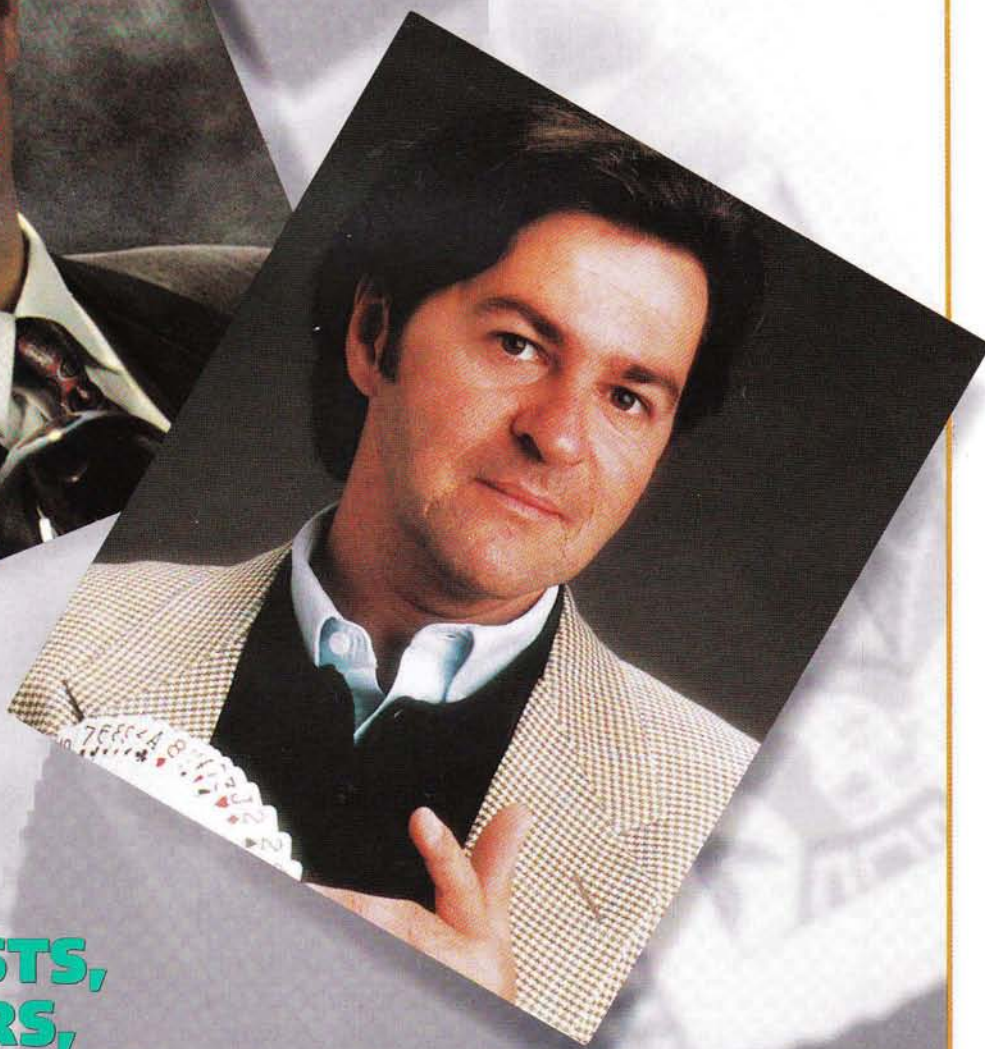
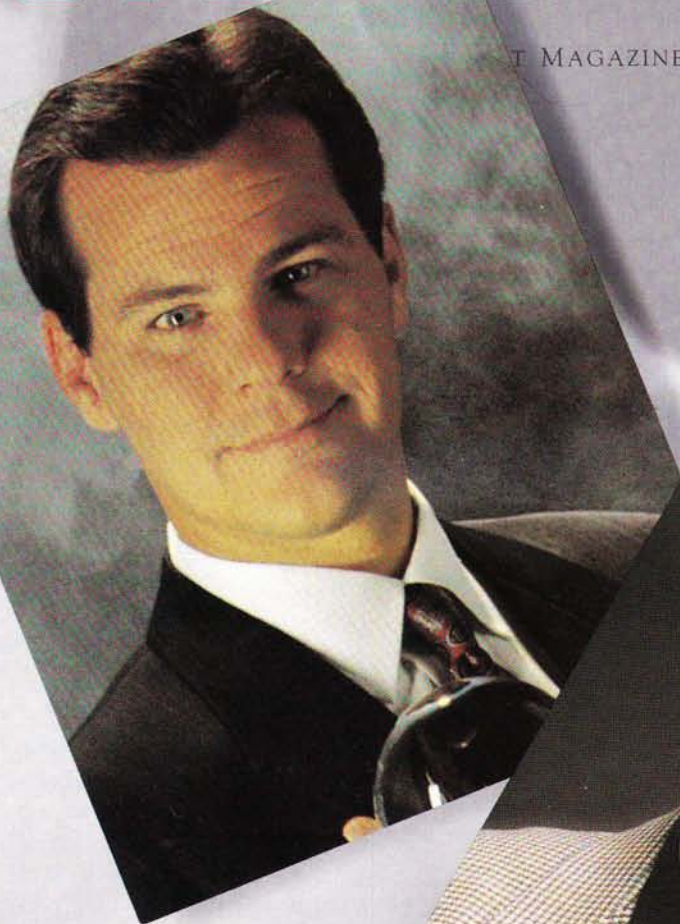


# MAGIC

THE MAGAZINE FOR MAGICIANS



**TWO CONTESTS,  
TWO WINNERS,  
ONE QUESTION...**

**WHO ARE THESE GUYS?**





# A Tale Of Two Winners

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## Prologue

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.  
It was the...

Well, maybe I should say...

It was competitive. It was camaraderie.  
It was a great feeling. It was a mixed feeling.  
It was the Desert Magic Seminar. It was the World Magic Summit.  
It was a man from Montreal. It was a man from Washington, D.C.  
It was Carl Cloutier. It was Tim Conover.

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### Two different men. Two different contests.

During the 1960s there was a very famous magician in Montreal named Stiphano, who just happened to be close friends with Carl Cloutier's parents. Young Carl showed an interest in learning the craft, so Stiphano took him on as a student and taught him some of the basic secrets of magic. Slowly the young man's repertoire began to grow and he began performing private shows for friends.

Tim Conover's influence came directly

from his father and grandfather who were both magic buffs. Young Tim also learned quite a few fundamentals by reading his father's copy of *The Classic Secrets of Magic* by Bruce Elliott. Tim fondly recalls "seeing pictures of my grandfather from the 1980s. He was a judge, but always had a love for magic. He had a twin brother and they used to switch each other out."

### Two different men. Two different homes.

"About seven or eight years ago, Gary

Kurtz moved from "Toronto to Montreal," says Cloutier. "I think that raised the level of magic here." Cloutier began studying privately with Kurtz, crediting him with teaching him some of the finer points of the art. Not just tricks, but also tips on presentation and misdirection. Carl also credits Obie O'Brien for being sort of a personal cheerleader. "He has always been very nice with me. He has always believed in me, and told me the truth about everything."

John Kennedy and Scotty York are the first names you will hear if you ask Conover to name someone who helped him fine tune

By Hiawatha





Carl Cloutier receives award from Siegfried and Roy



Cloutier performing at Fechter's

his magic thinking. He is quick to point out, "John taught me to always think of the effect first and then figure out a way to do it. Scotty taught me how to pick the best effects and the best methods."

## Two different men. Two different apple trees.

Our two heroes studied their craft day by day, year after year, video tape after video tape, until they had the courage to fearlessly compete in magic contests and emerge "victor, magic warrior, and keeper of the wand!" *I don't think so!* The fact is both men have come up a bit short in previous contests.

While Conover's first experience came in the 1982 Desert Magic Seminar, it is the story from the '83 Seminar that is most interesting. That was the year that Paul Gertner won with the hourglass, but wit as a heated competition with the likes of Goshman, Cornelius, Carney, and Weber. Everybody was there and, according to Tim, "Everybody was scared—even people I have tremendous respect for. Everybody was just shivering." He readily admits, "It was one the time in my life that while performing the thought went through my head: *I wish I wasn't doing this!*" He tied for sixth place with Sawa by changing his close-up mat into a ferret. "I dreamt the whole thing up, not to look good in the competition, but for the legend of being *the guy who changed his close-up mat into a ferret.*" He adds that the effect sounds much better than it actually looked. In his words, "It looked horrible. I had surprise on my side—who would do that?—but the method was absolutely hilarious."

On the other hand Cloutier might never have entered a contest if not for a little

"pushing" by Gary Kurtz. "Gary encouraged me to enter the close-up contest at the Baltimore IBM Convention. I was quite nervous. Doing magic for laymen versus doing magic for magicians, it's quite different!" The year was 1991. It was Carl's first time in the United States and the first time he ever performed for magicians. He admits to being bummed out by not winning, but still enjoyed the overall experience. "I was not confident. I didn't want to look like a schmuck in front of all those people, but when I heard the magicians' response, it made me push harder. I was proud of what I did." Obie O'Brien encouraged Carl to enter the IBM contest the following year in Salt Lake City. He took the advice and won first place. Armed with new confidence, Carl headed to London last December for Ron McMillan's close-up contest; another first place!

## Two different men. Two different reality checks.

Now it's 1993, and two heavyweight close-up competitions are offering cash and bookings totalling \$12,000. Would our heroes accept the challenge? Of course, Cloutier to the Desert Seminar and Conover to the Magic Summit. This time they were victors, they were warriors, they were keepers of the wand!

For Cloutier this year's competition at the Seminar offered very little pressure, mainly because he didn't feel he had any chance of finishing first—maybe in the top three to five, but not first. "The two guys to beat were Michael Weber and Daryl, but the rest were very strong as well." It was not only the competition that made him think lower than first. Given that the judging was

a "people's choice," Carl felt that "maybe you're going to vote for a friend over another guy, even if the other guy gave a better performance." Although Carl did win, he freely discussed what he disliked about the competition. "I didn't like the improv segment. I don't work with things on the table like salt shakers and napkins. It's not the kind of magic I like. And true improvisation does not exist; people prepare for months. When I perform magic—especially for magicians—I like to be prepared, to be tight and very clean. Still, I did my best."

When Conover entered the competition at the World Magic Summit, he also felt less pressure than he had felt in earlier competitions. "I experienced something that I had never experienced in a magic competition before. Everyone was rooting for the other guy. I had never seen that!" He actually credits two of the other competitors (and close friends) with helping him pull off the victory. "Bob Kohler and Bob Sheets watched my first show and urged me to omit one of the items I was performing. If it were up to me I would have kept it in, but I took it out because I trusted them."

The experience of winning was also different than Tim had expected. "I always thought I would be ecstatic. I guess I'm a bad winner. Don't get me wrong, I was grateful to win, but what I felt as soon as I won was that my friends are more important than any competition and that I probably would never do this again." And as far as letting a title go to your head, Tim says, "In the magic community you would





Tim Conover working the trade show floor

have to be really big-headed and kind of ignorant to believe you actually are the best magician in the world."

### **Two different men. Two different conquests.**

There are several good reasons one might enter a magic contest. These two men took two different paths. Conover competed to strictly say he won a title. "It's something that can be used in a verbal introduction before I walk out on stage. I only want to be able to say I won to laypeople." His whole focus is on laypeople. "Even though I have good methods, I design them for the general public. I don't consider whether I can fool magicians. If it happens, great, but I don't ever design my magic with that in mind." He considers trying to fool magicians a waste of time.

Cloutier doesn't mind promoting his title in the magic community. "If you win these contest you're going to have to lecture. If you lecture you're going to sell tapes and notes." While meeting all the "guys" and having a chance to share things with them is fun, Carl sees the direct benefit of entering contests as sales within the magic world.

### **Two different men. Two different goals.**

It is important to note that neither of

these gentlemen won with material created specifically for magic competitions. Both pulled their contest act directly from their regular working material.

Cloutier does 80% trade shows and 20% comedy clubs, performing both close-up and stage. He also makes approximately ten television appearances per year. His work is primarily in Montreal. Conover does 99% corporate work both close-up and stand-up. If the price is right he will do an occasional private party. He works throughout the United States.

In addition to his work as a professional magician, Carl does voice-overs for commercials and dubs English movies into French. At one time he worked as a radio newsman and an actor on a French soap opera in Canada. Tim actually had a "real" job in telecommunications for five years after college. He worked in sales, engineering, government projects and "heavy backbone telecommunications networks." His former employer became his first major client in the corporate field.

### **Two different men. Two different views.**

Our heroes came, saw, and conquered. And as all heroes seem to do, they've left us with a few words that offer insight into the secret of their success.

A teen-age Conover

Tim Conover: "Absolutely no card tricks were allowed. I wanted to stand out and I knew what I thought would score points. Every piece had to be original. That was my goal. Originality does give you points if the judges are in the know. Every single piece I did was totally mine, and if anybody does it they're violating me."

Carl Cloutier: "The stuff I use in close-up and stage has all been developed for television. Competitions forces you to work very hard to get good and tight. Maybe we're all a little bit lazy, but when we're pushed to the wall—like the Vegas Seminar—we have to work. That's the time when you come up with something good."

### **Two different men. Two different endings.**

When asked if we can expect to see them in future magic contests, we of course got two different answers. Cloutier is probably entering the SAM competition in New Orleans this summer and considering FISM in 1994. Conover says, "Probably not." He did add, however, that the only other contest he would consider would be FISM.

It would make for an interesting FISM. ●