



MAGIC

TAYLOR MADE

by James F. Scheer

WITHIN less than ten years, a former high school teacher, Merv Taylor, of North Hollywood, has become the world's largest producer of tricks and gadgets for professional magicians.

There seems to be an element of actual magic in his rapid rise when one considers that he entered this field as a complete novice and is now making illusions for such headliners as John Calvert, Dante, Virgil, Orson Welles, Chester Morris, Richard Himber, "Think-a-Drink" Hoffman, and Blackstone, as well as for parlor abracadabra artists.

From early youth, a first-class inferiority complex hindered Taylor's becoming a magician. However, his biggest obstacle was outside himself: the glib, silken-caped showmen who refused to let him in on guarded secrets of their trade. His stumbling blocks eventually turned into stepping stones.

After 15 years of every-day teaching—and an equal amount of night

school, learning pencil-sketching, color, design, leather-tooling, woodwork, machine work and forging—Merv Taylor had all but given up any notions about a career in magic. One afternoon while instructing his high school sheet metal class, he was interrupted by a request to fix a broken "Production Box,"—a magic apparatus for the dramatic club's play. A professional magician, helping students stage their show, was impressed by Taylor's efficient diagnosis and repair work. He asked the teacher to overhaul some of the trade props in his home. Taylor dissected the magic illusions and put them together again. He began to see how they operated—and better—to get new ideas.

Always a perfectionist, he was surprised at the inferior workmanship and materials in the tricks then marketed. They were tinny, fragile and crudely made. Magicians were constantly complaining about rusting funnels. Taylor

shaped his original ideas into the reality of illusions made from fine hardwood, plastics or stainless steel.

Nights, weekends and holidays found him in his small garage, giving creative rein to his imagination. Word got around in magicians' circles. Here was a man with quality products, clean of design and bright and eye-catching enough for good showmanship.

He soon worked out his own variation on the Razor Blade Illusion. This is a compact device by which a magician can appear to swallow eight sharp razor blades strung on a length of black thread. He mailed 25 of these illusions to dealers throughout the country. Repeat orders were 100 percent.

SOON there was no room in the garage workshop for the family car. Then magic began pushing the Taylors out of their home. Taylor had been able to wangle a special manufacturer's license but, because of zoning restrictions, could not get one for wholesale and retail selling. This led to his finding a good building site. He then quit his teaching job.

"Talk about starting on a shoe-string," he says. "We sold the equity in two houses, raised all the money we had—and some we didn't have—to build our modern 3200 square foot plant in North Hollywood."

Every dollar above bare living expenses went back into the business, for paying loans, for buying

additional machinery, for expansion. In his clean, airy, magic plant—the only one in the world equipped for spinning, welding, silver-soldering, glasswork (including sawing) plastic-molding, machining, woodworking, and rubber-molding—Merv Taylor now turns out illusions that have won cups and other awards at many magicians' conventions. More than 30 of these are being sold to professional performers and novelty wholesalers and retailers in almost every habitable country on earth.

There's a dazzling array of tricks in his inventory. There's the glistening, stainless steel "Empty" funnel that conceals 11 ounces of liquid; the tiny gleaming Por-Mor pitcher that amazes spectators by containing enough liquid to fill a huge, 22-ounce Malt Glass that "disappears" while someone at the opposite end of the stage sucks on a straw; there's the Magic Paddle, a short flat piece of wood that has appearing and disappearing print; and Orbs Eternal, solid stainless steel rings that magically link and unlink; the Sur-Fire-Bowl, which produces fire on demand; the guillotine, or arm-chopper, as well as many others. Most of these illusions are original developments from the five or six basic tricks known since the beginning of magic.

Taylor, often assisted by his lovely daughter, Lorita, takes special pride in presenting his latest crea-

tions in magic performances for clubs, professional groups, and GIs. One of these, the "Production Bird Cage," is said to be the sensation of the last 20 years. From inside a handkerchief, a big glistening round cage, complete with full-size, realistic canary on a swing, emerges.

ALTHOUGH he rarely uses magic props that aren't turned out in his plant, Merv Taylor did on one occasion—to his regret. His audience was particularly icy that night. At the height of his act, the illusion failed to produce what he had promised spectators. Embarrassed and shifting from one foot to the other, he looked with a dead pan at the prop, then slowly shook his head, saying—"Funny. The darned thing worked fine at home."

There was no more audience trouble.

The need to adjust to the unexpected as a magician has helped Taylor overcome much of his natural diffidence—as well as giving him added grey hairs. Once when he was scheduled to appear in a large theater, the dove he was to use escaped shortly before he went on stage. He had to substitute a guinea hen at the last moment.

Unused to being produced from a hat, the guinea hen was frightened. The customary act was to place the bird on his shoulder and go on with his patter from there. However, the spectators' thunder-

ous applause terrified the bird and she took off over the spectators.

This experience plus what happened to his wife, Della, at the last Pacific Coast Association of Magicians' convention in Portland, Oregon, has taught Taylor and the rest of his magic-minded family—Lorita, in her early twenties, and Richard, a boy in his teens—to stick with Taylor-made props.

One of the convention magicians jokingly slipped a pair of handcuffs on Taylor and Della. When the laughs began to wear off, they found themselves solidly hitched. All the magic of the Pacific Coast Magicians couldn't part the two. And there wasn't a key in sight. It was rather humiliating for the presto-change-o artists (plainly labeled with convention badges) to get a police locksmith to perform the magic.

Understanding the embarrassment possibilities of poorly-made props, Merv Taylor guarantees that every illusion turned out by him works perfectly. The same careful workmanship goes into production of a \$1 prop as into the more costly ones. Prices range anywhere from that minimum to \$1,000 for a prop made exclusively for an artist. Perhaps the most expensive illusion that Taylor and his nine full-time employees have turned out is the "Floating Lady" (a figure which moves about the stage as though on air). This illusion is tagged at almost \$4,000. It is absolutely nec-

essary to maintain strict secrecy as to construction details of exclusive jobs such as this. For as soon as a trick is duplicated, its value diminishes.

TAYLOR has produced many costly illusions but his favorite is the \$750 Full-Empty Glass, which has won a cabinet full of awards at magic conventions on the 15,000 mile yearly tour made by Taylor and his wife. The Full-Empty Glass contains milk or wine and, in less than a flash, can bring forth liquid or "vanish" it. Although this illusion pays big returns now, it gave Taylor nothing but headaches in the designing stage.

His method of planning and working out tricks and gadgets is to think of all possibilities and obstacles to an idea. He talks everything over with wife and shop workers then lets his subconscious mind take it from there. His problem with the Full-Empty Glass was finding fluids that would remain

contained in the base of the glass without deteriorating. Real milk or wine wouldn't work. He needed something resembling them—something that wouldn't get old or "craze" the glass. For three months he pondered the problem.

Because the Taylors eat, sleep, and live magic, it isn't unusual that Della wakes from a sound slumber at 3 A.M. to see her husband sketching on the Kleenex box or heading for the shop while dressing on the run. That is exactly what happened when Taylor struck upon proper liquids for the Full-Empty Glass.

The business that began as a one-man project in a small garage now employs nine full-time workers and is the world's largest enterprise of its kind. There's little wonder that almost every object in Merv Taylor's plant and household verifies the family's total absorption with magic. Even their tiny Pomeranian-Peke dog is named Trixie!

Eden on World Government

The cat was let out of the bag when the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, weak stooge of the Internationalists, declared on November 17, 1956 "That the *United Nations* had failed to become what it was intended to be, *the beginning of a world government based on collective security.*"

ROBOT

of the Deep

by Lt. Harry E. Rieseberg

TODAY there is more gold and silver lying on the sea's floor than there is in the combined treasures of all the nations of the world. The shattered hulks of ancient argosies stretch like a golden chain down the Atlantic and up the coasts of Africa and Europe, along the Pacific coasts of the two Americas, across to Asia and down to Oceania.

For decades, adventurous men have striven with ingenuity and courage to bring to the surface these great caches. Millions of dollars have been retrieved by various methods from hundreds of wrecks located in less than 50 fathoms—300 feet—of water. But the really valuable objectives remain far deeper. Divers cannot, in safety, work below this level. But recently, a new and ultra-modern deep sea diving robot has been devised, with which many deeply sunken fortunes may be retrieved safely.

Devised to be driven directly into the sea from beach level under its own power, or else dropped into the deeper depths of the ocean from a salvage vessel, it might be classed as a huge underwater army tank. Electrically driven motors operating from sealed chambers will move it over rocky slopes and pinacles of the ocean floor at five to eight miles per hour.

It is equipped with five gigantic cranes that project to any desired length for various underseas work. Each is hydraulically operated. At their ends are grips, claws, fingers and nippers, so sensitively adjusted that a coin the size of a half-dollar may be picked up from the ocean floor, so powerful that a section of heavy planking can be torn from its fastenings with astonishing ability, so highly perfected that they can tie ropes and steel cables even under the terrific pressure of extreme depths. These ends are de-