

Excerpt From:
MAGIC IS DEAD by Ian Frisch

Courtesy of Dey Street Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

Chapter 10: The Rules of the Game

For a long time, magic was confined to a stage. Then it found its place in private parties and spontaneous, close-up situations. Then it was stuck on television. But with the dawn of the internet age, the rules of the game have changed, and social media has emerged as the most important catalyst for magic's current progression.

Social media is in many ways a tool to live vicariously through people whose lives are seemingly better than your own. You follow a fashion blogger because you want to dress like her, you stalk the fitness vlogger because you wish your dedication to the weight room was as forthright as his, and you gawk and awe at the mother on Pinterest because of her perfectly curated domestic life. The same is true for magicians. Ramsay has always said that his take on social media isn't to strictly disseminate the performance of magic, but to show people what type of life can be attained by being a magician—jet-setting, traveling to the biggest cities in the world, mingling with celebrities, lecturing to the masses, and cashing six-figure checks as a successful new-media entrepreneur.

Truly, a successful magician has never been solely defined by his or her technical ability. A magician who wants to make it, especially in the present, needs to not only be talented but also gifted in self-promotion, performance, video and photography production, trick invention and innovation, and personal branding. And in many ways, this has always been true. Just look at Houdini's or Blaine's rise to fame: Houdini performed his most dangerous stunts in public places and whipped a city into a frenzy before the stunt by giving newspapers early access into how the event would go down; Blaine also utilized public spaces for his performances and marketed himself kind of like the antimagician—no frills, just raw astonishment. But the internet has made these aspects of a magician's career even more crucial. Because, the truth is, anyone eager for magic is only one click away from someone bigger and better—someone who best fits their own archetype of what kind of magician they want to see perform, or they themselves want to become.

In present-day magic, you not only have to harness the technical prowess that people can aspire to, but you also have to encompass lifestyle and aspiration, where success and influence is charted through Instagram followers and YouTube views. In any art form, people have been equally fascinated not only with the skill of a practitioner but also the lifestyle embodied by the artist. For me, great writers come to mind: Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, Jack Kerouac, Joan Didion, James Baldwin, Ernest Hemingway. People loved these authors not just for their books, but for the way in which they lived their lives while they created these memorable bodies of work. The two become inextricably linked. On a completely customizable platform like Instagram, a person can become anyone they want without the threat of their brand being

diminished or strangled by outside forces—an almost mandatory concession for a magician contracted into a big-time television deal with a billion-dollar media corporation.

The person who has emerged as one of magic's most heralded ambassadors to the outside world—the go-to archetype of a twenty-first-century magician—and the master of utilizing social media for the benefit of his career is also the person who first introduced me to this fascinating world: Chris Ramsay.