

The Telegraph

The many faces of Mark Pinksten



NASHUA – Some may know him as Indiana Jones or The Doctor; others may know him as Newt Scamander or perhaps even the shark from Jaws.

But to his friends, comedian, cosplayer and magician Mark Pinksten is simply himself.

Teaching computer and information security during the week, Pinksten uses his weekends to transform into any number of characters, while

performing at conventions and events all across the country in his Magic and Pop Culture show.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Pinksten was a big name in Nashua's performance circuit, working as a magician. He started out filling in at a neighborhood kid's birthday party, but before long, his magic career "*exploded*," he said.

Suddenly, he was surrounded by doves and rabbits, performing at five birthday parties per weekend.



He advanced beyond birthday shows (vowing he was done with them after a 12-year-old raked her nails across his arm, leaving deep scratches) and soon was performing at city events such as the Holiday Stroll, state fairs and even a mall tour.

However, trying to raise a family on a magician's salary, and with a wife who did not like him spending so much time performing, Pinksten

announced his retirement from magic in 2002 in front of a crowd of hundreds of spectators.

He went into security to make more money, but as his marriage broke apart and his kids grew up, boredom overcame him.

Sitting on the couch a few years ago, he looked across the room and noticed his stormtrooper mask sitting on a shelf. He stared at it and thought, “*that would look good with a straight jacket.*”

While this may seem odd or out of the blue to most, Pinksten has a history with the white jackets. Before his retirement, Pinksten had a “*Straight Jacket of Death*” routine, during which he taped a plastic bag over his head and tried to get out of a straight jacket to remove the bag. During a show at Holman Stadium, however, something went wrong and he sucked the bag into his mouth. He was choking on stage, fearing he might die, until he worked his way out of the restraints and freed himself. The audience was none the wiser, but Pinksten put the routine away after that.

Now, though, he thought, with a stormtrooper mask (and therefore far less risk of suffocation), he could have something different, something he had not seen before – a blend of magic and pop culture.

Pinksten is the self-proclaimed “*king of over delivery,*” meaning that when someone suggests “*Let’s do a show,*” his first instinct, he said, is to say, “*Let’s do nine.*”

Committed to this idea of blending comedy, pop culture and magic, he bought back 80 percent of his old tricks, purchased a TARDIS (a fictional time machine), found a benefit in Massachusetts, volunteered, hired a camera crew to film it, and then sent a tape of his performance to various conventions.

The calls started coming and they have not stopped since.

Pinksten has performed at more than 30 conventions in the last couple of years and has no plans of slowing down any time soon. The last two months, he said, have been the busiest of his life.

This weekend, he will perform five shows at Fan Expo Boston, formerly Boston Comic Con. Next month, he will perform six at Granite Con in Manchester.

Pinksten is the only person he knows who is combining magic and pop culture in this way.

“The magician market is changing,” he said, “And I invented something. When you invent something, you have no competitors.”

He has a Harry Potter-themed show and a Doctor Who-themed show, as well as an *“All Fandom”* show which combines, as the name suggests, several different *“fandoms.”* He starts his show as The Doctor from Dr. Who and features magic associated with science. Then, he becomes Newt Scamander from *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (in the Harry Potter Universe) with animal-themed tricks and comedy; Professor Clutterbuck, also from Harry Potter, although a character of his own creation, with more wand and spell oriented magic, such a levitation. Then, he becomes Indiana Jones, finding a bunch of treasures; Doc Brown from *Back to the Future* with a *“real”* flux capacitor that fluxes. He even transforms into a shark, although this weekend he plans to change it to a velociraptor to go with a Jurassic Park theme.

A fan of all the characters he plays, admitting to being somewhat of *“a nerd,”* Pinksten most enjoyed cosplaying as Lord High President Rassilon, a relatively obscure villain from Doctor Who, which he said nobody ever recognizes anywhere other than a Who-specific convention.

“Playing evil guys is so much more fun,” he said.

In fact, one of his favorite memories from his show was when he stood

on top of the seats in the (empty) front row of a theater, wielding a running chainsaw and terrifying his audience, which included a mother with arms outstretched to shield her two children.

“That just about made my life,” he recalled, laughing.

Immediately after, the song *“Everything is Awesome”* from the Lego Movie started playing, diffusing the tension.

Whether he is levitating someone, cutting someone in half or performing a simple coin trick, *“The most fun I have is that hour I’m on stage,”* he said.

Among the audience, Pinksten is gregarious, a performer. Even around his friends, he is *“always on.”* But behind the scenes in social situations, he described himself as a *“hermit,”* or the guy hiding *“behind the plant.”*

This is part of why he loves his job: he not only gets to go to conventions and get paid for it, but he is constantly getting out of his shell and meeting new people with similar interests and, if he is lucky, similar levels of energy.

Magic and comedy have fascinated him since childhood, from the time he made a theater in the basement and charged the neighborhood kids to see his show.

Sometimes, he regrets his decision to retire, now more than 15 years ago, because he feels he could have taken it pretty far.

That only reinforces the reason he started this new adventure.

“I needed to perform,” he added.

For more information on Pinksten’s shows, visit magicpopculture.com or email mark@magicpopculture.com.