

TRY OUR  
CURRENT  
ONLINE CONTEST AT  
gamesmagazine-online.com

PUZZLES TO SNACK ON

NOVEMBER 2011

# GAMES



**Twisted!**



Travel along the pretzel from Start to Finish. You may change directions at intersections, but you must pass over colored dots of condiments in the order red-green-yellow-red-green-yellow, etc.

ANSWER, PAGE 58

\$4.95 US  
Display Until 10/25/2011

0 7 1896 46444 3

# THE IMPOSSIBLE BOTTLE MAN



By Tom Cutrofello

**J**eff Scanlan has been a full-time professional magician for 19 years. He's known as America's Sports Magician because he's one of the only magicians who combines magic with sports props and themes. He performs for Fortune 500 companies, professional sports teams, athletes, and owners. Some of his clients include the Chicago Cubs, Chicago White Sox, Chicago Bulls, Milwaukee Brewers, Milwaukee Bucks, San Antonio Spurs, Johnson & Johnson Co., Coors Brewing, and Converse Shoes. He's been fortunate to have performed private parties for such sports celebrities as Scottie Pippen, Harry Caray, Mike Ditka, Bud Selig, and Dennis Rodman. However, puzzle aficionados know Jeff as the man who creates amazing Impossible Bottles.

The art of Impossible Bottles involves placing decks of cards, padlocks, tennis balls, and other objects into ordinary glass bottles through the neck. The bottles are not cut, heated, cooled, or formed around the object. In fact, the bottles are not manipulated in any way. Impossible Bottles fall into the puzzle category of: How was this made? Consider the jug shown at right. There are 17 different decks of playing cards (still sealed with their original cellophane wrapping on), with a 2" brass padlock ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " larger than the jug opening) hanging from a wood stopper. A piece of rope passes through the top of the stopper and is tied directly to the jug itself. This bottle was one of Jeff's most difficult and time-consuming creations.

## HARRY ENG

Making an Impossible Bottle takes creativity, persistence, dexterity, and lots of time. The secrets to this art form



are closely guarded. In December 1991 GAMES, the grandmaster of Impossible Bottles—Harry Eng—revealed one of his tricks for inserting a coin. First, get a small vise that can be easily disassembled. Bend the coin so that it fits through the bottle's neck. Then, insert the pieces of the vise. With long thin tweezers, reassemble the vise inside the bottle and use it to unbend the coin!

In 1996, Jeff read the September issue of *Magic* magazine, which featured an article about the recent passing of Harry Eng. "I saw the pictures of his bottles and told myself I have to learn how he created those bottles. I did some thinking, broke many bottles, ruined hundreds of decks of cards, and eventually figured out how to get a bar of Lava soap (still in the wrapping) into a bottle.

"A short time later a friend of mine came to me and showed me a deck of cards inside a bottle. I told him that I would teach him how to do the bar of soap if he taught me how to put the deck into the bottle. He agreed. From that point on I was hooked. I spent hours upon hours putting decks of cards, still sealed and in their original cellophane wrapping, into bottles. Each time I would work on how to make the deck look better. I contacted anyone who might have known anything about Harry to ask questions. Eventually, I became good friends with several people in the puzzle community who had known Harry well. They wouldn't tell me anything about how he created his bottles, but they would let me know if I was on the right track to accomplishing a new Impossible Bottle."

When Harry Eng passed away, he took most of his secrets with him. Nobody knows how he got a block of wood into a jug. But Jeff is always thinking about it. He has spent many hours reading anything about Harry Eng, his bottles, and his life. He's duplicated six of Harry's bottles, and continues to work on more, but without the knots. That was Harry's signature. Harry always had some sort of knot, small or large, in his bottles. "I haven't even come close to being able to make rope knots like Mr. Eng," Jeff says. His signature is putting wooden stoppers with a wood cross member (as in the bottom left bottle on the next page) inside his bottles.

There are only about 12 people in the world who have mastered the art of making Impossible Bottles. Jeff is considered to be among the very best.

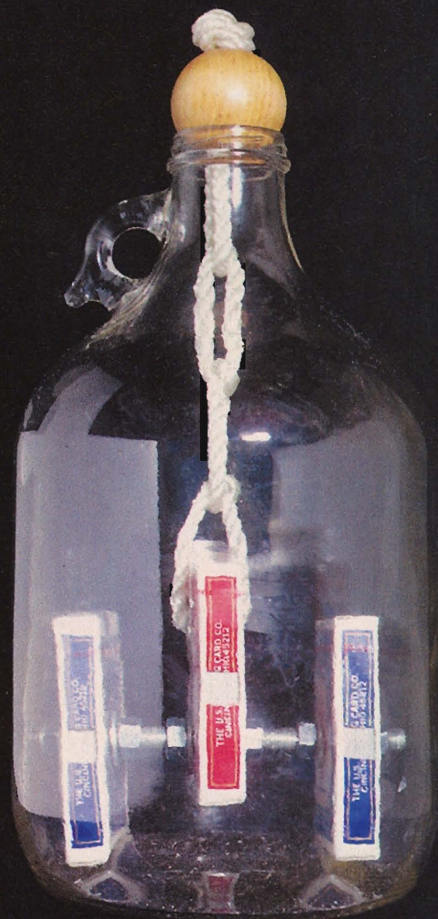
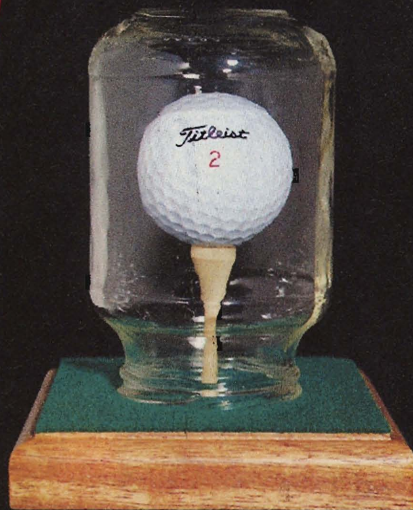


Currently, Jeff offers more than 15 different bottles for sale. His artistry has garnered him clients throughout the world.

Jeff explains his early interest in magical things: "I always enjoyed being creative and doing things that kept my mind stimulated. I enjoyed, and still do, putting together jigsaw puzzles. The other kind of puzzles I always found fascinating is bar bets—for example, placing a dime into a shot glass, then placing a quarter over the dime and asking someone if they can remove the dime before the quarter without touching either the glass or the coins. Or lining up five coins in a row (quarter, penny, quarter, penny, quarter) and then asking someone if they can get the coins to end up quarter, quarter, quarter, penny, penny in just three moves. The stipulations: Move two coins each time, and the coins must be next to each other and not lifted. Eventually, on my own, I would start adding more coins, and would try to figure out the absolute minimum number of moves in order to get all the corresponding coins next to each other. I know, a little quirky. But, those are the type of things I did. I always enjoyed challenging myself."

Jeff uses all kinds of bottles, but the Mystic Juice bottle was one of his most widely used. Unfortunately, the company redesigned the Mystic Juice bottle, making it taller and more slender. Because of the design change, the new Mystic bottles were too narrow to hold a deck of cards. When this happened, Jeff contacted the Mystic Juice brand manager to see if he could get any of the original style of bottle. A search of the warehouse only turned up 11 bottles, forcing Jeff to find another bottle type. Luckily, Jeff became friends with the vice president of a bottle distributor, who supplies him with four different styles of bottles for free. In return, Jeff has made her several Impossible Bottles, which she enjoys showing to her clients.

Creating Impossible Bottles is ever thought-provoking. After a challenge from a friend, Jeff spent 11 months trying to figure out how to seal a wine bottle with the cork and have the corkscrew inside the bottle while it was also twisted into the cork itself. "It took about a month and a half to figure out 80 percent of the puzzle. Nine and a half months for the remaining 20 percent," says Scanlan.





## LEARNING THE ART OF IMPOSSIBLE BOTTLES

Marc Adams, the founder of the Marc Adams School of Woodworking in Franklin, Indiana (<http://marcadams.com>), accidentally discovered Jeff's Impossible Bottle artwork. He was so impressed with his work that he invited him to come and teach a class on Impossible Bottle making. Nine students took the course, which met six to seven hours a day for five days in July 2010.

Although it was a very basic course, it ended up being a huge success. Marc Adams was so impressed that he decided not only to have Jeff return as an instructor in July of 2012 but to take the course himself.

Before Jeff left the school, Marc commissioned Jeff to make a bottle incorporating a small wooden marking

gauge that he had provided and the slogan "Layout Is Everything" written somewhere on the bottle. Four months later Jeff not only incorporated the things Marc asked for, but he also introduced two new bottle techniques that had never been performed before.

Marc wrote in a thank-you note, "Jeff, I just wanted to drop you a quick note to tell you that the bottle you made for me is astonishing! Who would have thought it would be possible to stick my marking gauge in a bottle, through a sealed deck of cards, locked in place, suspended in the bottle by a clasped chain with a mahogany stopper that has a cross member that locks the cork stopper tightly in place. There is no way possible to get items in or out. If I didn't know better I would say that is impossible, but with you it is truly 'magical.' As the

director of the largest Woodworking school in the world, I have made it my job to find the best craftsman of modern time. I did a lot of research before I contacted you, with everyone pointing to you as the best. Well they were right, no questions, end of story. You have a very special gift. Keep up the great work."

Jeff's bottle magic only continues to gain prominence. In January 2011, two of Jeff's bottle creations went on permanent display in the library of the world-famous Magic Castle in Hollywood, California; and the College of Magic, in Cape Town, South Africa, has commissioned Jeff to make four bottles that will be displayed at the College's new museum that is currently under construction. For more about Jeff Scanlan and his creations, visit <http://bottlemagic.com> and <http://jeffscanlan.com>. 