



# 50:50 Fantasia

**How to apparently win any 50:50 bet. You bet, they guess, you win. No props or moves, just your words, your mind... and a secret.**



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## **Publication**

### **50:50 Fantasia**

by Ian Rowland

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## **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Some Requests</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Effect #1: A Possible Stage Presentation</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Effect #2: A Possible Close-Up Presentation</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Method Overview</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Method In Detail</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Script A. Named Item Matches</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Script B. Named Item Does Not Match</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Script Structure</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Variations</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>A Supplementary Question</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>A Final Choice</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Intended Reaction</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Afterword</b>	<b>24</b>

## Introduction

Imagine if you could offer someone a simple 50:50 guess, such as 'Blue or Green', and *always* anticipate their guess correctly!

Imagine being able to do this with such certainty that you'd be happy to stake anything on the outcome — even a very large amount of your own money. Imagine being able to do this totally impromptu, with regard to *any* 50:50 guess or decision.

The script in this booklet is a way to create a *strong illusion* that you can do this. The principle is extremely versatile and you can dress it up any way you like.

For the purpose of this explanation, I am going to explain two possible presentations, one being more suitable for stage work and another for an informal, close-up performance for one spectator.

However, please remember that I am only describing these possible presentations in order to explain the script and how it works. Once you see how the script works, you will be able to devise endless variations to suit almost *any* theme and *any* situation, for either formal shows or close-up impromptu demonstrations.

## Some Requests

It took me a long time, and a lot of work, to come up with 50:50 Fantasia. Believe it or not, in one way or another I was working on it for the best part of three years!

The story goes back to a brilliant effect by Moziq, called 'Decisions', that is marketed by my friend Peter Nardi at Alakazam Magic. I thought the effect was superb when I bought it and I still do. However, it got me wondering whether there was a way to achieve a very similar effect without the need for the cards and ingenious 'something' involved in 'Decisions'.

This idea kept rattling around in my head for a while and I came up with an early version of 50:50 Fantasia that I called 'No Terror'. This was a bit of rather laboured word play on 'not error', or being able to anticipate a guess without ever making an error. I believe I only published this once, in some lecture notes I prepared for one, specific event. It was a little 'rough and ready' and the idea was still evolving in my head.

Eventually, after a *lot* of trial and error, and script refinement, plus some feedback from friends like Drew McAdam and Colin Cloud, I came up with this booklet.

I have two requests.

(1) Please keep this to yourself and don't explain it or share how it works, for example when talking to other magicians.

By all means, perform and demonstrate this item as often as you like. Also, if you feel so inclined, you are welcome to scream from the rooftops about it and tell the magic world that it's brilliant. Just please don't explain it to anyone. If anyone is curious, you can just point them to my website where I sell my mentalism stuff: [www.ianrowlandmagic.com](http://www.ianrowlandmagic.com) .

(2) If you are going to perform this effect, *please learn the script properly*. I know it's a lot of script to learn. Nonetheless, I ask you to respect it enough to learn it properly. This doesn't mean you have to recite it word for word like a robot. Of course, you will want to express yourself in your own words. However, please don't mess around with the script or the structure too much. There are very good reasons why it is written exactly the way it is.

Thank you. I look forward to seeing you perform this item one day!

## Effect #1: A Possible Stage Presentation

The Performer hands a small, folded packet to a spectator in the front row. Let's call the spectator Jack.

The Performer explains to Jack what he is holding: the packet is actually a large photograph that has been folded up with the picture on the inside. He states that the photo is of either Sydney Opera House or the Statue of Liberty — two very distinctive buildings that everyone can recognise immediately. The Performer explains that in a few minutes from now, Jack himself will unfold the photograph and show everyone what it is. The Performer gives a guarantee that he (the Performer) will not touch the photo again until the routine is over.

The Performer explains that this is all about a very simple 50:50 bet. All Jack has to do to win the bet is to guess whether the photo shows Sydney Opera House or the Statue of Liberty. The Performer tells Jack that, unfortunately, he will *not* win the bet.

Before going any further, the Performer explains that this, in itself, isn't very exciting, because it's only a 50:50 bet. He explains that in order to make it a bit more interesting, he's willing to bet some money.

The Performer takes out a small denomination bill and says he's willing to bet this much money on the outcome. He then reconsiders, and decides to make it even *more* interesting by betting even *more* money! He takes out a few more bills and says he's willing to bet the whole lot. The Performer explains that this could not be fairer to Jack since only he (the Performer) is actually betting any money whereas Jack doesn't have to bet anything.

Feeling even more confident, the Performer adds to the amount that he's willing to bet. He adds more high denomination bills and proceeds to add his watch, his credit card and several other items of high value. There is plenty of scope for humour here as the Performer adds more and more to the amount he is apparently willing to risk on this simple 50:50 bet. It starts to look like quite a risky situation from the Performer's point of view!

With the Performer having finally finished adding to the amount he's willing to bet, the moment of truth has arrived! The Performer invites Jack to guess either Sydney Opera House or Statue of Liberty. Let's say he names, "Statue of Liberty".

At this point, and with so much of the Performer's money at stake, everyone wonders if Jack has won or lost!

After building up a little bit of suspense and enjoying the tension in the room, the Performer gently breaks the bad news to Jack: he has lost the bet and so he hasn't won all the Performer's money.

The Performer puts away all the money and anything else that he added to the bet. Of course, everyone now wants to see the proof that Jack didn't guess correctly. The Performer invites Jack to unfold the large photograph and show everyone what it is. Sure enough, it turns out to be a clear, unambiguous photo of Sydney Opera House. It seems the Performer somehow knew, for sure, that Jack would guess the Statue of Liberty. But how could the Performer have possibly been so sure?

## Conditions

Let me clarify some aspects of the routine I have just described.

### **(1) The Photograph Is Just A Photograph**

The photograph is just a large, clear photograph of Sydney Opera House. There is nothing fake about it and it can't be opened or displayed in two ways. You can even give it away to the spectator if you want.

### **(2) The Procedure Is Clear, And Set In Stone**

You make it clear that the spectator (Jack in this example) is going to keep hold of the photo all the time. He is going to make his guess and then unfold the photo *himself* without you going near it. You do not retrieve the photo, switch it or alter the procedure in any way.

### **(3) It's Real Money!**

The money you show to everyone, and are apparently willing to bet on the outcome, is real money. Any other valuable items that you involve, such as your watch or your credit card (you can say you'll give Jack the PIN) are also real. There's no fakery involved!

### **(4) No Pre-show Or Stooges!**

There is no pre-show of any kind. You can use any spectator. This routine does not involve a stooge or confederate and there is no 'dual reality' involved. The spectator will be just as intrigued and baffled by the outcome as anyone else.

## Effect #2: A Possible Close-Up Presentation

Let's suppose the Performer is sitting in a coffee shop with a friend. We'll call this friend Julia.

The Performer explains that this is going to be about a simple 50:50 bet. He asks Julia what sort of information she would like the bet to be about: letters, numbers, colours, shapes, star signs, celebrities... or what?

Julia chooses shapes.

The Performer takes out a piece of paper and draws something on it, without being seen. He folds this up into a small packet which he hands to Julia. He asks Julia to keep this in his hand until it's time to open it and check what's on it.

The Performer explains that, on the piece of paper, he has drawn a shape. It is either a circle or a triangle. The Performer explains that he's going to let Julia guess which it is and he is willing to bet a large amount of money on the outcome. He adds that, sadly, Julia is *not* going to win the bet.

The Performer then proceeds to show how much he's willing to bet on the outcome. He starts with a small and unimpressive amount of money. He gradually adds more until it's really quite a large amount. Then he adds other items of value, such as his watch, his ring, his cell phone and so on.

Julia makes her guess: "It's a circle."

The Performer gently breaks the news that, sadly, Julia hasn't won. He puts away all his money and valuables. He invites Julia to check what was drawn on the piece of paper that she has been holding all the time. Julia opens the paper and it's clearly a drawing of a triangle.



## Method Overview

What I have described is what the audience *thinks* they see and what they will *remember*. The reality is a little different. This is in fact a swindle based on sleight of mouth. It hinges on the fact that a simple 50:50 bet can be interpreted in two completely different ways:

(a) This bet is about my ability. I am betting that I can anticipate the spectator's guess and the photo will serve as proof that I anticipated his guess correctly.

(b) This bet is about the spectator's ability. I am betting that the spectator will guess wrong and the photo will be my proof that he got it wrong.

The script for this routine conceals this ambiguity and makes it appear as if there was only ever one interpretation involved from start to finish.

## Method In Detail

For explanatory purposes, I will describe the script I use for the stage presentation described earlier in this booklet. (Don't worry if you don't happen to like this particular presentation. You will be able to adapt this effect to suit literally any theme or presentation you want.)

You will need a large photograph of Sydney Opera House. I just find a suitable photo and ask my local print/copy shop to make a black and white print for me about 1 metre high by 1.2 metres wide (3 feet by 4 feet). This doesn't cost much. You could get it done in colour if you're feeling extravagant or if the gig is going to be worth it! You can choose any size you like. All that matters is that, at the end of the routine, the spectator can unfold the photo and display it so that everyone in the audience can clearly see what it is.

The photograph needs to be simple and unambiguous. It should be immediately clear that it's Sydney Opera House. Avoid any 'arty' or 'creative' shots that might not be immediately clear.

Fold this photograph up into a packet with the image on the inside. Put a simple paper clip on it. Make sure no-one can tell, from looking at the packet, what the concealed image is. The folded packet should be of a size that can be comfortably held between the hands, such as A4 or Letter size. Do *not* put the photo in a folder, envelope or cover of any kind.

You will also need a large amount of money that you can introduce little by little. It's best to have some small denomination bills, then some larger ones, plus a few other items that you can add to the bet until it seems impressive and also absurdly risky!

Start by saying:

"Ladies and gentleman, there's something I have to do right at the start. I have to give *this* to someone to hold."

Show the folded photo, and hand it to someone in the audience. Towards the end of this routine this spectator will need to join you on stage to display the photograph to the rest of the audience. It therefore makes sense to choose someone near the front, where everyone else can see him, and who has easy access to the stage or performing area.

I always use a male spectator for this routine. I'm a man, and it seems more appropriate to choose a male spectator. I feel it could seem very lacking in chivalry to make a bet with a woman and tell her that she's going to lose.

You can choose a spectator at random if you prefer, for example by tossing a cuddly toy backwards over your shoulder into the audience. However, I think it's best *not* to introduce any other props or extraneous elements. For example, if you tossed out a ball of paper, people might suspect that in some versions of the routine, if the bet doesn't go your way, there's a message on the paper such as, 'If you choose Sydney Opera House then I win'. You don't want to involve any prop that people might think contains a hidden message or gives you a different way to end the routine.

"Let me give this to you. Please can I ask you to hold it between the palms of your hands? Thank you!"

Can I just ask you all to note that the very *first* thing I did, before *anything* else, was hand this packet to this gentleman. Even before I asked him his name or told you what this is all about! This is important, for reasons that will become clear."

Ask the spectator his name. Let's suppose it is Jack.

"Jack, let me tell you what you are holding between your hands. I love travelling, seeing all the famous sites of the world and taking photos. What you are holding is a large photograph that I've folded up a few times. It's a photograph of *either* Sydney Opera House *or* the Statue of Liberty. I'm sure we all know what those two famous structures look like.

It's not a trick or a joke. It's not a blurred or ambiguous picture. It's not all dark and I'm going to say 'It was taken at night, ha ha ha' or anything like that. I promise you it is a simple, clear photo of either Sydney Opera House or the Statue of Liberty. One or the other.

You don't even need to take this on trust because in a few minutes, Jack, you yourself will unfold it and see that I'm telling you the truth. I will never touch it again, I promise, until this is over. It's going to stay in your hands all the time.

Now, Jack, you know the sort of things I do. Some people say I must have some sort of psychic gift although I personally don't think this is true. Others have suggested that everything I do can be explained in terms of psychology or understanding patterns of behaviour and so on, although I don't think that's the whole story either.

Really, most of the things I do come down to this: I know what you are going to think before you think it. I'll say that again: I'm really good at knowing what you are going to think before you think it.

In a moment – not just yet – I'm going to invite you to name Sydney Opera House or Statue of Liberty. And remember, I gave you that photo even before I gave you the information that it *is* either Opera House or Liberty.

But even if you say exactly what I am pretty sure you're going to say, it won't seem very impressive because it's only a 50:50. So let's make it more interesting."

Take out your wallet, purse or whatever you are using as the source of your money and display a small amount, such as a low denomination bill. Let's say it's a one dollar bill (or the equivalent in your own country's currency).

"There you go, Jack. One dollar says I know what you are going to think before you even think it. We have one dollar worth of interesting.

But hey, you know what? This is an important show, maybe we should make it more interesting. How about... ten? [Add more money.] Then again, I like you, Jack. You're a good sport. Since it's you, I'm going to make it even more interesting. Twenty. Ah, no... let's go fifty. Fifty dollars says I know what you are going to think before you think it.

Actually, it seems a shame not to make it up to the full hundred, doesn't it? There... a hundred dollars worth of interesting.

But ladies and gentlemen, I think you're such a great crowd, you deserve something at least twice as interesting as that. Don't you think so? [Get the audience agreeing.] Sure you do. There you go... two hundred dollars worth of interesting. It's real money, Jack.

Hey, while we're here and all having fun, let's make it even more interesting. There you go... that's my credit card. It's got a lot of credit on it. If you win, I'll give you the PIN so you can use it.

Actually, this is such a great audience I think I should make it even more interesting. There's my watch. And my ring! That's worth a bit. And my phone."

You have fun gradually increasing the size of the bet, so it starts small and ends up looking very impressive and also very risky.

So, let's get on with it. Jack, you have the photo between your hands. Sydney Opera House or Statue of Liberty. And I'm going to invite you to name either one. Of course, you have complete *freedom* to do so. Are you listening? I said complete *freedom*."

Given that one of the choices is the Statue of *Liberty*, this looks like a clumsy attempt to influence Jack's decision.

"[To the audience in general] And you can all join in with this. Think... if you were given this choice, which way would you go? But it's Jack's decision that counts. [Focusing on Jack] So, Jack... on a count of three, just name either Sydney Opera House or the Statue Of Liberty. Here we go, nice and quick, big loud voice, 1 - 2 - 3 go!"

Jack names either of the two options. As soon as he does so, the audience will be interested in your reaction.

Maintain a 'deadpan' or 'poker face' expression that gives nothing away. Maintain good eye contact with the audience and let them see that although you understand their curiosity about what comes next, you are in no hurry to let them in on what you know.

You now use one of two possible scripts.

## Script A. Named Item Matches

In this example, the photo is of Sydney Opera House and this is what the spectator names. His guess matches the photo.

Say:

“This is quite an interesting moment, isn’t it? [Pause]

I said I’m often good at knowing what someone’s going to think before they think it. Maybe, on this occasion, I did know what Jack was going to say before he said it. Maybe I knew he’d say Sydney Opera House and he’s holding the proof right there in his hands: a large, clear picture of Sydney Opera House.

Or maybe I guessed wrong and I gave him a photo of the Statue of Liberty instead. In which case, I did *not* know what he was going to think and so I’ve failed – and Jack has just won two hundred dollars [or whatever amount is involved] of *my* money. And my watch, my credit card and everything else you see here.

What’s more, I can’t do anything about it! Look, Jack is holding the photo. It is literally out of my hands. If I was right all along, okay, but if I made a mistake, I’ve lost all this lovely money.

The only question is, which is it? Does Jack go home with my money? Or do I?”

Enjoy the suspense and the tension of this moment for as long as you feel it is appropriate to do so. When you are ready, allow a broad smile to break out on your face.

“Well, Jack, take a good look at all this money... because it’s the last you’ll ever see of it!”

Start to put away all the money and any other valuables that you involved in the bet.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, Jack, although I’m not *very* sorry, because I really didn’t want to lose. The truth is that I was 95% sure Jack would go for Sydney Opera House and that’s why I gave him a photo of Sydney Opera House to hold. Thank you!”

Act as if this is the end of the routine. Adopt an ‘applause cue’ pose and look as if you are expecting everyone to clap. Pretend to be disappointed that people won’t just take your word for it.

"No, really. It *is* a photograph of Sydney Opera House. I was sure that's what Jack would say so that's the picture I gave him. A nice, big photo of Sydney Opera House."

The next few lines are intended to get laughs. The audience know you are just teasing them, playing with them and making them wait to see the photograph opened.

"I'm sure you are all prepared to take my word for it. After all, you all know I would *never* tell you any lies!

And I'm sure none of you would be so petty as to feel there's any need for Jack to actually open up that photo and check. It would be a tedious waste of time... I've already *told* you what it is: a big picture of Sydney Opera House!"

At this point, you 'give in' to the audience's desire to see the proof.

"Jack, it seems people want to see some proof. I think you should come to the front, take off the clip, unfold the photograph and let everyone see that I was right."

Jack does so. This is a nice, dramatic moment with a big, visual punch to it. It should win a nice round of applause. Now go to the 'Epilogue' section.

## Script B. Named Item Does Not Match

In this example, the photo is of Sydney Opera House and this is *not* what the spectator names. His guess does *not* match the photo.

Say:

“This is quite an interesting moment, isn’t it? (Pause)

After all, maybe Jack has just guessed correctly and he is, in fact, holding a picture of the Statue of Liberty. If so, he’s just won rather a lot of money. *My* money.

Then again, maybe he is wrong on this occasion. Maybe I was pretty sure he would go for Statue of Liberty and I therefore deliberately gave him a photo of Sydney Opera House to hold. In which case, I can keep my money.

What’s more, I can’t do anything about it. Jack is holding the photo. It’s literally out of my hands. If he’s guessed correctly, he’s just won a big cash prize. But if my hunch was right, and I knew what he was going to think before he thought it, I keep my cash for another day.

The only question is, which is it? Does Jack go home with my money? Or do I?”

Enjoy the suspense and the tension of this moment for as long as you feel it is appropriate to do so. When you are ready, allow a broad smile to break out on your face.

“Well, Jack, take a good look at all this money... because it’s the last you’ll ever see of it!”

Put away all the money and anything else involved in the bet.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, Jack. Although to be honest I’m not *very* sorry, because I really didn’t want to lose today.

The fact is, I was 95% sure Jack would guess the Statue of Liberty which is precisely why I gave him a photo of Sydney Opera House to hold. Thank you!”

Act as if this is the end of the routine. Adopt an ‘applause cue’ pose and look as if you are expecting everyone to clap. Then pretend to be disappointed that people won’t just take your word for it.

“No, really. It *is* a photograph of Sydney Opera House. I felt sure that Jack would guess Statue of Liberty, so that’s why I chose a photo of Sydney Opera House.”

The next few lines are intended to get laughs. The audience know you are just teasing them and making them wait to see the photograph opened.

“I’m sure you are all prepared to take my word for it. After all, you all know I never tell lies!

And I’m sure none of you would be so petty as to feel there’s any need for Jack to actually open up that photo and check. It would be a tedious waste of time... I’ve already told you what it is: a big picture of Sydney Opera House!”

At this point, you ‘give in’ to the audience’s desire to see the proof.

“Jack, it seems people want to see some proof. I think you should come to the front, take off the clip, unfold the photograph and let everyone see that I was right.”

Jack does so. He joins you, faces everyone, unfolds the photo and shows everyone that it is exactly what you said: a photo of Sydney Opera House. You have proved that you knew what he would think before he thought it. Now go to the ‘Epilogue’ section.



## Epilogue

Whether you use Script A or Script B, you have reached a point where you have reclaimed your money and Jack has displayed the Opera House photo. Invite Jack to return to his seat and mention that he can keep the photo as a souvenir if he wants.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve been trying this particular test for several years, although I don’t include it in every show. At a rough estimate, I think I’ve tried it about 120 times. You may be wondering... how often have I lost my money? Well, I’ll tell you. I’ve lost my money about five times. Even I can’t get it right *every* time. To do that, I’d have to be some sort of mind reader!

Finally, may I just say thanks to you, Jack. I hope you don’t feel too bad. After all, you’re no worse off than you were to begin with plus, if you want it, you have a souvenir photo to keep! Thank you, and let’s hear it for Jack.”

You get your second and final round of applause for the routine, and you don’t make Jack feel so bad.



*A photo of Sydney Opera House that I’ve occasionally used for this routine. I took this shot while flying over Sydney in a helicopter owned by Australian entrepreneur Dick Smith. He even let me take the controls of the chopper for a minute or two! (This is intentionally a low-resolution copy of the photo.)*

## Script Structure

At the risk of tedious overkill, let me point out some aspects of the structure of the script, step by step.

“It’s not a trick or a joke. It’s not a blurred or fuzzy or ambiguous picture. It’s not all dark and I’m going to say ‘It was taken at night, ha ha ha’ or anything like that. I promise you it is a simple, clear photo of either Sydney Opera House or the Statue of Liberty. One or the other.”

You are making it clear that this will not involve jokes or ambiguity. Many spectators have seen gags where, for example, the ‘photo’ turns out to be a solid black rectangle and the Performer says it was ‘taken at night’. You want the audience to know you are not going in this direction.

“...you yourself will unfold it and see that I’m telling you the truth. I will never touch it again, I promise, until this is over. It’s in your hands, and it’s going to stay in your hands all the time.”

You are emphasising that the photo is out of your control and that the spectator will open it — not you. In other words, you are spiking the possibility of any moves, switches or ‘tricky’ procedures.

“...Really, most of the things I do come down to this: I know what you are going to think even before you think it. I’ll say that again: I’m really good at knowing what you are going to think before you think it.”

This is really the crux of the script. You mention ‘I know what you are going to think before you think it’ but you never state precisely what this means in the context of this demonstration. You never say if it means correctly anticipating the spectator’s choice or betting against him.

“In a moment — not just yet — I’m going to invite you to name Sydney Opera House or Statue of Liberty. // But even if you say exactly what I know you’ll say, it won’t seem very impressive because it’s only a 50:50. So let’s make it more interesting.”

This part of the script underlines the simplicity of the procedure and repeats the premise (that you can anticipate people’s thoughts). At no point do you commit yourself to the spectator being right or being wrong but when the spectators look back over what you said, *it will seem as if you did*.

Note that you use the word 'name': 'I'm going to invite you to name Sydney Opera House or Statue of Liberty'. You do not use the word 'guess' or 'bet'. This is a crucial part of the routine. However, as soon as you have said this, you move on to the business about making it interesting and adding money into the procedure. This distraction reduces the focus on what you have just said.

"Jack, you have the photo between your hands. Sydney Opera House or Statue of Liberty. And I'm going to invite you to name either one. Of course, you have complete *freedom* to do so. Are you listening? I said complete *freedom*."

You want people to notice the 'freedom' reference, and to wonder if this is an attempt to verbally influence Jack to choose 'Statue of Liberty'.

If you adapt this routine and build it around two other choices, see if you can add a touch like this that sounds like a fairly clumsy attempt to influence the spectator's choice.

For example, let's suppose the two choices are Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. You could use a clumsy suggestion such as, "I'm going to invite you to name either one. I won't *press* [pronounced like the first part of 'Presley'] you to choose one or the other, like some sort of *hound dog*."

How about a choice between two movie posters, 'The Shawshank Redemption' and 'Star Wars'? "I'm going to invite you to name either one. You're the *star* in this routine, not me. I won't try to steer you towards one choice or the other."

"So, Jack... on a count of three, just name either Sydney Opera House or the Statue Of Liberty. Here we go, nice and quick, big loud voice, 1 - 2 - 3 go!"

You want to quicken the pace a little here, adding a bit of lively energy and drama, to get the spectator to just name one item or the other.

All these aspects of the script are important for the successful presentation of 50:50 Fantasia. I hope you will study them carefully.

## Variations

The 50:50 Fantasia principle is almost infinitely versatile. This ‘Opera House/Liberty’ routine is just one that I happen to like, partly because travel photography is genuinely one of my passionate interests.

Of course, you can offer any two choices you want: two celebrities, sports teams, landmarks, objects, colours, shapes, animals or anything else. By all means base the routine around choices and options that either mean a lot to you or that will mean a lot to your audience. You can choose something topical or, if it’s a corporate gig, something relevant to the company, their brand or their market.

No matter what variations you devise, please keep the routine very simple and ‘low tech’. The stage routine I have described uses a photo that is folded up and held in place with a paperclip. When the audience sees the spectator unclip this and open it for display, it is abundantly clear that there couldn’t be any trickery. If the photo were in a folder or an envelope, or on a fancy presentation stand, the audience might suspect that you can somehow display either one of two possible images. It is important that the audience can see this is *not* the case.

Please avoid using any props that could make 50:50 Fantasia look or feel like a magic trick. For example, you *could* perform a version of this routine using a normal playing card and invite the spectator to guess if it’s red or black. You could use a coloured silk handkerchief in a bag and ask if it’s red or green. You *could* do something like this but I strongly recommend that you don’t. There are many things this routine can be about and many items you could use as the basis for the bet. Please don’t make it look, feel or sound similar to a magic trick.

## A Supplementary Question

I have sometimes used a more elaborate version of the routine that involves a supplementary question. To explain this briefly, I will carry on using the example of the ‘Opera House/Liberty’ routine I have already described.

I say that I will invite the spectator to make his guess and that when he has done so I will ask him a follow-up question. I make this procedure clear from the start, *before* the spectator has made his first response. I don’t want anyone thinking the procedure is subject to change depending on the first reply.

The spectator makes his guess. I then say, “Do you want to be right or do you want to be wrong?”

No matter which choices the spectator makes, you can still draw the routine to a successful conclusion. For example, suppose the spectator chooses ‘Opera House’ and says he wants to be ‘right’. You can interpret this to mean that you have correctly anticipated both his responses... which is why the photo turns out to be Sydney Opera House. If he chooses ‘Opera House’ but wants to be ‘wrong’, you interpret this to mean that if the photo is of the Statue of Liberty, he wins the money. Of course he then opens the photo and unfortunately wins nothing.

You can handle the two other possibilities the same way. You may want to think through the logic involved but I promise you this ‘extended’ version can and does work.

Why would you use this longer version? Some performers think it adds an extra layer of concealment and deception. Also, some feel you can then take credit for having correctly anticipated *two* responses instead of just one. I think it’s worth knowing and rehearsing both versions. There may be times, especially in informal situations, when you want to have a bit more fun by adding the ‘Right or wrong?’ Question.

## A Final Choice

When I am performing 50:50 Fantasia in close-up, informal conditions, I sometimes extract a little more fun from it in the following way.

Let’s suppose we are near the end of the routine. The spectator, Julia, is holding a folded up piece of paper. It bears a drawing of a triangle. Julia has guessed ‘circle’ and I have already cleared away all my money and told her that she won’t be winning my money.

At this point, of course, Julia is keen to open the piece of paper and see for herself what I drew on it.

I say:

At this point, Julia, you have two options.

Option 1 is just to open the piece of paper and see that I drew a triangle on it. This isn’t very interesting. After all, I have already *told* you that it’s a triangle, so it’s neither very surprising nor very interesting.

Option 2 is *not* to open the piece of paper and instead to just *trust* me. This would create a bond of trust between us, and trust is a beautiful thing. You could just throw the piece of paper away in that trash can over there, or burn it, and accept my word. This would be a beautiful thing in both our lives – to trust, and to be trusted.

You know, trust is wonderful. It's a delightful, beautiful and enduring bond between two people. When you think about, trust is really all we have. It's the bedrock of society and civilisation. If we don't have trust, we have nothing. So why not take this moment, Julia, to create a wonderful bond of trust between us? I've told you that piece of paper has a triangle on it. That's the truth, and I give you my word on it. Clearly, there's no real need to check this, as I would never lie to you. You can just trust me, throw the paper away and know that today you shared the wonderful bond of trust with another human being.

So, what's it to be?

I deliver all this in a playful, 'tongue-in-cheek' way. To the spectator, it sounds as if the performance has gone wrong, I have in fact *lost* the bet, and now I'm desperately trying to get her to agree *not* to check the evidence!

To date, I have never had a spectator agree *not* to check what's on the piece of paper. They generally say something like, "I do trust you, but I still want to see what's on this piece of paper!"

Of course, I then invite them to go ahead and check, and they find I was telling the truth all along... it's just a piece of paper with a triangle drawn on it!

## Intended Reaction

When you perform 50:50 Fantasia, the reaction you are aiming for is something like this: “It’s clear he [the Performer] was sure of the outcome. But how could he have known? And what would he have done if the spectator had jumped the other way? He would have lost all his money!”

This is the mystery you want to leave in the minds of the audience. How could you be so sure about something so unknowable?

The reaction you are *not* aiming for is, “I wonder how he switched the photo? Or maybe it can be opened in two different ways”. If this is the reaction you get, then it hasn’t worked and you can’t expect to win much of a reaction.

## Kindness To The Spectator

In this routine, the spectator who takes part is given the chance to win a lot of money (or that’s how it seems). Unfortunately for him, he loses. It is normally considered good practise in magic and mentalism to try to avoid making any spectator feel like a ‘loser’. For this reason, you may want to give the spectator a small consolation prize to ‘soften the blow’, and as if to say ‘better luck next time’.

This is what I do in all my formal shows. Always treat the participating spectator with kindness and respect. You don’t want them to feel that you made them look like a loser. Make it clear that you could have asked anyone in the audience to take part and you’re fairly certain the outcome would have been the same.

## Thanks

Jaq Greenspon, Ryan Fricke, Ashley Green, Mark Elsdon and Aidan O'Sullivan helped me to prepare this current edition of 50:50 Fantasia and I thank them all for their help.

## Afterword

I have been presenting different versions of 50:50 Fantasia for years, in both formal and informal situations. What I like is the fact that it can be used just about anywhere, regarding just about any conceivable 50:50 guess. It's always 'ready to go', in your head, with no props needed.

I hope you have enjoyed this booklet and that you, too, will have a lot of fun presenting this mystifying item, exploring different variations and coming up with your own presentational tweaks.

Thank you for buying this booklet and supporting my work. I'm always happy to hear from you.

— Ian

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