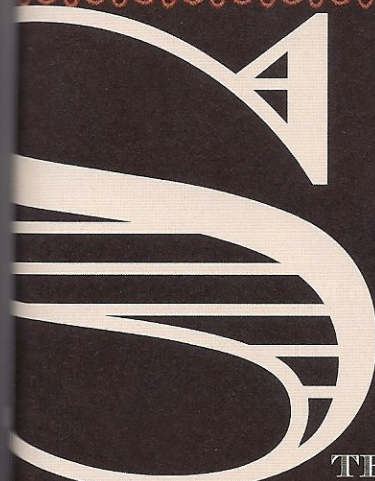




AVA DO

STEALING
HEARTS
& MINDS
(and Much More!)

by Kathryn Hulick



STEP UP

and test your wits against magician Ava Do! But watch out; she might swipe your watch or pick your pockets while you're not paying attention. This petite, friendly woman doesn't look like your ordinary magician, but she has plenty of tricks up her sleeves, or more accurately, in her brain.

Ava's brand of magic is called *mentalism*, sometimes known as mind reading. But it's really more like mind manipulation. She never pretends her magic act is a miracle, and tells her fascinated audiences that her tricks are all based in human psychology. *Misdirection*, or making sure a person is paying attention to something other than the trick, is at the heart of most magic. Ava's misdirection comes in the form of clever conversation and questioning that disguises her true motives. She explains, "If my hand is on your watch, and I'm asking you to think about something else so I can steal your watch at any point that I see your attention has shifted, I have to delay the watch steal for a moment or two while we turn your attention to something else."

Lie Detector

Ava's current favorite trick is the lie detector test, which is an entirely mental game. First, she hands you a \$100 bill. If you successfully hide it from her and lie about where it is, you keep the money. Sounds easy, right? Wrong. Ava uses psychological distractions, such as asking really personal questions. "I might ask you, 'When was the last time you felt really hurt?' . . . and when you think about it, you can't really think about where the money is." In other words, you're less likely to be careful about hiding your lies.

But how does Ava recognize a lie? She doesn't always! She was quick to point out that when the lie detector test begins, she has no idea when you're lying. It's a personal challenge for her, with real money on the line, to figure it out. For example, Ava might ask you to roll a die, and then lie to her about

what number comes up. She asks, "Was it a one? Was it a two?" all the way up to six. "I find that when people have just gone past the number that they have, they have a tendency to relax," she says. A "symptom" of lying like this one is called a *tell*. Sometimes Ava explains what's going on, but she has to be careful. After she tells you your "tells," you'll be a better liar and the trick won't work!

Grown-Up Assumptions

Could you pass Ava's lie detector test or escape getting your watch taken? You've got a better chance than her usual audience of business people because of your age. "Children are actually a lot more difficult to fool in magic than adults," she says. That's because grown-ups make a lot of assumptions in their daily lives about cause and effect or the purpose of objects, and children simply watch more closely and pay more attention in general. As an example of children's openness to new ways of thinking, Ava tells a riddle. See if you

PICKPOCKET LINGO

Want to talk like a pickpocket? Ava and her partner Apollo steal wallets and watches from unsuspecting people in their audience. It's all in fun, but out on the street, this crime can happen for real.

Wiremob: a team of pickpockets working together

Mark: the chosen victim

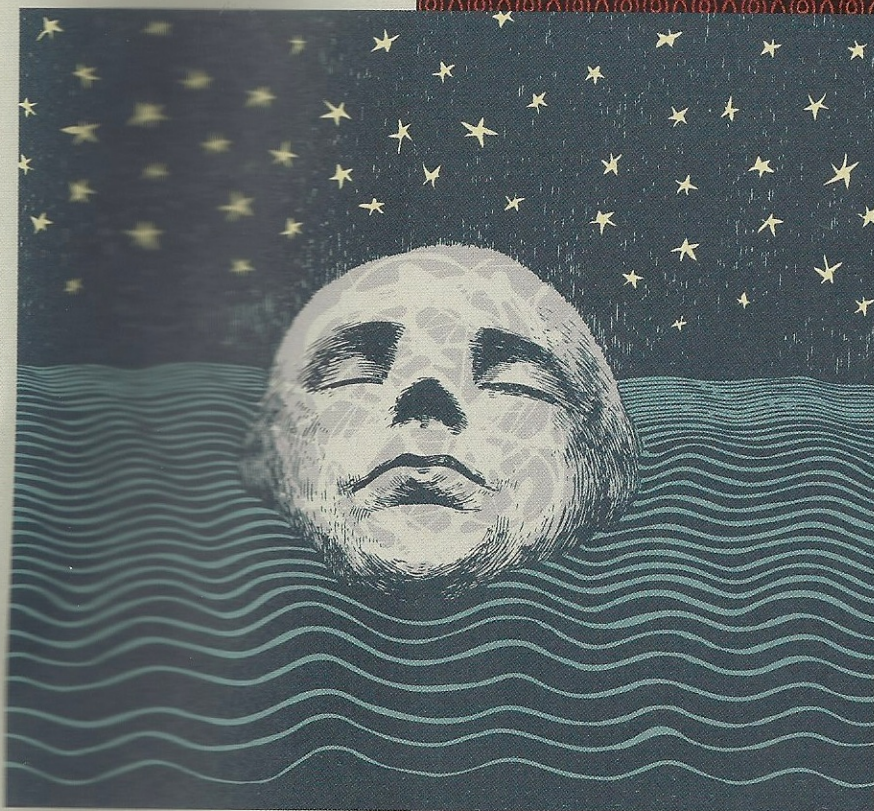
Stall: the one who distracts the mark

Dip/Wire: the one who does the steal

Lift: the actual steal

Shade: the one who covers (shades) the steal and runs countersurveillance for the team

Cannon: a solo pickpocket who can play all the different roles



THE DROWNING MAN PUZZLE

Ava retold this puzzle from her favorite book, *Mindfulness*, by Ellen J. Langer. Can you figure out the answer?

You're staying at a small house by a lake, when a distraught woman comes to the door. "Help me! My husband is drowning in the lake!" she cries. "I need a large, flat piece of wood to save him!" You want to help, but you don't have any flat pieces of wood in the house. You think about it for a little while, then help save the man. How did you do it?

Turn to page 48 for the answer.

can figure it out, then test an adult you know! (See sidebar, "The Drowning Man Puzzle.")

Unable to Speak

Ava didn't start out knowing she wanted to be a magician. In fact, when she arrived in America at age 14 after her family emigrated from Vietnam, she didn't speak any English. "It made me a lot more attentive to what people were saying with their faces and their bodies," she says. She majored in *psychobiology*, which combines the studies of human behavior and the brain, and got a job counseling battered women. The work was exhausting, but she learned to stay in tune with other people for long periods of time. According to Ava, what she does now isn't all that different from therapy. The environment is more light-hearted and the show

only lasts about an hour, but, as Ava puts it, "You're still letting me into your life. You're still letting me into your mind. And that's why I really love what I do."

Women in Magic

Ava points out that the first thing many people notice about her is not her cultural background, but the fact that she's a woman magician. More women do stage magic than close-up magic or mentalism, and very few have their own acts requiring direct interaction with an audience. "It's much like science, I think," Ava says. "I remember studying biology — you still see a lot more men than you see women." She's quick to point out that if you're a girl interested in magic (or science!), you should push past any barriers in your way. The male magicians she's met and worked with, including her partner and master pickpocket Apollo Robbins, have all been welcoming and encouraging. Now, Ava's part of a secretive and strange world: to train for their show, Ava and Apollo work with real or former thieves and criminals, including a former hacker, a pickpocket who is now a chef, and a card cheat who used to con poker tables in the Las Vegas casinos! When I asked her how, exactly, she figures out where a person hid that \$100 bill, she says, "That's all part of the routine that I can't really tell you about." 🎩

Kathryn Hulick writes Science Scoops for *ODYSSEY* and bets she'd lose the lie detector test!