BlockBuster

The Effect

Blockbuster was originally marketed by Martin Breese. The effect is simple and straight to the point. The performer shows a small block of wood threaded onto a length of ribbon (1). The ends of the ribbon are tied so that the block can't be removed. A slot is cut in the centre of the block and the spectators can see that the ribbon passes right through. The block is placed upon the table and from here on the performer does not touch it.

A solid metal bangle is handed to the spectator who may examine it. The spectator is then asked to insert the bangle into the slot at the top of the block (2). The spectator then lifts the ring from the slot and is amazed to find that it is now threaded on the ribbon (3). An unbelievable penetration has taken place.

Preparation

The block is quite solid. It has a hole drilled through it and a slot to take the ring. My block is a 45cm cube. The slot is 4mm wide and is 15mm up from the base of the block. The hole, drilled at right angles to the slot, is 8mm in diameter and set 10mm from the top of the block. The base of the block is covered in felt. You can make it quite easily from wood if you study the illustrations and follow the measurements carefully.

The ribbon, however, is not quite what it seems. One end of the ribbon is permanently fixed to the block. The ribbon is glued into the end of the hole. A few inches from that end a fake knot is tied to the ribbon (1). The knot can be slid up and down the ribbon's length. At the other end of the ribbon is a small wooden bullet (4). This is called the shuttle and it is this small fake that makes the trick possible. The shuttle measures 16mm by 4mm.

You also need a small wooden rod (able to push the shuttle into the 8mm diameter hole) to set the apparatus and two metal rings, each a different colour, for use in the effect.

Setting the Apparatus

Take the free end of the ribbon and wind it once around the shuttle (4). Hold the shuttle in the right hand with its rounded end pointing away from the fingers, gripped tightly so that the ribbon does not unwind (5). Note that the ribbon runs beneath the shuttle and not above it. Pick up the block in the left hand and insert the shuttle into the empty hole (ie the hole to which the other end of the ribbon is not attached) at the side of the block (6).

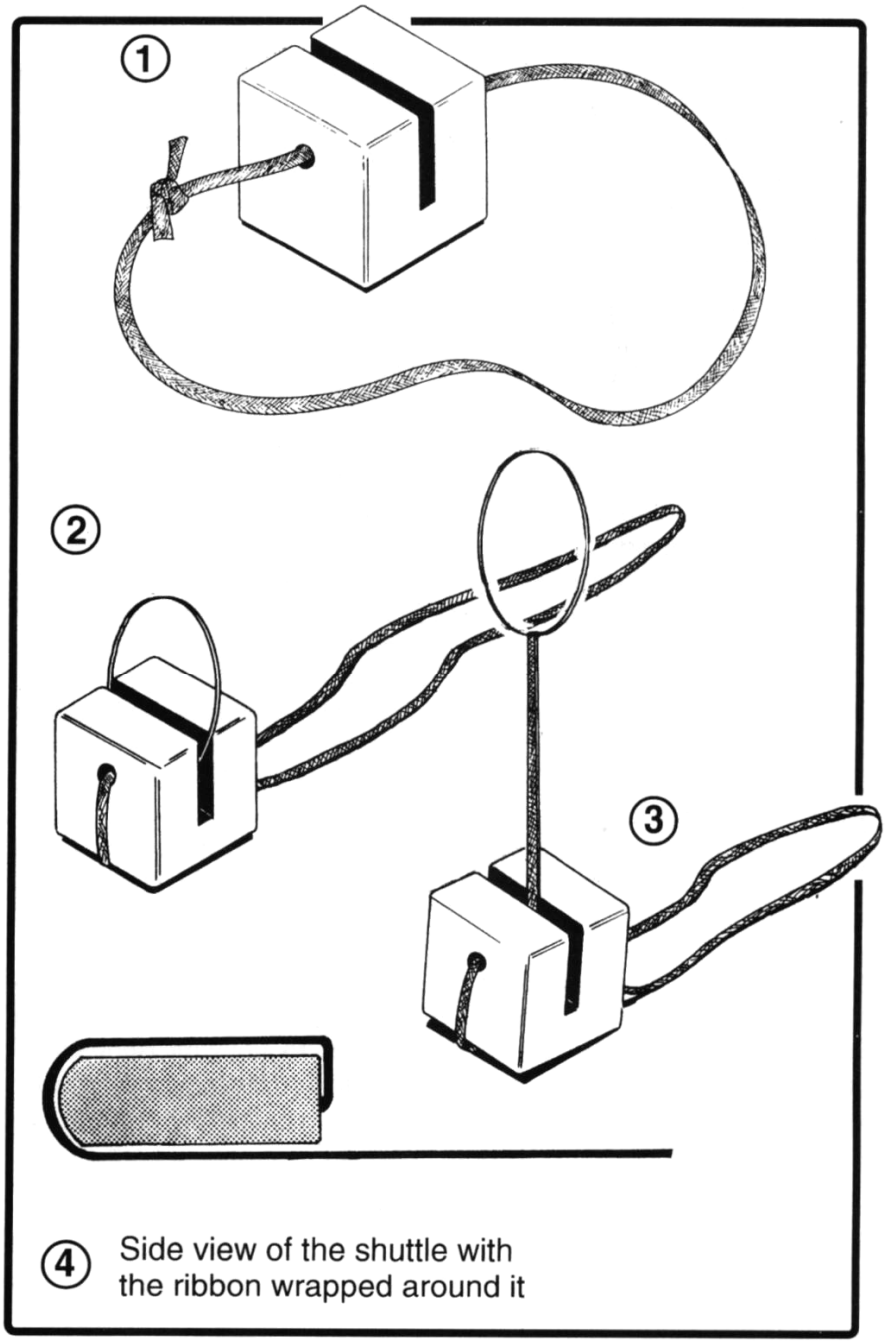
Using the rod, push the shuttle into the hole until it crosses the slot and you feel it contact the left fingers which are held against the hole on the opposite side of the block. Remove the rod and place the block on the table, slot uppermost.

If you examine the block you will see that the ribbon appears to run right through it. Looking into the slot you will see the ribbon stretching right across the gap. The fake

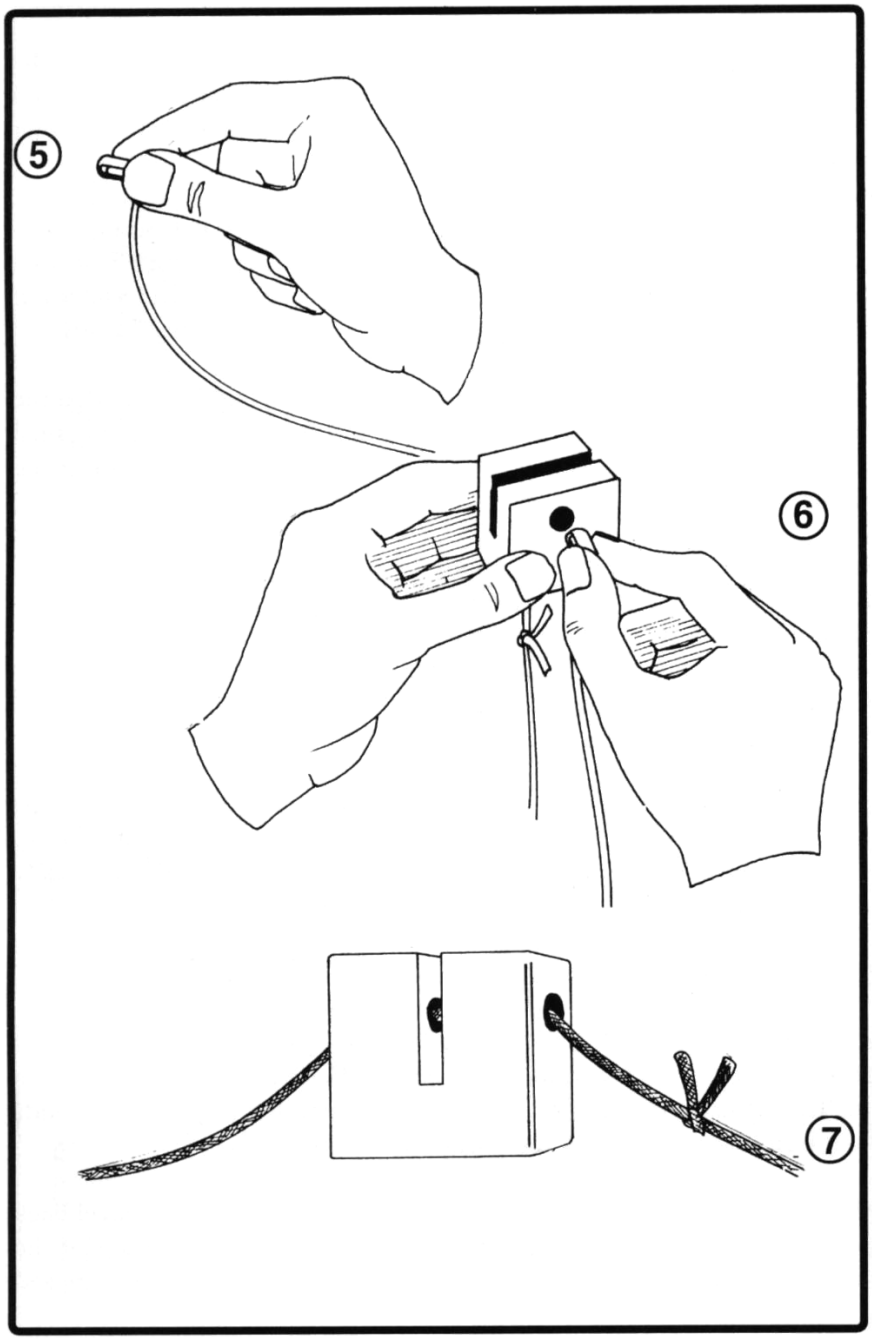
knot should be slid along the ribbon until it is about two inches from the point at which the ribbon is permanently anchored (7).

Basic Handling

For the penetration to work you must make sure that the block has been properly set. The ribbon must be wound correctly around the shuttle, the shuttle inserted rounded end first into the hole and then pushed through the hole as far as it will go without emerging from the other side.



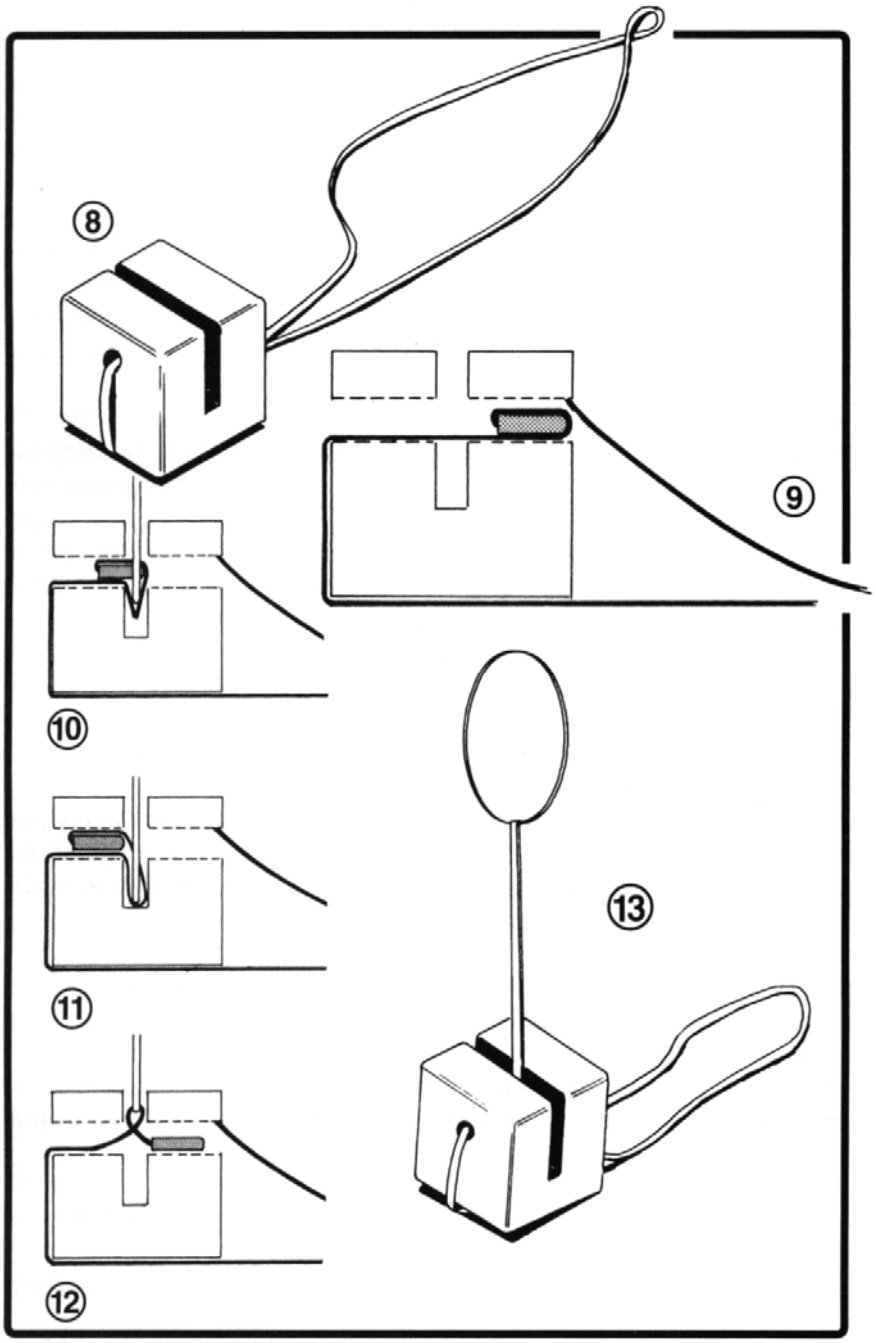
4 Side view of the shuttle with the ribbon wrapped around it



Set in this manner you can lift the block up and show it around, drawing the spectators' attention to the ribbon which is apparently threaded right through the block. Hold the block up to a spectator and ask him if he can see the ribbon through the slot. He will confirm that he can.

Transfer the block to the other hand and in regripping it ensure that the thumb and fingers cover the holes and trap the ribbon firmly against the side of the block. This stops the shuttle being pulled loose if the ribbon is accidentally pulled.

Raise the block and take the ribbon in the other hand, drawing it forward, and place the block on the table, trapping the nearer length of ribbon beneath it (8). The side at which the ribbon is anchored is away from you, pointing towards the spectators. The weight of the block holds the free end of the ribbon in place, something which is necessary for the penetration to work. 9 shows a cross-section of the set-up block.



Take one of the rings and, holding it vertically, insert it into the slot. The ring must be inserted centrally so that the lowest point of its circumference hits the middle of the slot's base. You'll, no doubt, do this naturally but it is essential for the proper working of the effect.

Let's take a look at what happens when the ring is pressed into the slot. Firstly the ribbon is pressed down under the edge of the ring and this drags the shuttle back through the hole and through the ring (10). 11 shows the position when the ring contacts the base of the slot. You can see that already the ribbon is threaded through the ring but both ends of the ribbon emerge from only one side of the block.

If you now pull the ring upwards it will force the shuttle to travel back across the hole (12). Now when the ring is pulled free of the slot the ribbon is seen to be threaded completely through it. As the ring is raised higher the ribbon is pulled through the block so that most of it is now emerging through the slot (13).'

That is the basic idea. The ring is pressed into the slot and the shuttle automatically threads the ribbon through it. As the ring is raised the shuttle goes into operation again, carrying the ribbon back to its original starting position.

Variations

As already described you may carry out the penetration by pushing the ring into the slot yourself. However, there is no reason why the spectator should not push the ring into the slot, indeed the effect is even stronger. Start by showing the threaded block and then place it on the table so that it traps the ribbon. Hand the ring to the spectator and ask him to examine it. He is then instructed to insert the ring into the slot at the top of the block. After a few seconds ask him to remove the ring, raising it high. He will be surprised to find that the ring is now threaded on the ribbon.

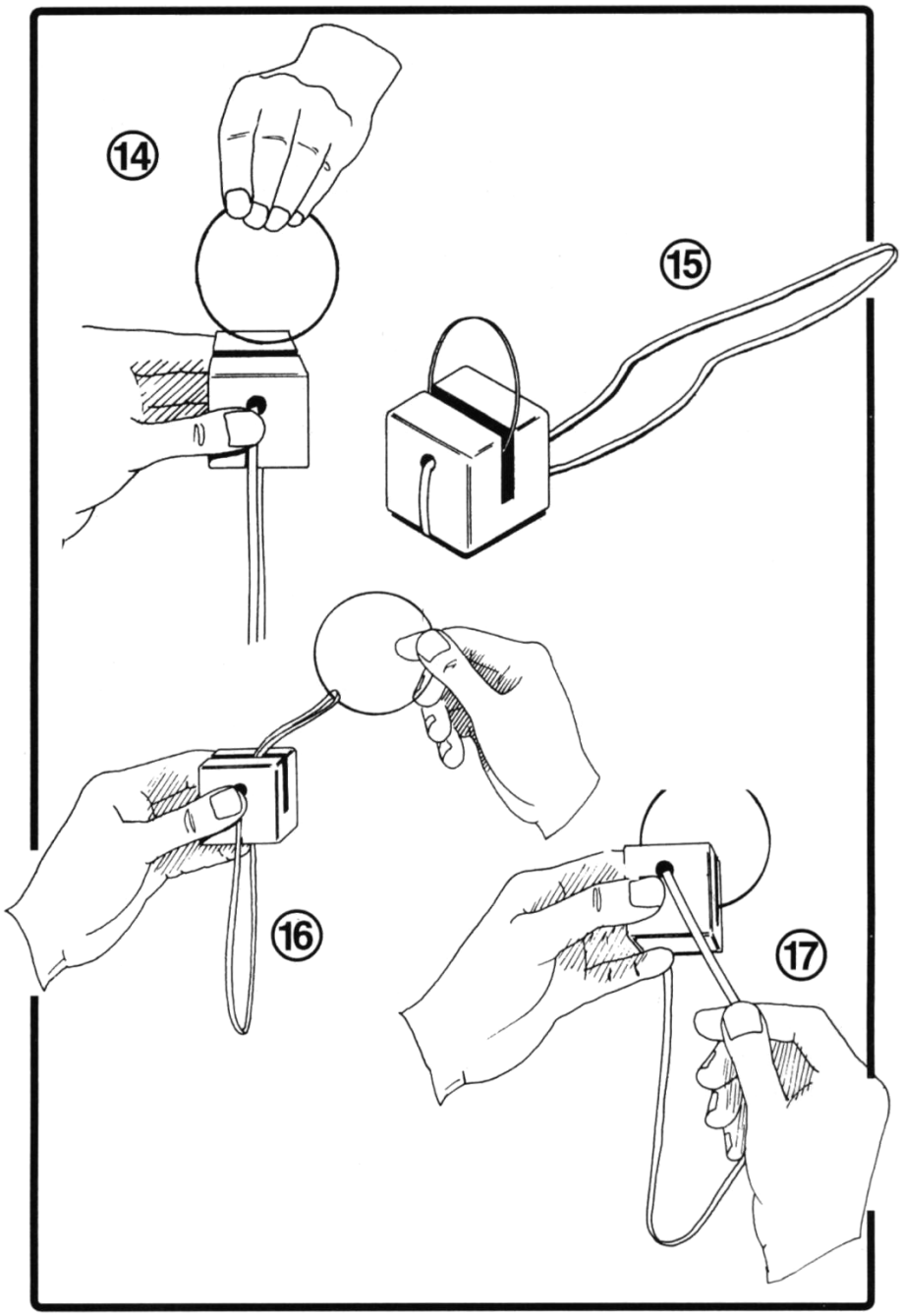
Another approach, and this looks quite dramatic, is for you to hold the block, your left thumb trapping the ribbon against the block (14), as the spectator inserts the ring in the slot. He retains his grip on the ring and you let the block drop. The ribbon is threaded through the ring and the spectator is left holding the block, swinging pendulum like from the ribbon. This is an unexpected and dramatic presentation.

The trick can also be worked in the spectator's hands. Place the block on the spectator's outstretched hand, trapping the ribbon between his hand and the block. Ask him to take the ring and press it into the slot. He keeps hold of the ring but removes the other hand from beneath the block, the block drops dramatically with the ribbon now threaded through the ring.

Releasing the Ring

Knowing how to untangle the ring from the ribbon is as important as knowing how to work the effect. If you try to do this without understanding why the trick works you may get yourself into an awful mess. It's important to realise that when the shuttle threads the ribbon through the ring it leaves a twist in the ribbon. To unthread the ribbon you must give the ring a half turn (you'll see which way the turn should be made by looking at the twist in the ribbon) before placing it back in the slot. When the ring is in the slot you can start pulling on the ribbon, drawing its free end back out of the hole. When the shuttle is out of the block the ring is free.

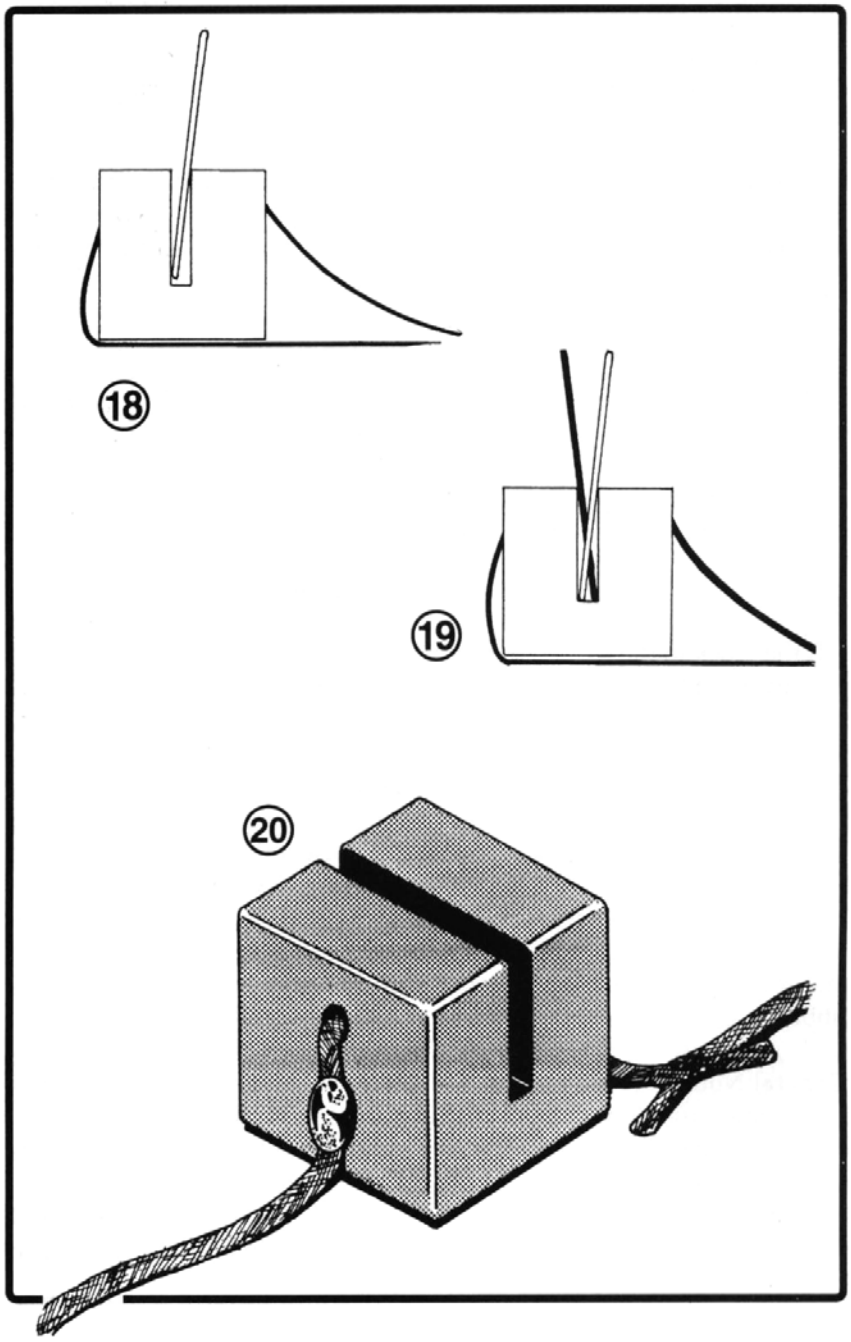
The ribbon should always be pulled back through the hole; the reverse action of setting the apparatus. Don't attempt to free the ribbon via the slot. If you take a look at 12 you'll understand why the ribbon becomes twisted and appreciate why the ring must be released correctly. If you go about releasing the ring in a haphazard manner you can end up with something resembling the Gordian Knot.



Two rings are supplied with this apparatus, one plain and one coloured. Let's imagine that the plain ring is the one sitting in the block. Take the block in the left hand, thumb at the nearside, fingers at the outer side, and raise it from the table. Tell the spectators that the ribbon is threaded through the block and through the ring. With the right hand pull

the ring a short distance upwards from the slot. The ring will drag the ribbon with it and the spectators can see that the ring is genuinely threaded (16).

Ask a spectator to hold the ring as you use your free hand to pull the ribbon back inside the block, grasping the ribbon at the near side of the block and drawing it out of the hole (17). Continue to do this, the spectator lowering the ring back into the slot as the ribbon becomes taught. Don't pull the ribbon too far, the shuttle must remain at the far side of the block so that the set-up remains the same as it was when you started.



The spectator releases the ring and you table the block, the ribbon trapped beneath it, as it was at the start (15).

Tip the ring forward in the slot (18). Bring out the coloured ring and have it examined by the spectator. Take the coloured ring and press it down into the slot so that it is on the nearside of the first ring. Tip the coloured ring towards you (19).

Now you can offer the spectators a choice. Ask them do they want you to exchange the rings so that the coloured ring is threaded on the ribbon and the plain ring is free, or, do they want both rings on the ribbon? Whatever their choice you proceed as follows:

To Exchange the Position of the Rings

With the finger of one hand pressing down on the coloured ring, roll the plain ring along the slot until it emerges at the side of the block, free from the ribbon. Hand the ring to a spectator. Next lift the coloured ring from the slot, making the shuttle complete its task, and reveal that this ring is now threaded on the ribbon.

To Link Both Rings on the Ribbon

Lift the block in the left hand, pressing on the top of the plain ring with the left forefinger to keep it in place. The right hand takes hold of the coloured ring and pulls it from the slot, revealing it to be threaded onto the ribbon. Table the block and lift the metal ring with the left hand. This ring is also threaded onto the ribbon.

Notes on the two ring effect: Instead of performing the ring exchange by first releasing one ring and then showing that the other has penetrated, you may prefer to lift both rings, together, from the slot. When the block is hanging from the ribbon you separate the rings showing that the original has been released and the second ring is now on the ribbon.

General Notes: Although the method is entirely mechanical, practise and proper attention to detail will pay dividends. This involves understanding exactly why the trick works and being able to set the apparatus correctly. I carry the Blockbuster in its set-up state, the shuttle in position and the rest of the ribbon wound around the block. The block and the rings are carried in a small velvet bag and this helps keep the ribbon in position. On taking the block from the bag you have only to unwind the ribbon and place the apparatus on the table to begin to be ready to perform the effect.

I have also pinned the ribbon to the block so that it is obvious that the ribbon is not meant to be removed. This is done by driving a drawing pin (tack) through the section of ribbon which is permanently fixed to the block and pinning it to that side of the block (20). It won't make any difference to the performance but it helps explain why you do not remove the ribbon from the block and perhaps hand it out for examination.

I also discovered that you can start the effect by penetrating a ring onto the ribbon and then immediately perform the second effect, the ring exchange. This involves wrapping the ribbon around the shuttle twice when you originally set the apparatus up. Unfortunately the trick doesn't always work because the extra thickness of ribbon prevents the shuttle travelling smoothly through the hole. Sometimes it works

sometimes it doesn't. If you have the inclination to experiment, a thinner shuttle and ribbon would probably make it 100 per cent. Let me know if you manage to perfect it.