



1,000,000 Years B.C. (Before Close-up)

Reported by Robin Dawes

Photos by Dale Farris

Journal Entry 2012-04-25, 1700 hours: It's the end of April and I'm on my way to Batavia, New York, to attend Obie's FFFF Convention (the original close-up convention, by invitation only). I've got a litre of maple syrup, ten pounds of back bacon, and a Tim Horton's coffee – I figure I'm ready for anything. But when I'm about ten kilometres away from Batavia the clock on my dashboard goes crazy – the numbers start spinning backwards! The trees around me start to change – they're taller, more like giant ferns. A volcano appears on the horizon, spewing a smoke plume. The air seems incredibly clear. The road has become a riverbed. The fields are no longer full of cows and horses – I see herds of woolly mammoths. Finally it dawns on me – I've been transported back in time – back to the Stone Age.



FFFF 2012 Guest of Honor David Stone.

I pull into the parking lot of the Clarion Huts and Caves. There's a sabre-tooth tiger there arguing with a sloth. I hurry inside the cave because I know the convention is about to begin.

1930 Hours: It's dark inside the cave, but I find my way to a huge fire with about two hundred hairy guys sitting around it. One of them blows a whistle, and I hear this strange muttering – it sounds like “Oh bee! Oh bee! Oh bee!” I realize that the

man with the whistle is **Obie “Olduvai” O'Brien**, the leader of the FFFF clan. Obie gets everyone's attention, and then introduces **Will Houstoun**. Will gives a fascinating lecture on the history of magic, based on documents from the Magic Circle Library in London. This is an eye-opener into the difficulties and delights of researching the origins of our art.

2130 Hours: After Will's lecture I join a lot of shambling knuckle-draggers in the

Dealers' Cave. I'm happy to see old friends like **Mark Leveridge**, **Andy Greget**, and **Craig Dickson**. I hang out there thumbing through the clay tablets until Obie whistles again. It's time for another lecture: **Gyula Czili** presents a lecture filled with colourful and visual magic using very creative props – this is material that would brighten up anyone's act.

After the lecture the hospitality caves open up. Old friends meet to swap yarns of the hunting and gathering (of new magic) from the past year. I finally head to my pile of sleeping furs in the wee small hours of the morning.

Journal Entry –1,000,000-04-26, 1100 Hours: I'm just finishing my raw stegosaurus cutlet breakfast when Obie calls the tribe together again. The next event is a lecture by **John van der Put** (aka Piff the Magic Dragon). John's lecture includes creative magic and excellent advice on how to improve one's act. He tells a harrowing story of an artistic performance that could easily have inspired Murphy's Law.

1130 Hours: Roger "Cro-Magnon" Klause was a great magician and an excellent teacher. FFFF honours his memory with the Roger Klause Teach-a-Trick Session, chaired once again by last year's Guest of Honour **Steve "Bam-bam" Beam**. This year's performers/teachers are **Steve Beam**, **David Corsaro**, **Scott Robinson**, **Chris Hannibal**, and **David Jade**, and the subject matter ranges from murder to mind-reading. As always the



Chris Hannibal combines magic, origami, and story-telling.

RK TaTS provides a wealth of ideas and inspirations; in fact, I think I see some proto-human inventing writing just so he can take notes.

1415 Hours: Matt "Enigmosaurus" Episcopo helms the Mini World Show (Part 1). Starting the show, **Vincent Hedan** performs strong card magic. **Derek Finn** makes magic with four aces. **Nobuyuki Nojima** performs the wildest, craziest Card Warp I've ever seen. **Jerome Bourgeon** takes a trip down memory lane to his first magic show. **Christian Schenk** performs a very clean sandwich effect. **Don Trabuk** gives us madcap magic in the Italian style. **Christian and Katalina** close the show with a multipart prediction involving candy and U.S. states.



Nobuyuki Nojima(r) warps cards for PIP Phil Willmarth.

1530 Hours: The Kick-Off Show is emceed by **Gary "Mastodon" Morton**. **Andy Dallas** shoves a hand-chipped arrowhead (ok, a knife) through a coat without damaging either. **Hide Kimoto** is graceful and elegant with small linking rings. **Patrick Lehnan** gives a very funny pitch for a gimmicked deck of cards that includes a remote control – he receives extended applause. **Tony Montana** psychically helps a volunteer decide which key will open a lock. **Vinny Grosso** hilariously escapes from a knotted rope. **Eric Roumestan** makes coins appear and vanish. **Gyula Czili** has dice that keep on multiplying. **Peter McLanachan** does magic with cards – and then his cards vanish! **Francesco Addeo** gives a very effective presentation of invisible palming. **Dirk**



Intense Sessioning continues during the dinner break.

Losander magically defeats gravity as only he can. **Hannibal** tells a story about elves, starting with “Y’all ain’t gonna believe this,” but we all do.

There is a break for dinner – foraging parties head off into the jungle brandishing spears and clubs (or are those spades and clubs?). For a short time the grinding of massive Neanderthal jaws drowns out the incessant rustle of cards being shuffled.

1930 Hours: Every year Obie’s FFFF Convention honours an individual for his or her contributions to the art of close-up magic. This year’s Guest of Honour is the great French magician **David Stone**, renowned throughout the prehistoric world for his abilities as a creator and performer of outstanding magic. As is the tradition, David gives a lecture on Thursday evening. David lectures on some of his classic and beautiful coin manipulations, his bottle production, a brilliant card control, the most visual torn and restored card I’ve ever seen, the Tool, a method for producing an inflated balloon from your stomach, and a great deal more besides. David is rewarded with an enthusiastic standing ovation.

2200 Hours: Reigning FISM Grand Prix winner **Soma** lectures on the importance of music in a magic act. His lecture is filled with general principles and practical examples. This is an extremely valuable lecture for anyone using or even thinking of using music in their act.

Later, “The Room” is open – **Mike Hrab, Andy Quinn, Leon Etienne, and Matt Episcopo** carry on the tradition founded years ago by **Ed Eckl, Bill Miesel, and Ron Zollweg**: an unofficial hospitality cave where the fire burns all night long. The night grows older and the wolves howl outside in the darkness, but inside the magic never ends.

Journal Entry –1,000,000-04-27, 1100 Hours: The great **Patrick Page** conducted a themed workshop every year at FFFF. Pat is gone, but the tradition continues. This year’s Pat Page Memorial Workshop is devoted to rubber band magic. **Mike “Paleolithic” Powers** does an admirable job as MC and leads off the teaching with a method for tossing a steel ring onto the middle of a rubber band. **Dan Garrett** follows with the boomerang rubber band. Then **Scott Robinson** makes a rubber band vanish completely. The always suave **Gene Gordon** uses a rubber band detective to find a chosen card. The often insane **Geoff Williams** links two rubber bands, and **Alan Zola Kronzek** teaches a variant handling of a similar effect. **David Neighbors** is Four Times as Crazy. **Mark Fitzgerald** has rubber bands that twist, climb, and fly. **Tony Gerard** teaches a slow motion penetration. **Buddy Farnan**’s rubber band is invisible but audible. Finally, **Howie Schwarzman** teaches one of his favourite rubber band routines.

1330 Hours: How does one describe



The Pat Page Memorial Workshop (l to r): Linking Ring columnist Mike Powers was the MC; Mark Fitzgerald had bands twist, climb, and fly; Buddy Farnan was invisible but audible.

Mathieu Bich? Unpredictable? Fey? Offbeat? Perhaps it is easiest to say that like his magic, he is completely original. Our afternoon begins with Mathieu lecturing on his uniquely creative magic. He reveals a chosen card by sprinkling water on a tissue, he passes coins through the table, and he performs a popular Internet trick in a way that will completely fool all the YouTube insta-magicians. He concludes by teaching his sublime Spread-wave.

1550 Hours: The next show is ceremonially mastered by **Joe “Tyrannosaurus” Turner**. The hilarious **Mandy Farrell** combines card magic and speed dating – and neither will ever be the same. **Rick Hebert** follows up with some knotty problems using rope and string. **Larry Kohorst** amazes everyone with the world’s fastest card trick. **Ryan Lehman** transforms a deck of cards into a solid block of glass. Australia’s **Murray Cooper** tells us how his grandfather died of “the five aces.” **Mike Maione** reads minds using “stupid celebrity” books.

Chris Payne recreates the occasion when he magically thwarted a mugger in London. The **Yamamotos** present beautiful magic with coloured ropes. **Steve Friedburg** offers a magical homage to Jack Parker. IBM President **Vanni Pule** combines rope magic with poetry. **Simon Lane** finds any card at any number. **Remy Robert** closes the show with superb coin magic.

2000 Hours: At the evening show, **Meir “Mesolithic” Yedid** is the MC. **Johan Stahl** performs wonderful and charming magic using items found on a typical restaurant table. The astonishing **Woody Aragon** shares some impossible spelling magic (even more impressive since the alphabet won’t be invented for another 900,000 years). **Henry Evans** performs his justly famous “10 Cuts.” **Kristian Nivala** portrays a



Meir Yedid



Friday performances included (l to r): Mariko Yamamoto, Akira Fujii, and Mike Chao.

magical teacher whose props keep surprising him. **Auke van Dokkum** magically produces a tableful of coins.

After a fifteen minute break Meir tells a joke that was old when the ape touched the monolith, and then the show goes on. **Shin Lim** performs dramatic and emotionally charged card magic – one of the highlights of the convention for me. **Akira Fujii** mentally controls an action-figure toy, and then makes it fly. **Jupiter** performs elegant, colourful magic in the European style. **Mike Chao** brings the audience to its feet in a standing ovation with his spectacular and colourful card and ball productions. Closing the show is the hilarious **Piff the Magic Dragon**, who finds a signed chosen card in a sealed can of dog food.

I make my way back to the Dealers' Cave. Someone has woven a bag out of reeds – they are placing a pterodactyl egg in the bag, showing the bag empty, and then showing the egg has returned. I know that trick is old – but seriously?

Journal Entry, -1,000,000-04-28, 1100 Hours: Denis Behr lectures on two subjects, each equally amazing. He introduces an online tool that I predict will become an invaluable resource for working magicians: a free-access database of books and contents, cross-referenced and fully searchable. You can find it at archive.denisbehr.de. Denis's second topic is a discussion of his advanced work on routining card magic so that the process of one effect sets up a stack for the next. He demonstrates some stunning examples.

1330 Hours: The Mini World Show (Part 2) is emceed by **Jean Emmanuel "Jurassic" Franzis**. **Keith Fields** performs miracles with his hat. **Ludovic Julliot** makes us an offer we can't refuse in the guise of the Godfather. **Alain Iannone** combines his French and Italian heritage to inspire his magic. **Matthew Garrett** demonstrates his ninja-like skills with rings that link and unlink. **Michael Dardant** magically finds bananas in all sorts of unlikely places. **Denis Behr** deals winning poker hands from a most unusual

deck of cards. **Kirk Patrick** proves that thimble magic rocks the house. **Boris Wild** presents the sequel to his world-famous Kiss Act – an emotional presentation so powerful and moving that some, myself included, have tears in our eyes. Boris is rewarded with a prolonged standing ovation.



Boris Wild introduced an emotionally powerful new act for the delighted assembly.

1530 Hours: Dan "Devonian" Garrett is MC for the next show. **Yumi** brings us the magic of the imagination and magically causes a painting of a chosen card to appear on a blank canvas. **Eric Redman** presents a harrowing tale of some cannibal kings. **Tony Polli** shares



Dan Garrett.

very original coin magic, losing visible coins into invisible slot machines. **Jack Browne** finds a borrowed dollar bill inside a lemon. **Jeffrey Copeland** displays his magical mastery over coins. **Luc Langevin** shows a deck of cards that are all blank except for a volunteer's freely named selection. **John Luka** does the cleanest, most magical card assembly routine I have ever seen. **Riccardo Negroni** performs graceful coin magic. **Chris Capehart** links rings in his inimitable way. **Francis Menotti** ends the show and earns a standing ovation for his x-ray

machine explanation of the razor-swallowing effect.

1930 Hours: Before the final show, Obie calls on various people to present awards to **David Stone**. In David's honour, **Matt Episcopo** and **Leon Etienne** present the latest in their series of spoof magic videos – you can view it at <http://tinyurl.com/7uju2uo>. David is visibly moved by the accolades. He says a few words of thanks, and then is too choked up to continue. The audience responds to his deep emotion with a vigorous standing ovation.

Obie “Origins” O’Brien emcees the show which opens with the remarkable

Billy Debu, who has presence and skills far beyond his fifteen years of age.

Mark Mason enlists **Marc de Souza’s** assistance and teaches him a magic effect on the spot. **Bebel**

presents his unique style of immaculate sleight-of-hand card magic. **Jean Emmanuel Franzis** shows us how elegant coin magic can be. **Daryl** announces that he wants to be a man (voluntary evolution?), and then makes very



Obie O'Brien.



(l to r from top): David Stone receives accolades and a standing ovation. Fifteen-year-old Billy Debu. Mark Mason(l) and Marc deSouza(r). Paul Gertner debuts an excerpt from his new show. Bebel(c) performs his immaculate card magic for David Stone and Paul Gertner. Shawn Farquhar(l) prepares to read David Stone’s mind. Daryl the magician’s magician. Hyun Joon Kim’s card manipulations earned him a standing ovation. The comedy team of Steve Bartzgatz(l) and Rick Merrill(r)

manly magic with coins and cards.

After a short intermission, the 2012 winner of the FFFF MVP award is announced: **Denis Behr**. Then **Soma** presents his high-energy and thoroughly entertaining rope magic. Reigning FISM Grand Prix winner **Shawn Farquhar** engages David Stone in an uproarious book test and performs his famous and baffling cups and balls routine. **Paul Gertner** offers us a preview of an extraordinary segment from his “Braindrops” show. **Hector Mancha** uses a projector and a deck of cards to tell a story in silhouette, reminiscent of South Pacific shadow theatre. The final magic performer of the convention is **Hyun Joon Kim**. He shares beautiful productions and manipulations of cards and balls and earns a standing ovation. **Steve Bargatze** and **Rick Merrill** close the show with their trademark edgy comedy.

The show ends, but the magic sharing does not – sessioning goes on far into the night (“The Room” may never close for all I know). My foray into the Stone Age has



I.B.M. officers and The Linking Ring staff were well represented. Standing, l to r: Shawn Farquhar (Executive Committee), Past International President Phil Willmarth, Past International President and International Secretary Don Wiberg, Past International President Joan Caesar, Past International President and Legal Advisor Jack Browne, Past International President Obie O’Brien, Joe Turner (Executive Committee and Linking Ring columnist). Seated, l to r: Past International President Mike Gorman, Executive Editor Samuel Patrick Smith, International President Vanni Pulé, Past International President Dr. William A. Wells, Past International President Dr. William E. Spooner. Missing from photo: Mike Powers (Linking Ring columnist). PHOTO BY CRAIG DICKSON

taught me one thing – strong close-up magic is timeless.

Obie’s FFFF is an intense immersion into the world of powerhouse close-up magic. I know that many attendees, myself included, are already counting the days until April 24, 2013.



FFFF Candida (l to r): Andy Dallas and PIP Joan Caesar enjoying a backstage conversation. I.B.M. International President Vanni Pulé and wife Mary Anne Pulé.