter and I unexpectedly win it.

I go, holy shit, very unexpected.

And so that was the first sort of sense I got that maybe,

maybe I'm kind of onto something here.

Maybe I've got something I'm doing that's working.

That's kind of exciting.

So I kept starting to enter other competitions.

And also I learned from it.

It's great to have a deadline.

It's great to have a challenging, slightly healthy,

stressful thing to work towards.

So I kept sort of doing that.

I found competitions useful as a way to grow.

And I kept winning little ones locally,

which was really gratifying.

And then fast forward a few years of this

and still working full time at the job,

doing magic on the side and on weekends,

often when exhausted from 12 hour days at a big corporate job,

and then going out to like open mikes to grind in material

and try and get experience and workshop things

and just burning the candle,

just like holding the candle in the fire with tongs,

not even more than both ends.

I was just really burning out,

but I was so excited, I needed to make a living

and still chase this passion.

Again, with no thought that it was going to be a profession

or anything at this point.

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It was just like, I just loved it intrinsically.
It was fascinating.
And then 2009, so the magic world championships,
the Singh Phism, which stands for something in French
that we can get into or not,
it's basically a way to think of it as like,
imagine like the UN of magic clubs.
And again, magic clubs are professional organizations
for technicians, designers
who try to create the illusions of impossibility, right?
That's the way to think of magic,
special effects design, but live and in some ways more powerful.
And so organizations where these people get together
and workshop and talk and exchange ideas,
some of those then affiliate with Phism,
which is French for International Federation of Magic Societies,
that began in like the 50s as a way to kind of like try to unite,
like to make some international collaboration,
which is a really healthy, nice thing.
And it's like any organization, there's politics
and there's a bunch of bullshit,
but mostly it's a really good thing overall.
And the main thing they run is every three years,
they have a big competition
that is kind of the de facto magic world championships
as a way to kind of, I think of it as to paraphrase Rick and Morty,
every three years Phism says to the world of magic,
show us what you got, right?
And the world of magic shows what it's got.
And it's always got something cool
and also a lot of stuff that sucks and everything in between.
And in 2009, it was going to be in China for the first time ever.
It's mostly been in Europe throughout its history.
It's always in a different city around the world.
And I ended up with the opportunity
to be the only Australian entrant
because clubs get given entry slots pro-rated based on membership
and Australia has a very small population.
And so again, getting those critical masses is very hard in Australia.
And it's one of the reasons I eventually came to the US to seek
more people and more inspiration.
There are plenty of really cool people there,

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but again, the critical mass just isn't there as much.

And I went, oh my God, the prospect to who gets the chance to represent their country at the world championships of anything, particularly a kid who didn't really, you know, have much he felt he was talented at.

This was extraordinary and terrifying and all the things.

And so I did it and much like kind of rocky.

I just wanted to compete and not embarrass myself or my country.

That was the goal.

Just to compete at a world stage was already more than I'd ever imagined.

And I ended up worked for over a year

on preparing the routine and getting ready for the competition

and ended up tying for third prize in the close-up magic category, which was so far beyond what I'd imagined.

I think about that, that thing that the bronze medalist is often happier than the silver medalist.

Totally.

As the silver medalist missed out on gold,

the bronze medalist missed out on having nothing.

You know who's even happier than the bronze medalist?

Who's that?

The person who tied for bronze.

Because maybe fourth place was a long way below you.

But when you tie for third, you are a hair's breadth from nothing.

You just squeaked into something and I was ecstatic and it was amazing.

And very quickly I realized that I was like,

oh my God, I've made it.

This is incredible.

And then it did nothing for my career or life in any way whatsoever.

So that band-aid got ripped off pretty quickly,

which was probably healthy.

There was the moment where the Chinese media came up

and I was there with a friend who'd won second prize in his category.

And we were going, oh my God, this is amazing.

The Chinese media come up and go, you are prize winners.

And we're like, yeah.

Thinking, yes, this is awesome.

We're going to be famous now.

And they go, oh, what did you win?

I go, I tied for third in close-up magic and Charlie here.

Came second in parlor magic and they went, ah, not first.

I'm like, oh no, but like, and then they just, oh, sorry, and left.

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It's like, I don't think we got 15 minutes of glory before just that the cold water was dumped on us. Which is the shortest route from exuberance to just, oh, Charlie Brown walk away from the room. So that happened. That happened. Then in 2012, three years later, I enter again. It's now in the UK this time. And the very short version of that very long story is I prepare a different routine again for over a year. And I find out about two weeks before the competition that a big chunk of what I'm planning to do isn't going to work. Now, normally what you would do is pull out of the competition at that point or try and find something else to replace it and come with something. I possibly naively stupidly chose the latter. Turns out I'm not a quitter. Once we're doing it, we're doing it. And it was insane. I am still kind of astonished. You could call it legal insanity that went for it, worked with an amazing group of people, friends, shout out to Dave and Yao and YC and everybody in Melbourne who helped with that. And all the names I'm now forgetting in the moment. And somehow got something adequate over the line. And it ended up winning the award for most original, closer backed, not best, closer back, but most original, which isn't necessarily the same. And I think it was because in that insane pressure cooker of having to come up with something, I came up with something so bizarre and unusual out of just sheer brute force necessity of what can we do with what's available. There wasn't any time to develop any sort of good polished methods. We had to just use some bizarre stuff and just decide, you know what, I don't even know if this is going to work. But let's try it and miraculously it did work, barely. Like I still watch the video of that and just, oh God, the amount of things that almost went wrong but failed to is still insane. Somehow it got across the line and got this originality award, which again, I hadn't expected, hadn't been aiming for originality.

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I just been aiming to not shit the bed in front of 2,000 people.
That was 100% of my goal at that point of like, oh God.
Sometimes close bedfellows pun intended.
Right. Exactly.
There's still this amazing photos somewhere of me on stage in 2012,
accepting this award with this completely bemused expression on my face.
I mean, later, but just surprised, like the last thing I saw coming.
And so that happened.
And the idea that I threw together at the last minute
that came to me at like 4 a.m.
while stressed out and vaguely panicked was,
I'd always been obsessed with this idea of,
can you take this fleeting, transcendent instant of wonder
and somehow preserve it into something physical and tangible
that lengthens that moment, lets you sit in that space longer.
Because I love that space.
That space is powerful and life changing.
And the idea was, what if you did an act where you
create one of these things live?
Because these things exist, but you see the finished result but not the process.
And what if you could create the illusion of it being created instantly?
So a piece of the act then lingers beyond the end of it into the world.
And that was the idea.
And in 2012, I did this first kind of very rough janky,
thrown together Sea of the Pan's version of it
that was not good but worked and I loved the idea.
And I also then gave up on magic competitions
because they're great, they serve a purpose,
but at the time I was trying to have a career,
I'd now quit my full-time job to go full magic,
which I don't necessarily recommend,
but has been going okay.
We'll come back to that.
We'll come to that.
And I was trying to make a career,
I was trying to find a way to make a living,
which is often the opposite of art and creativity, sadly.
Not always, but sometimes.
And this idea of this like creating the impossible object in the act,
I didn't see any commercial potential to it.
It was so high-touch, so much setup, played so small.
And I'm like, I love this, but I need to shelve this and work on something else.

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But it nagged at me, it ate away at me.
And putting effort into magic competitions,
I wasn't seeing any career payoff to that at the time.
So I went, you know what?
I've got to focus on actual, getting gigs, earning money,
shelve the competitions and the creative projects.
And for 10 years, that stayed that way.
Until in 2019, again, still this is the short version.
Highly abbreviated.
Yeah, this is the incredibly abbreviated story.
I started, ended up in jigsaw puzzle design,
separate story we'll get to, and left magic as a profession,
which was really liberating because I love magic.
I love it as an art.
It's a horrible business to be in, like most of the arts,
the comedians know, the jugglers know, all the variety entertainers know, the actors know.
Most of the musicians know, it's rough, it's brutal, it's hard.
And a lot of my weaknesses were very relevant.
My strengths didn't play well.
My weaknesses were very hindering.
And I found it really hard to build a career.
And so when the prospect of getting into creative product design came up,
work on a thing with a good team of people, put it into the world,
and have it scale passively in the background, not completely passively,
was amazing.
And you don't have to turn up to be earning the money.
And also being a magician is like being unemployed.
Every gig is off and a once off.
So you're constantly having to hustle and hustle for the next gig,
and I'm not great at that.
So quit magic full-time.
I'm like, great, it's now a hobby.
Ah, glorious.
I can just do the bits I'm excited by and passionate by.
And then the pandemic happened and all kinds of crazy stuff happened,
and it was a weird time for everybody.
And during that time, the 2022 Magic Championships was coming up.
And I just went, great, this is awesome.
I'm a hobbyist amateur magician now.
I can just go and hang out.
It doesn't matter.
There's no stress.

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And then I realized that I know myself now.
I'm going to enjoy it more if I'm,
I'll always pick creating over consuming, if you have no choice.
It's more rewarding.
Got to get that, you know, that little garnish of trauma, right?
That little, yeah, really feel it.
It's like the spicy chili or the bitter coffee.
You're like, oh, you feel it.
You know, you're alive.
And I thought, well, I could do, maybe get booked to do a show.
There's all kinds of events.
And then I remembered that 2012 routine,
that kind of very janky version of a really beautiful idea that I'd loved
and worked on.
I went, you know, and I'd been thinking about that ever since.
In weak moments, I would sort of work on bits of a version of idea
on how to fix it and improve it.
And they go, no, no, I shouldn't be working on this.
I should be working on my career.
And then a year later, I'd be like, oh, I think I have another idea
on how to solve this problem.
And I kept trying to find, it kept not being solvable.
It was one of these impossible problems.
And then in that lockdown, hiding out in the Midwest in 2021,
away from everything and all the insanity and the chaos.
And I was like, I think I finally have the last piece of it.
This is not quite the right analogy, but having the idea
and actually actualizing it, executing it,
as our buddy Derek Sivers says, ideas and execution,
is so different.
And I was like, I think I can do this.
But it's going to take months of work to even test it to find out.
And the way the magic championships works
is the year before they have regional continental qualifiers.
They're the North American, the South American,
the Asian, the European, the African, and the Oceania,
like mini championships.
The North American championships was coming up in about six months.
And I went, you know what?
I need a deadline to make my brain hyper-focus.
I'll enter that.
It'll be small.

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This was still during lockdown.
It was post-vaccines, but still in lockdowns.
It won't be very well attended.
If I can't get this idea together and it shits the bed,
it'll only shit the bed in front of a relatively small audience.
And if it doesn't shit the bed,
I'll know, all right, I've got something
and I have a year to really work on it to make it good.
I went, great.
You know, low stress, just high enough stress to do it.
And so I spend the next six months in crunch mode going,
okay, let's take a swing at this.
Let's see if I can bring this thing to life.
And I work like a maniac.
I go into full workshop rehearsal, testing, theory, mode.
And I go to the North American championships.
Again, just to kind of see if this thing's got legs or not.
I don't really know yet.
I don't know what I've got or not.
And I win the whole thing.
I become the North American closer magic champion.
And once again, I'm shocked.
I'm completely surprised.
I did not see this coming.
And I go, oh, I guess it does have legs.
Oh, shit, okay.
All right, we got something here.
And then how much do you know about when a caterpillar
turns into a butterfly?
What happens inside the chrysalis?
I'm going to go with very little.
Okay, just so I don't get caught.
Is the emperor with no clothes?
I also am not a biologist.
Or is it an entomological biologist?
This is one of the most amazing things I've learned
about the natural world.
You would think that the caterpillar maybe changes shape a bit,
then sprouts wings and now it's a butterfly.
Turns out the caterpillar basically liquefies
into primordial sludge.
With small chunks of neural matter still in there.

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And then from that primordial soup,
the butterfly then just basically grows
into its full form, which is astounding.
And it retains memories and experience through this process.
And they've done scans of this to see that this is what happens,
which is one of the most, again,
magical in the sense of seems impossible.
Turns to sludge and then reforms
into a completely different organism.
And I realized in the months I was working
before the real championship that at the North American championships,
I felt like I had won the prize for best caterpillar in show.
And I'm like, this thing's great, great caterpillar.
Oh my God, what a caterpillar.
Damn.
But I had this hunch that I think this thing could fly.
I think this thing might be able to grow wings, maybe.
And that meant it had to turn into sludge.
And there's a lot of people who can relate to that creativity.
And so for the next eight months, I went to the magic castle
because one of the best things about that place
is it has these areas where magician members can go
and do little impromptu shows for, you know,
whichever public members are around.
It's hard to find open mics.
You need places to test stuff.
You only get good by doing and experiencing.
And that's hard to find for most variety arts.
Magic concluded.
And it's one of the reasons I live near the place.
And I went there on quiet nights because
to get the routine to this better place,
I had to kind of break it and test out these things
that you can only test them in front of people.
You need to observe as mind is where the magic happens.
And it wasn't good and it was awkward.
It was uncomfortable and I hated it.
And I would wait till there were just like three people
rather than gathering a big crowd to get good energy.
I'd be like, ah, no, I don't want anyone to see it sucking
while it's in this crappy phase.
And just went there night after night, just again and again.

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It was brutal and it was unpleasant,
but slowly wove it together and started to find a way
to get the improvements.
So question just on that process.
Because I saw the room where you did a lot of that practice.
Tiny little room.
And I saw the performance when things worked.
So when you're workshopping this rough material,
and it makes me think of a long time ago,
when I was in the Bay Area,
I was actually a judge for an amateur comedy competition.
But there were a couple of pros and they would bring
their notebooks up on stage
and something would just die on the vine.
Wouldn't get any response and be like,
okay, we're going to cut that one.
And then they'd pull up in their notebook and on stage,
they would make their notes.
And I loved seeing the under the hood process.
When you are performing, for say three people,
and it sucks it to use your word,
does that mean it works, but it's not pretty?
Does that mean it just completely falls apart
and does not work?
It doesn't produce the illusion.
And what do you say or do when people have come to be
entertained and it doesn't work?
Yeah.
The answer is sort of all of the above.
There are so many different failure modes,
which again is sort of the engineering mindset,
the different ways it can fail.
With this particular thing I was working on in this story,
there was one particular thing I needed to accomplish
secretly without anyone seeing.
It was submission impossible type shit.
Your mission should you choose to accept it is,
the parameters should have been impossible.
And I was trying to find a way to make this work
and I had a hunch there might be a way,
but it relied on sort of like nuanced body language based
misdirection and like how human perception actually works

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and how to kind of slip that through the cracks
in ways that were really hard to theorize
and you have to kind of feel it.
And so I would prefix it,
knowing that there was a solid chance of it failing
by going, hi, I'm testing on something new.
If it works, it'll be amazing.
If it doesn't work, it'll be hilarious.
So win, win, win either way.
Hopefully you will get an entertaining experience.
So that, you know, that set expectations informed consent.
They know what they're getting into.
And it's a weird place because I don't know
which one of those it's going to be.
And if it works, they are going to see something astounding.
And then they're going to see me go, was that any good?
Which is such a jarring experience for them
to see me just break reality.
And they go, was that any good?
Did you see the thing that I hoped you didn't see?
Like what the hell?
But then if they did see the thing, they'd be like,
I mean, yeah, because I'm letting them know I want their feedback.
And it's often hard to get people to give you that feedback
because often they mistakenly think that being polite is better.
It is helpful.
They don't hurt your feelings.
I know it's the opposite.
I got like hurt me.
Punch me in the face.
Like, let's go.
Give me the pain.
I need to know.
I want the painful truth of the beautiful lie.
This is what we need right now.
And usually you can see it on their faces,
even if they're trying to hide.
You can sort of see that their eyes flicker
to where the thing happened.
I'm like, damn it.
All right.
Well, lesson learned.

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Back to the drawing board.
Let's try it again tomorrow.
And if it does work, they just, you see the wonder.
And so it's great.
We got it that time.
Now let's try and make sure that happens
every time with an error margin.
So you're putting in the reps.
Putting in the reps.
Just grinding through the reps for weeks and months.
And it gets down to the point where I've sort of got
two approaches kind of figured out.
There's two paths to making this thing work.
And they each have different pros and cons.
And I can't really decide between them.
One is the slightly risky one that looks better,
but has a different problem.
Again, a classic engineering situation.
You just have to decide between the trade-offs.
And with now it's just a few weeks away.
And I go, all right, we're going to pick one and focus on it.
And I pick the safer one that is less amazing,
but like more reliable.
So we go to the competition.
And it's a six-day event.
And it's the competition, but also shows and workshops
and panel discussions and events and all kinds of cool.
It's a whole big, beautiful celebration.
Best one.
Yeah, exactly.
And the competition's the main thing.
And annoyingly, my friend Shoot and I.
So Shoot is a really good magician friend
who was also competing in a different category.
And we'd been training each other,
really like supporting each other on the journey
and trying to do our thing.
And we're both on the final day, which is annoying,
because what I wanted was rip off the band-aid early
and then enjoy the festival.
But instead, I have to make sure I get to sleep
and make sure I stay healthy.

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And so I can't go too hard,
because I spent like a year and a half working towards this.
In a way, I spent 10 years working towards this.
I don't care if I win.
I'm just there to do the thing
and to see if we can close this narrative arc
because it'll be more engaging.
Because the fact that it was exactly 10 years
felt just too perfect to let that go.
It's such a beautiful plot arc.
I'm like, I want to see if this thing can fly.
And if it can't, that's okay, because at least I'll know.
At least I tried the thing.
And shoot's in a similar place.
He's just entering because it's been a pandemic.
We haven't been able to do this for so many years.
He wants to be part of it.
So it's the final day, actually it's not yet,
because two days before the final day,
I'm lying awake, shoot and I are sharing a hotel room.
And I have insomnia, which doesn't happen to me much.
And I'm lying awake because adrenaline and time zone
and just it's not surprising.
I'm lying awake staring at the ceiling going,
God damn it, get to sleep.
And then suddenly, it's one of those moments
where my eyes widen and I just suddenly see the matrix.
And I'm like, holy shit, I suddenly think
I've seen a way to combine these two approaches
and get the best bits of both.
Two days before game time.
Yeah, and this always happens to me.
This every day, it's a running joke
with friends in Melbourne who know the muse only visits.
48 to 36 hours before the deadline.
48 hours before a go time.
Every damn time, that's when the muse turns up.
I playfully anthropomorphize my muse.
I think of her as like, I'm like arguing with her going,
could you one time turn up three weeks out?
And she's like, no.
And I'm like, oh, you know what?

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Terribly sorry.
Appreciate you.
Please don't stop turning up.
No.
All right.
That's, I guess that's what it's going to be.
Looks like that's a schedule.
Yep.
All right.
Thank you.
Appreciate you.
Please don't, don't leave.
So she turns up at 4am two days before
and just punches me in the face with this idea.
And I'm like, oh my God, hang on.
And shoot is asleep in the, he's a pretty sound sleeper.
We've traveled together a lot now.
For many gigs.
And I realized, hang on.
I think often you need to think with your body.
I find you need to sort of work through it and block through it.
So I get up very quietly, try not to wake him up.
And in the darkness is like dim light of the moon
through the slit in the window.
I sort of work through this idea thinking,
am I insane?
Will this work?
And I kind of think, I think this might have legs,
but I don't know if I'm just sleep deprived and delusional.
So I write down a bunch of notes on it
for my future self in the morning to go like,
in case I forget.
And then I don't get to sleep.
I'm just lying there and my mind's racing.
I'm like, I think, hang on.
Maybe is there not surprise?
This kind of work.
And finally shoot wakes up.
What the fuck are you doing?
He's used to it.
He's not surprised.
The amount of weird shit we've seen each other doing

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for magic over the years.
Like it's all so much stranger than fiction.
He just looks at me as like, uh-huh.
Something like, okay.
So full disclosure, I haven't slept.
So I might be a little manic.
What do you think of this idea?
And shoot is legendary for being a friendly,
beautiful human, but very sort of blunt with his feedback
and his opinion.
He breaks a lot of people's spirits unintentionally
because he's just-
The dream destroyer.
Exactly.
Very, very sort of.
Yeah.
Like he younger Mr. Miyagi.
Like, no, no, no.
And I go, okay, here's the idea.
We all know everything about each other's acts at this point.
And I'm like, so this version, this version,
I think if I do this and do this and then that,
and that gives us the best bit of this,
but without the drawback of this,
because this angle and this perceptual focal direction,
and then this, what do you think?
Is this something?
Has it got legs?
And he looks at me and thinks and goes,
I can't say no.
Which from him is-
Which is like A plus.
High praise.
He's like, yeah.
Because normally he'd be like, ah, but you know,
this wouldn't work.
So I'm like, oh, shit.
Okay.
And then I ran it by Jordan as well later on.
Like again, haven't slept, might be a little manic.
You know, I'm learning how to, you know,
interact and filter properly.

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And he's like, yeah, I think maybe.
And I'm like, all right.
So then I spend the next day and a half
because that's all I've got.
Blocking through this new version.
It's not a massive change.
And when you say blocking, what do you mean?
Blocking in the theatrical sense,
as in kind of walking through it physically,
like going through the whole motions.
Because a lot of magic, again,
the Vernon theory of naturalness is about
looking like your body has no tension
where there is actually a lot of tension,
or vice versa, or faking tension where there is none.
And you kind of need to,
in the same way that a special effects designer
is lying with their CGI,
lying for the benefit of the audience,
lying to create something beautiful,
you have to sort of lie with your whole body.
Sure.
In a really, a way that really takes a long time
to kind of get intuitive.
And it's one of the hardest things
about learning magic at a high level.
You know, I just realized also something about you,
which tell me if this is an accurate perception,
and that is you may not be able to put yourself
in the minds or the shoes of, say,
certain listeners of stories,
but you would have to be quite good at putting yourself
behind the eyes, the very least.
Absolutely, yeah.
Of your spectators.
Completely.
Of your marks.
Yeah.
Because the angles matter.
Yeah, absolutely.
And the knowledge and the preconceptions,
and the assumptions,

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and the just the ways people perceive reality around them, absolutely, is literally the medium with which, you know, the magician slash illusionist works. And the con misconceptions to, you know, the hands, or the cards, or the coins, or the whatever. But no, I mean, those are the tools, but you are sculpting the perceptions of an observer into a beautiful, amazing shape. You need to be present to that. That is the sculptor that you are crafting. And the thing where I find that's different about things like what stories would be interesting is perception of physical reality is a much more universal, consistent thing than people's creative preferences, or personal preferences, or wants, or needs, or desires, or interests. That is hugely variable between people. And I think in any sort of, at least for me, the neurodivergencies are more about those things and more divergent. What I like, what I'm interested in, what I want to hear about, what I don't. Whereas perception of physical object is... Perceptual faculties for survival that have evolved over time. Exactly. That's pretty much the same for everybody. Pretty consistent. Not everybody, but all, you know, way higher percentage. So you're 48 hours roughly out. You're not sleeping. Come on, Simon, for fuck's sake. Get to sleep. Get it together. Muse is like... Muse is just punching me in the face with... Amazing things. Punch in the face. And I'm like, thank you, I think. So now you think you have something. I think I've got something. How do you balance? Maybe that's not even the word to use.

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Prepping with something new before game time
with trying to get some sleep.
Yeah. I definitely try to get sleep.
Sleep is important.
I don't really have a process.
I just sort of feel it.
And I get it to a point where I think it's good enough.
I have a bit of a background in improv acting,
which is one of the best things I ever studied in my life.
And being okay with just kind of...
Again, the friends from Melbourne who are listening,
shout out to Dom and Veeam and everybody else,
know that I'm inevitably like hours before a show,
building something new to try in it.
I think a lot about this idea of the two thresholds of
imagine that you oversimplify how good is a performance
into a single axis, which is ridiculously oversimplified.
But say, you know, at the bottom is the worst thing you've ever seen.
This is like the Y axis on a graph.
Exactly. And at the top is the best thing you've ever seen in your life.
Again, oversimplification, but for the sake of argument,
it's that George Box quote,
all conceptual models are wrong, but some are useful.
And this is wrong, but useful.
And I often think about we're trying to go upwards.
We're trying to get high on the scale.
You want it to be, that show was really good.
Some people think it was the best thing they've ever seen.
Some people think it's really good.
And there's an infinite number of lines you could draw on that graph.
And the two that I think about the most is
somewhere very high up is people in the audience are thinking,
that is one of the best things I've ever seen ever in my life,
across all categories of experience.
Holy shit. That's always where I'm aiming at.
I don't think I hit it.
I think most people never hit it.
Maybe I'll hit it one day before I die.
That would be amazing.
Maybe I won't, that's okay, but I'm aiming at that.
I think about the Bruce Lee quote,
the aim the punch two inches beyond the intended point of impact.

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Aiming at the line, I don't need to hit it to feel happy.
But then way lower is the line
above which not one person in the audience
felt like they wasted their time with their money.
And I'm willing to take risks down to that line.
But not below it.
If I go below that line, then I'll beat myself up.
Then I have a karmic debt to repay to the world.
But above that line, my conscience is clean.
My karma is clear.
And I'm willing to take risks to explore and experiment down to that line.
And this is a bit different because the world damn championships.
So the minimum line is a bit higher.
And so it's more, I get at the line where I'm like,
I'm confident that this is going to do extremely likely to work
to the highest level.
You can never be certain, but I'm confident I've got this and it'll work.
And at that point, I chill and get some sleep and try and relax.
Okay.
And that's the competition.
And then I'm up and it's terrifying and I'm ready.
I want to make a little tangent about, again,
a thousand stories we could tell.
Because why is it actually worth doing anything?
What do we do before we die?
What makes you happy?
What makes you, what do you find fulfilling?
One of the things back in 2012 that made that performance I did so insane
as a weird method is one of my best friends in Melbourne, Dave,
helped out by, and this is massive spoiler,
first time it's revealed, hiding under the table during the act.
This is not a method.
This is not something magicians do.
This is ridiculous and absurd.
This was a desperation move of just a brute force approach,
heinously inelegant and basically like constructing things during the act
to make this thing possible, which was such a ridiculous thing to do as a method.
But I'm like, we don't have time to come up with something better.
We're just going the brute force thing.
Under the table you go.
Yep. Dave and Dave's like, I got this.
And that's, again, there's a group of friends there, again,

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like Dave and Dom and Veeam and YC and yeah,
that many of us have done this for each other.
What do you need?
Where on it?
Jason Bourne, a nonviolent Jason Bourne kind of mentality.
Like what needs to be done?
We'll get it done.
I've hidden under the table for friends in various other bizarre situations to build shit,
which is wonderful.
It's like the behind the scenes.
And so it became a running joke that Simon's magic is done by Dave being under the table.
Not the case.
This is not how magic is done, but it became a running joke.
And so again, that was 10 years ago.
And for this one, I've realized for six months, I've got a bit that I want to do.
I've got a joke I want to make in homage to these wonderful friends
and these beautiful people who have helped along the way.
And in this act, it doesn't use a table.
It uses this tiny little side stand that's part of,
that's one of the problems with the 2012 one.
It was cumbersome.
It was bulky.
It was inefficient, inelegant.
This one's very simple and clear and minimalist.
And on this little side stand that I'm putting, the very few props I have,
that I've always been a minimalist in my tastes.
I make a little video 10 minutes before I go on stage for the World Championships.
And to me, that's what makes this funny.
That's what makes this good, that it's there in the arena.
And I record a little video of the table going,
all right, guys, going on stage in 10 minutes, World Championships,
just pre-show check.
I opened my little box.
I'm like, yep, all the props are there.
Is everyone where they need to be?
And I pan down and look under the table.
And there's a photo of Dave taped under the table.
Yep, everyone's in place.
We've got everyone need to be.
All right, we're ready.
And I send that to the group chat.
And like, that was the thing I really wanted to do.

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Like stuff like that, that's the actual beauty of it.

So on the game day, I'm just wondering because you're on the last day.

No last day.

Okay.

So I have had the fortunate opposite experience.

The only time that I spoke on the Ted main stage,

I was in the opening session and I was so grateful because it was

a lot of pressure and stress on one hand,

but then I could enjoy the rest of the event.

Completely.

And I knew that I would otherwise just be mentally rehearsing my own act the entire time.

So walk us through game day and what it's like leading up to it also.

So game day, well, and also before game day, because you're so right,

like exactly what you described as what's way better.

And instead, I'm watching all the competitions with friends.

And it's also a great celebration of magic and amazement.

But we're watching going, again, so much of how it goes is, who's there?

Is there someone way better than you?

Is no, who's turning up from all, you know,

who are the Belgians bringing?

Who are the Italians bringing?

You know, who's here from South Korea?

You know, what, what is the world going to deliver that might be amazing?

And again, the goal isn't to win, but still you can't help but kind of want to maybe imagine.

And no, but then you don't imagine that's that's setting yourself up for disappointment.

You don't want to think about that.

So game day, get up, final preps and doing things like this joke of Dave under the table

is also what's keeping me sane, because that's something else makes fun and beautiful to focus on.

Just to let a little little pressure out of the tires.

And those are in many ways the things that really matter in some ways,

but just being a human being and friendships and relationships and all those things.

So I get there, just double check the props.

I've got backups of everything.

And also I've spent the last few days trying to write a script.

While you're there.

While I'm there, because I'm not, I'm not good at scripting,

not good at script writing.

I've always found it very hard.

Oh, I see script writing.

You're like writing a totally unrelated screenplay script meaning for the act.

Well, I was writing some unrelated software, but we got us a separate story.

I was writing my romcom.

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Yeah, right.

What I'm actually meant to be saying during Zach.

God, I got.

And usually my process for quote unquote scripting is I sort of work out roughly what I want the thing to be about.

And I go to the literal figurative open mic and I think of it like sketching a line.

You do a lot of like light sketches and gradually find the shape of the line until you thicken it and thicken it and find the actual, the bold line.

And that's sort of usually how I work on material.

So meaning that you'd have a few bullets and then you would improv.

Yeah.

And you would gradually find the right sculpting.

Exactly.

Of the words that are the connective tissue between those bullet points.

Or even how to articulate those bullet points in the moment.

I know semantically the idea I want to get across and the words.

I discover what words come out of me in that moment.

And for whatever reason, for me, I found that's the best way to find the real stuff.

Because in that moment, in the spotlight, it's more real.

And I then record all the shows and go, oh, those words are good today.

Damn, where did I say?

Oh, that's good shit.

I'll say that again next time.

And that's slowly how the script emerges.

Most of the time, I don't necessarily think that's a good way to work, but it's the way I've got that I found.

Yeah.

But for this one, it's like, I want to kind of have this nailed.

And I fail to write this script.

I keep trying.

I've got friends who are like, come on, write your script.

Like, I'm on it.

I'm going to do it.

Lock myself in the room for an hour.

Can't do it.

Brain just slips off the task.

So on the day, I don't have a script.

And I'm like, you know what?

I'm just going to accept that.

I wish I did.

I didn't.

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It is what it is.

And I hit up a friend, Jared, an amazing magician, who is also there just hanging out performing.

And there's this one line.

I kind of want to nail the ending line.

I know what I'm going to open with.

And I know a bunch of key phrases that I'm going to be good.

And I'm confident I've got through this many times in rehearsal.

And it's always a little bit different, but it's fine.

There's this one bit at the end that it's a chance

to give it a final line before the ending.

I've never worked out what to say there.

And Jared is just an amazing human being, philosopher, writer, speaker.

And we sort of have a...

We overlap a lot in some of our theories of magic.

He's like sort of me, but more poetic and philosophical.

And so I hit him up.

And I'm like, hey, I'm trying to figure out this line.

And we just sit down.

And the competition's going on.

I'm the second last act of the whole day, of like the 15 competitors on the Friday.

And we just sit down.

And there's this odd, ironic zen like calm, because I've now done everything.

The preparation's over.

That's in that sort of calm before the storm.

We've done everything we realistically could.

And we just chat about this final line.

And it's this beautiful, peaceful moment of just him and I, these sort of grizzled veterans of this bizarre art form, just going, yeah, what's this want to be?

And we figure out sort of a line for it.

I'm like, that's pretty good.

Thanks. Thanks, man.

We'll see if I remember it in a moment.

Because I don't know.

We don't know what's going to happen.

And then backstage, and again, a couple of friends, Dom and Shoot are there.

They're going, okay, we have this term being the special agent.

But again, it's like the nonviolent Jason Bourne,

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just the person who's capable, motivated,
and just on top of whatever inevitably is going to go wrong.
Because something is.
So this is like your A-team fixer?
Yes, exactly.
Yeah. And I am often that for other friends as well.
And so we all take turns.
Like who's just on it and gets it and is there.
When Dom went on America's Got Talent,
I was his special agent.
I'm like, we're there, we're ready,
just going to deal with whatever's going to happen.
And so he's there and it's great and it's calm.
And then I do the stupid video joke.
Because I've realized from experience,
going on stage at something like that is terrifying.
And I've realized that it helps me to have something else to think about.
And that's part of the reason why jokes like that are funny little side projects.
There are a couple of other ones that are other stories.
And one thing I love actually that's relevant at FISM,
I've been there five times.
I've competed three times, attended two times.
And something that has happened every single time is
a contestant will go out and begin their act.
And something will go wrong.
They'll have a fumble or a clear issue or a lighting problem that they have proposed.
And you've got this audience of up to 3,000 magicians from all over the world.
And every time this happens,
someone has kind of an awkward fumble moment.
The audience like applauds supportively in that sort of nice, quiet applause
to say like they know how scary it is and how much bravery it takes to walk out on that stage.
And it's like, we see you, we got you.
Even if we're hoping someone else wins,
we want to run to at least be able to do a great job.
We want to see something amazing.
And it's just it's every damn time it makes me choke up slightly when I see that happen.
It's that's lovely.
It's my favorite damn thing about the whole thing.
It's it's not true for all communities.
No, there are really hyper competitive communities.
And then there are others that seem to be really supportive in that way.
Yeah. Yeah.

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Everyone there is most people.
There's a few narcissists and shitheads and everything.
But mostly people are there worshiping at the altar of wonder.
They want to feel the thing.
They want to see people be able to do the thing.
And I know that as well.
And that also helps me.
I'm going out there to a warm room.
It's always warm.
People want to be amazed.
They want you to be good and you just have to not screw it up.
So I go out and I do the thing and it goes okay.
And I get bring the person up and I do the thing.
I'm going to create this moment that then is going to linger beyond the end of it.
And it goes okay.
And the new bit goes fine.
It goes really well.
It's one of those rare beautiful moments where the thing goes as you planned.
Usually things don't.
It takes a lot of iterations to get through it.
It just works.
And it's just, oh, it's deeply satisfying.
I do the thing.
I give the person to the person.
They go back.
All the lines land.
All the moments hit.
And I go, you know, thank you.
You know, good night.
And it gets the whole room up, stands up to applaud.
It gets a full standing ovation, which again, I did not expect.
I was just trying to focus on, I just want to do the thing and not shit the bed.
Just going to get through this with my janky ass half written script and remember the line that Jared gave me and like just trying, I'm just completely focused on getting through it.
Again, not knowing how it's going to be perceived.
I've learned that I just don't know.
It might be great.
It might be terrible.
And the main thing, they're very strict time limits.
Minimum five minutes, maximum 10 minutes, a minute over a second over under you get disqualified.
And I think the theory is you're professional.

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You should be able to keep within a five minute range.

Get it together.

And I still remember when everyone's standing up to applaud,

my main thought is, wait, am I, is this going to put this time?

Is this like, oh God, can I, like is this, I don't know, they're still applauding.

But luckily there's a time where I can look at and we're only at like eight minutes food.

So I'm like, oh, okay, thank God.

All right, we're fine.

We're fine.

We can, we can accept the applause.

It's great.

Oh man.

And I feel awkward about it.

Like it's, it's that weird duality of it's, it's lovely.

Like the recognition is beautiful, but also, I also feel very awkward about it at the same time.

I'm a shy ass introvert.

I mask very effectively and pretend not to be, but I'm shy and awkward in most situations.

And this is definitely one of them.

So I'm like, don't look at me, but also thanks.

I really appreciate it.

It's complicated.

So finally I'm like, all right, and I just go backstage.

And then the moment happens, the riot happens.

The friends like, come out and look at this.

I'm like, oh my God, like what?

It's just crowd is gathered around the person with the object and they're taking photos and examining it and this.

And there's a whole bunch of photos out there of people just looking like they're getting high.

Jordan showed me a photo, sort of a diagonal top down photo from someone who had that vantage point of this.

Yeah.

And the variety of extreme facial expressions is tremendous.

Yeah.

You have some people who are just, they look like they're inspecting a diamond, right?

They're really trying to scrutinize.

You have one guy, I think he had a very short white beard who just, he looks like he's blissed out on cloud nine and an opium den.

Yeah.

He's just soaking it in.

Yep.

It was wild.

Yeah.

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He's taking in his communion with wonder.

Yeah.

And what an experience.

Right.

And then thank God it's over.

And shoot and I had been joking for weeks about, yeah, we were so tired.

We were giving it everything we had.

Like it's just trying, we're doing this once.

This is also the only time I'm ever going to do this again.

I'm never going to enter another magic competition after that at the time is what I'm thinking.

I'm like, this is the shot.

So I want to give it everything.

I want to at least give it the chance to just bloom and to be whatever it's going to be.

I don't want to think, you know, what if I want to just give it a shot because this is, either way, this is the end of this 10 year story arc for this routine, one way or the other.

And so now shoot and I like, oh my God, we're done.

Thank God.

Now we can actually join the party and celebrate and relax and it's great.

But the way this thing works is they do all the preliminaries.

There's eight different categories, three subcategories of close up magic, five subcategories of stage magic.

Would you mind just mentioning some of the categories?

Sure.

Under close up magic, they have general close up magic.

They call it micro magic, which is just European for close up magic, basically.

Parler magic, which is more medium scale and then card magic gets its own category as a specialist.

And medium scale refers to the size of the props?

Oh, the audience.

The audience.

Yeah.

So normally, and these categories are sort of, I would debate whether these are useful categories, but the way they define it is close up magic is done where you can physically touch the audience, where you're in physical proximity.

It's truly close up.

Parler magic is more for sort of 50 to 100 people in a more stand up situation, generally.

Again, that's an oversimplification, but that's kind of how they roughly define it.

It's always been nebulous and blurry.

And what are some of the outside of the subcategories of close up magic?

What are some of the other categories?

So under stage magic, they have general stage magic manipulation, which is heavy, slight of hand focused, so difficult dexterity to give the illusion of impossibility, state grand illusion, which is like big box tricks, basically.

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Not really my thing, but...

Big box, like cutting someone in half stuff.

Yeah, that kind of thing.

The cutting a person in half is the classic big box grand illusion, as they call it.

Mentalism, the illusion of mind reading or fake psychological abilities or whatever, and comedy magic.

It gets its own category, which again, is an odd false dichotomies all over the place, but that's the...

Still makes it fun.

Adds some space.

Exactly.

Makes it interesting.

And the way it works is they award a first, second, and third prize in each of these eight categories.

And one of the things I really respect about fism, because again, it has many flaws.

It's not perfect by long shot, but I respect that the judges don't have to award any of the prizes.

If an act is not the standard, they don't have to award the first prize, for example, and often they don't.

Oh, interesting.

The theory is...

So it's not a ranked podium finish.

You could have the top winner in a category get the equivalent of second place.

You could, yeah.

No one gets first.

And that does happen.

That has happened many times in its history.

They try to make it mean something over the decades.

I love that.

Yeah.

I really respect that.

No great inflation.

Yep.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

It's not just who's best on the day.

It's like, is this good enough by the standards we've sort of admittedly arbitrarily, subjectively said?

But yeah, I respect that intent.

What a...

Just a breath of fresh air.

Right.

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That's kind of cool.

Make it mean something.

Right.

Exactly.

And obviously it's subjective.

How do you judge art?

Should you try and judge art?

Should you even have competitions?

These are very reasonable questions, but at least they're kind of trying.

They're genuinely going in.

And then of the winners, the first prizes, they have the option, but not the obligation, to give out one overall quote, unquote, grand prix.

You know, it's French, big prize for overall close-up and overall stage.

The two big mega prizes that they don't have to award, but that's the big final thing.

But shoot and I like, we're done.

It's great.

It's over.

Thank God we get to relax and finally party and hang out.

And then one of the organizers comes up to us and goes, forget the words, but like, yeah, be ready to perform again tomorrow, which is simultaneously amazing and terrible news.

It's amazing.

You're like, what about the cheesecake and rum?

What about other things?

Damn it.

Oh, horrible, horrible success.

And this is incredible because we're pretty sure we don't know for certain.

This is also what makes it complex.

It implies they're likely.

It seems likely we have probably won our categories or you can tie for first.

They can offer like a special prize.

You never quite know.

There's a lot of exception cases throughout history that have happened.

So we're like, probably means, which is a weird place to be.

We're like, we think that means we might have won our categories.

It definitely means I shouldn't get blackout drunk.

It definitely means we have to do it again tomorrow.

And it felt exactly like, like getting to the end of a marathon, having given it everything to make it to the finish.

And suddenly you need to run another five miles.

And we're just like, oh my God.

Oh God.

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And we just, we did not prepare for this.
We did not think this was what was going to happen.
And so we go back to the hotel room and start prepping for another performance.
For both of us in different ways, that's a non-trivial undertaking.
And it's like, oh God, damn it.
But also amazing.
Oh my God.
This is incredible.
What a, oh my God.
What a joy.
Like such a complex yin and yang of emotion.
Yeah.
That's sort of Janus faced blessing.
Exactly.
Oh yeah.
And so we then get some sleep and get up the next day
and go into preparation mode.
And again, that day is its own insane story of all kinds of weird things
went wrong.
The first place winners all perform again.
This time for all 12 judges.
The close-up and stage judges join together to judge everything.
So the close-ups haven't seen the stage thing.
The stage judges haven't seen the close-ups.
They're all now going to watch them
and judge, are any of these acts worthy of the grand prix?
And if so, which one for each?
And 10 minutes before walking out for that performance,
I am in the stairwell, the fire escape stairwell,
in my t-shirt and jeans, not my suit, fixing a problem with one of the props
that has gone wrong for reasons.
It's a whole story.
There are visual aids.
It's a separate thing.
It's, and again, Dom and Ruben and Veeam never,
are not surprised because they're like,
yeah, classic coronel.
This, it's always like this.
I'm like, yeah, I wish that wasn't true, but it is.
One day I'll be fully ready for a performance.
One day it'll be great.
And at that point I'm thinking, if it comes down to it,

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I would rather walk out in my crappy t-shirt and jeans
with a trick that works than in my nice stage suit
with a trick that doesn't work.
Luckily, we get both barely.
So I walk out on stage fighting the trembles.
Like I'm adrenaline soaked and haven't had time
to get in the zone at all.
But I do the thing.
It goes okay.
I'm freaking out, but holding it together.
No one can tell.
The tremor is very slight in the hand, but I keep it together.
And the person, the different person I bring up is amazed
and it works well.
And I'm like, now it's over.
Thank God.
Goddamn.
Now we're actually done.
And so then there's a few hours while the judges deliberate
and then there's going to be the awards ceremony.
And the awards ceremony is the first time we find out
what actually happened.
And it turns out that shoot wins first prize in parlor magic,
which is amazing and wonderful.
And I tie for first in close-up magic, in micro magic,
which is incredible.
Holy shit.
I just wanted to make this thing real.
And I was so happy back in 2009 to tie for third.
Now one day I'll get my own award.
Like I keep tying for things.
It seems to be a running joke.
And then we go back and sit in the audience with the trophies.
And this is the first moment I've had in days,
if not weeks, to pause for breath.
I'm sitting there in the crowd amongst friends.
And like Vincent, a guy from Australia,
came second in parlor magic after shoot, which is amazing.
And Dom went there to do a stupid joke for a show
he's working on and achieved it.
And just everyone got some version of what they came for.
And it's just beautiful.

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And all the other prize winners,
I would call it worthy.
Because sometimes someone wins.
And you're like, eh, really?
Is that who's the world champion of that?
But it was all beautiful.
It was just this beautiful moment.
Everything was great.
And I'm sitting there.
And when there's 150 contestants or thousands
from in the preliminaries, you're like, anything could happen.
You don't know.
You're up against so many people.
It's you don't even think about what the outcome is going to be.
So much of it's, again, epic tedious, right?
It's out of your control.
But now I'm sitting there.
And they're slow rolling the awards ceremony.
And there's other announcements.
And they announced the next one's going to be in Italy.
And that's a whole thing.
And they thank the sponsors.
And they do the thing.
I'm sitting there holding this first place trophy.
And now thinking about, wait a minute,
they're still going to announce the grand prize.
And now, rather than 150 people or hundreds or thousands of people,
it's down to four people.
It's me, the guy I tied with, shoot.
And the card guy from France, I think.
That's actually slightly embarrassing, wherever he's from.
And when it's one in four,
that's something your brain can engage with.
And I'm sitting there trying not to think about it.
Because the internal dialogue is going,
don't you do this to yourself?
You son of a bitch, don't you do it?
This is what leads to disappointment.
Don't you fucking think about it?
Can we swear?
Yes, you can swear.
Don't you fucking do this to yourself?

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Don't you get your hopes up because you get disappointed?

That is how that happens.

Don't you do it?

But then the brain goes, well, look, imagine you're a fism judge.

And you're thinking, okay, who do we give the grand prize to?

And my brain was like, there was a riot.

Something happened that's never happened before.

And I'm like, don't shut up.

Shut up, internal voice.

Shut the fuck up.

Don't you do this.

Don't get the hopes up.

But this goes on for like 10 minutes, 20 minutes.

And they're slow rolling this thing.

I'm there with this internal...

I'd like to thank our bronze sponsor.

And I'm there in this deep internal struggle of like,
don't think about it.

Med it, Zen.

Remember the mindfulness, focus on the breath.

But then the inner voice is like, but maybe.

And I'm like, no.

And I'm thinking about it

because it's the first time I've had to catch my breath.

And I am thinking about the last year and a half

and the last 10 years and the last decades

and this whole damn journey.

And it becomes very clear to me

over that half hour sitting there

that if, as much as I try to think about it at all,

if they say my name,

I realize I'm absolutely going to burst into tears.

And I'm not a cryer.

I cry like once every year or two, like maybe.

And I realize, oh yeah, there's no way.

It's because I'm already like just at the memories
of like what it had taken

and what it had cost

and how much it had taken to walk this path

and get to this point

and how I never thought it would get anywhere,

let alone here, let alone what I'm despite myself thinking.

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And I realize, oh yeah, I'm just going to break down.
And I realized in that moment
that one thing that's always made me sad
is when people cry,
so often the first instinct is to hide or apologize
or pretend not to.
And that always breaks my heart.
I wish that weren't the case.
It's sad that society teaches us
to hide that or to shelve that.
And I kind of decide, you know what,
the only thing, it's like a little side quest
in my head now at this point
to just sort of like a not think about it,
is that all we can ever do is try to lead by example.
And even that, you very rarely get a chance to do.
And I don't, you know,
was it be the change you want in the world,
even if it's in a tiny, almost trivial way?
And I go, you know what, if this happens,
don't think about it, don't think about it.
But if, but don't think about,
okay, if it happens, I realize I'm not going to hide it.
I'm not even going to wipe a tear away.
I'm just going to let it rip.
And at least, I mean, I'm going to cry,
at least I can do it on my own terms.
And then they say my goddamn name.
And as predicted, I burst into tears,
just uncontrollable, like convulsive sobbing.
And I walk up on stage and I stand there.
And the only thing I'm thinking about
is try to keep shoulders back, head up,
make it clear that you are not going to hide.
And I just stand there on stage
and I find out later that the presenter
was like awkwardly kind of expecting
to give me the mic to give a speech.
But it's like, I'm just like,
I'm just fucking heaving and sobbing.
Someone called it ugly crying,
just like, holding this enormous goddamn trophy,

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just bawling my eyes out on stage.
And this was, I found out later,
this was live streamed as well.
So I'm like, okay, cool, great, fine.
And then the main fism guy comes over
and we pose the photo and I'm still just weeping
and then walk off stage and try to find a tissue.
What did it feel like to let it rip?
Really cathartic, really good.
It felt right.
It was the right decision.
I mean, it's not what I would have chosen to do
if I'd had the option,
but it was very clear that I was not going to have a choice.
This was going to happen whether I wanted it to or not.
And so it felt good to, yeah, to not hide
and to not, yeah, not be ashamed
because that's what I want for everybody else.
What did the hour or two or three after that feel like?
So then they announced the stage Grand Prix person,
which is this duo from Belgium
who also did this amazing stage act.
And then we come back out
and then all the winners come back out,
which is three times eight plus a heap of people on stage
for like all the photos and the video
and to everyone to come up.
And it was just this sort of,
sort of genteel pandemonium in the loveliest sense
because again, everyone's there out of love.
And it's just had been this beautiful thing.
And basically everyone felt good
about all the announcements and just,
and we just stood on the stage
and all the official photographers took photos
and then everyone else took photos
and a bunch of people wanted to pose for selfies.
And then eventually, and there's this photo somewhere
once it had sort of started to calm down
as in went from 3,000 people down to only a few hundred people.
And then shoot and I just kind of sat down on the steps
at the front of the stage and just sat there, just empty.

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Yeah, completely just huh.

And then people kept coming up and just saying,
it was great or congrats or can we get a photo
or can you sign my thing?

And it was just this sort of the first time
I'd felt like sort of clear headed in weeks or months
or just like the catharsis of it.

I don't even know how to describe it, just.

In addition to the catharsis, were you or are you able to,
in that case, let's make it specific,
were you able to sit in the afterglow or celebrate?

And I ask in part because I'm not terribly good at it.

Yeah.

Or were you like, let me catch my breath
and then already needed a few days later,
thinking about where you might be pointed.

A bit of both.

It was one of the many things.

And I mean, one thing I still haven't fully processed it.

You know, this was July last year, it's now April.

It feels like eating a six foot wide donut.

I don't know how to get all of this knowledge.

Not sure how to do this.

Yeah, I'm nibbling at it, but it's not going in.

It still hasn't gone in yet.

I'm still actively figuring it out.

But did that really happen?

I keep forgetting it happened.

It's not fitting into my brain.

But one of the things that came out of it, two big things.

One was for the first time I felt my imposter syndrome,
which nearly everyone has, unless you're a raging narcissist.

I think everyone has imposter syndrome to some degree.

I felt it just pop like a soap bubble,
just a delicate little and felt free of it,
which isn't the same as having an ego or anything
because not everything I do is good.

That demon on the shoulder that tells you,
no, you suck.

You're not good enough.

That was finally a big enough event
that even that demon got squashed by it and couldn't rub up.

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The demon was like, oh, all right, okay, fine.
You can do good stuff.
All right, fine, shut up.
That was one.
And the other thing was it was the first time
in my adult life since finishing high school
that I felt like I could stop and catch a breath for a moment.
Because I'd never felt that before.
I always felt like I hadn't proved myself.
I hadn't figured out a career.
I hadn't achieved the thing or there was always something to do.
There was always that pressure, that forwards movement.
And for the first time, I felt, you know what?
I'm going to take a few months and just do nothing
and just sit and just regroup and catch my breath.
Because also I was unsurprisingly massively burnt out.
I was so burnt out at that point.
I'd been going, not shocked.
Yeah, right.
I mean, pandemic alone and everything else,
a lot plus all of that.
But the thing that was great was shoot and I flew back to LA
and we slept and then the next day we did what we had been
knowing for months or over a year at this point
that we knew what we wanted to do more than anything.
And we went to a cafe and we just hung out and had coffee
without stress or worry or the upcoming pressure.
And it was perfect.
That was what we were talking for years.
You know, once this is over, oh man,
we can just hang out and have coffee.
And like that's the best possible thing.
The simple things.
And then we went to the magic castle that night
just to have a drink.
And we, I remember we, as you know,
sort of the night we flew back,
we went to the magic castle.
This is before the coffee.
And we kind of went, you know what,
let's go have a drink at the castle.
Why not hang out?

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And we, as we walked up the hill to it,
we were going, I wonder if anyone's heard,
because it had been that day.
It was that same afternoon.
We're like, I wonder if anyone's heard.
I don't know.
Maybe, maybe not.
And we walk in and everyone has heard.
Like it was all, everyone who works there,
the people in the kitchen, everybody was the number one user.
We're like, oh God.
And that night was amazing.
It was fun.
But a homecoming.
Right.
And because the thing is, the magic castle was,
I mean, again, it's the real place,
but there had been even pre-pandemic,
it'd be going through kind of a dark age
in that it had just been less inspiring.
There were fewer really amazing people hanging out there.
It was under management that wasn't particularly tapping
into the beautiful, wonderful things about the place.
And I'd found myself just less inclined to go there
on any given night.
Normally you go there and you have an amazing night
and it's incredible and you meet amazing people
and see amazing things.
And that had just been happening less and less
in the years leading up to the pandemic.
And then the pandemic obviously was awful.
And so many people that night mentioned versions of,
you know what this feels like?
It feels like the old school castle again.
And there was a vibe.
People I hadn't seen for years were there.
And this is the closest I will ever come
to saying something self-congratulatory.
Because even just being Australian,
it's like awkward.
But this was something someone else said.
So I feel less uncomfortable about it,

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even though it's still very uncomfortable.
And this friend said, well, yeah, you know,
because the magic castle was founded back in the 50s
in the vernier on having the best magic in the world was there.
And that was true.
And for a long time that had kind of stopped being true.
And the best magic was maybe in Madrid or South Korea
or Germany or a bunch of other places
that are these real hot spots of magical innovation
and excellence.
And it hadn't been the castle actually for a long time.
And then she said in this amazingly dramatic way,
but tonight that changed.
And I was like, ooh, chills, tingles.
And also I don't know how to handle the implied responsibility
of that.
I'm still kind of figuring that out.
I don't know.
I'm mostly just not thinking about it as much as I can.
So you went to have a drink.
What was your drink?
What did you go to?
I had a vodka lime and soda with a low calorie option.
Trying to, you know, trying to keep it together.
Simple, trying to keep it together.
If I'm not thinking about the calories, it's a French 75.
What is a French 75?
I think it's champagne, gin, lemon juice and simple syrup.
Sort of like a fancy Tom Collins.
Cheat day.
Yeah, exactly.
Exactly.
I have a long list of questions.
Break it down.
Let's go.
Let's see if we can answer them in less than an hour and a half each
on like the last one.
So feeling lucky having started later with magic.
Yeah.
Why is that?
The main reason is a lot of good things begin from empathy.
Understanding the experience of the other person or people in so many ways,

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in so many fields of human endeavor.

And magic in particular, like you observed earlier, requires an understanding and awareness of the mind of the observer of what's happening perceptually.

And one of the things that I think is really difficult about magic is that once you learn how it's done, it becomes very hard to remember what it was like to not know how it was done. Totally.

It's very hard to maintain empathy with the audience experience.

Very, very difficult.

Even more so than most other odds.

I've thought about this.

I don't want to take us down a side alley too far, but I'll let out a secret that we probably won't have time to unpack today, but you speak Chinese very well.

I do.

Mandarin.

And I've spent time in China.

I've spent time in Japan.

And I often wonder what it used to be like to look at Japanese or Chinese writing when it just looked illegible.

But I can't revert.

Absolutely.

And it's similar.

It is very hard to maintain that sense of what it is actually like to literally see the magic, to see the thing that looks impossible.

Because you can't once you know.

And I think I see a lot of magicians who get into it when they're younger.

There's often this disconnect of...

So I have very clear memories as an adult, technically, legally, legal adult, 18.

I can remember seeing what are considered in the magic industry, very sort of simple, almost beginner tricks.

And I can remember the visceral memory being profoundly affected by them and being profoundly amazed.

I run into many magicians, not the good ones.

The good ones get it.

The good ones understand who have long ago lost touch with the power of these illusions.

And they're like, oh, that's just basic.

Listen, man, do not underestimate the power of that because I have those memories still.

And those guide so much of my creative process with magic of like,

I remember what it felt like to see these things just barely.

Like, I try to hold those memories because they're so precious and valuable

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because they give, enable that empathy with the audience.

Right.

So you can position switch in a sense, perhaps more effectively than people who started so young that their reference set of experiences makes it very hard to stand in for the audience.

Yeah.

And it's still hard for me, but less hard.

All right.

So we hop skipped and jumped across a few Lilypads and consulting was in there at one point.

And so Accenture, I like to talk about that.

That's a name that a lot of people will recognize, very well respected.

Mostly.

Mostly.

Depends who you are.

Depends on when it was.

Depends on exactly, right?

They have a complex history.

Yeah.

Depends on the point in time.

But yeah.

And but a recognizable thing.

Absolutely.

It's like Fortune 300 company, at least back when I worked there.

It's huge.

Huge, yeah.

So I guess a few questions related to that.

The first is diving into some phrasing that you used that I think I'm capturing accurately, which is you said that Accenture played to some of your weaknesses.

Yeah.

What do you mean by that?

I mean, this sort of gets into the, and this is the thing that again, as I mentioned earlier, I feel very sort of nervous, timid about talking about because I've spent most of my life, adult life, actively avoiding hiding the neurodivergent stuff, you know, and I figured, why not? When you asked me on this, it's a good chance to just rip off the band aid, you know, and most public possible arena.

We're going into the honest, truthful phase of my life or something.

But in my early 20s, I was diagnosed with at the time Asperger syndrome, like high functioning autism spectrum thing, which to the surprise of no one at the time.

So many people have the same experience.

It was a relief.

I was like, oh, that's why all that stuff was confusing and awkward and didn't make sense.

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It's bad news.

Like it's not good news, but at least it makes sense.

There's some explanatory power.

Yeah.

At least I kind of now know what we're working with and can start the incredibly long, difficult process of working on what to do about that.

And that then was the next couple of decades of my life trying to work out what to do about that and how to learn those skills that weren't there naturally and learn how to, you know, read nonverbal signals and communication and just all that.

That's still ongoing.

It's still a challenge every day.

It's a pain in the ass, but there are worse problems.

I don't know.

So human interaction is challenging.

It's difficult.

There's extra layers.

There's a lot of extra thinking and analysis to figure out.

And in a high pressure business environment, there's a lot of that.

And so it was a lot of situations I found very awkward and uncomfortable and stressful, even more so than they would be for anybody, I think.

A lot of it's like trying to figure out what is universal and what is unique.

And the answer is lots of both.

And also I'm now realizing I spent so many years focused on like trying to work around that and make up for those deficits and do the extra work to deal with it that is now increasingly apparent that I probably also have some kind of executive function disorder situation going on. Maybe ADHD, maybe something else.

I'm not going to self diagnose.

I'm going to wait till I can actually get to a professional to deal with that.

Because again, things I didn't realize weren't universal.

Difficulty with scheduling, with remembering things, keeping track of time, being organized, organizing data, things like that.

All the kinds of things that you're doing a lot of in a high pressure, high powered business strategy consulting environment.

And I was doing okay.

I was getting the job done and doing a pretty okay job of it, but it was just exhausting.

It was killing me to do so.

All the extra cognitive load to deal with some of those things that are not easy for anybody necessarily, but were like extra exhausting.

And at the time I was, you know, I now have learned the term masking, hiding it, trying to, you know, do the work to pretend to not be dealing with this stuff.

Because for all the reasons that people learn to do that and learn that they should.

And I'm only just now kind of going, you know, what, what if we try not doing that?

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Which we sort of acknowledge it.

And I think one of the reasons I hid it was I've just seen so many people use it as an excuse or a crutch where they're just kind of being an asshole and go, oh, I want the autism spectrum. So it's okay.

I'm like, what?

No, it's still just an asshole.

And I think I'd seen too much of that, that I wanted to make sure I didn't give myself that out, that I didn't give myself the crutch.

There's a quote from Terry Pratchett is one of my favorite authors.

Amazing author.

I lucked out that man.

I feel so lucky to have gotten to his books when I was like early teenager.

Learned so much about just being a human being in the best way.

And one of his characters, Granny Weatherwax, one of the witches who's just an amazing character.

There was this quote, she says to one of the other witches that, yeah, the hard way is pretty hard, but it's not nearly as hard as the easy way.

And there's deep wisdom there.

But I think maybe I ran too far with that.

I think maybe I made it too hard for myself.

And that's been good.

And now let's try maybe acknowledging it a bit.

So yeah, it's very scary and very intimidating.

Well, I appreciate you being so candid.

I know that there are many people, not only in my audience,

but there are many people in my audience who have children who also fit this profile.

Many of my very close friends right now have neurodivergent children.

So it gives them permission to also have conversations, which is important.

If we look at Accenture at the Job,

I find this of interest to put under a microscope for a little bit,

because it's also a path that contrasts with maybe some of the often apocryphal,

but storied histories of, say, magicians or authors who throw caution to the wind.

And if you're going to be a writer, write goddamn it.

And they don't have a backup plan, and they're just living hand to mouth,

barely making hands meet, and they figure out a way to make writing financially viable.

But then there's the other track, which I would say,

just based on what I'm hearing, this would fit into,

which is similar to, say, a friend of mine who's a very successful novelist,

Simon Ciannani.

And even after he had had one or two New York Times bestsellers,

he still had an SAT tutoring company, very small.

I mean, I think he was a solo proprietor,

but he kept it running because he didn't want to feel too much pressure

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imposed on his creative love.

And what he hoped would have wings, but he didn't want to bet on.

And there are sort of philosophical differences here.

One is, give yourself no options that you take the only option you can't.

Exactly, burn the boats.

The other is good idea to have a little bit of savings, maybe, a little bit of stability so that you can develop your craft without having to make a lot of creative compromises.

How did you feel during this process when you were basically

Bruce Wayne by day, Batman by night, or on the weekends?

It's a very generous analogy, but I'll take it.

You know what? I'm feeling generous today.

And how did you make the decision to go full time?

What did that process look like?

I realized when I joined Accenture, I joined it with the intent of sort of doing it for a couple of years, seeing what it was like, get enough experience on the Brazy May that it would hold its value.

That was at least the conventional wisdom at the time.

And then do something else, like start a startup

or like go full magic or something I didn't really know.

And I remember before I joined Accenture, there was this like,

I think I was also lucky to get into magic late

because I was just barely wise enough to make some smart choices.

Barely.

Wisdom is a heavy word for what you have when you're 18, but lowercase wisdom.

Yeah, compared to a nine-year-old.

Right, you've got a little, yeah, very wise.

And when I joined Accenture, I realized I had this sort of flash forward to going, yeah, I'm young and idealistic.

I'm going to join for a couple of years, then quit and do something that leads me towards something, whatever.

I don't know.

And I just had a sudden flicker of like, wait a minute, I've heard this story.

I've heard how this can go.

And then you blink and you're 40 in middle management and wondering where the decades went.

And I kind of sensed, wait, that could be me.

You never know who you are until you're there in the moment, until you're faced with the actual trolley lever, right?

You don't know which what you'll do.

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And so I went on this round the world pilgrimage
with all my remaining savings at the time.
It was the first time I came to America to see the Magic Castle,
to see Vegas and all the Cirque du Soleil shows
and all the stuff I'd heard of.
And this is before Accenture.
This was in the months, because I realized
it was going to be a while before I had free time.
I was going to go into this high pressure corporate environment.
And I did it as kind of a almost creative pilgrimage to kind of,
I thought it was like almost injecting inspiration
into intravenously to kind of keep that fire burning.
Stockpile some fire.
Exactly.
Hide my soul in my sock where they can't find it
and drag it into the corporate drudgery.
That was sort of the mind, the other mindset at the time.
And I think that was good because I did have a sense
I wanted to do something, but I didn't know what or when.
And so at Accenture, while I was there and earning a, you know,
okay salary, I still lived pretty frugally
and I stockpiled savings.
I deliberately didn't buy a car,
even though I could have afforded one.
And instead I spent the money on trips to the U.S.
to keep getting inspired and connecting and everything
and building savings.
I didn't live extravagantly
because I kind of had a sense whatever's next.
I don't know what's next,
but it's going to be good to have a stockpile of savings.
And then I realized that the phrase I wrote once
in a diary entry was fear and enthusiasm
battled and fear kept winning.
I'm like, I want to leave and do something cool
and do the thing and go full magic or something,
but it's scary.
I don't feel ready.
And then finally after sort of three more,
I was at the company for five years.
And after three years longer than I intended to be,
just out of fear and out of the golden handcuffs

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and the stability and one day finally
some pieces clicked together in my head.
There was an actual moment where I realized
I'd read an article by a palliative care nurse
about her observations on people's end of life regrets.
And the number one, as is well documented,
is that they never tried the thing.
Didn't try the thing.
Always wanted, never found out.
And I realized, yeah, I don't want to die that way.
I want to know, even if it fails, at least you know.
Sorry, it's okay.
Number one, I have to try the thing.
Number two, I'd been waiting until I felt ready.
Enough savings and enough career contacts,
enough good magic material or whatever.
And I realized I was a perfectionist
and I was never going to feel ready.
And so number three, if there's no right time,
then sooner is better than later.
And I started drafting my resignation letter.
Like it was one of those rare moments.
Normally life doesn't work with these epiphanies,
but that was one where it was.
There was A, B, C. It was a simple equation,
was an algorithm.
I'm like, yep, that logically checks out.
All right, fuck, I guess I'm doing it.
And in your mind, did you think to yourself
something along the lines of the management
or strategy consulting?
It's like, okay, I'm going to do this for X number of years
to accumulate A, B, and C, and then assess course
or do the thing.
Completely, absolutely.
And so with magic, did you have something similar?
You're like, okay, I'm not going to leave this open-ended.
I'm going to say travel to LA.
I'm going to be in the thick of things.
I'm going to give it six months or 12 months
and then reassess, or was it like, okay,
come hell or high water?

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It was something in between the two.
It definitely wasn't the former.
There was no plan.
I just went for it.
I think I just went out there, again,
sort of I kept the beginner's mind.
I'm just going, I don't know what's going to happen.
Let's go and find out.
Let's jump into it with full strength and full intensity
and just reevaluate as we go.
I think that's the only way to sort of, again,
be like water, right?
Stay open, no fixed positions in the martial art.
See what happens.
And it basically didn't work, which is the weird twist.
My full-time job was magic for the next 10 years,
and I would say I failed at it.
I mostly lived off those savings.
I was earning money, but not enough.
The savings were dwindling.
And most of those years, safe space,
no one else is listening.
It's fine.
It's just us two.
For that 10 years, I mostly earned poverty line
or below income for those 10 years.
It was hard because the tragedy
is what gets financial success is not artistic ability.
It's networking, client relationship management,
negotiating, et cetera, et cetera.
So those business skills that are replying to emails
in a timely manner.
All that stuff that I just did not have at all,
or being able to find the right people,
but again, shy, introverted, spectromy type.
I wasn't good at finding people.
I was good at connecting with people I really felt resonance with,
but they often weren't the ones who could build my career.
And I just never found a way to make it work.
And in the end, when the puzzles came along,
I was so ready to be done with it.
I loved the magic, but not the business of it.

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And you have, though, at least for the show that I saw,
assembled a core team of people who do compliment.
Which is amazing.
And it is the first time I've really felt this.
And it is, I feel a lot like,
I think a lot about the parable,
is it the right word, of the cat who sits on the hot stove
and gets burnt, and it learns not to sit on the hot stove,
but it also doesn't sit on the cold stove.
And I've been thinking about that a lot recently,
about looking back over my experiences in the 10 years I was full-time magic,
and going, oh, God, no.
But maybe it's a different stove now.
I haven't made conclusions on that yet.
I don't know.
But Chad Rabinovitz, the director and producer of the show,
who's amazing, incredible magic director,
of which there are not many in the world.
He might be the only good magic director in North America that I know of.
He nudged me to do this.
He went, come on, we should get this show up.
And I'm like, oh, God, damn it.
No, professional magic sucks.
I felt that it was bad.
It wasn't for me.
I'm done with it.
And he's like, come on, let's do this show.
I'm like, you know what?
I would like this to happen.
Let's creatively.
And I'm like, I don't know.
Maybe it doesn't have to be a failure this time.
I'm not sure.
I don't know.
So I wanted to highlight that, that you have this core team now.
And then we will talk about the puzzles.
Before we get there, I have a whole slew of miscellaneous
that I need to address, or it's going to bother me.
So the first is hotbeds of magical innovation.
I'm always fascinated within these subcultures of which
locations seem to be producing interesting things.
And I just wrote down Madrid, South Korea, Germany.

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And before we started recording, we were also looking at some of the tabletop games that I have behind me, which I'm testing out. And there are certain places that just take tabletop gaming very seriously.

Germany would absolutely.

In the world of magic, what are the top high concentration spots for magic innovation?

I think the biggest one right now is probably South Korea.

The South Korean magic scene is extraordinary right now.

And it really, the rest of the world found out about it.

I think it would have been roughly 2012 at FISM, the one that I got the weird originality prize at, when a guy called Yoo Ho Jin won the stage Grand Prix.

It's still one of those just defining moments I remember in my life of being there just in the audience hanging out.

I'd competed on like the first day, like, yeah, got it off.

And acts come out and Yoo Ho Jin comes out and just is transcendent.

It just does, it's just amazing.

It's one of those Grand Prix moments that captivates everybody.

And I remember afterwards just instant standing ovation.

I remember thinking, I'm just going to stand here and applaud until I cannot physically applaud anymore.

Like, I'm just going to clap these hands until they fall off.

I'm just, that is amazing.

And this was the world kind of going, oh my God,

and there were a bunch of other South Korean magicians there as well who also placed very highly.

And I was going, what is happening in South Korea?

I'm not qualified to speak to the details of it,

but apparently there'd been this, you know,

there was the Korean War and the North Korean situation

and they'd been like this artistic slump for a long time.

But then a couple of people there had really done a lot to re-incubate it.

And this amazingly collaborative scene had emerged where they were like really innovating.

There was government funding, I think,

like arts council funding that was helping as well.

And just to this day, just South Korea, it's really exciting.

I was literally just having a conversation yesterday

with this entrepreneur and also a very, very skilled writer named Bobby Hundreds who's here in LA,

famous for creating the iconic streetwear brand.

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And he is Korean American.

And we were talking about South Korea
because there are so many sectors
in which South Korea just comes out of seemingly nowhere
and begins to dominate.

That's true.

And of all things, breakdancing,
for many years they had the best breakdancers in the world,
the most innovative.

They were doing things people didn't think was even in the realm
of possibility for human bodies to produce.

This would include even comparing them to Olympic gymnasts.

I mean, they're doing some of the most incredible things
that I've ever seen.

And then you have desktop gaming, right?

PC gaming, archery.

They've been the most dominant in Olympic archery,
no close second place for ever.

And this is something I want to study.

So I'll just make another note, South Korea.

Absolutely.

Revisit South Korea.

You were mentioning the categories of magic
in the Ephysm competition.

And I'm wondering if there are any particular experts or specialists?

They don't have to be specialists,
but people are particularly impressive to you
in the world of mentalism.

My opinion is on mentalism.

Or you can start with your opinions on mentalism.

Yeah, I am not a fan of mentalism.

Why is that?

All right. Oh, God, this is going to get me hate mail.

So what the hell?

Radical honesty.

Let's go. So again, this is not universal.

There are exceptions to this.

There are wonderful people who do mentalism.

Some of them are friends.

They're cool.

But...

And for people who don't remember the definition,

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maybe you could just define the term.
So mentalism broadly, you could define as magic used to create...
Rather than the illusion of vanishing and reappearing
and things like that,
you used to create the illusion of psychic or psychological abilities
that you do not have.
Think of a number from 1 to 17.
Yeah. Oh, my God, you got it right.
Holy shit, you must have either psychic powers
or really good body language, ENLP stuff
that overwhelmingly is not the case.
Here's the thing is...
Oh, boy.
Oh, this is really going to piss some people off.
Can't please everyone.
You really can't. Here's the thing.
One of the things I realized back when I first got into magic,
I was really intrigued by mentalism.
Because how would you not be?
It's compelling. It's powerful.
It gets a reaction.
Of course, you feel like all the things that...
Many of the things that draw you to it.
But I eventually realized that a very common...
I've always held the golden rule.
Do as you would be done by.
Ethic or reciprocity.
It doesn't always work because people are different,
but it's a pretty good place to start from.
And I remembered way back seeing a magician as a teenager
and being amazed by something and going,
how did you do that?
It's a natural healthy scientific question
and getting like a glib dismissive reply.
And I was like, this guy's an asshole.
I felt dismissed. I didn't feel good.
And so when finding myself on the other side of that interaction,
I take it very seriously.
And I realized that the things I do magically personally
are all things where if someone goes, how did you do that?
I have to hide the method to keep it amazing.
But I can go, it's a combination of slight of hand

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and misdirection and a bunch of other complicated things
to create the illusion of a thing that definitely didn't happen.
The coin didn't actually disappear.
I did a bunch of complicated shit
to make it look like it disappeared.
And that is the truth.
That is the literal truth of what happened.
So you can give them a lot of the truth without ruining it.
I don't know if this is too much of a reveal.
We can take it out if you want.
But you do a fair amount of this in glitches in reality.
Yeah.
And do you explain some of the elements
and Bob and weave and a very interesting dance,
which I really enjoyed.
And it is very much doing as I would be done by.
Right.
That is how I would like to be treated by a show.
So you can do that with what you do.
Yeah.
And also if people do, say, find out the actual method,
all of them, I think, stand up as, yeah, that's, wow,
that's intriguing that I'm proud of it.
I'm not going to be ashamed by the revelation of the truth.
It's not like, oh, no, I'm ruined.
I'm a fraud.
Now, yeah, I did what I claimed to do.
We did clever, complicated, sneaky stuff to.
But with mentalism, I found when I was doing it and people said,
oh my God, how did you know I was thinking of 17?
I realized I couldn't tell them any of the truth without
completely destroying the illusion because with mentalism,
what you are claiming to do is completely false.
You are claiming a category of really you absolutely do not have.
It is all a lie.
You know, like 1%, yeah, maybe sometimes you kind of
take a guess and read a bit of body language,
but that's like 1% of it maybe.
And I just didn't feel comfortable with that
because I also realized doing magic, I meet people through,
I've met you through magic.
We literally married a show.

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And I realized if I was doing a mentalism show,
you would be impressed by me doing things that I absolutely
count to and the foundation of our relationship would be
based on a lie.

And I realized I didn't want to live that way.

If I meet friends or in a dating context or whatever,
I don't want our relationship to be based on a fundamental
miscategorization of my art craft job abilities.

And I just, I think, again, exceptions,
I think you kind of have to be a bit of a sociopath
to be okay with that.

And again, or have not really thought through.

And I think a lot of lovely people who are mentalists,
I think they just haven't really thought through
what the ramifications of what they're actually doing are.

The social ramifications.

Yeah, yeah, the social or the cultural.

What if you open your act by saying,

I have none of these abilities.

If you proceed your act with that disclaimer,
does that solve the problem or not really?

It helps.

Something like Darren Brown, who is a masterful showman,
a beautiful human being.

And again, one of the people I would call mostly an exception.

But the problem is, I think it doesn't quite...

Like a show miracle, right?

Oh, God, yeah.

As an example.

Darren's amazing.

Like incredible, incredible inspiration.

But like even Darren, who goes out of his way to kind of be a,
you know, servant of the truth,

I don't think there's any disclaimer strong enough,
because the illusions are so powerful and so compelling
that people are still going to go,

oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, the disclaimer's fake.

Obviously you have some kind of actual powers
and these things are actually possible and real
and they're just not...

And it just makes me uncomfortable.

I don't know.

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I'm not going to say mentalism's evil or anything.

You know, don't...

Come on, I need my headline on YouTube.

Yeah, right.

I'm kidding.

But it just, it makes me uncomfortable.

Okay.

Dust.

Yeah, it's not my thing.

So you don't have to name names,

which is what I was sort of going for with my initial question.

But if we skip that, are there

magicians, broadly speaking,

and you could look at this question in a way that makes sense,

who have just such ability to compute

or do unusual things mentally that stand out to you?

I would imagine there are types of performances

where there's a lot that you need to sort of hold

in working memory.

Yeah.

I don't know.

I'm just kind of speculating.

Put it this way, I'm probably paraphrasing as best I can,

Teller from Penn and Teller,

who is an extraordinarily brilliant performer

in person, talks about the fact

that often the method to a lot of magic

is just that no one would ever imagine

you went to as much effort as you actually did to do a thing.

Half the times the secrets are hidden

by the being so off the scale,

crazy extent of effort and work

that it wouldn't even occur to someone.

And sometimes something you watch all the time

is people will see a magic trick

and often guess the method correctly

and then talk themselves out of it,

going, maybe whatever, whatever.

No, no one would do that.

It's a, what is, I have no idea.

And they will actually get it

and then go that it couldn't be that.

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That's ridiculous.

Now, because it seems too simplistic
or it just seems like too much work.

Both.

Sometimes A, sometimes B, sometimes both together.

Magic is so much broader and so much deeper
than people ever realize.

There are so many different rooms in the House of Magic.

You could spend 10 lifetimes on it

and not even get close to everything there is to know and learn.

So given that the breadth and depth is,

I mean, I hesitate to say infinite,

but just beyond the scope of anything
one human could digest, let alone master.

If, say, someone wanted to, as an adult,
delve into the world of magic as a practitioner,

not to become a professional,

but to experiment with something that might be enjoyable,

to become more aware of perceptual faculties

and how perception can be shaped,

how might they start?

Because if it's, say, baseball or a given sport,

you're like, okay, we can break this down

to into a few components.

We can practice those components.

Here's a logical progression.

So we can put A through F in some type of logical buildup.

Yeah.

If I said I would love to experiment with magic somehow,

how would we even navigate that?

And what questions might you ask me?

Or what recommendations might you make?

Because I know there's so many different types and so on.

I think the truest answer is it's hard.

There isn't an easy answer.

Again, we can only ever speak for ourselves.

I'm always wary of advice

because all advice is wrong for somebody.

Everyone's situation is so different.

Totally.

I found that I, again, when I was a kid,

I had a magic set and I had a few magic books.

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And none of them helped me.
I concluded I was terrible at magic and had no potential.
She tells you something about those books and those kits.
And for me, what made the difference
was going to that university club
and having a person to guide me.
Because a good teacher, teaching's hard.
Teaching's a complex art and craft.
And I teach a lot of magic.
I used to teach beginner magic courses in Melbourne
at this organization.
And I still sometimes take on students
if it's the right kind of person and the schedule allows
is the job of the teacher to adapt to the student.
And having a person to see what I was struggling with,
the unique struggles I was having that everyone wouldn't,
and then be adapt to that and guide that,
knowing whether it's you or someone,
what is it you want to achieve?
Why do you want to get to magic?
What do you want out of life that is making you think about magic?
These are all relevant questions that will then affect
what you would teach and how you would teach it
and what that journey would be.
Yeah, I would say it's the pervasive ADD,
meaning awe, deficiency disorder.
That I think humans suffer from increasingly,
this like despondent nihilism,
where there is severe deficiency in moments of awe.
And the ability to conjure that simply,
or maybe not simply, but both in learning the skill myself,
but also to provide those moments,
even it's just for kids who maybe aren't going to discern
what I'm doing as easily an adult.
That's fine.
I mean, I don't want to perform birthday parties,
so maybe it makes sense for me to practice for adults.
The only, let's call it magic book that ever clicked for me,
and I didn't take it seriously.
This was a gift, but I did buy a handful of books here and there,
and similar to your experience,
most of them was like, I'm not good at this.

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I can't do it.

This doesn't work.

There was one very short book, and it was basically Science Magic Tricks.

It was very straightforward, but it's like, okay, here's how you can take a fork and a spoon and say, shove them together and use a toothpick to balance it on the side of a glass, and it just blows people's minds.

It doesn't seem to make any sense.

And then you can burn the ends of the toothpick, and it looks insane, and you can pick it up in two minutes and then demonstrate it.

And that was extremely gratifying for me.

I also just like learning new things, taking it seriously for a period of time, and seeing what comes of it.

It's like, okay, if I did a sprint for a few weeks, with magic, whatever that would end up meaning, what could I do?

Right?

And there are certain things that go through my mind where I'm looking at, for instance, some of the demonstrations that you did, very strong opener, by the way, in the show.

Oh, gosh.

Love the opener.

I'm just looking at some of the things you can do with your hands, and I'm like, okay, there's no fucking way that I'm going to develop that in a few weeks, also because I simply just don't have much like learning to speak Mandarin.

It's like you can take somebody who's never spoken Mandarin and try to get them, even if they have very good hearing, to mimic some of the tones and sounds.

They're not going to have the musculature and the control in their throat, in their vocal cords, to produce those sounds.

It doesn't matter how smart they are.

Similarly, I'm like, okay, I probably am not going to develop the attributes to do some of a lot of what you can do.

But I wonder what I could do in a shorter period of time.

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And you could if you gave it long enough,
but that may not be a thing that you care enough to do,
and there's nothing wrong with that.
So when you're teaching, let's say these introductory courses,
what did the course look like?
So it always began with exactly that question.
I usually captured about 10 to 15 people.
Now it's more one-on-one or very small groups, usually,
on the occasions I do it.
And it was always going around and asking,
first of all, why is everyone here?
Like, why are you here?
What do you want?
What are you hoping to get out of this?
And let's see if we can find an overlap that we can achieve.
And I'll also ask if they've ever either learned a martial art
or played a sport or learned a musical instrument
or even just learned to drive a manual car.
All right.
And I'm looking for some way I can find an analogous experience
of going up like a mastery journey of going from,
I have no idea how to do this thing,
and now I can do this thing because a lot of people just tap out.
They get demotivated.
And they are the common misconception
that it's about natural talent or natural dexterity,
that, oh, my hands are not big enough or not dexterous enough,
or I won't be able to do this.
And it's like, no, well, if you learn that other thing,
you'll be able to learn this.
And that's trying to find that way to reach them
because I know from experience,
that's one of the common stumbling bits.
And then usually starting by teaching a couple of basic tricks.
And I always go for, get some instant gratification, right?
Because you want to have that response.
You want to get them in some sort of flow state,
give them a very simple thing.
And then right from the start, the thing I do that's pretty unusual
compared to most teachers is from the very beginning,
I'm teaching them to put their own unique
presentational spin on it.

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It is always ideally do this trick
in a way that no other person would do it exactly the same way.
What are you saying?
How are you saying it?
What's your vibe?
Who are you?
And how are you as you going to do this trick
for whoever you do it for?
And the theory is that particularly
in a casual sort of social performance
as opposed to a formal show like you saw,
I sort of think that ideally the performance
should be a bit different every time.
You should never say exactly the same thing
because the situation is different.
The being present to that person in that moment
and like how to guide that, how to feel that,
how to keep it adaptable and keep it real and everything.
How long were these courses that you taught in the small groups?
The ones I did back then, it was four weeks,
four three hour sessions once a week for a month.
And it was pretty good.
There's a bunch of people who I'm still in touch with
who got started there and that's always very gratifying.
But I love the different reasons why people would do it.
Like there was a bartender who wanted to get better tips
and I'm like, oh cool, that's a very different thing to...
That's cool.
That's a great use case.
Yeah, there was a woman in her 70s
who was developing arthritis
and wanted something to do with her hands
as more fun occupational therapy.
Great, that's a totally different objective
that we'll teach to very differently.
There was a certain author who was working on a novel,
he was a published author, legit,
who wanted to research for a magician character
and wanted to make sure he understood the source material
and I'm like, I respect that, good for you.
Like I actually want to know what you're talking about.
It doesn't matter if he gets the sleight of hand down,

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he just needs to understand to be present.
I'm like, this is great, these are all wonderful reasons that we can feed to all of these.
So in my case, I would say that I would like to be able to use found objects so rather than travel with a kit.
Yep, very relatable and understandable.
I was sort of like the dinner with the toothpick and the silverware, it's like, I can do that anywhere.
Yeah, it feels more organic, it's more relatable.
And it could be, I mean this isn't magic, but like I had a friend who was incredibly good at turning paper napkins into like roses and all sorts of stuff and it was wonderful because it traveled with him, he could do it anywhere.
The question I have next I suppose because you mentioned kind of lead into this with what you just said, are there any films or books that relate to magic in some way that you like or that magicians like?
And the reason I ask is because I'm sure there are a ton that you do not like. And I have one friend who's an extremely high-level professional drummer.
I loved the movie Whiplash, he can't watch it though because there are all these technical aspects that they took a lot of creative license with.
So are there any movies, docs, books, anything that comes to mind?
Absolutely, there's a few because the one, an interesting one, because you've got the, to start with the very famous one, the prestige is interesting because I would rate its magic accuracy as extremely low, but it's a good movie.
I like the movie, the complete, a couple of things that actually gets pretty good, but mostly very like, they never kill the doves in the cages, the whole twins like, it's very not representative, but good movie, I liked it.

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In terms of magic accuracy, there's a book,
I would recommend to anyone,
a book called Hiding the Elephant by Jim Steinmeier,
which is the only magic history book
I've ever completely enjoyed.
I'm not a good non-fiction reader,
I need a plot to keep me going.
Hiding the Elephant's amazing,
you learn a lot about perception, psychology, history,
Houdini, goes into some of the details,
really interesting and a good read.
Payes Turner, Arrested Development,
a cult classic sitcom.
I remember when it came out in the Melbourne magic scene,
we were watching this show,
it was just hilarious and incredibly written,
going and there's Joe Bluth,
the magician character who plays this awful,
awful magician parody character,
but it's accurate, awful parody.
And that's not normally the case.
But Wonderstone, for example,
it's again, good movie, not accurate for magic.
Like it's this whimsical, silly thing of fine,
Joe Bluth, whoever wrote this knows the magic industry.
Like it's two on the nose.
Like it's kind of like when the musicians
talk about spinal tap and then getting a lost backstage
and not being able to get through the curtains,
they're like, this person knew.
Joe Bluth, Arrested Development is that for magic.
It's so dead on.
Like the Gothic Castle is a perfect parody
of the magic castle.
The Alliance of Magicians is so,
in the same way that the real estate people
are parodies of awful real estate tropes,
the magic is so accurate in that,
in this twisted parody way, it's so good.
And it turns out, I think it was Mitch Hurwitz,
as like a magic castle member knows the industry,
I'm like, yeah, that checks out.

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So there are a number of docs that I've watched.
I've had this maybe fascination from a distance
with magic for a long time,
but I've never jumped into it.
I haven't known how, in part because it's so expansive
in its scope.
I'm like, I don't know how to do this,
whereas if it's something like a language,
it's like, okay, well, let's figure out
what the thousand most frequently occurring words are.
Let's figure out the sense structure.
Like I know how to break it down, whereas with magic,
I'm like, ah, how do we boil this ocean?
I'm not really sure.
But I have watched a bunch of docs.
I really enjoyed Delt,
which is a fantastic documentary about Richard Turner,
who lives near Austin in San Antonio,
who lost his eyesight and is one of a kind,
an amazing character, an incredible card mechanic.
Also an honest liar about,
is it the amazing Randy?
James Randy, yeah.
James Randy.
And that leads into my next question,
and here's how it connects.
So for people who watch an honest liar,
Randy was famous as a magician,
but he was also famous,
and I'm not sure if he's still around,
but as a debunker.
Yeah.
And he wanted to identify frauds and charlatans,
and he actually provided a real service
in a bunch of cases where there were
some very manipulative, cult-like figures
who were convincing people to leave their medications
and donate money and do all these things
that were certainly not in their best interest.
I have noticed, at least among some of the magicians
I've had exposure to,
who are from either the US, UK, or Australia,

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that there's a strong, atheistic identity.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Okay.

Very common.

Right.

Now, on one hand, I can see why that would make sense if you feel like you are able to identify part of your skill in magic is deconstructing illusion and truth-seeking, but are there religious magicians out there?

There must have been at some point.

Oh yeah, there's still are.

And the reason that I'm curious, is it almost a prerequisite to have an atheistic, right, at the very least agnostic stance to be accepted by magicians now, if they're from a sort of secular Western frame?

The showdowns, they absolutely are religious magicians, and much like any demographic trend, it's a huge spectrum of someone who's a chill observant, Quaker or whatever, who does magic, all the way up to someone who's an evangelical, whatever, who uses magic in their sermons, and everything in between.

And again, this is not my area.

I'm not really highly qualified to speak to it, but if you ever want a fascinating Google rabbit hole, just Google gospel magic.

Gospel magic.

As a genre, and there is a genre of magic that is products and books and things are released for about how to use magic with religious themes to communicate religious concepts.

And it is fascinating.

Without placing any value judgment either way on that, it is an eye-opening little niche that exists.

Again, magic is broad and deep.

There is so much more in there than you can imagine. Jigsaw puzzles.

Yeah.

How on earth do we get to jigsaw puzzles?

While struggling to be a professional magician

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and work out how to make a living and pay my rent
and afford healthcare in America and all those things,
and struggling really badly,
I realized that also it really hit me that with magic,
even the best case, you know,
you become David Copfield or Penn and Teller or whoever,
Shin Lim, you're crushing it, shows are successful,
it hit me that I realized I don't enjoy doing the same thing
day in, day out.
And it suddenly hit me that even if I achieved,
you know, quote unquote, success in magic,
I still think I wouldn't be happy.
And that was a really confronting realization.
Yeah, totally.
And also, you know, I was reading a lot of, you know,
passive income is good,
trying to work out my long-term financial future,
how to like learning more about business theory
and everything else.
And basically, long story short,
someone I knew was thinking of making some jigsaw puzzles
and ran into the idea that I had been working
completely separately with the engineering
and geometry and math and programming background
on these things called geometric vanishes.
The most famous one is the infinite chocolate illusion
that many people have seen on the internet.
Which I haven't seen, but I need to look it up.
Look it up, infinite chocolate illusion.
It's great.
You chop up a block of chocolate and rearrange the pieces
and it looks like you remove a piece,
but the block is still intact.
It's a really delightful, very clever,
little geometric illusion.
I had a bunch of ideas on ways I could use this.
A lot of the material I do starts with me
seeing something that's pretty good.
And I'm like, I think this could be better.
I think there's more here than is being explored.
That's where a lot of my things begin.
And again, I went, what is an egg on it?

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Like, what is, okay, let's really, let's,
and went away, like as per Jordan's very accurate story.
And I'm like, what is going on here?
Let's really get into this and started like,
drawing diagrams and doing mathematical research
and reading the source material.
And six months later, I found that when I work on things,
19 out of 20 of them go nowhere.
Or I'm like, okay, but not great.
And I'm like, oh, well, that's fine.
That's just the ratio it takes to try stuff.
And this one was like that.
I sort of had some ideas, but it never got there.
But I'd done all the reverse engineering.
I knew what an egg was in that regard.
And then it was a set of like, what if we like,
just make a product that goes on shelves
and jigsaw puzzles are popular,
but at the time they were all kind of boring.
You know, they would just get a piece of art,
whack on a puzzle.
And while we were talking about this,
ran at the idea of like, wait a minute,
could that geometric vanish be applied to a jigsaw puzzle?
And I'm like, I don't know, but maybe,
and I went away and didn't shower for six days
and went like fully into the tank.
I'm like, when it's a full, you know, creative mode
and realize, yeah, I think it can.
There's a few complicated constraints
on how it would have to happen
and how the guidelines would be cut,
but like, I think this is doable.
And again, long complicated story
led to then did some prototypes
and eventually put the puzzles up on Kickstarter.
And by absurd coincidence,
this happened to be right at the beginning
of the first 2020 pandemic lockdown.
So for you guys, good timing, probably.
In fact, kind of too good.
I learned a term apparently that originates

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from Xerox, a success disaster,
where something is so big, it causes problems.
And it's actually worse than if it had been smaller.
Sometimes they call that the hug of death.
Yeah, completely, in so many ways,
because also this was a time where,
in the pandemic lockdown, global supply chain crisis,
this was like before it was cool.
We were having a supply chain crisis
before the rest of the world was.
It was just insane and dealing with it,
but the puzzles were good.
And I suddenly realized, oh my God, this is a thing.
Maybe I don't have to just want to shoot myself in the face
from trying to be a professional magician all the time.
Like maybe I can actually be a product designer
and create beautiful things
that bring people happiness and wonder and joy,
that then I just scale and sell.
And I don't have to be just like dealing
with the contracts and the negotiation
and the hustling and just the exhausting dynamics of doing it.
And it was this real revelation of realizing
that all the things that I'd learned in software engineering
and in psychology and in magic, they're all kind of the same.
It's all experience design to some degree.
And it was an amazing exercise to be able to apply all of that thinking
and realize it absolutely translates across different fields
and applying that to a jigsaw puzzle
to give the same experience of surprise, wonder, delight.
And it was a real eye-opener for me.
And now as I think about the future,
I'm like, okay, what else can we apply these thinking to?
What is the next thing that can use this kind of background
and understanding of human experience and psychology
and engineering and everything else
to make optimize something else in a surprising way?
You have some good friends, as far as I can tell,
to help with thinking through these things as well.
We'll find out.
You have a good crew, lots of special agents.
So that is the number one back puzzle of all time on the Kickstarter.

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And I highly recommend people check this out.

So I have not yet received mine, but certainly the Magic Puzzle Company.

People need to check out magicpuzzlecompany.com.

People can find you at simoncornell.com.

Where would you like your show to go?

What is your ideal dream manifestation of that?

What does it look like?

Mostly this show began, the short answer is I don't know yet.

I'm going in there with the beginner's mind.

I'm not sure.

I've learned that no matter what you expect,

I was talking with my good friend,

Vyom Sharma, medical doctor and magician in Melbourne.

After FISM, I went through, as I've learned,

is not uncommon after a massive success.

I went into a deep existential depression for about six months,

which was really weird, complicated, messy time for all kinds of reasons.

One of the many things that helped me claw out of it

was something actually he said that you can, as we see throughout history,

all the time, you can have the best plan.

You can have everything figured out.

You know what you're doing.

You've got the plan.

It's going to be great.

And then out of nowhere, it can fail.

Or you can also have no idea what you're doing,

no idea where you're going.

But move forward, work hard, be a good person,

keep your eyes open, and things can just work out out of nowhere.

And so it made me kind of feel more okay

that I didn't know where I was going or what I was doing,

which is a lot of the cause of what do I do now?

How do I make a living?

What is going to happen?

And so that's kind of where I'm at with the show right now.

I don't know, but I want it to...

I first had the idea for this show back in 2013,

as sort of a full show version of this idea of take a moment,

preserve it in the world in a wonderful way.

And it has never quite hit the full vision of the vision

in my mind of what it was going to be.

It's very close now, thanks to Chad and thanks to

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another friend team who introduced me to Chad,
and a few other people that, again, the team,
the wonderful people who have been involved.
Right now, I mostly want to see it hit the full vision.
I want to see the full version of it.
It's like 90% there now.
It's a few more improvements.
And just for my own internal spiritual satisfaction,
I want to close this plot arc.
So it took me to the World Championships.
I just wanted to end the story.
I just wanted to try the thing,
see what happens.
Find the thing.
Yeah.
Complete the story arc.
And then, I don't know,
then whatever comes next, we'll find out.
Maybe nothing.
Maybe that'll be it.
And it'll go nowhere.
That often is what happens with these things.
Maybe it'll go somewhere.
Yeah.
I mean, sometimes doors close,
sometimes more interesting doors open
than we could have planned for.
Right.
And from the ashes, new phoenixes are sometimes born.
Is there anything else you would like to say,
any requests to my audience, anything at all
that you'd like to add before we wrap up?
This first recorded conversation?
How many more hours have you got?
The world's confusing.
The world's complicated.
It's difficult.
It's hard.
For most people, it's just really damn hard.
But that doesn't mean that it doesn't have to be great as well.
I don't know.
Yeah.

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I'm wary of advice, you know?

Yeah.

But I mean,

pontificating is not necessarily equal prescription.

Yeah, true.

True that.

So I think that's a good place to wrap up.

Try the puzzles.

They're delightful.

Try the puzzles.

I'm a person who is incredibly critical of his own work.

Every time I watch back a show, I'm like,

the audience liked it, but I'm unhappy.

The puzzles are so good.

They just really make me smile with just how well they turned out.

It's a beautiful thing.

Yeah.

So that's the reason they've been backed as much as they have been backed.

And there's a lot of excitement, as people will see online,

if they go look around.

MagicPuzzleCompany.com, check it out, folks.

And for links to everything we've talked about,

you can find them in the show notes as per usual

at tim.blogs.podcast.

Thank you, Simon.

My pleasure.

Appreciate it.

And until next time, folks, be a little kinder than is necessary,

not only to others, to yourself as well.

And thanks for tuning in.

Hey, guys, this is Tim again.

Just one more thing before you take off.

And that is Five Bullet Friday.

Would you enjoy getting a short email from me every Friday

that provides a little fun before the weekend?

Between one and a half and two million people

subscribe to my free newsletter,

my super short newsletter called Five Bullet Friday.

Easy to sign up, easy to cancel.

It is basically a half page that I send out every Friday

to share the coolest things I've found or discovered

or have started exploring over that week.

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It's kind of like my diary of cool things.

It often includes articles I'm reading, books I'm reading, albums, perhaps, gadgets, gizmos, all sorts of tech tricks and so on that get sent to me by my friends, including a lot of podcasts.

Guests and these strange esoteric things end up in my field and then I test them and then I share them with you.

So if that sounds fun, again, it's very short, a little tiny bite of goodness before you head off for the weekend, something to think about.

If you'd like to try it out, just go to tim.blog/slashfriday.

Type that into your browser, tim.blog/slashfriday.

Drop in your email and you'll get the very next one.

Thanks for listening.

This episode is brought to you by Allbirds.

It is summer 2023 finally and this is the summer to explore.

I'm about to do that myself.

And I'm looking at the floor in front of me, literally three feet away.

What do I have?

I have my Allbirds.

So before you set foot out the door, set foot in the ultimate travel shoes from Allbirds, super comfortable and sustainable shoes.

Allbirds are versatile enough to go with any outfit, durable enough to wear on any terrain and lightweight enough to make packing a breeze.

Plus the tree dashers, runners, pipers, and other Allbirds tree shoes are made from insanely comfortable breezy Eucalyptus fiber.

They're the only shoes your suitcase needs.

I am speaking from experience here.

I've been wearing Allbirds for the last several months and I've been alternating between two pairs.

I'm traveling with them right now.

I started with the tree runners in marine blue in case you're curious.

And now I'm wearing the tree dashers and the tree dashers are my current daily driver.

I wear them for everything.

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They're easy to slip on, easy to tie,
everything about them is just easy, easy, simple, simple.
I stick with the blue hoos and the dashers in this case
are in buoyant blue.

The color pops, I've received a ton of compliments
but putting the color aside,
the tree dasher is an everyday running and walking shoe
that's also great for light workouts.

Super comfortable and I've been testing it
on long walks in Austin.

I've also been testing it on the trails and pavement
in places like New Zealand.

Get in vacation mode before you even leave the house
with Allbirds.

Find your perfect pair at Allbirds.com today
and use code TIM that's T-I-M for free socks.

Just add them to your shopping cart
with a purchase of \$48 or more.

That's Allbirds, A-L-L-B-I-R-D-S.com and code TIM.

T-I-M, check it out.

This episode is brought to you by AeroPress.

I love AeroPress with more than 45,000 five-star reviews
and customers in more than 60 countries.

It might be the highest rated coffee maker on the planet.

Let's rewind just a bit because back in 2010, 2011,

I tested the entire gamut of coffee brewing
and filtering options alongside a former Barista World Champion.

This was for research for the four hour chef.

That concluded with a statement that the AeroPress was,
quote, bar none, my favorite brewing method.

End quote.

I even mentioned it and made a cup of coffee on late night
with Jimmy Fallon using the AeroPress.

Here is the back-back story.

Remember the Arobi, the amazing UFO-like disc
that you could throw farther than a football field?

Alan Adler, a mechanical engineer
and Stanford University lecturer created that.

Then after conquering the 1980s toy market,
he began to obsess over one thing, coffee.

The result was the AeroPress, which debuted in 2006.

It was quickly adopted by the specialty coffee community

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and it became so popular with the Barista community
that someone in Oslo, Norway started a World AeroPress Championship.
Because the AeroPress combines the best of three brewing methods,
you get a cup that is full-bodied like a French press,
smooth and complex as if you were using a pour-over method
and rich in flavor like espresso.
Best of all, it's super small.
You can pack it in your bag when you travel.
It takes literally five seconds to clean.
It is all practical, no fuss,
and you don't have to drink mediocre coffee at your office
or Airbnb.
Now they have a new, extra-large version called XL
that serves two times as much coffee as the original AeroPress.
Pick one up at [AeroPress.com](https://aeropress.com) slash Tim
for a fraction of the cost of a fancy machine.
That's A-E-R-O-P-R-E-S-S dot com slash Tim.
And my listeners, that's you guys, can get 15% off.
Just use the link [AeroPress.com](https://aeropress.com) slash Tim.
One more time, that's [AeroPress.com](https://aeropress.com) slash Tim.