



**THE TIMES**

THE TIMES FRIDAY JULY 13 2001

# Magic with no rabbits

Thanks to David Blaine and Harry Potter the art of illusion is cool. **Hugo Rifkind** explains

Imagine your managing director sealed inside a block of ice in Central Park, New York. Fantasy? Wish-fulfillment? Well no, actually. Corporate training.

"We haven't actually done the David Blaine thing yet," muses James Freedman, referring to the US street magician who famously performed that trick last November. Freedman is creative director of Magic Management, a marketing and training firm that uses magic to help its clients. "We'd freeze anyone if it helped to make a point," he says. "We faked a car crash not long ago, and we had one financial director who learnt to pull a rabbit out of a hat in order to improve a presentation. Anything that helps get the message across, really."

There is more to Magic Management than conjuring tricks, however. "This isn't just about gimmicks," says Freedman. "Magic is enjoying a long-overdue renaissance. We teach people how to speak like magicians, to use suggestion and implication, and to make sure that people are paying attention."

Magic is clearly regaining a glamour it enjoyed in a previous age. For the past decade or two, magicians have seemed rather shabby. Until recently, magic was associated with wailing

hippies, or veiny old men in threadbare dinner-jackets pulling out of battered hats.

This is no longer the case. *Harry Potter*, last year's publishing sensation, is expected to turn into this year's huge film hit on its release in November. Tom Cruise is working on a film about the true story of the British magician Jasper Maskelyne, who used stage magic techniques to dupe the Luftwaffe in Egypt during the Second World War, among other achievements.

Moreover, possibly because of

Blaine's street-magic celebrity, magicians are sexier than they have been for years. Blaine's fans include Bill Clinton, Jack Nicholson and Madonna. Robert De Niro is believed to have bought the rights to make a film of the Brooklyn-born illusionist's life, written by Jim Uhls, who scripted Brad Pitt's *Fight Club*.

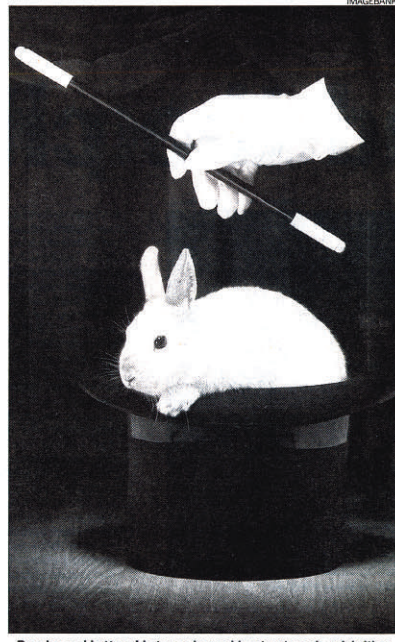
"David Blaine has taken away the spangles and the sequins of magic, and returned it to a street level," says Glen David Gold, author of *Carter Beats the Devil*, a novel based on Carter the Great, a legendary magician of

the 1920s and 30s. "Blaine has made it very real and personal."

Britain has its own answers to Blaine. The current issue of *Tatler* has two twentysomething magicians on its Top 20 list of bright young things. One is David Jarre, the son of the actress Charlotte Rampling and composer Jean-Michel Jarre. Possessing "brown eyes and a voice like a caress", Jarre works on the terraces of St Tropez, and once made Elton John's glass of water disappear from under his nose. The other is Jim Scott, the son of the Channel 4 commentator Brough Scott, who works his way out of a chained-up sack at the bottom of a river.

Gold believes that magic is attracting new followers now for the same reasons as it did in the 1920s, the period addressed in his novel. He believes that our own age has a similar outlook. "We have gene therapy and the Internet," he says. "When anything seems possible scientifically, people are reassured by the idea that there are other, greater, things that we can't fathom. Think of the interest in psychics, and the amount of UFO sightings these days. No wonder there is a fascination with magic."

"Magic," insists Gold's publishers, "is the new black." And look, this time not a moth-eaten rabbit or a sequin in sight.



Bunnies and battered hats are banned by street-magic celebrities

THE TIMES 13 JULY 2001 ref. MM-024