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## The Best Card Trick for Laymen

A question that often arises whenever I give a lecture or full day seminar is how to choose one's repertoire. Very simple: just use the best tricks. But how do we know what the best tricks are, you might ask? Well, again very simple: Ask the Masters.

Few will argue that Dai Vernon was one of the greatest Masters of magic in general and of card magic in particular. Actually I would even put it this way: There might be quite a few people who don't believe in God, but there are practically no magicians who don't believe in Vernon.

Let me therefore draw your attention to a statement Dai Vernon made and which has been documented on p. 130 of Stephen Minch's *The Vernon Chronicles – The Lost Inner Secrets Volume One*. I quote: «Lewis Ganson once asked Mr. Vernon what he felt was the most effective card trick for laymen. 'Matching the Cards' was Mr. Vernon's choice.» End of quote.

### The Effect

Before going any further let me briefly explain the effect on the audience for those among my readers who are not familiar with the title: The performer offers to cut to three cards of the same value as a prediction card previously put aside. Although he succeeds in cutting to three Sevens, the prediction card proves to be a King. Failing several times to transform the King into a Seven, at the snap of his fingers the Sevens change to match the King thus producing four Kings.

### The Genesis

The first time I came across an explanation of this extraordinary card trick was in Lewis Ganson's *Inner Secrets of Card Magic* (p. 24) and later in *Dai Vernon's Tribute to Nate Leipzig* (p. 167). I had it in my active repertoire for many years and then somehow forgot it, replacing it with much inferior items, because as most youngsters past and present I thought that this is old stuff and moved on to more complicated, confusing, less magical and therefore inferior card tricks.

But reading Vernon's opinion above of what is the best card trick for laymen, can anyone afford not to have this trick in his or her repertoire? Nonetheless I can't remember seeing anyone perform this particular trick in the past ten years. One reason is that magic tricks, like fashions, come and go. Another might be in the set-up required. Although this is fairly small and consists of merely seven cards, these cards need to be placed on top, bottom and in the approximate center of the deck – to arrive at this in an elegant manner is no mean achievement.

After coming up, adopting, trying and tossing dozens of approaches back and forth, several years ago I have finally come up with what I have found to be a very practical and efficient method. This is the first time I publish it, having previously shown it to only a few close friends. When I showed it to Johnny Thompson on his visit to Switzerland in December 2003, not only was he very complimentary about it, he also showed me some previously unreleased details of handling he credited to Dai Vernon and which I will pass on to you with his blessings in the following description.

The method is completely impromptu and can be done at any time during the performance, even with a borrowed deck. The body of the trick is exactly Vernon's, but with my idea of how to get into the set-up from a shuffled deck and a few hitherto unpublished details of handling. Vernon, the genius, probably had dozens of superior methods, but until we find them, you might want to try the following:

## **Matching the Cards — The Details of Handling**

Hand the deck to a spectator for shuffling and cutting. As you take it back face down, holding it in dealing position, obtain a little finger break under the top card. Seize the deck with the right hand in end grip and turn it face up like the page of a book, the right side acting as fulcrum.

This will result in the previously top card being diagonally side-jogged to the right, allowing you to glimpse its inner right index under cover of the protecting right hand, still arched over the deck. The slightly protruding card is immediately squared with the deck. I found the first record of this practical and versatile technique in Masatoshi Furota's book *The Thoughts of Tenkai* where it is applied to a packet trick titled «Flying Queens» (p. 46), a predecessor of what should become later known as *Homing Card*, so brilliantly interpreted by Dutch Master Magician Fred Kaps. (This isn't the trick from *Stars of Magic* by Francis Carlyle, but the homonymous effect described by Jean Hugard in his booklet *Show Stoppers* in 1948.) Let's assume the glimpsed card to be a spot card, e.g. the Seven of Spades.

Start spreading the deck face up between your hands, tossing the four Kings face up on the table as you come to them; in the process imperceptibly cull any two of the remaining three Sevens to the back of the spread. Put the balance of the deck aside face down – it will have three Sevens on top unbeknownst to the audience.

If at the beginning you glimpse a court card instead of a spot card, take out any four spot cards, such as the Aces. The idea is to take out a set of four-of-a-kind that contrasts with the triplet on top of the deck.

We will assume that the Kings have been segregated from the deck. Use them in a short but good trick such as Vernon's *Twisting the Aces* or *Dr. Daley's Last Trick*. May I suggest you look up either of the original handlings and do it exactly as written up, don't use any of the so-called «improved» versions. (He, who says to have improved Vernon or Daley, is like saying he improved Beethoven or Mozart – he's either a fool or a liar.)

## **Running up the Set-up**

When you have finished, replace the Kings face down on the deck, which you then immediately seize and false shuffle. In this particular case I suggest using an Overhand Injog Shuffle like this: in the first action of the shuffle chop off about a third of the deck, run the next card singly injogging it and then shuffle off. Square the deck in dealing position, thereby taking a break below the injogged card first with the right thumb, and then transferring it to the left little finger. Cut about half the cards above the break on the table, cut all the cards above the break on top of the tabled third and eventually drop the last third on top.

The arrangement of seven cards is still on top of the face down deck. We are going to use a little ruse to alternate the Sevens and the Kings plus one single Overhand Shuffle to position

two of these cards on top, two on bottom and three in the approximate center of the deck. This is as simple as it sounds complicated. Follow along with cards in hands.

Explain, «Most of you will have had an uncle or friend who did those card tricks, where you had to deal cards to never end.» To illustrate this comment, which has to be delivered good-naturedly, because you don't want to offend uncles and friends of your audience, deal the first three cards of the deck face down in a row from left to right. Repeat by dealing another three cards individually from left to right on top of the already tabled cards. Check: the first pair on your left has two Kings, the second a King with a Seven on top, and the third also a King with a Seven on top. Continue, «I won't do any of that.» As you are saying this, pick up the pair furthest on your right, gently slap it on top of the pair to the left of it, pick up all four cards and put them on the last pair to the left. Put all cards back on the balance. From top down your arrangement now reads: 7, K, 7, K, K, K, 7 balance of the deck.

The procedure just used is a clever way of obtaining a set-up which otherwise would require more technical work than most people would want or even would be able to do. This is a polyvalent principle, which can be varied and expanded. Oh, should I mention that it is another of those brilliant Vernon thoughts, the sum of which makes a genius? You may want to compare Vernon's original handling in Stephen Minch's *The Vernon Chronicles Volume 1*, «A Match Made in Cincinnati», p. 139. The handling just described has the advantage that it can be memorized very easily: you deal from left to right twice, then you gather the pairs from right (where you end the last deal) to left and put everything back on top of the deck. That's as easy as eating a piece of Swiss chocolate.

Immediately follow up with what should look like one single innocent Overhand Shuffle: Run the first two cards into the left hand, lift them behind the balance in the right hand as you run another two cards into the left hand. Chop off about half of the balance onto the two cards already in your left hand, drop the second half of the balance on top, leaving you with two cards in the right hand previously lifted – drop them on top of all thus ending one single Overhand Shuffle.

Check: On top you have a King and a Seven, in the approximate center two Kings and a Seven and on the bottom a King and a Seven - everything is in place as it is needed. And if you don't believe it, repeat the previous deal and shuffle leaving the cards of the arrangement face-up.

## **Determining the Prediction Card**

We now need to obtain a break between the two Kings in the center of the deck. I'm very much indebted to the Great Tomsoni, Johnny Thompson, one of the last Masters of Classic Magic, with whom I have had quite a few marvelous sessions, for pointing out to me the following clever and hitherto unpublished Vernon strategy to get into the required situation.

Explain, «I will take out a specific card from the deck, which is going to be a prediction card.» As you are saying this, hold the deck face down in dealing position and riffle the inner end up with your right thumb, looking at the indexes as they fly by. The text gives you an excellent reason to do this openly and at your own rhythm. Since you know the approximate location of the Seven and the two Kings, it will be easy: riffle until you see a first King - the preceding Seven will «warn» you – drop it off and pick up a break between this King and the next King as you riffle the cards off. I insist that this is very easy to do, since you have at least *four* assisting features: 1. you know the approximate location of the triplet, 2. you have a Seven as your first «warning», 3. you have the following King as your second «warning», 4. you can look and riffle slowly.

As soon as you've picked up your break look up and end the riffle, seemingly changing your mind, «Actually we are going to do it more challenging. You, Sir, will determine the prediction card.» Turn to a spectator and using the Riffle Force, start riffing the cards until he calls 'stop', and then separate the deck at the break. Ask the spectator whether he wants the top

card of the lower half or the bottom card of the upper half. «It can be any card – it doesn't matter.» It took me some time to understand how powerful and deceptive this apparently minute detail of giving a «second free choice» is. To the spectator this sounds as if he could have taken *any* card, not just one of two, and that's amazing. Again, this is a polyvalent idea that can be adapted, expanded and used in other contexts. Place the requested card aside face down and then restore the balance in such a way, that a break is held between the King (above) and the Seven (below).

(For the Riffle Force I suggest you use my handling described in *Card College Volume 1*, p. 224 with the wonderful detail by Rainer Teschner. Study the description carefully as most people I've seen don't do it correctly – just do what the text says.)

## **The Theme**

Explain the premise that you want to cut to three cards of the same value as the prediction card you don't even know.

Spread through the deck face down and separate it at the break as you come to it. Still holding the upper packet slightly spread in your right hand, use it to flip the top card of the lower packet face up – a Seven will be seen. Turn it face down again using the right hand spread, thereby secretly adding its lower card on top. Immediately thumb it off face down on the table, clearly separated from the prediction. This is «The Card-Spread Switch» (*Card College 4*, p. 814) and is a variation of the «Merlin Tip-Over Addition», which can be used instead, of course.

For the next card do a false cut and double turnover the top two cards as one displaying a second Seven – this apparently confirms that you are on the right way. Turn the double again face down and deal the top card on the table next to the first. Apparently these are two Sevens, in reality they are two Kings.

For the third card we will use another unpublished handling that was shown to me by Johnny Thompson and which I reveal here for the first time with his blessing. We are basically using a Hindu Shuffle Force in combination with a Second Deal. To this I will add a subtlety: Start a Hindu Shuffle but pull off a small packet from the bottom in the first shuffle action instead of from the top; as you do this look at the audience. Look back at the cards in your hand and immediately continue the shuffle by regularly pulling off two packets from the top. Stop the shuffle and display the bottom card explaining, «As I shuffle the cards please say stop whenever you like. Regardless of where you stop, there will always be a different card.» As you say this, you have a chance to do what you just did twice more, i.e. look up, pull off a small packet from the bottom, continue by pulling off a few packets from the top, stop the shuffle and show another card on bottom. Since you've already shuffled off to many cards to make the choice statistically relevant, drop the remaining cards from your right hand on those in your left. Start a new Hindu Shuffle and this time simply stop where the spectator says so and show the bottom card of the right hand packet in the standard Hindu Shuffle Force manner – another Seven.

Table the packet in the left hand, transfer the packet in the right hand to the left hand which receives it face up in dealing position. This is done as an in-transit action so that the right forefinger can point to the Seven as the main action. You can now either use the Glide or a Second Deal to apparently place the Seven, but really the King, on the two face down cards already on the table. The latter was the method favored by the Professor as Ganson and Minch mention and Thompson confirms. The cover is very good, because you just showed the Seven, which is a good effect and the reaction to it will serve as an excellent psychological misdirection. Bring the left packet to an almost vertical position as the right hand reaches to apparently take the Seven on the face. Do a Strike or Push-off Second Deal, taking the second card – the King – back towards the audience and continue turning it face down as you put it on the two cards already on the table. Simultaneously the left hand

also turns inward and back up, placing its packet face down on the packet just tabled a few seconds ago. Go through this whole action without doing the sleight and you will understand its Gestalt – which means how it should look to the audience.

## **The Failure & the Magical Recovery**

Apparently you have succeeded and it only remains to confirm your success by turning the prediction card face up. Do so by turning it first with the face towards the audience and then so that you can see it, too.

In order for the psychological construction of this moment to work in favor of the dramatic construction, it is important that the audience sees the card before you do. This creates a believable moment of conflict, which of course is the whole *raison d'être* of your magical powers, namely to rectify a mishap in life. My mentor Juan Tamariz always explains how to act when an apparent mistake happens: the answer is don't act. Don't say anything. If you act and say something it normally doesn't sound right. Except if you are an excellent actor. But in my experience those who are professional actors are not good magicians and those who are good magicians are not professional actors (with the usual exception to the rule, of course). Therefore just shut up for a few seconds. Do not say anything but simply stare at the cards. This is the most believable way to act a mistake without trying to act. (If I get enough solicitations I will tell you what I think about the interpretation of the Robert-Houdin quote that a magician is an actor playing the part of a magician – I tell you in advance that I think it is a gross misinterpretation of an intelligent thought).

Back to the trick: in my opinion the most logical thing to do now is to try to change the King by magic into a Seven. Try to do it twice and but it won't work. Look at the three tabled cards, look at the audience and then say, «It's impossible to change the King.» Pause. «But it is a miracle to change the Sevens.» Hold the King face up in your left hand as the right hand takes the first tabled card, *snaps it* and turns it face up to reveal the first Seven has changed into a King. Place the King next to the first already in your left hand. Take the next face down card, *snap it*, turn it over and add it to the fanned Kings in your left hand. Eventually *snap* and show the last Seven to have turned into the fourth King. Transfer it to your left hand which now holds all four Kings fanned and in a vertical position towards the audience – an excellent applause queue. Don't leave out the *snaps*, as they are the magic ritual, which transforms the cards.

## **Lest I forget ...**

The first effect takes place when you display the second Seven. If you would like the display of the first Seven to be an effect already, you could do it by passing your hand over the face down prediction card and saying something like, «I sense this card to be a spot card, odd, a five, no wait, maybe a seven.» Then spread the deck between your hands and turn the first Seven face up. Now finding this first Seven is perceived as an effect and you can then continue as described.

By using the above handling and holding the final fan in a vertical position this trick even becomes suitable for parlor or stage situation – and this is the way the great Nate Leipzig as well as Paul Rosini used it. And if you place the cards in glasses rather than dropping them on the table, you have an exquisite stand-up piece of card magic.

To end on a historical note: the plot of «Matching the Cards» can already be found in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* from 1584, using an interesting handling of the Glide.

(A version of this essay was published in November 2005 in Roberto Giobbi's column «The Genii Session» in *Genii Magazine*.)