Whit Haydn and Chef Anton

Present

The School for Scoundrels

Notes
on
Three-Card Monte

Written by
Whit Haydn

Featuring: Gazzo on the London Monte Mob

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The **School for Scoundrels** would like to thank all the magicians and swindlers who have ever added to our knowledge of the history and strategy of these fascinating games. We apologize for any omissions or errors in attributing credit for any ideas or moves. We will be happy to correct all that are brought to our attention.

We thank all the magicians who have taken the **School for Scoundrels** course at the **Magic Castle** over the past several years. Their questions about these scams, and unique insights have taught us a lot.

But we specially wanted to mention all the help and advice we received from the late Hal Hale, the librarian at the **Magic Castle**, who would always turn down thanks and say, "Just make sure the library gets a copy."

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To our wives Nancy and Bonnie:

We are eternally thankful. Without your love, support, help and patience this project could never have reached completion. To you two wonderful ladies, who somehow managed to fall in love with scoundrels, we dedicate these notes.

Whit Haydn and Chef Anton
The School for Scoundrels

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Preface

The **School for Scoundrels Notes** are a series of three books that were designed as class notes for a four-week course taught at the **Magic Castle**. This course has been taught once a year since 1996 for magician members of the Castle as part of the **Magic University**. We will continue to expand, correct and update these notes from time to time.

In the **School for Scoundrels**, we cover the history, psychology and application to magic of the three major street cons—*fast and loose*, *three-card monte*, and *the shell game*. The practitioners of these ancient swindles have much to teach us. They were experts not only at fooling people with a combination of sleight-of-hand and psychology, but were entertainers who knew how draw a crowd, hook their interest, and hold them spell-bound for the duration of their scam.

There is much we can learn from these con artists that is valuable for our own work as entertainers. The games are covered in sufficient depth so that the student will be knowledgeable in the history, parlance, subterfuges, and sleight-of-hand involved in each of these swindles.

We want to cover the history of these scams as accurately as possible, even though we are not historians or scholars in the field. We are more interested in the color that these stories from history provide for our performances than we are in the settling of any serious questions about how the games evolved. Still, we find the history of these short-con swindles to be endlessly fascinating and want to encourage further study by sharing our love for this subject with as many as possible.

The exhibition of these games holds a great deal of interest for any audience, and can be exciting and fun for the performer as well. In each book in this series we intend to provide as much as possible in the way of original source material which can aid in the construction of entertaining presentations. We also provide the student with original, audience-tested routines for each of these classic scams, complete with patter and presentation points. These can be used as they are, or can become a resource for creating new routines.

But the central focus of our course is not on learning to perform these con games for entertainment. Our real purpose is to study the grifters' techniques for the sake of gaining a better understanding of our own art and improving our presentation of magic. The con man faces many of the same challenges in the pursuit of his goals as the magician does in his. Much more than the average magician, the grifter must analyze his performance from a spectator's point of view. The con man must really get inside his subject's head. He must manipulate both the victim's thinking and his emotional responses.

Jean Hugard once expressed concern about what was then the new interest in Erdnase and the techniques of the professional card cheats. He was afraid that magicians would start thinking like card mechanics instead of like magicians. Much good has come from the work of Vernon, Marlo, and others who have mined the rich resources of the gambling world. This helped correct the over-dependence on broad misdirection and unnatural actions that were common in early close-up magic.

But what Hugard saw, and we think he was prophetic, was that the interest in gambling artifice could lead the magician into a way of thinking that was biased toward invisibility of method, and that ignored the importance of manipulating the thinking and responses of the spectator.

The card cheat seeks to be invisible; he doesn't want to attract attention. He seeks to confine each and every action to the natural procedure of the game. He doesn't want an audience, and he doesn't seek to engage the other people at the table intellectually.

Much of modern close-up magic is derived from this model, and this can lead to performances that are more a display of skill than a creation of magic. The audience may be completely fooled, but they just don't seem to care. This sort of art lacks the mental engagement with the audience that is the hallmark of great magic.

The street-swindler offers us a much better model for the performance of magic than the card mechanic. The operator of these scams has to know how to reel a crowd in and hold its attention. He must disarm the natural defenses of its members. He uses hooks and come-ons to keep them interested. He baits them psychologically. He engages the audience in an intellectual contest and sets traps for them that will cost them everything in their wallets.

In short, the con artist of the streets is a performer, an actor, and an entertainer who hides the sword of his purpose behind a cape of geniality, humor, and character. The magician can learn a lot from the grifter's technique and even more importantly, from his *focus*.

For the con man knows exactly what he is about and what he is trying to accomplish. He knows what he wants from the spectator. Magicians must emulate this same sort of focus in order to truly move people. Our study of street swindling can lead us into a better understanding of what we are trying to accomplish as magicians and how best to go about it.

In the process of writing books such as these, we must also consider the possibility that some might use the information contained inside for purposes other than entertainment. As a matter of fact, these three books form a practical handbook for larceny.

To those who might be considering such an idea we only have a few mild warnings. Aside from the obvious dangers faced by the grifter—of jail time and the threat of violence—most of the really clever con men we will study died broke. Money that was gained so effortlessly had no meaning for these people, and it was usually thrown away hand over fist.

The grift entails a life of rootless, stressful existence. And even worse, it is in the long run monotonous. The same handful of scripts is played out again and again, day after day. Others will rarely appreciate the work and craft put into this profession. What art there is in it, is sold for whatever money can be had that day. It is ultimately a desperate and unfulfilling way to live.

Most of the great short-con practitioners justified what they did to others by claiming that they were teaching a lesson to dishonest people. The games were always "a case of the biter being bitten." It was only when the sucker sought to take unfair advantage of the con artist that he became a potential victim.

There is more than a little truth to this, and it is hard to have much sympathy for the mark. It is his own hidden weaknesses—his avarice, cupidity and ego—that cause him to lose his money at one of these games. Since he has allowed himself to be drawn into a battle of wits, he should be prepared to lose as well as win. Anyone who falls for one of these ancient tricks should at least walk away with an expensive lesson about himself and about the ways of the world. But that is not the way it works.

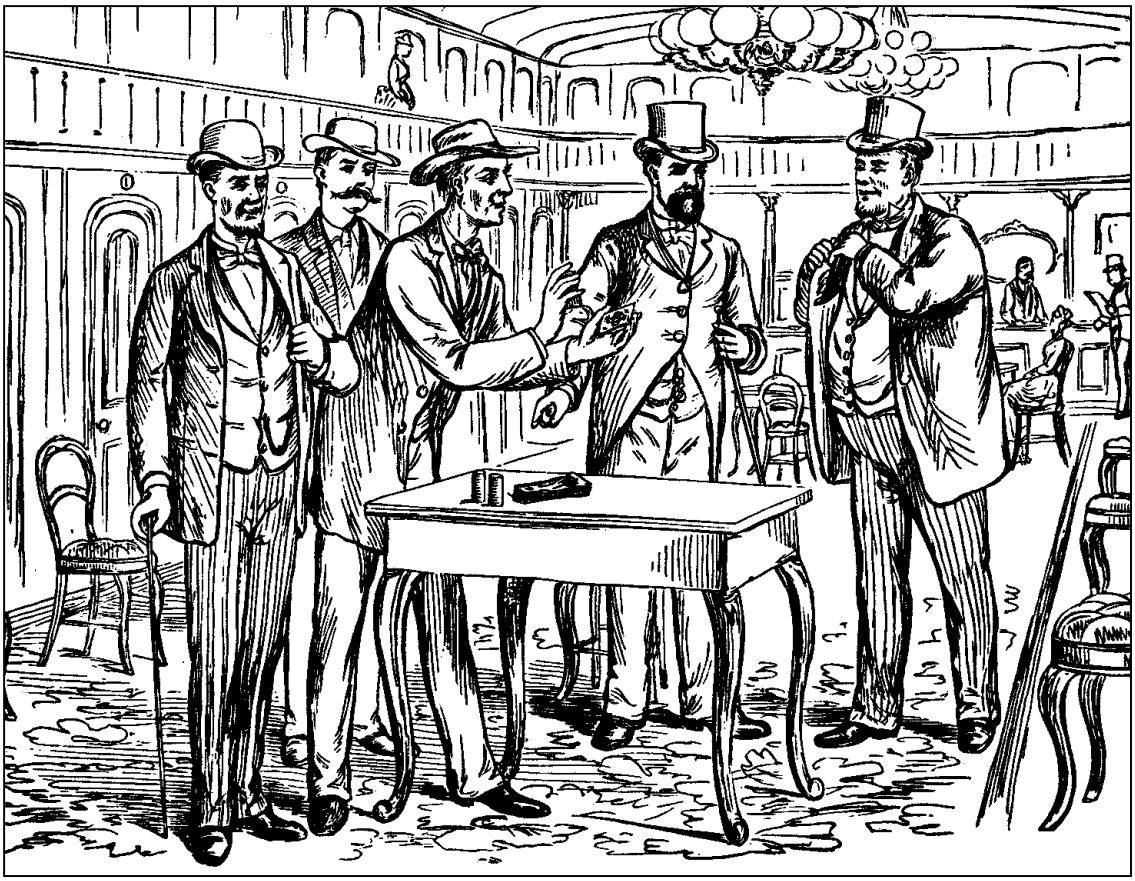
Experience has always shown that teaching a sucker a lesson is next to impossible. You "can't wise up a chump." Every swindler knows the truth of this, and in his heart the swindler knows that his "lessons" are almost always useless. He isn't really offering a service to the world anyway. The grifter's true purpose is to take the mark's money and in the process prime his own ego—and he knows it.

We believe that we are all brothers and sisters on this planet. It is not our job to entrap our fellow travelers and expose their weaknesses for good or for ill. Life is hard enough as it is, and it seems to us that it is better lived sharing what we've learned, having fun together, and helping each other along the journey.

—Whit Haydn and Chef Anton. June 2001.

Three-Card Monte

Three-Card Monte
History



Canada Bill Jones (ready to throw the cards) and George Devol (pointing) about to trim a sucker at three-card monte.
From George Devol's **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**.

Of the three major street scams—*fast and loose*, *the shell game*, and *three-card monte*—the monte is the youngest as well as the best known. There are two basic ways of playing three-card monte, either *open* or *closed*. Open monte is played—with or without shills—on the streets, in a tavern, or in any situation where the suckers can be lured by the play of the game itself. Closed monte is more of a traditional confidence game, perhaps one of the original confidence games, in which an outside man (the steerer) identifies a promising sucker, gains his confidence, and then leads him to the inside man (the dealer) whereupon the two of them proceed to clean out the victim's wallet.

Many authors contend that three-card monte first appeared in Mexico. The name "monte" certainly came from Mexico—from the once prominent Mexican card game *Monte*. But this game had no real relationship with the swindle three-card monte. The sharpers of the American west just borrowed the name "monte"—a game that greenhorns would have heard of, but never seen—to give an air of legitimacy to their swindle. The actual origin of the three-card trick is obscure, but we believe it to be much earlier than generally assumed.

Gypsy mountebanks drifted into Europe sometime during the fourteenth century. They brought with them various types of "take-down" games. One of these may be the forerunner of the three-card trick. According to David Maurer, the picaresque literature of seventeenth-century Spain shows the basic principles of all modern short-con games in operation. He suggests that most of these principles were a thousand years old when the Spaniards began to apply them, and this is certainly possible.

M.P. Adams in **The Rich Uncle from Fiji** claims the three-card trick was played on the streets of Paris at a period prior to 1795: "…the Parisian trickster, squatting in a side street, manipulated the three cards on the city flag-stones, to the confusion of the French 'pigeon' of the day." Unfortunately he didn't offer any reference for this assertion. But this early date may be supported in a small way by Robert-Houdin.

In his book **Card Sharpers** (**Les Tricheries des Grecs**), first published in 1861, Robert-Houdin describes the three-card trick as played by street swindlers he had seen in years past. At the time he was writing, the game had disappeared from Parisian streets because of a police ban. This seems to indicate that the game had been played for some time by a number of practitioners (it had to become known well enough to have been banned). This places the game in Paris at the least in the mid eighteen-fifties.

Earlier in the book Robert-Houdin describes the ruse used by French con men called "playing the peasant" which is identical to the "rube act" practiced in the United States. He also mentions thimblerig as the English equivalent to the three-card game, and seems to think that the three-card trick is a swindle of the "Greeks," or sharpers, of Paris. He is not aware of any American origin. He describes the game just as it is played here in the United States, but thrown in a less sophisticated manner—e.g., the cards are flat, not bridged, and are held by the long sides rather than the short ends as in the United States.

Maskelyne has an almost identical picture of the way the cards are held by English con artists in **Sharps and Flats** published in 1894. This may be a copy of Houdin's illustration—the drawings are so similar. Nevertheless, both Robert-Houdin and Maskelyne were obviously familiar with the game and both usually paid close attention to detail, so these probably represented the way they had seen the game played. Maskelyne does seem to believe the game was an American import, but offers no evidence.

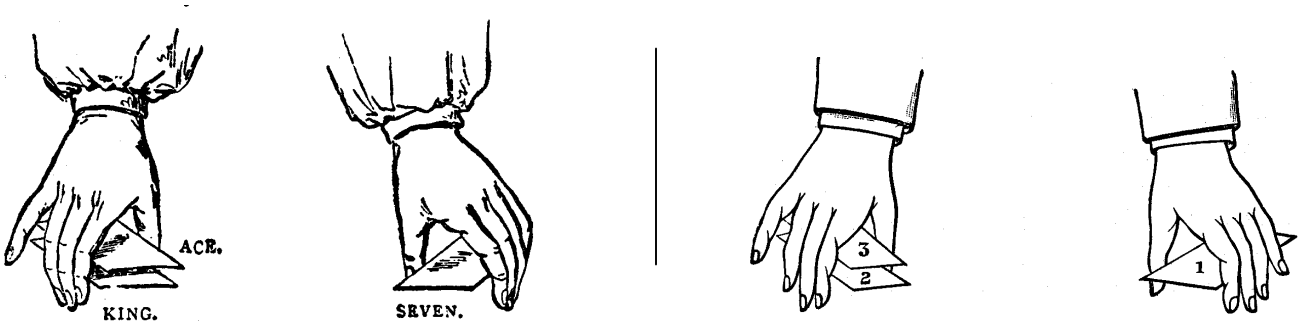


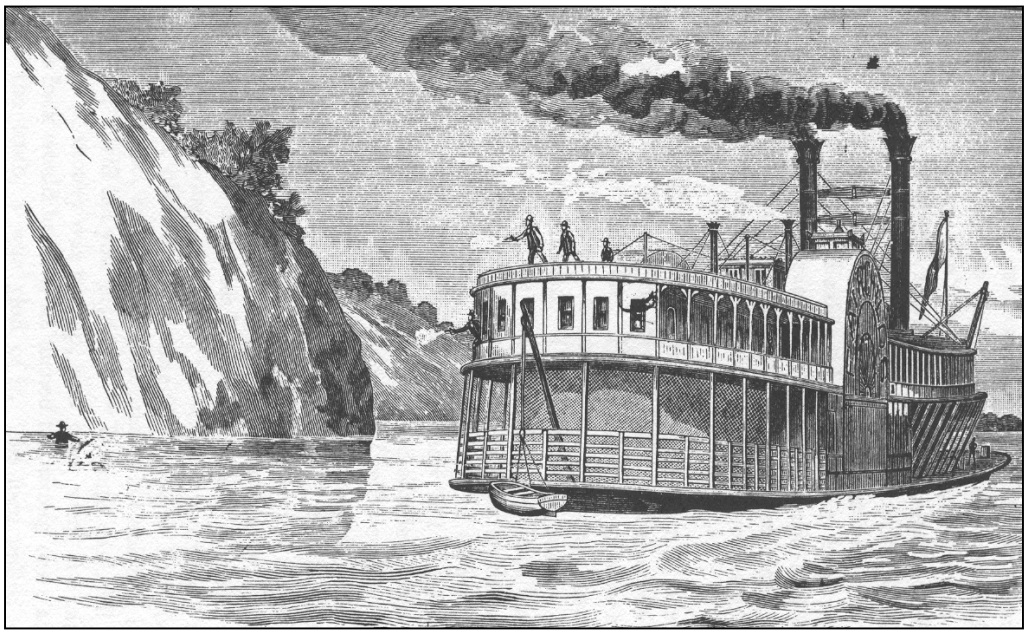
Illustration on the left is from Houdin's book **Card Sharpers**, 1860; the right from John Nevil Maskelyne's **Sharps and Flats**, 1894. In both illustrations, the cards are held by the long edges rather than the short edges as in the United States.

We don't know at what point the cards were first bridged, but Adams describes it as an American practice and even details the *flip-change* as early as 1911. The earliest prints of Devol and Canada Bill seem to show the cards held by the short ends. The method shown in the illustrations above has in the twentieth century been almost universally replaced with the superior method that we believe was developed at a fairly early period in the United States. If the Europeans had learned the game from American swindlers, they would probably have used the same method.

Further, because of the great opportunity for big scores on the American steamboats, the more relaxed law enforcement here, and the general flow of immigration from, rather than to Europe, it seems to us more likely that street con men familiar with such a game would have moved here from Europe—not the other way around. Also, the terminology of the swindlers in France and England is different from that of their American counterparts, e.g. the old English term for shill is "bonnet" which probably came from the French "bonneteur." (see Glossary).

We suspect that the game is much older than normally acknowledged, but there is little proof. It is assuredly younger than the "cups and balls" and its descendant thimblerig—from which it probably was developed. It would not have arisen until playing cards came into common usage among the lower classes. Our best guess is that instead of coming from Mexico or the United States, the three-card trick we know today probably originated in France sometime during the reign of Louis XV; although it is possible it is even older.

As far as we know, there are no practitioners of the three-card trick in Europe who rival the success and notoriety of the nineteenth-century American masters of this scam. We would love to be shown wrong here. Perhaps those with better resources will be able to help clarify some of these questions on the game's early origins. It may be that we will never know much more about the early development of the swindle.



George Devol jumping ship to avoid being shot by irate victims of the Monte.
From **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**.

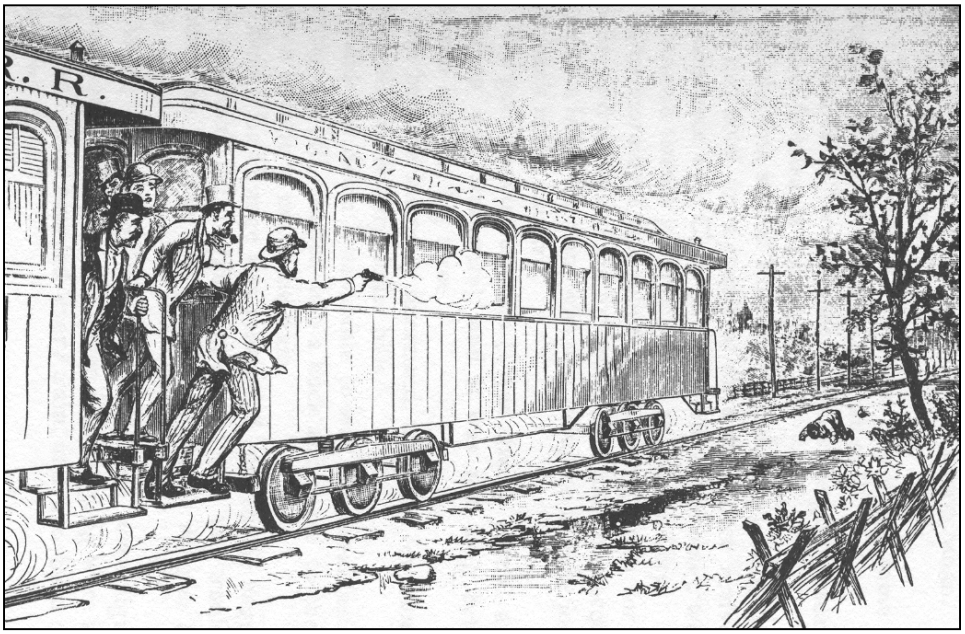
We do know that three-card monte first appeared in the United States during the early 1830's, when it was introduced into New Orleans from Texas, then a part of Mexico. One of the first known operators was a Louisianan named Phillips. The New Orleans police put an abrupt end to his career in 1837, when he was sent to prison for two years after he fleeced a citizen of $700. The monte throwers were frightened out of New Orleans, and from there they spread out and seemingly infested all of the American West:

> Although they never gained much of a foothold in the East, from about 1845 to the early 1880's a horde of these rascals, shrewd, slick, glib and dexterous, crowded the steamboats and railroad trains and swarmed in the towns of the South and West.
>
> —Herbert Asbury, **Sucker's Progress**

One of the first of these sharpers to work the steamboats was Bill Rollins. George Devol says that he was the first man he ever saw throw the cards, and the best except for Canada Bill Jones. Rollins was followed by men such as "Rattlesnake Jack" McGee (who earned his nickname as a youth catching rattlesnakes back in western Virginia), Charley Bush, Jew Mose, High Miller, Ephraim "Eph" Holland (who later became a prominent politician in Cincinnati), and Posey Jeffers—a great operator and roper who never lived down the time he once won $10,000 at monte that turned out to be counterfeit.

A lot of genuine money went to these riverboat gamblers as well. Canada Bill Jones, George Devol, Tom Brown, and Holly Chapell were monte operators who traveled together on the Red, Ohio and Mississippi rivers for some three years in the early 1850's, and by the end of that time, each man's share of the profits came to $240,000. Within a year each of the four were broke again, having gambled everything away at Faro or short cards.

During and after the Civil War, the steamboats were no longer a profitable source of income for the gamblers. They adapted their scams to new situations, and moved west, following the railway workers and mining camps. They plied their craft on the trains and later in the larger cities at racetracks and in monte "stores." But the days of the western gambler were numbered. In the 1880's, as frontier society began to change and become more civilized, the golden age of the sure-thing gambler began to fade. Anti-gambling and temperance sentiments were growing fast, and gaining momentum even in the west.



George Devol jumping from a train to avoid being shot by irate victims of the Monte.
From **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**.

A number of these sharpers—including Canada Bill Jones, George Devol, Doc Baggs, John Bull, Ben Marks and Frank Tarbeaux—made fortunes playing three-card monte between 1840 and 1890. Because several gamblers—including Mason Long, Devol and Tarbeaux—published their life stories we have a pretty clear idea of how the scam was played in the period.

As an aside, we have not found any evidence of women throwing three-card monte during the frontier period, but there were several famous women gamblers who dealt and played both Faro and short cards with the best of the men players, including La Tules, "Madame Mustache" Dumont, Poker Alice, Kitty "The Schemer" Le Roy, and "Calamity Jane" Canary. It would be surprising if they were not familiar with, and perhaps adept at this staple of the profession.

In those days, it was not uncommon for men to carry large sums of cash with them on steamboats and in later years, trains. They were either coming home from selling goods or stock, or on their way West to begin businesses. Their money was the target for which these con artists had been sharpening their skills. Even a few army paymasters were clipped. Many a game involved single bets of from two thousand to ten thousand dollars.

Gambling was the favorite pastime of men in this early period, and professional gamblers were considered reputable men. The individual was supposed to be responsible for himself, and if a man was stupid enough to get involved in a game of cards with a professional, no one had much sympathy for him. In his saloon in Denver, Soapy Smith had a sign over the staircase to his crooked gambling rooms, "Caveat Emptor." If a man were to get in a fight with a dangerous gunman, then "he went and got hisself killed." The spirit of the times was "get while the getting is good." Everyone was out to make a fortune, and short of robbery and murder, almost anything went. It was, after all, the era of the "Robber Barons," and the little guys were following the flawed moral compass of their "betters."

In this period, short-con games such as the shell game and three-card monte were known as *skin-games* or *sure-thing* games. A sure-thing gambler never relied on luck, but he didn't consider himself a cheat either. These men would insist that they were just "trimming a sucker," by which they meant they were teaching a lesson to a dishonest person who had tried to cheat them. The sucker always thinks he has an unfair advantage over the operator:

> When a sucker sees a corner turned up, or a little spot on a card in three-card monte, he does not know that it was done for the purpose of making him think he has the advantage. He thinks, of course, the player does not see it, and he is in such a hurry to get out his money that he often cuts or tears his clothes…After they have put up their money and turned the card, they see that the mark was put there for a purpose. Then they are mad, because they are beat at their own game. They begin to kick, and want their money back, but they would not have thought of such a thing had they won the money from a blind man, for they did think he must be nearly blind, or he could have seen the mark on the winning card. They expected to rob a blind man, and got left. I never had any sympathy for them, and I would fight before I would give them back one cent. It is a good lesson for a dishonest man to be caught by some trick, and I always did like to teach it.
>
> —George Devol, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**

Devol claims that in his whole career he never returned a sucker's money under threat or pressure. It was quite a career. His book, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi** describes in a series of vignettes how the game was played both on Mississippi steamboats in the eighteen forties and fifties, and later, after the civil war, on railroad trains in the West.

George Devol was born in 1829 in Ohio. He ran away from home at the age of ten as a cabin boy on a riverboat—the *Wacousta*. After seeing the high lifestyle of the professional gamblers that steamed up and down the river, Devol devoted himself to the study of cheating. By the time Devol was in his teens, he could deal bottoms and seconds, palm cards, and recover the cut. He first made big money at the age of seventeen. It was the time of the Mexican War, and he trimmed soldiers on the Rio Grande.

He was a big man, weighing over two hundred pounds. He had a large head and big hands, and claimed that he could "hold one deck in the palm of my hand and shuffle up another." Devol loved to fight, and often used his remarkably thick forehead to butt his opponents senseless. He never hesitated to pull a gun, accept a fair fight or—if necessary—run. Some of the exigencies of his profession are made clear in his autobiography as he explains:

> I don't know (and I guess I never will while I'm alive) just how thick my old skull is, but I do know that it is pretty thick, or it would have been cracked many years ago, for I have been struck some terrible blows on my head with iron dray-pins, pokers, clubs, stone-coal, and bowlders, which would have split any man's skull wide open unless it was pretty thick. Doctors have often told me that my skull was nearly an inch in thickness over my forehead.
>
> —George Devol, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**

George Devol made and spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars in the years preceding the Civil War, working mainly on steamboats in the South. His partners included Bill Rollins, Canada Bill Jones, Edward "Dad" Ryan, Big Alexander, Tom Brown, Posey Jeffers and Holly Chapell.

George Devol
From **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**.

George Devol, like so many other of the brotherhood, was addicted to gambling. The money he made on three-card monte was quickly lost at the Faro tables. And that could be a lot of money indeed:

> At the expiration of four years, Alexander showed me receipts for money he had sent to his home in Dover, Ky., amounting to $44,000, and he was not a stingy man, either; for he was a good liver and dresser, and I have known him often to spend as much as $200 in one night for wine, etc. He has often talked to me about playing the bank, and wanted me to quit it; and I can now see if I had taken his advice I might have been worth forty time $44,000.
>
> —George Devol, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**

Around 1850, Canada Bill and George Devol taught a young African-American boy named Pinchback to throw monte. He had been working for Devol and his team as a body servant, and was known as "Pinch." Pinch was an intelligent and charming free black Devol had picked up in a steamboat barbershop where the boy had been shining shoes. His real name was Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinhback, and he was born in Macon Georgia in 1837 (just two years before Devol ran away from his home to become a ship's cabin boy). Pinch's father was a white planter and his mother a slave whom the planter freed before the child was born. When the planter died, the family moved to Ohio for fear that white relatives might try to put them back under slavery. Young Pinchback became a steward on the steamboats plying the Mississippi, Missouri and Red rivers.

Devol and the other sharpers tutored Pinch on the intricacies of their trade, and soon while Devol and his partners were fleecing the white folks in the saloon with monte, faro and poker, the boy was up on deck roping in the black deckhands with a chuck-a-luck game. In later years Pinch continued to do very well for himself, and used the money he saved from sure-thing gambling to finance a political career. Like Devol and the others, he quit the river soon after the Civil War began, and in 1862 he ran the Confederate blockade at Yazoo City, and reached New Orleans soon after the capture of the city by Farragut. He raised a company of black volunteers for the North, called the Corps d'Afrique. When he encountered racial discrimination in the service, however, he resigned his captain's commission. Pinch

immediately rose to a position of prominence among the blacks, and after the War he organized the Fourth Ward Republican Club and became a member of his party's state committee.

Thereafter, he was increasingly important in carpetbag affairs. In 1868 he was elected to the state Senate and in 1871 was chosen Lieutenant Governor to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Oscar J. Dunn. He was acting governor of Louisiana from December 9, 1872 to January 13, 1873, during the impeachment of Governor H. C. Warmoth, and in 1873 was elected to the United States Senate. The Senate, however, after three years of debate refused to seat him—supposedly because of voting irregularities but most probably because of race—though they offered him the pay and mileage of a senator.

Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback

He never forgot his friends among the gamblers, and once, while occupying the governor's chair, he was able to have Devol as a guest at the Governor's mansion and help him out of a scrape involving a New Orleans Police Commissioner whom Devol had beaten out of $800 playing three-card monte. Pinchback helped establish *Southern University* when, in the Constitutional Convention of 1879, he pushed for the creation of a college for blacks in Louisiana.

Pinchback and his family moved to Washington and then New York where he was a Federal Marshal. At the age of 50 he decided to take up a new profession and entered Straight College, New Orleans, to study law. He was subsequently admitted to the bar. Disillusioned with the outcome of Reconstruction and the return to power of the traditional white hierarchy, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he remained active in politics. There he took in his daughter and her son after she was abandoned by her husband. He helped raise his grandson, who became the celebrated idealist poet, philosopher and novelist of the Harlem Rennaissance, Jean Toomer. Pinchback died in 1921, and is buried in Metairie.

Devol headed west after the war and became part of the army of skin game artists working Hell-on-Wheels—the entertainment tents that followed the workers who laid the Union Pacific railway. Prostitution, gambling, variety entertainment and liquor were among the surest ways to make a lot of money quickly, but the sure-thing was surest of all. Sometimes the monte was played at a table in the gambling tents just like a casino game. In the early 1870's, Devol worked the trains between Cheyenne and Omaha, and between Omaha and Kansas City. His partners from the south were Canada Bill, Sherman Thurston, Jew Mose and Dad Ryan. They competed against, and sometimes teamed up with westerners like John Bull, Ben Marks, Cowboy Tripp, Doc Baggs, and Frank Tarbeaux. By the mid-seventies, the rail officials received hundreds of complaints from passengers who had been bilked by these men. The game was so popular that gambler's supply houses, like E. N. Grandines in New York City, would supply three-card monte tickets at $1.00 a pack and $8.00 a dozen—along with their stripped or marked poker cards and gimmicked Faro boxes. A set of monte tickets consisted of three cards, usually including a boy playing with a hoop, an old woman, and a man.

George Devol and Jew Mose were working the Cheyenne to Omaha train when Devol picked up a man on the sleeper and beat him out of $1,200. It turned out that he was one of the directors of the road. As soon as he reached Omaha, the outraged official had handbills printed and hung up in the cars that not only prohibited gambling, but also threatened to fire any conductor permitting the game to take place on his train. The railroads sent in Pinkerton agents to watch for the best known of the fraternity. The great days of the railroad gamblers were over. Devol quit the profession in 1886, at his new wife's insistence. The last years of his life were spent peddling copies of his autobiography. During his forty years as a gambler he estimated he won over two million dollars. He died in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1903, virtually penniless.

Canada Bill Jones was born in a gypsy tent in Yorkshire, England. He moved to Canada where he learned his trade from Dick Cady, a veteran three-card monte player. By the time he left Canada for the rich pickings in the pre-war South, Bill was an expert at the game. Two decades of experience on the southern rivers, and Canada Bill became the greatest monte sharp to ever "pitch the broads." Canada Bill is credited with inventing the "rube act," but this is probably false. The "rube act" is actually a very ancient dodge that dates back at least to the sixteenth century in Spain. It was known as "playing the peasant." It is generally accepted that Canada Bill is the one who applied the "rube act" to the three-card monte and introduced it in this form to America:

> Canada Bill was a character one might travel the length and breadth of the land and never see his match, or run across his equal. Imagine a medium-sized, chicken-headed, tow-haired sort of a man with mild blue eyes, and a mouth nearly from ear to ear, who walked with a shuffling, half-apologetic sort of a gait, and who, when his countenance was in repose, resembled an idiot. For hours he would sit in his chair, twisting his hair in little ringlets…His clothes were always several sizes too large, and his face was as smooth as a woman's and never had a particle of hair on it. Canada was a slick one. He had a squeaking, boyish voice, and awkward, gawky manners, and a way of asking fool questions and putting on a good natured sort of a grin, that led everybody to believe that he was the rankest kind of a sucker—the greenest sort of a country jake. Woe to the man who picked him up, though.
>
> —George Devol, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**

It is said that Canada Bill was one of the few men who could display the monte cards, or tickets as they were called, and in the act of throwing them down on the table, palm the winning card and ring in a third loser card—cutting the chances of the suckers down to nil. This ability is not mentioned by Devol, and may be a fabrication on the part of someone who did not understand the actual working of the game. In one story in Devol's book, a man does manage to pick the right card and Canada Bill is forced to pay out (as it turned out this was a setup, part of a trick played on Jones by Devol).

Canada Bill Jones

Canada Bill's makeup for the "Rube Act"

During the harness races in Utica, New York in 1876, Mason Long once capped for Canada Bill's monte store—a saloon that fronted for his three-card monte game operating in the back room. His description of the event is included in the Appendix. In his book, **Mason Long the Converted Gambler**, Long called Canada Bill "the most notorious and successful thief who ever operated in this country…whose name is familiar to every newspaper reader." After describing Bill's performance of the rube act, he goes on to say that Bill "squandered his money lavishly and drank himself to death in about a year after the incident I have related. He died a pauper."

Devol took great exception to Long's description of Canada Bill. As known to his long-time partner, Bill never weighed more than 130 pounds, rarely drank anything harder than cider, and was an unabashed coward. According to Devol, he "would not fight a woman if she said boo." Devol says that he was not a thief, but was honest to a fault, that he was a kind man in many ways, and he was noted for displays of charity to the unfortunate, even among gamblers—who as a class were noted for their generosity. Canada Bill liked to render service to someone in trouble, partly to improve his luck at the gaming tables—for "Bill's luck" he would call it:

> There never lived a better-hearted man. He was liberal to a fault. I have known him to turn back when we were on the street and give to some poor object we had passed. Many a time I have seen him walk up to a Sister of Charity and make her a present of as much as $50, when we would speak of it, he would say: "Well, George, they do a great deal for the poor, and I think they know better how to use the money than I do." Once I saw him win $200 from a man, and shortly after his little boy came running down the cabin, Bill called the boy up and handed him the $200 and told him to give it to his mother.
>
> —George Devol, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**

Bill needed luck because he was always a sucker for the short card games—poker, casino, and seven-up. Devol said that he had seen Bill play for seventy hours at a time, and had never known him to quit anything but a loser. It was so bad, that gamblers used to follow Bill from town to town just so they could take advantage of him. Devol says, "He loved gambling for its own sake, just as the moralists love virtue for its own sake."

One of the most famous and most often quoted of all gambling stories, is about the time that Canada Bill had to spend the night in Baton Rouge, and searched all over town until he finally found a Faro game in the back room of a barbershop. George Devol found him there and saw immediately that the dealer was cheating using a "two-card" (rigged) box. He begged Bill to quit the game. "Can't you see this game is crooked?" Devol asked. "Sure I know it, George," sighed Bill with resignation, "but it's the only game in town." The punch line of this story has become a familiar part of our popular culture.

When the Civil War ended the reign of the steamboats, Canada Bill moved onto the railroads out west. Devol, Doc Baggs and John Bull capped for Canada Bill on the trains out of Omaha. Baggs and Bull also acted as steerers for young Frank Tarbeaux who would play the same "rube act" that Canada Bill had created so many years before.

Canada Bill in a familiar pose—The "Rube Act." George Devol is pointing.

Canada Bill once wrote to the general superintendent of the Union Pacific Railroad. In his letter he offered $25,000 a year for the exclusive rights to run a three-card monte game on the trains. He promised to limit his victims to commercial travelers from Chicago and Methodist preachers. The railroad official politely declined the offer.

In the mid-seventies, as the railroads went the way of steamboats for the sharpers, Bill began a grand tour of racetracks around the country. He made so much money at monte and other swindles that he could have retired a dozen times. Unfortunately, Canada Bill couldn't stay away from Faro and short cards. This ironically confirms Bill's often quoted claim that "Suckers have no business with money, anyway."

Canada Bill Jones died in 1880 in Reading, Pennsylvania. He was destitute, and buried at public expense. One of the gamblers who stood by as they lowered Canada Bill into the ground offered to bet $1000 at two to one odds that Bill wasn't in the casket. There were no takers. One gambler within earshot said, "I've seen Bill get out of tighter holes than that before." When the western gambling fraternity learned of his death, a group of them from Chicago raised money among themselves to recompense the city of Reading for the funeral expenses, and had a gravestone erected for Canada Bill. But Canada Bill's real monument is his "rube act" creation—which proved so devastating a tool in the hands of the many sharpers who followed him.

Frank Tarbeaux was born at the site of present day Boulder, Colorado in 1852. He claimed to be the first white child born in Colorado. Young Frank fought Indians "before his voice changed" and killed his first man when only fourteen. He was making his way as a professional gambler by the age of eighteen. He worked the trains out of Omaha doing Bill's "rube act" when he was still in his early twenties.

Tarbeaux was the very model of the western gambler, and in fact, Sir Gilbert Parker and Frank Harris both wrote fictional works that were based on the character that they each had met in real life—Frank Tarbeaux:

> A striking, clean-shaven, good-looking man whose years it would be impossible to say, for he had no gray hair, and yet there was a look, not of age, but of long experience, in his face…It was a figure and a face not to be forgotten. There was a touch of the foreigner in his looks and yet he did not speak with an accent…It was a face that never wrinkled with emotion. Its only life was in the eyes and at the mouth and they were most expressive. He had the impassive look of a Jap and was vigilant in a curious, quiet way…It was to be said that he had not had complete social training, and yet he was well dressed and had dignity. I can say truthfully I never met a man with greater social gifts, although it was clear he had limited education…His charm lay in keen intelligence, a rare natural philosophy, and in humour of an original kind.
>
> —Sir Gilbert Parker, **Tarboe, the Story of a Life**

During his long life, Tarbeaux traveled extensively outside the United States, and claimed to have befriended many famous people including King Kalakaua of Hawaii, Oscar Wilde and Hadden Chambers. When he was seventy-seven in 1930, he gave his recollections to Donald Henderson Clarke and these were recorded in the book, **Autobiography of Frank Tarbeaux**.

Clarke described Tarbeaux as he was in his late seventies: "This amazing man still dresses like a beau, rides like a hero, and shoots like a demon. Doctors have told him that his physical condition is perfect."

Tarbeaux was one of the few really successful sharpers to retire comfortably and in good health. Another of these few was Tarbeaux's steerer on the trains, Charles "Doc" Baggs. Tarbeaux records that as late as 1930, at the age of ninety-three, Baggs was in good health and living quite comfortably under another name on an estate located near New York City. This is all the more surprising because Doc Baggs had won, and then at the Faro table lost, several fortunes in his checkered career.

Baggs was one of "the sharpest of the sharp," and became one of the most notorious con men in an era of fabulous skin-game artists. He graduated from monte steerer to full-fledged bunco operator. He claimed to have been arrested "about a thousand times," but was never convicted of anything.

Once, when arrested by lawman Michael Spangler on a charge of "bunco-steering," Doc acted as his own attorney. "Gentlemen," he told the court, "no such term as 'bunco-steerer' appears in the statutes defining criminal acts. How could I possibly be guilty of a charge not prohibited by the statutes?" Doc Baggs even produced a huge dictionary, thumbed through it and then announced that it didn't even contain the term. This completely baffled the court, and the judge dismissed the charge.

Baggs once declared, "I defy the newspapers to put their hands on a single man I ever beat that was not financially able to stand it. I am emotionally insane. When I see anyone looking in a jewelry store thinking how they would like to get away with the diamonds, an irresistible desire comes over me to skin them. I don't drink, smoke, chew, or cheat poor people, I pay my debts."

Doc Baggs was always among the best dressed of a fancy-dressing crowd. He never quarreled or used loud words. He was soft-voiced, gentle-mannered, and always wore a smile. He was a consummate

actor, equally convincing as a ranchman, stockman, miner, banker, minister or laborer. Any theater property man would be proud to own a costume wardrobe as extensive as Doc's vast array of disguises.

Charles "Doc" Baggs

He is credited with inventing the "gold brick" confidence game, with which he managed to fleece many wealthy and prominent people. He extended and improved the concept of the monte store that was invented by his friend and fellow traveler Ben Marks—an invention that revolutionized con games and became the basis for the so-called "big store," the foundation of all the big cons. Before we describe Doc Baggs' store, we need to talk a bit about the origins of the monte store.

Benjamin Marks was born in Little Fort, Illinois (later renamed Waukegan) in 1848. At the age of thirteen he served as a dispatch bearer in the Civil War. During the year 1867, at the age of nineteen, he worked his way westward to Cheyenne, Wyoming, from a home in Council Bluffs, Iowa—dealing three-card monte on a board suspended from his shoulders.

Marks—like Doc Baggs, Canada Bill Jones, Frank Tarbeaux and the others with whom he teamed—called himself a gambler, but was in fact a confidence man. His object was to steer his victim into a trap, lead him to believe he was on the inside of a "sure thing," and then milk him dry.

But in Cheyenne, during the days of the Hell-on-Wheels horde, he found the competition in the gambling tents too tough. He hit upon an idea that, according to Maurer, was "to revolutionize the grift, an idea which was to become the backbone of all big-time confidence games."

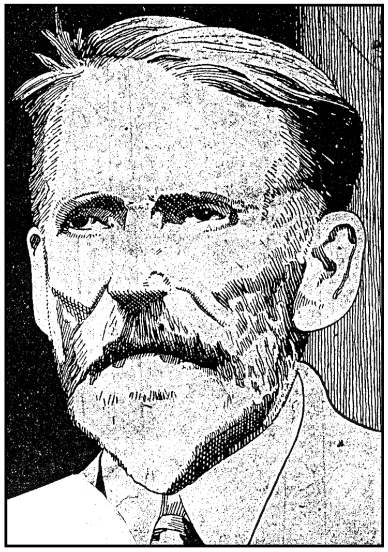
Ben Marks posted a sign on a Cheyenne building reading, "The Dollar Store." The store's window exhibited all sorts of goods, each item worth much more than a dollar. Inside, Marks and his cohorts would wait. Bargain hunters and "something-for-nothing chumps" soon appeared.

Once inside, the sucker's interest was switched from the dollar bargains to a three-card monte game being dealt on a wooden barrel. Since no customer ever left the monte game with any money in his pocket, none of the merchandise was ever sold.

These monte stores caught on, and were copied all over the country. Steerers and ropers would operate at hotels and the rail and stage terminals to find suckers and bring them along to the bargain store. In an ironic development, one such store in Chicago eventually found itself making more money selling items for a dollar than running scams, and the owner founded a national chain of legitimate department stores.

Scores of monte stores in cities throughout the West, South and Mid-West continued their profitable operations up until the First World War. After the turn of the century, a well-known swindler named Farmer Brown made hundreds of thousands of dollars in Chicago monte-stores, mostly from ranchers and farmers who came into town.

Doc Baggs used the concept of the store to promote the sell of his gold bricks. He and others also used the "mitt" store in which a sucker was engaged in a game of poker and cold-decked. Ben Marks developed the "race" and "fight" stores where they set up rigged foot and horse races or prizefights, and offered the sucker an inside track on a "sure thing."



Ben Marks

Ben Marks had considerable success in his various con games, but was later in life to become an excellent businessman. He was considered a political heavy, a man who could make or break a man politically. He was well-respected as a "gambler and philosopher, and a good judge of men, land and horses."

Marks, like Tarbeaux said of his gambling cronies, was a "pretty hard baby." According to W.R. Mynster, Council Bluffs ministers prone to sermons about prostitution, temperance and gambling, would get a kindly visit from Ben who would give them a long talking-to with occasional quotes from the scripture and one assumes liberal financial contributions. On occasion, he offered more tough stuff.

With "plain or garden reformers," Marks recommended that the aggrieved go to the office of the reformer "…and be sure you are alone. Then tell him that you are sorry he is acting the way he is, and if

he acts different it will be to his advantage—if not it's apt to cause a lot of trouble. If he gets big and blustery, just get up and go over and shove a gun in his ribs. Then tell him in plainer and more forceful language. Promise to come back if necessary, and if he has been a sinner tell him about it. Be convincing, and prod him a bit with the barrel."

Ben and Mary had a big three-story log farmhouse in Elks Grove just outside of Council Bluffs straddling the county line. The "Hog Ranch," as it was called, was not only their home but a well-known and popular casino and brothel—Mary was a successful madam and considerable character in her own right. The law officers of one county would raid the place to find everyone had moved to the other end of the room—across county lines and out of jurisdiction. This house still stands outside of town.

When he died, Marks had extensive properties of farmland in South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska. Like Doc Baggs and Frank Tarbeaux, he was one of the rare success stories in the con game business who did not throw everything away through high-living and gambling. Ben Marks and his wife Mary lived near Council Bluffs, Iowa until his death from liver failure in 1918. He was seventy-one years old.

Maurer writes about Ben Marks' contribution: "Thus, in a very crude form, developed what we know today as the 'big store'—the swanky gambling club or fake brokerage establishment in which the modern payoff or rag is played." The movie *The Sting* was based on this sort of "big store" con. Doc Baggs took the store concept to great heights.

Doc Baggs' "store" would be an office—elaborate and rich looking. It had the best obtainable in furnishings, with an immense safe that appeared to be built into the wall, its front flush with the far side of the main office. This safe was no less than seven feet square, and as the massive doors were left conveniently open, the viewer could see in its interior depths the shelving, boxes, and pigeonholes usual and customary in all such safes.

But this one was different. It was nothing but a cleverly executed painting. It consisted of a number of thin wooden panels about the size of a cigar-box lid; all joined together by a surface of silk upon which had been painted the safe—including the fancy curlicue lettering, delicate flowers, and elaborate emblems of the period. In the case of a police raid or other emergency, it could readily be ripped off the wall and carried into hiding folded under one arm.

Doc's heavy oak desk stood right in front of the safe, while in the forepart of the room, where the visitor would enter, were solid oak counters and a railing and gate of similar material. At least, so it looked. All of these could collapse for quick storage or convert into other completely different furnishings. Clerks seated on high stools behind these counters scribbled busily into papier-mâché ledgers. Glass panels in the doors leading out of the room bore such inscriptions as Private, Manager, Attorney and Actuary. These doors were constructed from movable partitions that could quickly disappear into hiding places inside the walls.

When a sucker returned to Doc's office with the sheriff in tow—perhaps in a matter of twenty minutes of being sheared—he would be confused when he burst through the door to find instead of an office, the plainly furnished interior of a lady's bedroom. A terrified Chinese servant would valiantly try to explain in his broken English, "Missy not here." The victim would end up foolishly trying to explain to the lawman—probably on Doc's payroll—that the brokerage office "must be around here somewhere."

Ben Marks' monte store is an example of closed monte. In a sense, the classic nineteenth-century version of the game as usually described is closed monte. Whether on the railroad train or in the monte store, the basic plan was for the steerer to look for a well-heeled victim, strike up a friendship, gain his confidence, and then bring him to the dealer so he can be taken for as much as possible in as quiet a way as possible. The type of character that could pull off this scam had to be a man of considerable ability and money himself. At least the bunco-steerers had to dress and act like men of substance if they were to gain the trust of a well-to-do victim. Doc Baggs and George Devol were perfect in this role.

Some steerers came from respectable families and had excellent educations. Clay Wilson, a native of Ohio, was famous for having shot and killed a well-known and dangerous gambler named Jim Moon. For years Wilson kept a secret diary of his activities as an outside man for John Bull, Doc Baggs, and later Soapy Smith in what his puzzled fraternity called mere "chicken scratches." The personal journal was eventually to end up in the hands of the police. After sending the book to a university, the authorities discovered that it had been written in perfect Sanskrit. Such proficiency in languages and other fields was not as uncommon among these con men as may be supposed.

Some ropers brought other skills. For instance, the "Reverend" Charles Bowers was a famous steerer whose demeanor was described by his peers as "piety personified." He was also acknowledged as a premier *grip-man*. This is the term for a steerer who, by many devious methods over the years, had learned the closely guarded handshakes of practically all fraternal orders and secret societies. When Bowers recognized a pin or emblem that would identify a mark as a member of the Masons or of the Odd Fellows, he would move in, give the secret sign and handshake, and soon he and his new-found "brother" would be moving in the direction of someone like Canada Bill Jones or Frank Tarbeaux.

So the type of play demanded by the closed monte would be very polished—it was "high class." The biographies of the gamblers we have mentioned usually spoke of this kind of game, because that is the way they played it. We know that during the same time the game was played in a different way. When poorer, less "respectable" swindlers tried their hand at a game like this, it was most likely played on the street or in or near the gambling tents. It was played for less money, and probably avoided the big stings to keep the heat off. We know that Ben Marks and others would play the game in this fashion on a board hanging from around their necks.

Journalist Albert D. Richardson describes open monte in the Denver House in 1859. He claims that the sharper, "in woolen shirt and jockey cap, drove a thriving business at three-card monte, which netted him about one hundred dollars a day." He went on to record the come-on spiel of this broad-tosser, a spiel that could be heard almost verbatim on city streets for over a hundred years:

> "Here you are, gentlemen; this ace of hearts is the winning card. Watch it closely. Follow it with your eye as I shuffle. Here it is, and now here, now here, and now—where? If you point it out the first time you win; but if you miss you lose. Here it is, you see; now watch it again. This ace of hearts, gentlemen, is the winning card. I take no bets from paupers, cripples, or orphan children. The ace of hearts. It is my regular trade, gentlemen, to move my hands quicker than your eyes. I always have two chances to your one. The ace of hearts. If your sight is quick enough, you beat me and I pay; if not, I beat you and take your money. The ace of hearts; who will go me twenty? It is very plain and simple, but you can't always tell. Here you are gentlemen; the ace, and the ace. Who will go me twenty dollars?"
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> —Richardson, Albert D., **Beyond the Mississippi**, pages 187-188

The three-card trick probably began as an open game on the streets of Paris. When Devol and others opened a game for all comers in the social hall of a steamship in the 1840's, this was open monte. As the steamships gave way to trains, closed monte became more dominant. When conditions favored open monte over closed monte—as they have in the twentieth century—it reappeared.

Today's version of open monte—the tightly orchestrated play which appeared on the streets of major cities around the world in the twenties and thirties—was also probably developed in the United States in the latter years of the nineteenth-century. It's not as well known and its origins are harder to trace because its practitioners were less known and less spectacularly successful. But the notorious "Soapy" Smith probably had a heavy influence on its development.

Jeff Smith first learned the shell game from a circus grifter named Clubfoot Hall, but his short and notorious career really took off in 1885 in Leadville, Colorado. There he apprenticed to "Old Man" Taylor, the foremost shell game operator of the day. Taylor was an expert pitchman, and the inventor of the soap swindle from which Jefferson Randolph Smith would get the nickname that would stick with him the rest of his life.

Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith

In the soap swindle, Soapy would present himself as a "soap salesman" on a city street corner. After extolling the many virtues of his wonderful soap, "made in my own laboratory from a secret formula," a number of bars of soap were unwrapped in front of the public, and then folded back up with $10, $20 and $50 dollar bills hidden in the paper wrappers. These were dropped into a suitcase with the ordinary soap bars (worth about a nickel), and the spectators were allowed to take their pick at $5.00 a bar. Only the five or six shills in the crowd ever seemed to find any money since Soapy had palmed off each bill in the act of folding the wrapper.

Soapy Smith would become one of the most famous and influential con men of the nineteenth century. He would take over the vice and gambling in whole towns—in Denver and Creede in Colorado, and later in Skagway, Alaska. Doc Baggs and George Devol would steer for Soapy for a time, but Soapy's main operating principle was the opposite of Baggs, Devol, and all those of the earlier period.

Instead of finding the richest victim and taking him for the most possible, Soapy liked to take average people for less money. He planned to make it up in volume. By lowering his profile in this way, he could work the same area for a long time, and didn't have to constantly "hit the road." He believed in organization, and wanted all the grifters in an area working together. This would be useful in dealing

with the authorities, many of who were already used to "arrangements" with various types of criminal gangs. He wanted to have the "fix" put in with the police, and if he didn't bother the local people, and avoided violence this was usually possible—for a price.

During his six-month reign as the uncrowned "King of Skagway," some of Soapy's gang of more than a hundred con men wintered in California before joining him in the Gold Rush boom of Alaska. They continued to practice every type of sharp play and swindle. Soapy even collected newspaper articles about his friends back in Los Angeles from an L. A. newspaper.

Members of Soapy's gang in Los Angeles—from 1890's newspaper clippings found in Soapy's scrapbook.

Soapy was an expert at calling and holding a crowd on the street, and at the patent medicine show technique of filling the crowd with shills and boosters. He combined all the best methods of the street pitchman and medicine show with the con-artistry of the shell game.

While Soapy is not known to have thrown three-card monte, he and his men certainly knew it and probably were very capable at it. We suspect that he had a heavy influence on the way con men later approached the three-card monte, and the modern "open monte" may resemble in many ways the shell game he would play on the streets of Denver or Creede. Certainly, he understood the right approach for the changing times, and many of the old masters worked for him at one time or another late in their careers. We will discuss Soapy, his gang and his methods at greater length in **The School for Scoundrels Notes on the *Shell Game***.

Citizen-vigilante Frank Reid and Jefferson Randolph Smith shot and killed each other on the Skagway docks in 1898. Soapy's gang fled in every direction. It is certain that these talented and finely trained con men carried on with his ideas as they scattered all across the country:

"The way of the transgressor is hard—to quit."
—Jefferson Randolph "Soapy" Smith

Closed Monte and Open Monte

As we have said, there are two types of monte. In the open monte, the game is played where it can draw a crowd. It is played sometimes with none, but usually with one to six shills who help to incite interest and set up the suckers. On a street corner, in a steamboat's social hall, or in a gambling tent, the operator and his shills cast a wide net to draw in anyone who wanders by. This game invites attention by its openness, and requires either a laissez-faire attitude from the authorities, or lookouts and a quick escape plan.

Closed monte is hidden away from the public. Usually involving only one steerer (the outside man), and the operator (the inside man), closed monte can be accomplished under the very nose of the authorities. George Devol and his partner fleeced a sucker with a suspicious railroad superintendent sitting right across the aisle from them:

> Just then the conductor came in, so the superintendent said to him: "Those d—d villains have played their games right under my very nose, beat these d—d fools out of over $1,000, and got off. Now, if any one comes into my office and tells me that our conductors are in with the d—d gamblers, I will take a club and knock his d—d brains out. You attend to your train hereafter, and let the d—d suckers take care of themselves."
>
> —George Devol, **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**

Closed monte takes place in a train, a monte store, or in the back room of a saloon. It takes more time than open monte, as the roper has to qualify a victim, take him to the inside man, and help set him up for the kill.

Generally, closed monte is best suited to situations in which there is plenty of leisure time and people carrying large sums of cash. It is also preferable over open monte when the authorities are alert and knowledgeable.

Tel Aviv, April 1987. Photograph by Ronald A. Wohl.

Open monte is the version most likely to be seen today, and can be seen anywhere in the world on street corners from Amsterdam to Jakarta. I have recent video taken by **School for Scoundrels** alumnus Bob Jablonski showing a three-card monte game operating on the streets of Kieva in ex-Soviet central Asia. The dealer played on the pavement, just as in the game in the photo above taken in Tel Aviv in the late eighties.

Open monte appears and disappears from place to place in accordance with a number of variables. When too many gangs begin working the same area, the authorities will tend to clamp down—as Mayor Guiliani has in the past few years along New York's 42nd Street.

Gazzo told us that when tourists began carrying credit cards instead of cash, three-card monte operations started to dwindle in London.

Scarne says that monte workers were plentiful at the 1933 N.R.A. celebration in New York. Darwin Ortiz says that he grew up in New York City, and until the mid-seventies he had never seen a monte game there. By that time they were all over the city.

The swindle seems to reach a peak of popularity, and then disappear for a couple of decades. It was common in the big eastern cities in the thirties, and then re-appeared in the fifties, and then again in the seventies. It seemed to move from the countryside, to the cities, and back again. All the while it flourished amidst the crowds at racetracks and carnivals.

Even though David Maurer called closed monte obsolete in his important work **The American Confidence Man**, it still works in certain situations even in this century, and probably will continue to be utilized whenever a sharper seeks less visibility or wants to use only one partner. Mike Rogers describes a game played in the South in the late sixties by two "hitchhikers." In the Appendix, we will describe the *Texas Twist*, a version of closed monte common in the south today.

In order to get the best possible understanding of these two approaches, we will look at an example of each. First, for the closed monte we will follow the description of the "rube act" as practiced by Frank Tarbeaux. Next we will describe an open monte game as performed on the streets of London in the late 1970's.

This description comes to us from famous street-magician Gazzo, who actually worked as a teenager with the mob he tells us about. Later, in the Appendix, we will detail several other versions of open monte and closed monte.

You may want to jump to the Appendix and read through these scenarios before going on to the sleight-of-hand section of these notes. It helps to have a clear concept of the various ways that the scam can be applied. The psychology of the various sleight-of-hand moves makes more sense when the moves are seen in the context of the overall scam.

We would like to apologize beforehand for the some of the language used in these historical accounts. Although George Devol, Frank Tarbeaux and other gamblers of the period were actually quite liberal in outlook—at least for their day—and had Blacks and Jews among their friends and associates, they were men of their times and expressed themselves in language that anyone would consider racist and very offensive today.

Rather than censor or sanitize the material, we have quoted them verbatim. We do not feel we should whitewash the social or the moral attitudes of these fascinating, but very deeply flawed men.

Closed Monte:
The Rube Act of Frank Tarbeaux

(p. 41)

I remember the boys used to think nothing of using a few lengths of wire, after the telegraph went through, to wrap around meat for broiling over the campfire. The wire made a real handy broiler. And if the telegraph service was discommoded, why that didn't make the meat taste any less sweet.

My fist gyps were carried on in the same spirit of hell-raising. Gyps and cons are all cases of the biter being bitten. I got into my three-card monte gyp that way because I loved to kid, and because I loved to trim suckers.

(p. 84)

The first real gyp in which I ever took an active part was the three-card monte gyp. All through my younger days I had been fascinated by the fun to be gotten out of fooling people…

(p. 85)

But, feeling the way I did, and always figuring ways to kid people, it wasn't any wonder that I took the three-card monte gyp. It's the funniest act in the world to look at and I nearly died laughing when I first saw it. In fact, I laughed so hard that my pals told me I'd have to shut up or get out, as I'd spoil the game.

This gyp should be seen and heard to appreciate its artistry. It loses a deal of its color in cold type. The reader should keep a picture of the figures in his mind to get anything like the real savor of it.

This gyp, which of course, was not one invented by me, we worked generally on railroad trains. I worked in it mostly out of Omaha. Sometimes the train crews were in with the boys; and sometimes they weren't. But the train crews couldn't do anything about it, anyhow. If they'd kicked, we would have taken over the train. I guess we were pretty hard babies.

We used to win hats full of split second watches, worth anywhere from five or six hundred to a thousand dollars, at a time when a watch was a great treasure. And we used to give one of those watches to each of a favorite train crew.

The gyp was worked by two steerers and a player. I was the player. The steerers got on the train, and each of them selected a sucker. Conversation was easily opened, and when a steerer decided his sucker had money enough to make him worthwhile, he'd raise his hat as a signal to me.

I had gotten on the train in a linen duster and a hard hat. I had folded up the hard hat in the duster and tossed it up on a hat rack. From my pocket I took a soft hat, and put it on. I had a dickey, with a rubber band around the neck, which when pulled up, dressed me so far as the eye was concerned in a hickory shirt.

The duster had concealed a homespun suit, dyed with butternut, a popular form of dress with rubes. We used to call them "humspuns." With tobacco juice leaking from the corner of my mouth, my make-up was complete. It was a lightning change make-up too.

Take off the soft hat, pull down the dickey, slip on the linen duster, and put on the hard hat, and I was an average traveler, nothing like the gawky rube of an instant before. When I got the signal from a pal I arose from my inconspicuous seat and approached him and the sucker. Said I:

"Any of yo'ole Yankees got a chaw of terbacker?"

My partner looked up, as if annoyed, and sharply replied:

"No!"

"Yo' ole Yankees are mighty stingy," I'd say. "Down wha' Ah live when Ah asks a feller f'r a chaw of terbacker he gives me one."

"Where do you live?" my partner asked.

"Ah come f'om Kaintucky. Tha's wha' Ah was bawn, bred an' raised—wha' we got the prettiest gals, the fastest hawses and the best cawn liquoh in the whole worl'—Sir, by God, sir, yo' ole Yankees ain't got nuthin' up here—nuthin'!"

You see the idea at the opening was to make the sucker so mad by my attacks on Yankees that he would be glad to trim me, and all through I was putting across my stupidity.

"You don't seem to like the Yankees very much," my partner said.

"Naw," I rejoined. "We don't like the ole Yankees. We fit agin' the ole Yankees in the wa'. My brother Zeke, he fit in the wa', and' so did Dad."

Here, my partner whispered to the sucker:

"Let's string this fellow along a bit, he's apparently a character." To me he would say, with sudden cordiality: "Sit down, Kaintucky. Sit down. What are you doing up here?"

"Ah been up to Chycawga town," I'd say, sitting down in the opposite seat. "Dad allus sent my brother Bill up with the hawses to sell 'em, but Bill took sick with the rheumaticks an' he couldn't come. Dad said to Mom: 'We'll send Bud up with the hawses this time'—Bud, that's my name. Ah'm Bud Alexander. That's me. Dad says: 'They cain't slick Bud.'

"Becuz down wha' Ah live everybody says Ah'm as keen as a brier. Ah was stoppin' at that Paycific Tavern (Grand Pacific Hotel). That's the highest hotel in the whole worl'. Well, it oughter be. That Chycawga town is the biggest town in the whole worl'.

"They got histin' machines there. Just put your finger on a button and sh'll shoot yo' up wha' yo' live. One of the niggers that worked that histin' machine—he looked like one of ouah niggers we call Eph. Ah used to ride up and down with him and talk to him. He was like our old Eph at home, an' he tol' me he'd show me aroun' the town.

"He took me up one place—a gal house (I chuckled here)—and the gals didn't have dresses furder down than this (pointing to above the knees and chuckling again) an' they axed five dollars for a bottle of pop. They don't get but five cents for pop down wha' Ah live, but it don't taste the same. But I

didn't care. Ah got plenty of money. Ah sold the hawses." (And I showed a big roll I was carrying in my inside coat pocket.)

"Young man," my partner then said, "you shouldn't be showing big sums of money like that around in public. Someone is likely to take it away from you. Put it up."

"No ole Yankee is smaht enough to take money away from Bud Alexander," I replied. (My hot Southern blood was boiling). "Eph took me in to one place and the' were a fellow there. He had some cyards slickin' 'em aroun' on top o' that glass snake box.

"One of the cyards had an ole man on it: another had a' ole woman on it, and the other had a little boy with a hoop. And he could sneak 'em around so fast you couldn't tell. You had to find the little boy with the hoop.

"He tole me Ah couldn't find it, an' Ah thought Ah could tell wha'it were. Then we just got bettin'. He axed me if Ah would bet three hundred dollars Ah could find it. Ah said Ah would, and Ah jus' pulled the cyard right out and put it up. But when Ah went to pick it up it weren't there; it were another cyard.

"An then he slicked 'em over again, an' Ah bet him three hundred dollars more, and gosh durned if Ah could tell it. Ah lost six hundred dollars, but Ah didn't keer. Ah tole him if he'd show me how to do it Ah'd give him three hundred dollars for the cyards, cuz ev'ry Satidy afernoon down at Davis's log-rollin' groun's we have pony racin' and hawse-shoe pitchin' and chicken fightin'" (a regular hell of a time, you see).

"Luke Hawkins—he comes to see my sister, Sal. My sister Sal used to be a schoolma'am. He rides a purty rackin' (colloquial for pacing) hawse, Luke does, an' Ah'm goin' to slick him with this game out of that there rackin' hawse, an' make Luke walk home when he comes to see Sister Sal. Ah been practisin' it. Ah c'n do it so fast Ah can't tell wha' it is mahself. Ah got the ole cyards right here. Ah just bringed 'em along."

My partner said: "Let's see them."

"Oh naw," I said. "Ah won't show 'em to yo'—yo' Ole Yankees—you'd steal 'em."

"We wouldn't steal them," my partner said. "Come on, Bud, let's see them."

"Ah'll show yo'ef yo' ole Yankees won't steal 'em. Ah'll show yo'." (And I show the three cards customarily used in three-card monte—the woman, the man, and the boy with the hoop.)

"Show us here," my partner said, spreading a duster over his knees. I threw the cards around clumsily face down, and said:

"Now, yo' all got to find the boy with the hoop."

"I'll bet you five dollars I can pick him out," my partner said.

"Ah'll bet yo'," I said. "Put up your money. Ah wouldn't trust no ole Yankee for no money, no how. Put it up in your old uncle's han'." (The sucker always was called 'uncle' or 'brother.')

We each put up five dollars, and my partner won. I clumsily dropped a card, and while I stooped down to retrieve it, my partner reached over and turned up a corner on the little boy with the hoop and showed it to the sucker, and whispered:

"We'll have some fun with this fellow."

Then he said to me: "I'll bet you a hundred dollars I can pick it up this time."

I said to him: "Ah'll go yo'."

When my partner won again, I said:

"Say, Ah reckon as how yo've seen this hyer afore. Yo' all are too smaht fo' me Ah reckon. Yo' all beat me two times." And I started to pick up the cards.

"My uncle will make you a bet," my partner said.

"All right," I said. "Ah'll try him onct."

The sucker hopped right to it, and pulled out his money, which we had been waiting for.

"Ah won't play for no more chicken feed," I said. "Yo' ole Yankee cowards. In the wa' you was cowards. Ah'll bet yo' all yo' got. That's what Ah'll do. Put her right up there in yore kin's hands."

The sucker put up his roll, and picked the wrong card.

"Thet ain't the little boy with the hoop," I said. "Yo' done lost."

I collected the bets and added:

"Ah'm goin' back to the bed cyar and go to sleep. Ah'll slick 'em aroun' for yo' in the mawnin', an' bet yo' all yo' want." (I acted as if I didn't know the sucker had lost all he had, or would lose.)

Then I went, perhaps back to another car, where my second partner had another sucker, or perhaps I changed my make-up and stepped off the train at a wayside station, and went back to town to wait for my pals to join me there.

One of my pals told me that a conductor said to him:

"I understand all about that game, that the fellow who is acting the rube is supposed to look like a damned fool, but that one (pointing at me) really is a damned fool. Isn't he?"

And that tickled me pink, because I was proud of my make-up, and proud of my acting in the three-card monte gyp.

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Clarke, Donald Henderson. **The Autobiography of Frank Tarbeaux**. New York: the Vanguard Press, 1930.

Open Monte:
The London Mob

The following description of the monte shows the game being played in its most sophisticated and nuanced form. The psychology and depth of the play is astounding, and is certainly the work of years of experience and thought.

Gazzo hung out with "Cracker" Parker's three-card monte mob in London in the late seventies. He was sixteen when he first started as a hanger-on and gofer for one of the gangs. The owner of a flower shop, "Buster" Edwards, would be the one to introduce him to the mob. Edwards was an ex-con who (with Ronnie Biggs) had been one of the principle thieves involved in the famous "Great Train Robbery" back in 1963, and the subject of the Phil Collins' movie **Buster**.

Gazzo was raised in the town of Didcot, Oxfordshire—back then known as Barkshire—some 64 miles west of London. Gazzo was into falconry and hawking, and he had an air rifle that he kept to kill sparrows which he used for his birds of prey. One Saturday, while on his way through London with his best friend Mark Brogdon to get an air rifle fixed, Gazzo passed Edward's flower shop. The owner was standing outside and commented on the gun, saying, "You can be arrested for carrying that."

Gazzo explained it was just an air rifle and that he wanted to have a stronger spring put in it. Gazzo and he talked for a while, and then Edwards noticed that Gazzo also had a book in his pocket, a paperback of **The Phantom of the Card Table**. Gazzo explained that he was a magician, and that this was a famous book on cheating at cards.

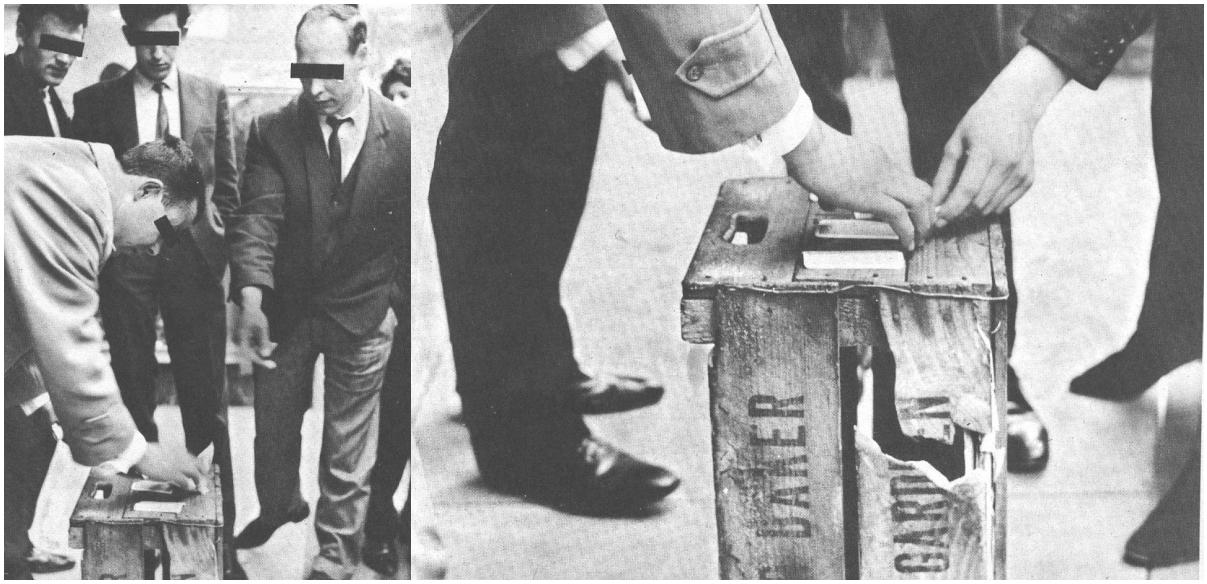
Edwards made him show him a couple of card moves, and suitably impressed, suggested Gazzo go over a few blocks and meet some friends of his who were into cards. It turned out to be Cracker Parker and his monte mob. Fascinated, Gazzo began to spend his weekends hanging out with these men, watching them run their scams in the area of London stretching between Oxford Circus and Tottenham Court Road.

For about two years Gazzo became the lookout for the one of the greatest monte teams in the world. "Tea-boy" or "thief-boy" is what Parker called Gazzo's unique position as lookout and gofer for the mob (from Cockney rhyming slang for thief: "tea leaf" = "thief," also "Tetley's" for a gang).

Once, in 1979 Gazzo made the mistake of performing three-card monte for his father. The next day, his father threw down a *Sunday Mirror* and said "Look what happens to folk that do tricks like that." Gazzo was shocked to see photos of Cracker Parker and members of his mob being arrested and facing prison time. He was just glad that his father didn't realize that the men in the paper were the friends he had been hanging out with every weekend for the past couple of years. (editor's note: We would love to get a copy of this story from the 1979 *Sunday Mirror*, if anyone in London is interested in doing the research.)

The gang consisted of one ringleader—Cracker—who recruited and trained three or four teams that would consist of six to seven people each. He would take half of the winnings, and provide costumes, pay expenses, bail, etc. Each team could average at least £2,000 a day. Friday, Saturday and Sunday are the primary workdays for the monte mob, as that is when people are likely to be flush with cash from payday. But they will operate seven days a week.

The tosser (dealer) is the one that police always seem to arrest. The ringleader is never the tosser, since he does not want a police record. The ringleader knows the scam inside out, and can teach the players any part. The part of the tosser requires the most skill, and takes the longest to learn. There were several that Gazzo worked with, each with his own style and specialty. One tosser that Gazzo worked with was named "Polish" Kilczynski—a big, strong man also known as "the Bear."



These photos from Alan Wykes 1964 book, **Gambling**, show tosser "Polish" Kilczynski in action.

The shills can learn their individual parts in a couple of days of "on the job" training.

The team looks for a location that has good tourist traffic. They like to use the storefront of a place that is closed or up for lease, and they want it near an alley that leads to another street so that they have a favorable escape route in case of trouble. A couple of cardboard boxes are hinged together with tape so that they can make a table for the cards. The top of the table is surrounded on three sides by a two-inch strip of cardboard that is taped to the box to provide a windbreak. A piece of newspaper is taped on top of the box to provide a good working surface. When an emergency situation develops, one kick will send the boxes to the wall—folded one inside the other so they look like a couple of empty packing boxes. When the folded boxes are outside a closed storefront, other monte mobs know the spot is taken. (See photos of this setup in the chapter "Trays, Boxes, Tables and Umbrellas: The Layouts.")

The minimum team consists of the tosser, two lookouts or "pickets," four or more shills, and one "smoother." The shills look and dress as different from each other and from the tosser as possible, and are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds so that they look as though they couldn't possibly be working together.

There are certain favorite characters that are commonly used. One is the Arab—a rich-looking Arab businessman who plays for big money. Others would be a tourist, a businessman, a tradesman, or a shopper with several Harrod's bags (these can be used as a drop for the cards and money). The "partner" shill who encourages the mark to bet with him is usually portrayed as a street-wise local.

The lookouts are stationed out of sight at either end of the street, and they keep an eye out for police. They are also usually the "muscle" if a sucker makes trouble, or if a tough tries to strong-arm the tosser.

The “smoother” is usually a respectable-looking older gentleman, often carrying a folded umbrella which can be used in an emergency as a dump for the cards and cash. His job is to “cool” out the victim after the scam is completed.

The tosser is the operator of the game. Since he is the most vulnerable target for the police, he often will wear clothes that make for a good quick-change in case of trouble—like a jacket that is reversible. Sometimes he carries an umbrella that he can open and use as a table for throwing the cards instead of the boxes. The umbrella is also a handy place to ditch money and cards in a pinch.

The tosser is a character, sort of a “goof.” He wears thick “coke bottle” glasses and is apparently very near-sighted. He has to pick the cards up and hold them inches from his nose to read them. He also acts deaf, and wears a hearing aid.

These explain why he can’t see the bent corner on the card and can’t hear the comments of the shills and spectators. The tosser is usually very friendly and likable, so that he seems approachable, and has a good line of chatter and jokes to keep everything fun and light-spirited. Gazzo said that the same guys who tossed the cards also worked for Cracker in perfume and jewelry street scams. This was called selling “furniture.” Much of the same patter was used in all the scams, and Gazzo says that the Guy Ritchie movie *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* shows a gang doing the perfume sales scam in the exact same manner and using patter that could have been taught to them by Cracker Parker himself.

In his hands, the tosser keeps folded bills to pay off the winners. The bills are folded lengthwise and then folded around the ring fingers of each hand. This way the money is always visible to the crowd, and yet out of the way of the throws. If someone tries to grab the money, he can close his fists and have a good grip on it. After all, the only way a spectator will ever get away with money is if he snatches it. He keeps the smaller bills in the right hand, and an impressive number of big bills in the left. The movement of the green helps to cover the sleight-of-hand by drawing the eye, and has a heating effect on the victim’s avarice.

The tosser has a set of signals that he uses to let the shills know where the winning card is located. These are usually simple. He may keep both fists in the center of the table if the card is in the center, or one fist to either side to indicate it’s on that side. Or he may look to the left when the card is on the right, and to the right if the card is on the left. It is impossible for the gang to follow the throw of the cards just by watching.

The dealer has other verbal and visual ways of signaling the shills when he wants them to make a particular play. He orchestrates every move.

When a “mark” first sees the group gathered around the cardboard boxes, he is attracted by the laughter and excitement. Everyone seems to be having a good time, and the tosser is likable, and seems like an interesting and colorful “character.” As he approaches, the gang opens up for him to get in close, and then crowds in around him. He is the only one in the group that is not part of the gang.

“I don’t cry when I lose, and I don’t laugh when I win. Find the lady! This is a player’s game not a watcher’s game. Step right up.” As the mark watches, the Arab makes a bet and wins. The tosser pays and compliments him. The mark finds it easier than expected to follow the cards, and is surprised when people bet on the wrong card. He thinks he must be much more observant than the rest of the crowd.

A spectator on the mark's right pulls him aside. "He's on to me. He won't let me play. Bet this £20 note on the one on the right for me, won't you?" The mark takes the money and plays the card on the right. The dealer turns the card and it's a winner! He looks up at the mark and smiles, "Beginners luck! Good on you, sir!" and he pays out. The first spectator takes the money and thanks the mark. "See, if he thinks you're too good at it he won't let you play."

The mark is now convinced that the tosser will actually pay when he loses, and even more important, the mark has actually held some money in his hands and this enflames his innate avarice. At this point, a second spectator on the mark's immediate left places a bet in front of a card. The dealer doesn't see who put the money down, and asks the mark to turn over the card—a winner! He "mistakenly" pays off the mark. "You've got a sharp pair of eyes. I'll have to work hard to beat you, sir."

The second spectator snatches the money from the mark's hand and complains, "Hey, that was my bet!" This puts the mark off balance, and once more proves that if the player wins, the dealer pays. Once again, money has passed through the mark's hands. And when the second spectator walks away down the street with his winnings, the mark begins to think that you **can** win this game, and actually walk away with your winnings. He doesn't understand that no one ever wins, and even if they did, the dealer never pays.

The tosser throws the cards again, but as he turns to the right to answer a question, the shill on the left sneaks a look at the Queen, and then places a £100 bet on it. The dealer didn't see the shill cheat, and he pays even money. The mark can't help but notice what a large amount of money the tosser is holding, and begins to think that it would be easy to take advantage of him this way, but is too timid to try.

The cheat waits until the dealer is distracted again, and takes another peek. When he makes a bet of £50, the dealer says, "Bet £100. I want to get my money back." As the cheating shill turns away to get more money from his wallet, the dealer slides the supposed Queen and the right hand card across the table—exchanging one card for another. The mark now realizes that the deaf and blind tosser is a cheat!

The shill makes his bet and loses, and gets really mad, but can't say that he knows the card was a Queen. At this point, the first shill—the one on the mark's right—hands the mark a £20 note to bet on one of the other two cards. The dealer refuses the bet. "Only one bet per toss."

Sometimes, at this point, the mark will venture a bet on his own. The tosser won't accept it. Suddenly nasty, he says, "Don't throw your money at me that way, sir. We're just having a little fun. This game is illegal and can get us all in trouble. If you're going to have an attitude like that, then don't play!" The mark's attitude toward the tosser hardens.

The cheating shill soon gets a chance to peek again, and flashes the card to the mark. "Bet with me this time." The mark puts up £50 and the cheat puts up £100. The partner or "come-on" shill now tells the mark, "Put your hands on the other two cards this time so he can't switch them." Before the mark can act, another shill bets £500 on the same card.

"I have to take the highest bet," the tosser announces, and pays off the £500 bet. The mark and his shill "partner" have to take back their money.

The partner is angry. He whispers to the mark, “They always do that, see, those two work together. He doubles the bet whenever we get the right card. We need more money. I’ve got £400. How much have you got?” At this point, another shill chimes up, “I’ve got £200. I’m in.”

While the tosser is distracted, the “partner” shows the Queen to the mark, and winks as he bends up the corner.

“How much have you got?” This is the moment the gang has been waiting for—a chance to “peek at the poke.” If the mark opens his wallet, they expertly assess how much money he has on him. They want it all. Now the “partner” and the other shill hand their money (£600) to the mark. “Make the bet.” The Arab bets £300 on the wrong card—the one without the bent corner. The mark now raises the bet, and puts his money with the shills’ money on the “right” card—the one with the bent corner.

The tosser has to take the highest bet. The shill that was identified as “working with” the tosser now raises the bet on the same card, and the tosser turns away the mark’s bet. Exasperated, the “partner” shill calls out, “Wait, we’ve got more money.” He turns to the mark. “You’ve got more, I saw it. Come on. This is our only chance.” The two shills urge the mark to pull out everything he has on him. The money goes down on the bent card. The tosser says, “That’s too much. I can’t handle a bet like that.” The “partner” shill says, “Come on, play fair. You’ve got enough to cover it in your hands.” All the other shills chime in and force the play. The tosser tells the mark to turn over the card. It is a loser. This is the only time that the mark gets to touch the cards.

Cracker Parker used to explain this rule carefully and insist on his teams following it. Only if the sucker turns the card over himself can the team avoid “claret,” or spilled blood. The mark only has himself to blame when he turns the wrong card. If the dealer turns the card, the sucker is bound to claim that the dealer switched it and a fight would start. Having the sucker turn over the card himself prevented this. Usually at the point the he turns his card over, the sucker is buried under an avalanche of sudden realizations, and is pretty much incapacitated.

As the mark is still focused in disbelief on the losing card with the bent corner, someone in the crowd yells, “Police!” When the mark looks up, the whole crowd has completely disappeared as if by magic. Even the cardboard table is gone. The only person left standing near is a kindly, well-dressed gentleman—the “smoother.”

“Cleaned you out, didn’t they?” he asks. “Did the same thing to me a week ago. I would have warned you, but they are a nasty bunch. They all work together, you know. They would have stuck a knife in me without a thought. But here, at least let me buy you a pint.” The smoother walks the mark to a nearby pub, but one out of the neighborhood. He buys the mark a beer, and continues, “It’s no use going to the police. It’s racketeering. You were gambling same as them. I guess the best thing is to just chalk this up to experience. Stay away from that neighborhood, though. If anyone in the gang recognizes you, they’ll think you’re there to cause trouble, and they are a vicious lot.” In actuality, the mob abhorred violence—though only because it brought unwanted attention from the authorities. The Cracker Parker mob worked the same small area of London for more than thirty years.

The smoother gives the mark some money to cover bus fare, and wishes him luck. He leaves, but sticks around long enough to make sure the mark doesn’t head for the police or back toward the neighborhood just left, and then proceeds back to the storefront where the mob is already setting up again. The whole procedure lasted less than ten minutes, and the gang is back at work in five.

If a potential mark walks up to the game with a note in his hand or stuck in his breast pocket, the gang knows that he has seen the game before, and wants to make sure he doesn't bet more than he plans to lose. He is too sharp to open up his wallet in front of them. They don't waste much time on this kind, or on any victim that seems too broke or too resistant to take for a lot. The tosser will immediately go into hyped throws and take the money as quickly as possible. Then the tosser pushes him out of the game—"It's a players game, sir, not a watchers game." That's when one of the bigger shills turns to him and says menacingly, "Take off!"

If the mark is promising, they go into the routine described above, and never use a *hype* throw until the mark is ready to bet his wallet. The bent corner is usually not even necessary—the hype done correctly is enough to get the money. The bent corner is only used on a good prospect that needs some firming up. On rare occasions, a shill will even walk a mark to a bank to get more money. This is the "send."

Gazzo says that the monte players are clever and interesting people, but heartless. He quit working with them shortly after seeing them take an older lady for £600. It was everything she had. The mob laughed about it.

Later, Gazzo threw open monte on occasion on the street or in bars one-on-one. But it is impossible to get any big money this way. He says, "It was good for chump change, you know, for drinks or whatever. But your victims have friends and you are left pretty vulnerable that way."

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—as told by Gazzo, 1998

Trays, Boxes, Tables and Umbrellas:
The Layouts

Monte probably originated as a game hustled right on the cobblestones of Paris. It has continued to be played this way from time to time, and is still seen this way today. There are certain advantages to working on the ground. For one, there is no bulky table or box to interfere with a hasty departure, and no evidence to be left behind. Another advantage is that the greatly increased viewing angle helps hide the *hype*, and thus favors the dealer.

Political Cartoon from St. Stephens Review Sept 15, 1888. Original in Color.
Ronald A. Wohl Collection

Illustrated London News May 26, 1860 Ronald A. Wohl collection.

The two illustrations above show the monte being played on the ground in the nineteenth century. In the political cartoon at the top, the game is shown being played on a rug. The illustration

from the London News underneath shows the three-card trick being played on the bare ground. Bill Bowers told us that he was with Dai Vernon in Europe when they saw the monte thrown on the pavement. The operator had the victim put his foot on the chosen card. Vernon was very impressed with the concept.

The photos below show the monte being played right on the bare pavement in Tel Aviv, and it is still often seen this way. Nevertheless, a newspaper, mat, or rug of some kind can be an important addition. A ground cover of some kind helps to prevent the cards from becoming soiled or damaged, which would make them potentially distinguishable from one another.

Monte played on bare pavement. Tel Aviv, Israel—April 1987. Photographs by Ronald A. Wohl

One further advantage of working on the ground is that it physically and psychologically separates the tosser from the shills and suckers—it is easy for the shills to talk to the sucker and give him advice "over the head of the operator." One disadvantage is that performing this way for any length of time can be very tiring for the dealer.

In the nineteenth century, it was common for the operator to carry a tray suspended from a leather belt around his neck. This was used a lot in the gambling tents of the "Hell on Wheels" camps that followed the building of the Union Pacific railroad, and later in mining camps such as Leadville and Creede in Colorado. Ben Marks used this sort of rig. One advantage is that the playing surface could be very fine, often suede or felt. The operator can easily shift angles on a victim by simply turning his body.

Chef Anton with suspended tray. The rear of the tray has a small corner brace that hooks over the belt, or a chain fastens around the waist.

The best part is that the monte dealer with a tray can move about a crowd and go up to prospective suckers rather than waiting for them to come to him. This is a great layout for open monte, but one that suggests that there is little concern for a quick get away. It was used in places where monte was tolerated by the authorities. A suspended tray such as those shown above might be an attractive choice for a magician working monte or the shell game in walk-around—say for a Casino Night party or street theme event.

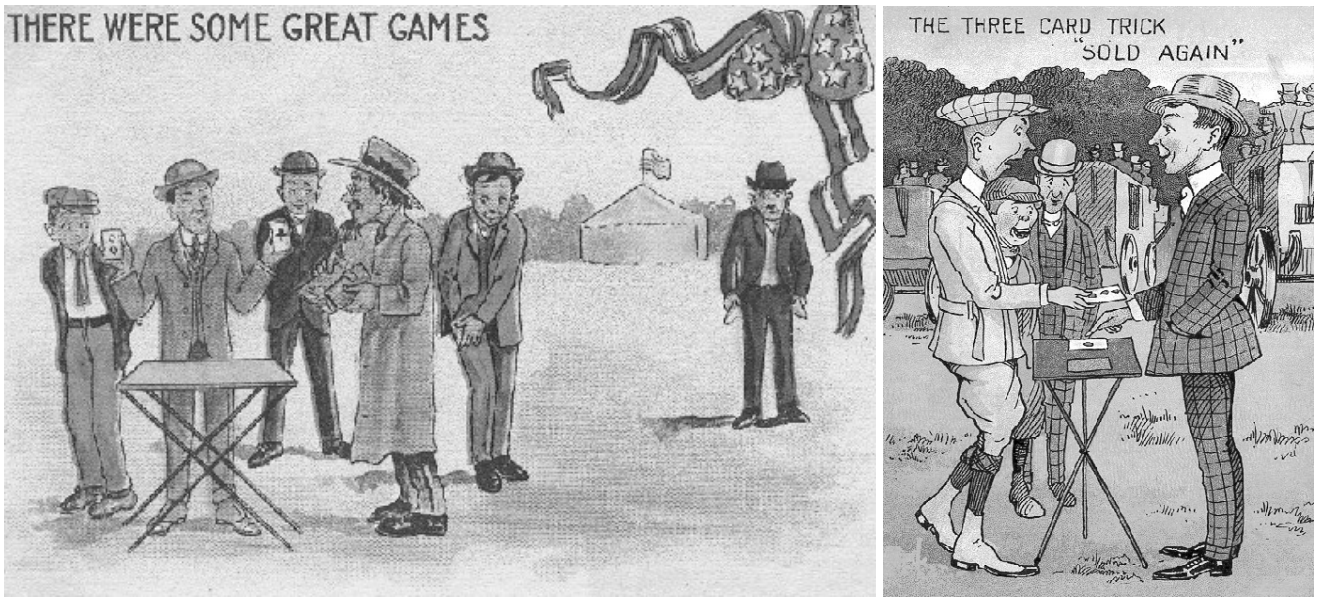
A newspaper, blanket or overcoat can be spread across the lap when an operator is working a train or bus or any situation where he is sitting down without a table. A playing surface made from an overcoat spread over the knees was very common in the twenties and thirties. Grifters called it a "veal cutlet." A folded newspaper not only provided more support than an overcoat, but it could be folded up with the money and cards inside, and make an innocent-looking accessory for a rapid exit.

Newspaper as a playing surface for the railroad carriage. Artist in plate: Lance Calkin April 1, 1893.
Ronald A. Wohl collection

The use of a blanket, newspaper or overcoat over the knees also provides a surface that is better suited to the use of un-bridged cards. The give of the playing surface allows for an easy pickup of the cards even when they are flat. This layout with flat cards and soft working surface would be ideal for the Mexican turnover move described elsewhere in this book.

The folded object over the knees can also be used to hide extra cards which can be switched into play at certain times, as with the pencil-marked or torn corner card. Scarne has several plays that involve the use of extra cards, and the action of adjusting and straightening the newspaper or coat allows plenty of opportunity to make a steal. One of the problems of this arrangement is that it is more difficult for the shill to make a mark on a card in a convincingly surreptitious manner when it is sitting on the operator's lap. The operator must set the newspaper and cards to the side to get money out of his pocket, or to ask a question of the train's conductor, or some similar ploy. In the long run, this sort of distraction can be

very useful to the game. While the shill distracts the suckers by marking the card, the operator can obtain daub or graphite on his finger, or he can steal an extra card in preparation for the "big finale."



The broad tosser on the left has tray and waiter's stand, the British grifter on the right has tray and tripod or "tripe."
Left: USA postcard, no date. Right: British postcard, 1907. Originals in color. Both from Ronald A. Wohl collection.

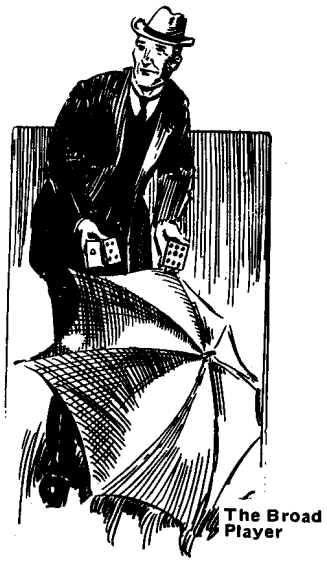
The use of a tray on a stand depends on a fairly secure environment—a lack of pressure from the authorities. It is not easy to run with, or to disappear into a crowd with such a device. When in a racetrack, carnival or street setting in which there is not much heat, it provides a portable and convenient working table with an excellent performing surface.

The stand was often a folding tripod. This was very common in the nineteenth century, and was used by street peddlers of all kinds. The peddlers often would set a suitcase full of their wares on the tripod, and this was called a "tripe and keister." Soapy Smith used just such an arrangement to sell his soap. A tray supported on a "tripe" is shown in the illustration on the right above. A tripod is very lightweight and portable. Unfortunately, these devices are hard to find today.

Chef Anton with a tray and waiter's stand. This is a replica of a nineteenth century tray and stand.

A cheap, easy to make stand can be fashioned from wood strips and leather. This is similar to a waiter's stand, and is shown in the photos above. It makes a very sturdy, steady table. Though heavier

than the tripod, it is still very portable. It is an attractive, practical and historically authentic choice for a magician doing an exhibition routine.



Left: French Trade card, ca. 1910-20, original in color (Ronald A. Wohl collection). Right: M.P. Adams, **The Rich Uncle from Fiji**, 1911.

The use of a gentleman's umbrella as a playing surface dates back at least to the turn of the century. We know that it was used for the shell game as well as three-card monte. It was more common in Europe and Australia than the United States. This may be because the three-card trick was still being done with un-bridged cards at a much later period in other countries, and the umbrella provides a perfect working surface when using flat cards. Also, the umbrella is less common in general as a man's accessory in the States.

In the article in our Appendix, titled "How to Photograph Three-Card Monte and the Shell Game," Dr. Wohl explains why the umbrella went out of fashion among the three-card monte mobs in London in the mid-fifties. A shill for the mob in the photos below told him that too many expensive umbrellas were lost when the mob had to run for it. They switched to cheap folding aluminum stools with canvas tops. These provided a similar working surface, but were much more affordable to abandon.

Polish Kilczynski (left) and Cracker Parker (right) tossing the boards in 1954. Photographs by Ronald A. Wohl.

Two monte operators. 14th Street, NYC, 1989. Photographs by Ronald A. Wohl.

Two monte operators at Paris flea market (Marché aux Puces), June 1990. Photographs by Ronald A. Wohl.

Today's most familiar and practical table for open monte is made from cardboard boxes. These provide excellent sturdy tables, with good working surfaces, with the plus that they are totally expendable. Even so, the mobs prefer to carry them with them when they run, or toss the boxes one inside the other and throw them where they can rest innocently against a building rather than have them torn up by the police.

In the top two pictures, taken in New York City, both operators are using windbreaks made by using a pizza or similar shallow box on top of the other boxes, and are using folded newspapers for a working surface. The Parisian scam artists in the lower photographs are working right on top of the box. The newspaper actually can be an advantage for the operator, because it deadens the fall of the cards and keeps them from bouncing and turning over, and because it can hide reserve sets of monte cards.

The Cracker Parker Mob's Hinged Box

Chef Anton shows the boxes described by Gazzo. A newspaper is taped to the top, a windbreak is taped to the sides.

Rear and side views: The two boxes are hinged together at the open end with tape. The top box can fold inside the larger bottom box.

Table sets up in seconds. One swift kick can fold the boxes and send them up against a building—just a couple of empty boxes.

The pictures above show one of the most sophisticated versions of the box table. Gazzo describes its use in the previous section in "Open Monte: The London Mob." The tape hinge is usually reinforced with string loops. The whole layout is practical and inexpensive. It can be set up and torn down in seconds. When left near an empty storefront, other mobs know that the spot is taken. For modern street situations, it is probably the crème de la crème of playing tables.

Lower Broadway, NYC, August 1990. Operator stepped out of picture.
Photograph by Ronald A. Wohl.

This photo shows the layout for a variation of three-card monte called *Trinidad monte*. It is played with three disks of hard rubber with chalk mark on one. The *hype* moves are nearly identical, and the premise of the game is the same. The disk with the chalk mark accidentally becomes smudged on the back with chalk. When the money goes down, the smudge has mysteriously moved to a losing disk.

Here's a description of the game from the photographer:

> I saw it once in the early seventies in NYC, then around 1990 for about a year. All the operators were from Trinidad. I befriended one of the mobs for a little while, but they did not want to be photographed (no three-card monte hustlers want to, except for one of those on the Paris Flea market who obviously posed for me). According to the Trinidad guy, it was always the same guy throwing in 1990, and the same shills. This version was very common in Trinidad where he learned it (I have never been to Trinidad; also things change).
>
> The operator either had white pants or a white hat. He used both to remove smudges of chalk from his right middle finger when using the chalk mark as a hook. The three disks have five black surfaces that lose, and only one chalked face that wins. This allows moves in which one of the disks is turned over during a throw—something not possible with playing cards. Discs are about 2 inches in diameter and are made of three layers of hard rubber (black/red/black).
>
> —Ronald A. Wohl

Darwin Ortiz describes a strikingly similar version of the game in **Gambling Scams**. Ortiz had a friend from Hungary who told him that this version of the game had been popular there before the communist takeover, but had since been eliminated. The *Hungarian monte* used metal disks, one of which had a large red spot painted on the bottom, but otherwise seems identical to the *Trinidad monte*.

This covers the various playing surfaces and tables that have been commonly used in the various incarnations of the scam, both open and closed. Now we turn to the actual sleight-of-hand that is its hidden machinery.

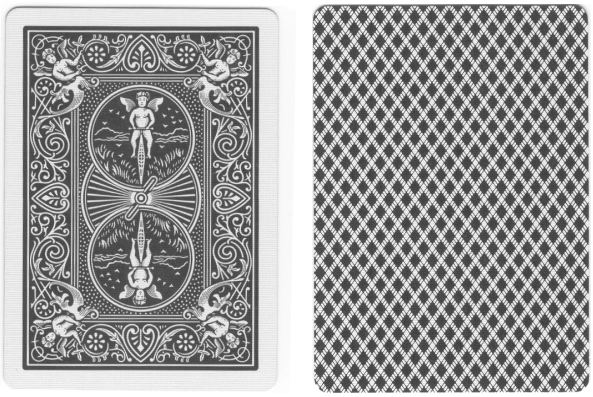
Sleight-of-Hand

> But there is not a single card feat in the whole calendar that will give as good returns for the amount of practice required, or that will mystify as greatly, or cause as much amusement, or bear so much repetition, as this little game; and for these reasons we believe it worth of unstinted effort to master it thoroughly.
>
> —S. W. Erdnase, **The Expert at the Card Table**

Psychology, acting, routining and an ability to improvise are the essential ingredients for success at three-card monte. The sleight-of-hand technique involved in the scam is rudimentary, and for the street swindler, is the least important element. Only one or two moves are really needed to "get the money"—but over the years many variations have been developed. The magician or card expert doing an exhibition routine will need the variations since he has to fool the spectators over and over again. We will include some moves and come-ons that will only be of use in exhibition routines, as well as all of the main ruses used in both open and closed monte. In order to perform the basic moves easily, certain preparation has to be applied to the cards.

The Cards

The cards used in the game should have backs that are borderless—as in the "Bee" or "Steamboat" designs. A white border makes the movement of one card across another much more visible, and therefore the *hype* (the sleight used to switch cards) may be easier for the sucker to follow—this, obviously, is to be avoided. A blue-backed design seems to further deaden any visible movement and is preferred over a red-backed design.



The "Bicycle" back (left) in comparison to the borderless "Bee" back design (right).

Many different combinations of faces can be used—two eights and a Queen or King, two red aces and one Black Ace, etc.—according to the taste of the operator. I personally prefer using two Jokers and the Ace of Spades from the "Bee" pack. I like the "old-fashioned" look of the cards, and I think the artwork on the faces gives plenty of patter opportunities. The Ace of Spades in this deck contains a picture of a beehive, with bees flying all around it—"That's where the money is, that's where the honey is. Make a beeline for the hive. That's the money card. That's the Ace of Spades."

The Joker shows a picture of a little jester riding on the back of a bee—"Don't ride the bee, that's how you get stung. I pay on the Ace, not on the Joker."

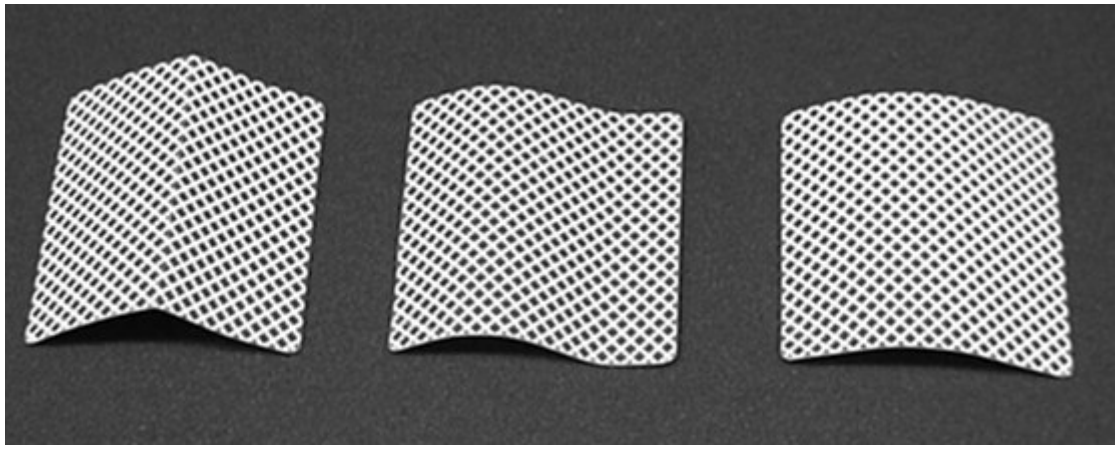
The Ace of Spades and the Joker from the "Bee" deck.

Whatever cards are chosen, they are prepared beforehand. First, the corners of the three cards must be softened to allow the bent corner to be easily put in and taken out. The three cards are placed together face down in the left hand in tight register—as if they were one card. The outer right hand corner of the three cards is bent upwards slightly. This should make a slight bend whose fold is about a quarter of an inch from the corner of the card.

Dotted line shows where bend is put in.

This is straightened back out, and then bent again several times, a little further each time until the corner easily bends almost 90° and holds its position. Care should be taken so that the cards bend at the fold but don't crack. The cards should not be bent back forward past the original plane of the card, as the fibers of the card should provide resistance when the bend is taken out of the card during the action of the routine.

Photo 1


The crease, the "s" or "snake" bend, the simple bend—from the spectator's point of view.

Next the cards are bridged in one of several ways. As above, the bridge is put into all three cards at the same time—as if they were one card. The bridge can be a crease down the center, an "s" or "snake" bend, or a simple bend down the center of the card. It is simply a matter of preference.

The “s” (snake) bend is a type often used on the street. It has the advantage of bouncing less when it hits the table, it gives more support for the operator to put the crimp in the corner and it has a low profile on the mat that makes it hard for the spectators to sneak a glimpse of the face. In a variation sometimes seen on the street, the cards are bridged in a simple bend, but with slight bends along either of the long sides like a re-curved hunting bow. This has some of the advantages of the “s” bend, but does not provide the same kind of support for putting in and taking out the bent corner.

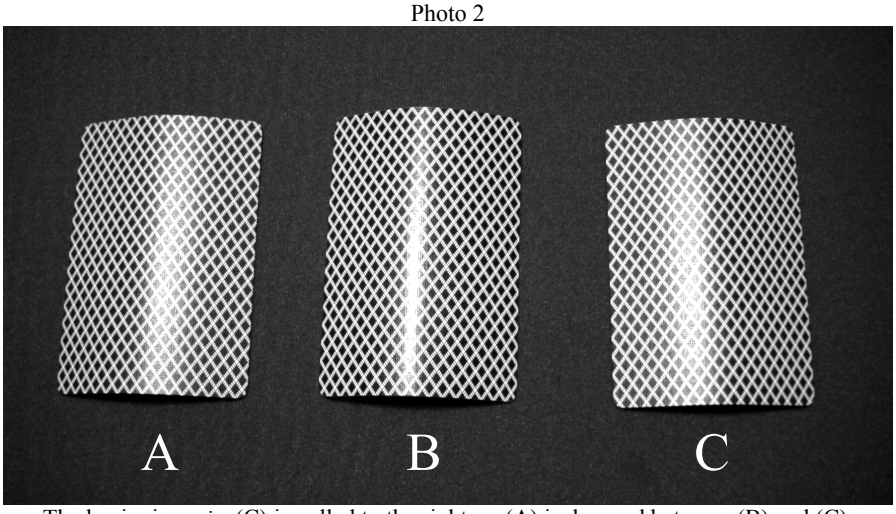
In exhibition routines, the simple bend may seem more familiar to a lay audience, and may be easier to use with the *flip* and certain other moves. It is also easier to take out of the cards when using borrowed cards. The crease is the least useful of the bridges, and although it is sometimes seen on the street, it doesn’t seem to have any real advantages over the other two, and seems to get in the way of certain advanced moves.

The Mix

The cards are shown individually and placed faces down on the table with the Ace in the center. They are then mixed—sometimes slowly and deliberately; sometimes at a pretty fast clip. The *mix* is done with the supposed intention of confusing the spectator so that he loses track of the money card. In reality, the cards are switched in the action of putting them facedown on the table (the *throw*), and the *mix* doesn’t mean anything.

We want the audience to pay especial attention to the *mix* so as not to lose track of the card they suppose is the Ace. When they miss the card, they should blame the *mix*. In reality, the cards cannot be honestly shown and mixed in this fashion at any speed that would confuse a four year old. We wouldn’t want to confuse the spectators anyway, since it is important that they always think they know where the money card is hiding. When other bettors miss, the sucker thinks that he must have a better than average pair of eyes.

Photo 2



The beginning *mix*: (C) is pulled to the right, as (A) is dropped between (B) and (C).

The cards are—from the operator’s point of view—Left (A), Center (B), and Right (C). To start the mixing procedure, the card on the right (C) is picked up in the right hand and moved over slightly to the right, at the same time the left hand picks up the left-hand card (A) and drops it between (B) and (C).

The left hand picks up (B) and moves it slightly to the left, as the right hand picks up (C) and drops it between (B) and (A). Now the right hand picks up (A) and moves it to the right, as the left hand picks up (B) and drops it between (C) and (A). The order is now left to right: (C), (B), (A).

The action is repeated, only this time, the left hand moves its card (C) to the left first, and the right hand drops (A) between (C) and (B). (B) is moved to the right, and (C) is dropped between (A) and (B). Finally, (A) is moved to the left, and (B) is dropped between (A) and (C). We are now back in our starting position: (A), (B), (C).

It is good to separate the *throw* of the cards from the *mix* in the spectator's mind. Once the cards are shown and placed facedown, the operator can show the palms of the hands to the onlookers and say, "Watch the hands!" before beginning the *mix*. Another time he might gesture with both open hands to the cards on the table and say, "Just three cards."

It is good to pause for just a moment before beginning the *mix* to make sure the audience is with you. If they get confused at the start of the *mix*, they will not be able to follow and will not bet. So give them a half a second to make sure they are ready before you start.

In fact, the moment when the operator shows his hands empty before beginning the *mix* is a good time to mentally note the position of the money card. Since the Ace will be in the same position at the end of the *mix* as it was when it was thrown, no energy need be wasted keeping track of it during the mixing process.

Instead, during the *mix* the operator should follow the position of the card that is *supposed* to be the Ace in his mind. This can sometimes read to the audience through unconscious "tells" on the part of the operator—further helping to mislead them by almost subliminal misdirection.

If the spectators are already paying very close attention, or if they seem to be looking for the hype, or if the performer is doing demonstration runs, or even just for variety, the *throw* and the *mix* can also be combined. The last toss of the *throw* is followed immediately by the first move of the *mix*. This is especially good when using the bent card, as it looks as if you are seriously trying to "beat" the spectators, and since the card is bent, the spectators should have no trouble keeping up with it.

The *mix* can also be varied somewhat by sliding the cards around on the table instead of lifting them. The pattern is basically the same, but it looks a little different. This can be combined with the *Charleston*, a move we will describe momentarily.

A second variation is the *cascade mix*. In this version, the hands each have a card and one is on the table. The right hand picks up the one on the table in *toss* position, and the card in the hand is dropped—like a slow-motion *hype*. Then the left hand comes over and picks up the card on the table and drops its card. This is repeated until the cards are back in their original order. It resembles the juggling pattern known as the cascade, only upside down.

The important thing in any version of the *mix* is that the spectators must always be staying with the dealer. They should feel that they are keeping up and know where the card is all the time. They must also believe that the dealer is really trying to confuse them. The easier the dealer makes it to follow the cards through the *throw* and *mix*, the more likely it is that the sucker is going to bite.

Nevertheless, the sucker has to be convinced that the dealer believes that he is mixing the cards in a way that the average person couldn't follow. Fortunately, the mix can be done at a very fast clip and still be followed by a four year old—especially if the throw and mix are separated. The throw is done slow, then the mix fast.

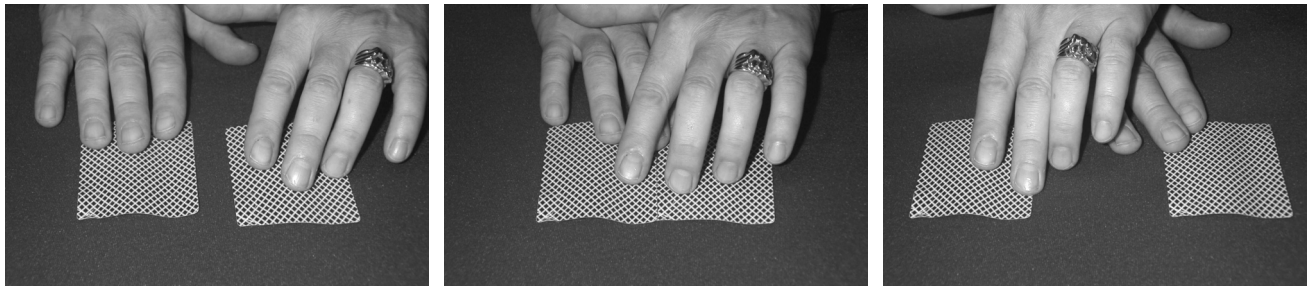
Many of the street sharps seen today throw the hype right into the mix, and everything is done so fast that it is sometimes difficult for the suckers to follow. Using shills and acting techniques, this can still be made effective, but the relaxed, slow throws and fast mix of the old timers is much better, and much easier for the spectators in an exhibition routine.

Gazzo created a move for the *mix* that he calls the *Charleston*, since it resembles the well-known dance move in which the hands are placed on the knees and the knees are brought together and then moved apart as the hands change places. The *Charleston* is used to make the spectators believe that the dealer is trying something clever to fool them during the mix, but that they somehow manage to see through with their "keen powers of observation."

The cards are slid around the table during the mix, and at some point the two loser cards (the spectators think one of them is the Ace) are brought together until they touch. At that point, the fingers of each of the hands move to the other cards and the cards are separated as the hands cross as in the photos below. The spectators think that the dealer is trying to fool them into believing the cards have changed places, when it is clear to them that it was a feint.

It really doesn't matter whether they "see through" the move or not, since whether the cards were actually switched or not, the move itself convinces the spectators psychologically that one of the two is the money card. Otherwise, why did the dealer try to throw them off? Since either card will be a loser, this can be a very powerful weapon.

Gazzo's Charleston Move



The cards are being slid around the table in the mix, when two cards are brought together and apparently switched.

The Toss

In both the *toss* (underthrow) and the *hype* (overthrow) the cards are held in one hand in exactly the same manner. What that manner will be varies from one dealer to another. Sometimes the cards are held deep in the hands, with all four fingers of the palm down hand resting on the forward narrow end of the face down cards and the thumb on the rear narrow end. This can help hide the action of the hype under the palm of the hand. In this method, the first finger controls the top facedown card, and the fourth finger controls the bottom card (see Ganson).

Sometimes they are held so that they extend out quite a bit from the thumb side of the hand. In this case, the first and second fingers control the cards (see Behnke).

It is a matter of personal taste to some extent, but we favor the following method based on Erdnase, one in which the cards are controlled by the second and third fingers. First, the cards are fairly deep in the hand, thus hiding the *hype* to some extent, and also providing more cover for any marked or bent corner. Secondly, the first finger is free, and the cards extend a little out of the thumb side of the hands which can make certain other moves easier, especially the *flip* and the *flip-change*. Lastly, the second and ring fingers usually have a little more strength and flexibility for putting in and taking out the bent corner.

The cards are displayed in the hands before being placed one at a time on the table. The right hand picks up a Joker. The right hand card is held so that the right second finger is at the right outer end of the card, the ball of the thumb holding the left inner end slightly to the right of center (Photo 3). This card is laid over the Ace so that the two cards are picked up together—almost square—held by the thumb and second finger (Photo 4).

Photo 3

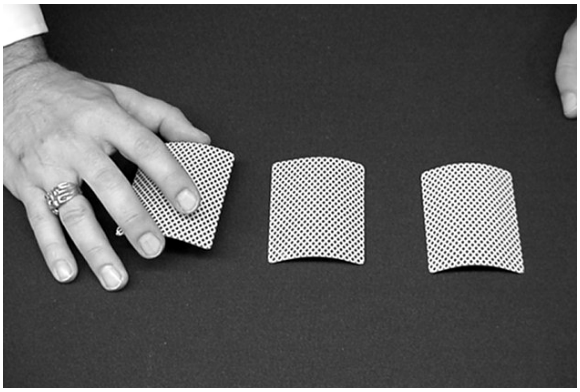
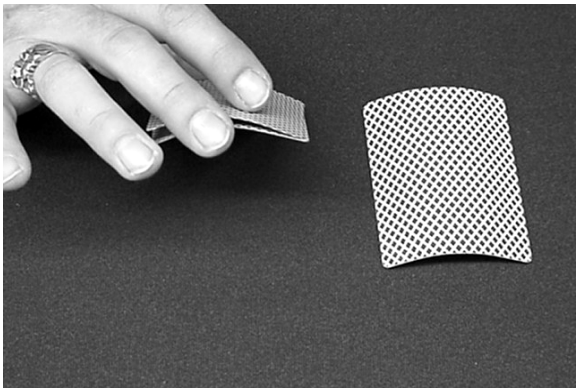


Photo 4



The right hand picks up the Joker and places it on top of the Ace, picking it up. The ring finger separates the corner of the Ace.

The side of the right ring finger connects the very corner of the Ace, and slightly separates it from the Joker. The second finger lets go of the Ace, and is now holding just the Joker. The ring finger is holding the Ace by just touching the corner. The second and ring fingers now come together so that the cards are held as closely aligned as possible, but with enough control that either card can be released independently by the fingers.

The second finger should be held next to the ring finger as in Photo 7 below, not separated as far as shown in Photo 4. At this point, the second and ring fingers *could* be separated, lifting one card away from the other (Photo 6), but instead are held together (Photo 5).

Photo 5

Photo 6

Photo on left shows the cards as they are actually held, in the photo on the right the second finger and ring finger are separated.

The left hand picks up the second Joker, and both hands are displayed to the audience as in the photo below at right (Photo 8).

Photo 7

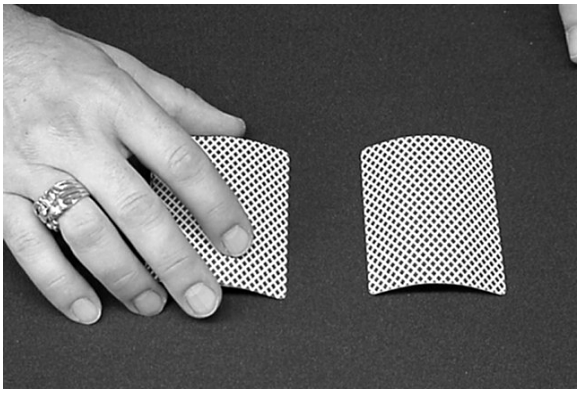


Photo 8

The picture on the left shows the actual position of the second and ring fingers. The Ace is shown to spectators.

The performer turns the right hand palm up and glances at the Ace (Photo 9), and then turns hand palm down and drops the Ace to the table. This action can be varied somewhat. Sometimes the Ace is thrown to the table from a few inches above the surface; sometimes the card is seemingly "placed" on the table. The left hand tosses its Joker to the right of the Ace and slightly behind (toward the operator), and the right hand drops its Joker to the left of the Ace, also slightly behind. Now the operator performs the *mix*.

Photo 9

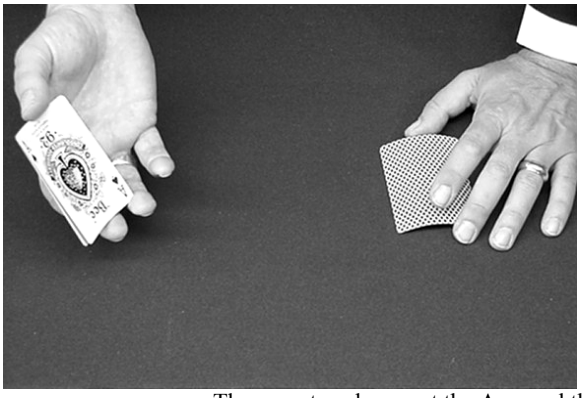
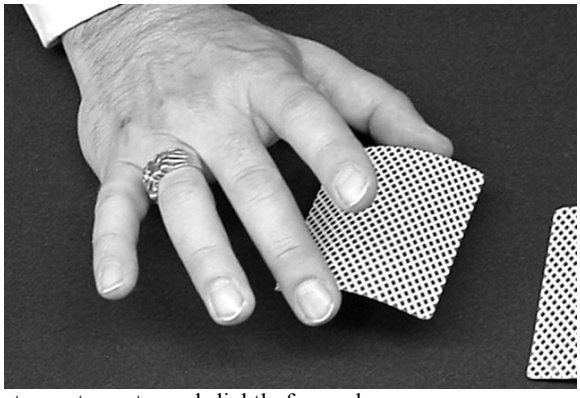


Photo 10



The operator glances at the Ace, and then tosses to center and slightly forward.

This is a straight *toss*, and the Ace can be followed through the *mix* easily. In order to beat the spectators, the operator simulates this exact series of actions, but in throwing down the Ace, the *hype* is used.

The Hype

The *hype* (sometimes called the *overthrow* by magicians) is the most important move in the monte. Although not difficult, it should be practiced until it looks just like the normal *toss* (underthrow). Sometimes the card is thrown to the table from a few inches away; sometimes the card is virtually "placed" on the table (an excellent but more difficult maneuver). Either way, the move should exactly simulate the action of a *toss*. It should always be done in a casual, offhand way. It should not look like a "move" or as if anything important was happening.

The *hype* is identical to the *toss* until the point that the operator glances at the Ace. This time, as the right hand turns palm down to make the toss, the right second finger releases the Joker instead of the Ace. The second and third fingers separate just slightly during this action, pivoting the two cards on the thumb. This makes it easier to separate the two cards and release the top one cleanly.

As the top card is released, the right hand pulls the Ace quickly to the right and out from under the Joker (Photo 11), and the right second finger is placed back next to the ring finger on the edge of the Joker. The ring finger is then lifted off the card as in Photo 12. All of this happens in one quick movement as the card is thrown to the table. The hyped card should be tossed flat on the table—dead—without hitting either edge or bouncing.

The action of pulling out the right hand is difficult to describe. The appearance should be one of a relaxed, casual action. In order to create this, the right hand immediately begins to slow down as it moves to the right once it clears the Joker. It is important to mimic exactly the look of the normal *toss*.

Photo 11

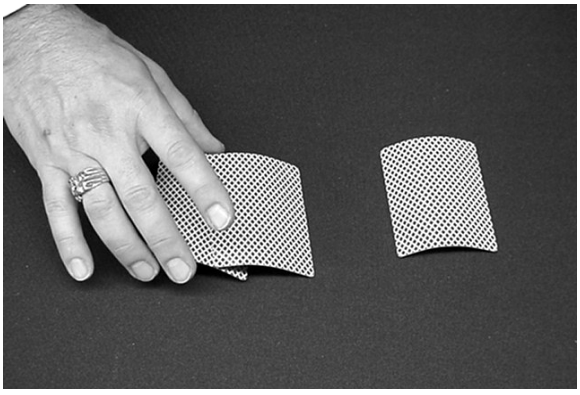
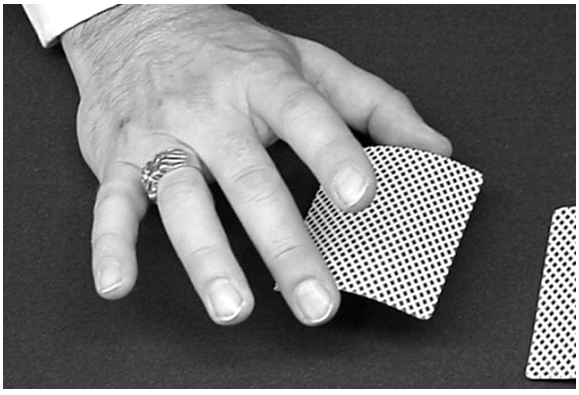


Photo 12



When learning to "place" the card on the table, it may be easier at first to *hype* to the left position instead of the center. This sometimes helps the beginner to get a feel for placing the card down and moving the hand to the right. The pullout is the real secret. Think about it as if you were pulling a tablecloth out from under some dishes.

A useful ruse in the *hype* is to "call the card facedown." Instead of showing and naming the Ace and then throwing it to the table, the Ace is shown and thrown but is not named until it *hits* the table. The idea is to shift the moment in which the spectator is implicitly asked for agreement.

The performer shows the Ace to the spectators and says, "Here's the money card. That's where the hive is, that's where the honey is…" Now he glances at the face of the card as in Photo 9, and *hypes* the Joker to the table. "I pay on the Ace of Spades." The card should land on the table as the word "Spades" is said. As he says this last line, the operator gestures slightly toward the card on the table with the face down card in his right hand. He looks at the spectator inquisitively as if asking, "You understand, right? I pay on the Spade?" The operator then nods at the spectator as if silently thinking, "Good, you're with me."

The spectators are being asked subliminally to agree that the facedown card on the table is the Ace of Spades. At the same time, the dealer is vocally seeking agreement that the Ace of Spades is the money card—that it's the one that pays. Since the spectators already accept that the Ace of Spades is the money card and readily agree to this, they are then inclined to agree to the other *implicit* question without thought. This is subtle, but extremely powerful. The idea of calling the facedown card is useful in other card tricks that require a double-lift, top-change or other switch. By moving the moment of agreement, a number of discrepancies can be cleverly buried. The additional ruse of shifting the question for agreement to one previously accepted adds even more authority to the maneuver.

The *hype* can also be used to show the Ace and remaining Joker as two Jokers. These moves are called *flash-hypes*. After the Joker (supposedly the Ace) is hyped to the table, the Ace is in the right hand, and the Joker is in the left. The two hands are casually brought together and the two cards are arranged in the right hand in the *toss* position with the Joker underneath. The operator does not look at his hands as he does this, but rather acts as if he is moving the left hand card to the right hand so that he can gesture with the left as he talks.

The right hand turns palm up so that the performer (and also the spectators) can see the Joker, as if the operator is reassuring himself. It is then casually hyped either to the left or right of the face down card on the table. The right hand turns palm up again, and checks the "other" Joker (actually the same Joker), then tosses it to the opposite side of the supposed Ace on the table.

Sometimes the two losers are thrown facedown to the table as in the description of the *toss* above, and then as if on second thought, the Ace (supposedly a Joker) is picked up and placed on top of the Joker in *toss* position. The Joker is then shown, the Ace is hyped, and the Joker shown again and dropped to table.

Another patter subtlety for the *flash-hype* is to *hype* the Joker (supposedly the Ace) to the table and call it face down. "The Ace of Spades..." Then as the two supposed Jokers are shown in the *flash-hype*, the operator says, "and one (*hype*), two Jokers…" as he shows and tosses the "second" joker to the table. He gestures to the cards on the table and says, "Just three cards."

People will subconsciously question any assertion that the operator makes. This is part of the normal process of gathering information. By making the point of the operator's assertion seem to be that he is proving that there are only three cards, the spectators are not subconsciously questioning when he shows the two Jokers, "Are they both Jokers?" They are able to accept the assertion "just three cards" without question since they have by that time already assured themselves of this fact.

Three in the Hand Toss

The right hand picks up a Joker between the first finger and thumb and shows it, then the Ace is picked up between the right middle finger and thumb and shown, and finally the last Joker is picked up between the right ring finger and thumb and shown. The Joker is thrown to the left, the Ace to the right, and the third Joker to the center. *Mix*. The Ace ends up on right. The same throw is done, but this time the Ace is hyped to the left instead of tossing the Joker. *Mix*. The Ace ends up on left. Other patterns for this throw are described in the following section called *Throws and Patterns*.

Photo 13

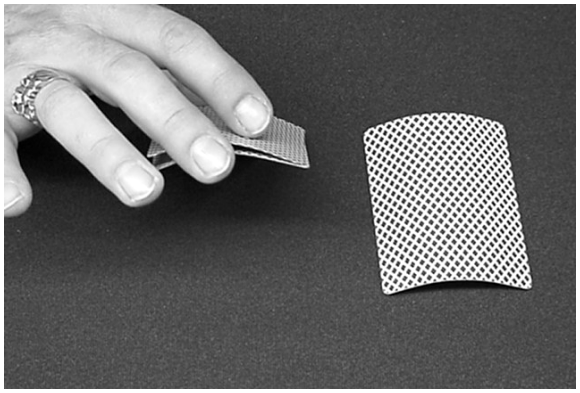


Photo 14

Second, more subtle version—second finger holds top two cards, the third card is held at the corner by the third finger.

In an even subtler version of this move, the Joker above and the Ace underneath are both held by the second finger (Photo 13). The second Joker is then picked up and held by the third finger (Photo 14). The second finger simply straightens out slightly to release the Ace for the hype. This takes some practice, but is not too difficult.

In an exhibition routine, this move can be used to show all three cards are the same. To show all three cards as Jokers, the cards are picked up with the Ace in the center. The cards are turned face up to show a Joker, and the Ace is then hyped to the left. The cards are turned over to show the same Joker a second time, and it is tossed to the center. The hand turns over again, displays the second Joker, and drops it to the right. To show all Aces, the Ace starts on the bottom of the stack, and is shown all three times as both Jokers are hyped one at a time to the table.

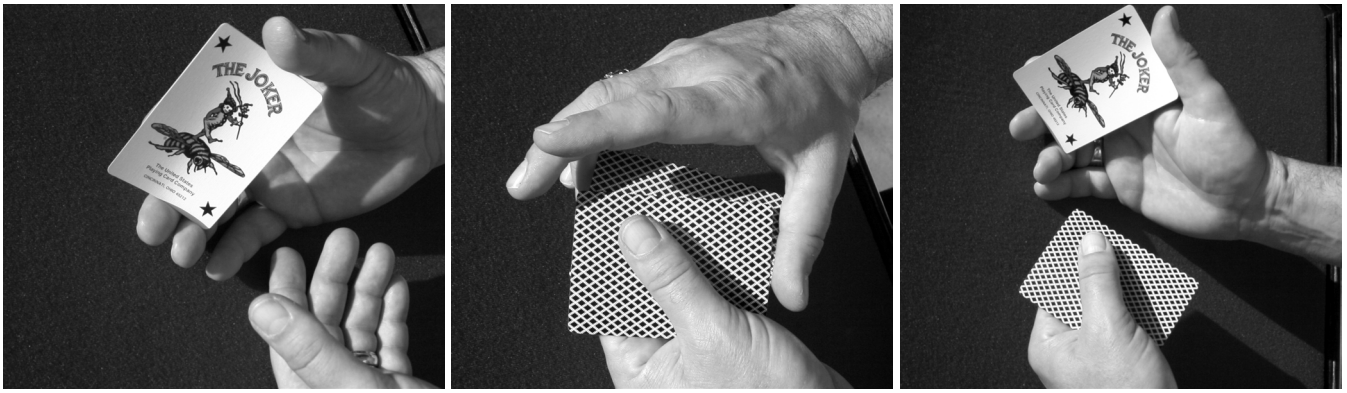
Flushtration Move

There is a move that can be substituted for the *flash-hype* in order to show an Ace and Joker as two Jokers. This is a variation of Brother John Hamman's Flushtration Move, except that in this case it is used to show that the faces instead of the backs of the cards are the same. Since the spectators are shown two cards that are both Jokers, and since this is what they expected to see, the move works just as well this way.

It shouldn't be done as if the operator is trying to **prove** that the two remaining cards are both Jokers. Once again, the operator's vocal assertion is set up so that the spectators find themselves agreeing to two things at once—that there are just three cards, and that those are the Ace on the table,

and the two Jokers on either side. The vocal assertion, “Just three cards,” is considered by the spectators, while the implied assertion that the last two cards are Jokers is slipped right by the spectators’ information verifying radar.

Photo 15 Photo 16 Photo 17



The Ace is behind the Joker in the right hand. The cards are turned facedown and the Ace is pulled into the left hand and tabled. As the left-hand card is being set down, the Joker is turned face up again.

At the beginning of the move, a Joker has been switched for an Ace by the hype or other method, and is now resting in the center of the table. The remaining two cards are in *toss* position in the right hand with the Ace on top of the Joker. Pointing with the left hand at the tabled card, the operator says, “That’s the money card.” At the same time, the right hand turns palm up with the Joker showing. The right hand turns palm down and the Ace is taken into the left hand by the thumb.

His eyes follow the facedown card in his left as it is set down to the left of the tabled card, “And that’s **one**…” As he is taking the card in the left hand, his right hand turns its card face up, but reflexively—without any intention. The dealer then looks over at the face up card in his right hand, and as he drops it on the table to the right says “…and **two** Jokers.” He wipes his hands together to show them empty, “Just three cards.” We will describe another method of performing this sleight in *Kohler’s Knifed!* in the section below titled “Come-Ons and Hooks.”

Some Other Switches

There are a variety of methods that can be used to keep the spectators off balance. For example, the *hype* can be replaced in a *throw* by the *buckle double-lift*, the *glide*, or the *optical move*.

Buckle Double-Lift

In this move, the cards are placed facedown in the left hand, Ace in the center of the stack. The cards are bent backward so that the bridge in the cards is reversed—the bow is toward the left palm. The left first finger covers the front narrow edge of the cards (Photo 18). The left second finger pulls the bottom card in so that it becomes slightly buckled away from the other two (Photo 19).

This slight buckle enables the right hand thumb and first finger to take the right long edges of the top two cards near the center (Photo 20) and flip them over as one onto the facedown bottom card (Photo 21). It looks as if the Ace was on the top of the packet and is shown to the audience. The move is repeated, turning the top two cards back to their original facedown position, and the top card is dealt facedown onto the table.

Photo 18

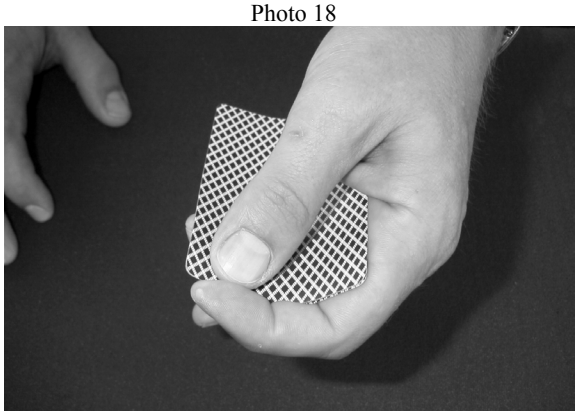


Photo 19

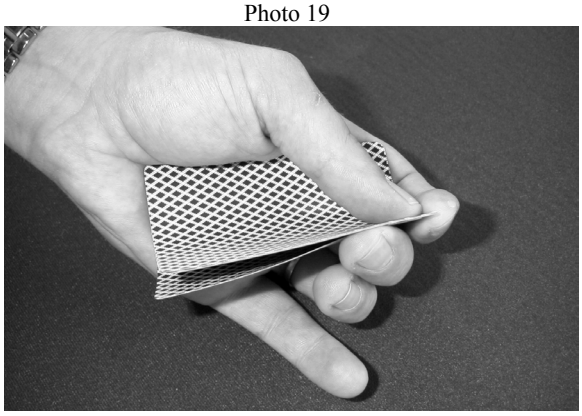


Photo 20

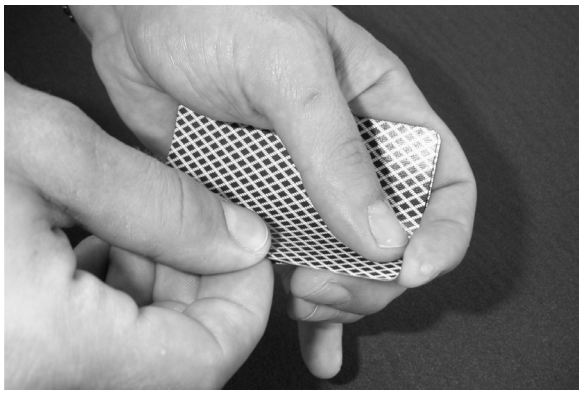


Photo 21

In making this move, it is very important to call the card facedown. The two cards are turned face up, and the operator says, “Here we have the Ace…of…” The two cards are turned facedown and the top card is dealt off onto the table as the operator says, “…uh…Spades.” (actually it is a Joker). The cards are turned facedown as the dealer says “of.” As he takes the facedown top card in his right hand, he says “uh” and as he says “Spades,” the card is set down on the table. In this case, the “uh” makes it look as if the dealer’s brain has simply spun in its track for a second. Of course he knows the Ace is Spades. The card hits the table on “Spades” and the spectators subconsciously agree as the card hits the table, “Ace of Spades.”

If the dealer’s mind has momentarily derailed, he is not likely to be pulling off anything sneaky. So the spectators relax just at the moment the switch is being made. This is the moment of discrepancy in the double-lift that Vernon talked about. The Professor asked, “Why turn the card facedown back on the pack and then deal it off. Why not just set it on the table facedown?”

This discrepancy is painfully evident if the card is called face up. In that case, the spectators agree that a card is an Ace “We have an Ace of Spades.” Then the card is turned facedown back on the packet. Then it is dealt off and placed on the table. The audience is beginning to question “Is that the same card?” just as the switch is being made.

By shifting the vocal statement "Here is the Ace of Spades" so that it is made to coincide with the end of the entire sequence of moves—to the moment the facedown card hits the table—the reasonable question that our statement provokes in the spectator's mind ("Is it?") is answered for the wrong card. Secondly, the extended beat given by shifting the moment of agreement helps to smooth over the discrepancy in the move. Finally, the use of the "uh," the little trip up of the mind, helps to trivialize the moment the switch is made so that it is not questioned. If the dealer isn't paying attention, why should the spectator?

The right hand comes back and takes both cards as in photo 15, and shows a Joker. The Flushtration Move is used—the right hand turns palm down with the two cards and brings them over to the left hand. The left hand takes the top facedown card and moves it toward the left side of the tabled card as the right hand turns face up. The operator keeps his attention on the facedown card he is placing on the table. He turns to glance at the right hand card, and then drops it to the right.

The dealer then gestures to the three cards on the table with both hands palm up saying out loud, "Just three cards." Each card is then picked up and the bridge carefully re-instated. The whole action should look as if the performer is merely showing that there are only three cards as he adjusts the bridges in each one. The cards are then mixed.

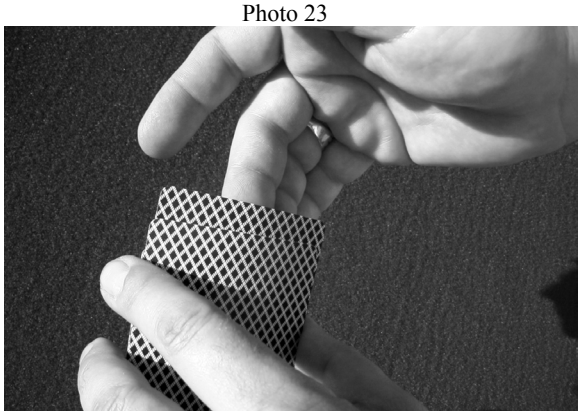
In any of these moves, it is psychologically stronger for the magician to look at the cards himself as if to check them, rather than "show" them to the audience as if to prove something. The audience can still see the cards, but the manner of display does not invite critical observation. If the operator doesn't try to prove anything, the audience does not have to question anything.

Glide

We think the *glide* is one of the weaker switches for monte, mainly because it leaves the two cards in the left hand with the Ace on the bottom. It is awkward to set up for any kind of flash from this position. Nevertheless, the glide works well with bridged cards, and can still be used to "get the money."

Photo 22

Photo 23



This is Dai Vernon's method for the *glide*. The three cards are held facedown in the left hand with the Ace of Spades at the face of the packet. The cards are held with the left fingers resting along the left edge of the packet, except for the left little finger, which is at the inner end, and the left thumb is at the center of the right edge (see Photo 22). The left little finger should be completely dead as if without feeling.

The left hand is turned palm to the audience to show the Ace of Spades (Photo 22), and then is turned facedown again. The right hand is brought to the outer end of the packet with the backs of the fingers toward the table. The right middle finger tip touches the outer half-inch of the face of the Ace of Spades, and the right hand keeps pushing until the pad of that second finger is also resting on the outer half inch of the middle card. This action has pushed the bottom card to the rear about a half an inch, carrying with it the dead weight of the little finger.

Now the action of the right hand is reversed and the middle finger will draw the middle card (a Joker) straight out from between the other two and yet look as though it is drawing out the Ace of Spades from the bottom of the packet (Photo 23). As this happens, the left little finger acts as a spring to push the bottom card (Ace of Spades) flush with the top card. Once the middle card (Joker) is about half way out of the packet, the right thumb grasps it and it is placed facedown on the table. The left hand drops one of its cards to the left of the chosen card, the other to the right. The cards are mixed.

The glide can be also be used in an exhibition routine to show all three cards are Jokers (move is started with the Ace in the center of the packet).

Vernon's Optical Move

This move is from Dai Vernon's three-card monte routine in **Further Inner Secrets of Card Magic**. It can't truly be appreciated until it is performed for someone. Vernon recommended this as strong enough to conclude a three-card monte exhibition. The bridge is removed from the cards, and they are held facedown in the left hand, with the Ace of Spades on the top.

All three cards are fanned between the hands, and then the top two are taken into the right hand with the right thumb tip on the back of the top card about a third of the way up from the inner end and central. The right first fingertip should be under the bottom card and directly beneath the thumb. The top card is diagonally across the bottom card, with the inner left corner projecting slightly over the side and near the left inner corner of the bottom card (Photo 24).

Photo 24

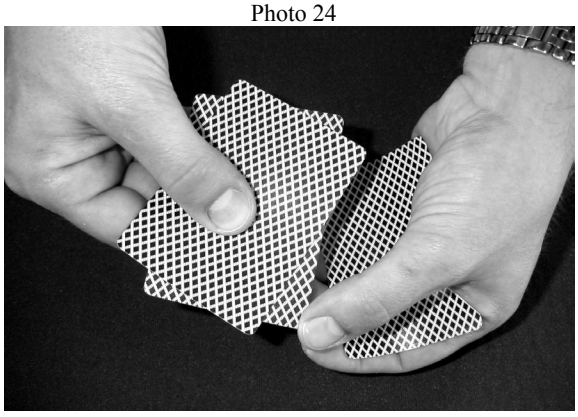
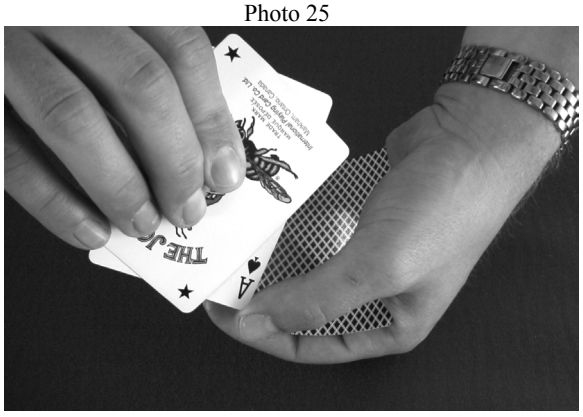


Photo 25



The third card is held way down in the left hand so that the left thumb is free. With the left thumb, the dealer snaps the left outer corner of the bottom card of the two in the right hand twice as in Photo 24, and then immediately the right hand is turned over inwards, while the right thumb simultaneously is moved about a quarter of an inch to the left. This will push the top card (Ace of Spades) across the back of the bottom one. As the cards come face up, there is a new projecting corner at

the left outer end of the packet that comes up against the left thumb (Photo 25). This new corner is seen to be the index corner of the Ace of Spades. The left thumb snaps this corner twice without pausing.

The perfect illusion is created that the left thumb snapped a projecting facedown corner of the Ace of Spades, and then snapped the *same* corner after the cards were turned face up. The snap was evidently to call attention to the position of the Ace of Spades.

Without stopping the action, the moves are reversed to bring the cards facedown, moving the right thumb to the right to pull the Ace of Spades across the back of the Joker—returning it to its original position. As the cards come facedown, the outer corner of the bottom card (Joker) again projects to the left and hits the left thumb, which snaps it twice more.

All of the above actions must seem to be one continuous flow. The two cards in the right hand are placed on top of the left hand card, keeping all three fanned slightly apart. The two bottom cards are slowly and deliberately changed one for the other, and then the cards are fanned toward the spectator for him to choose the Ace. He will take the card on the dealer's left—the Joker. The Ace is actually on the dealer's right (top card).

If the dealer then shows the actual location of the Ace by taking the top two cards into his right hand and repeating the optical move sequence as above, the spectator will choose the Joker again.

Scarne's Monte Slide

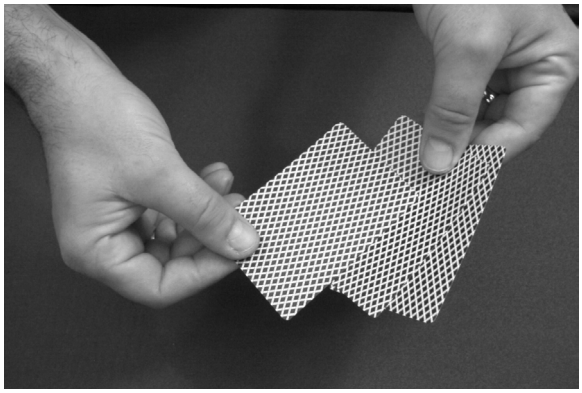
This move from Scarne is somewhat similar in concept to the *optical move*. It also is done with un-bridged cards. Three cards are held in the left hand, face up, ace in middle. Each is snapped with the first finger of the right hand, and then laid on the table. Try as they can, the spectators can't find the ace.

The three cards are in the left hand face up (Photo 26). Pay attention to the way the hand holds the cards—fingers on top, thumb underneath. The cards are ordered from face to back—2H, QC, 2D.

Its best to follow these moves with cards in hand. The right hand reaches over and snaps the 2D at the outer left corner, and the operator names the card out loud (Photo 26). Turn the hand over showing the back of the cards, and snap the corner, now on the right, again calling, "Two of Diamonds." Take out the 2D and place on the table (Photo 27), but don't show it again. Let them question in their minds, "Is it the 2D?"

Photo 26

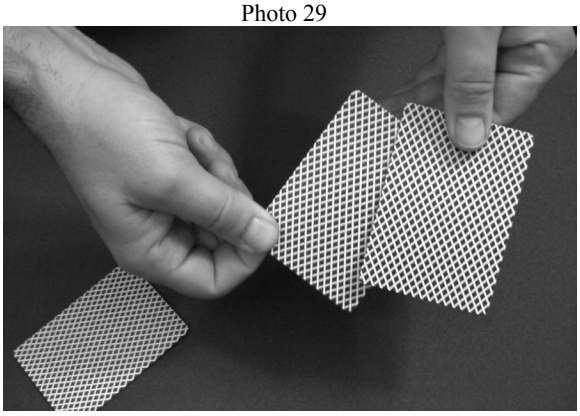
Photo 27



Turn cards in hand over again, showing the faces as in Photo 28. Now the spectators can see that the 2D is missing, and really was placed on the table. Now snap the KC just as before with the 2D, calling out "King of Clubs" Now, as the cards are turned facedown again, the left thumb pushes and the fingers draw back the two cards so that they change places—now the 2H is on the left. The right forefinger snaps the corner of the 2H, and the KC is named again, and the 2H is placed onto the table (Photo 29). The remaining face down card is snapped and named out loud, "Two of Hearts." It is dropped to the table.

Photo 28

Photo 29



This effect has to be accomplished at a steady clip, with a good deal of confidence. It is very strong, and if you try it on yourself you will be surprised how deceptive it is. Scarne notes that it is great for the know-it-all type. He suggests that the *Mexican turnover* can even be used to turn over the cards, so that the wise guy will have his theory thrown way off.

Scarne also recommends this move as a simple way for working the torn corner as a come-on. All three cards are snapped and laid on the table as above. The apparent KC is picked up and a corner torn off as explained a little later under *Come-Ons and Hooks*.

This brings us to a different type of switch, with different uses.

Turnover Moves

Flip and Forward-Flip

The *flip* is used to switch one card for another in the process of turning the card face up. It takes some practice, but is not very difficult. It can be extremely effective and useful.

To begin with, let's say the Ace is in the center. We want to show that the center card is a Joker. The right hand and left hand each hold a facedown Joker (Photo 30). The right hand approaches the center card, and as it comes over, it takes the center card in the *toss* position. At the same time, the right hand comes over and places the left edge of its card on top of the right edges of the right hand cards (Photo 31). The right hand lifts straight up, allowing the top card—the Joker—to turn over as in Photos

32 and 33. The illusion that the operator merely used the other two cards to "flip" the center card over is perfect. The *flip* should be practiced so that it can be accomplished with either hand.

Photo 30

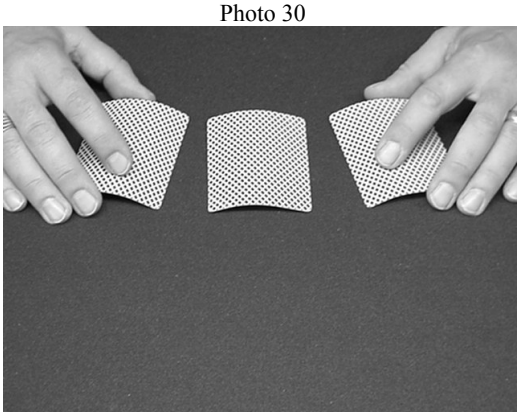
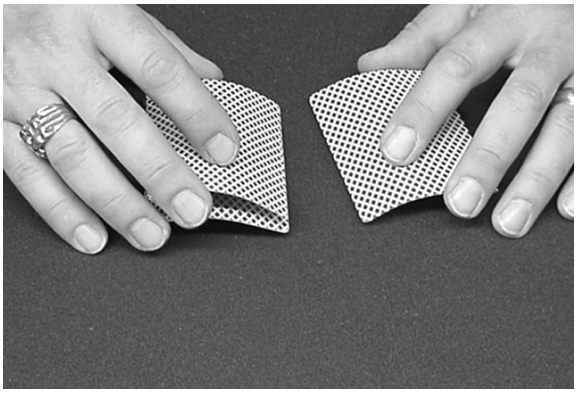


Photo 31



The right hand picks up the center card in *throw* position, as the left hand approaches and lays the edge of its card on top the left edge of the right hand cards.

Photo 32

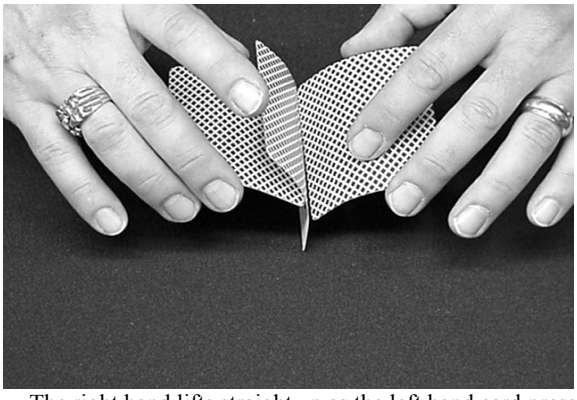
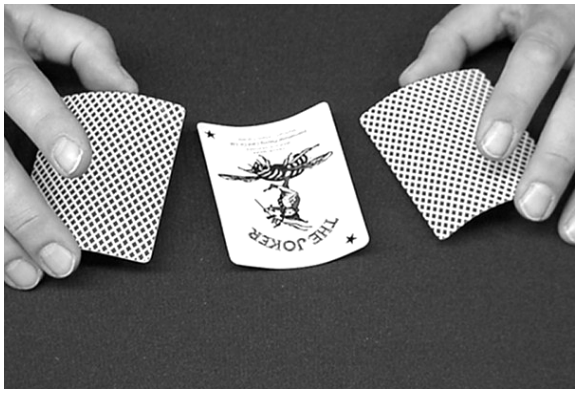


Photo 33



The right hand lifts straight up as the left hand card presses down, allowing the Joker to flip face up as the right hand takes away the Ace.

Photo 34

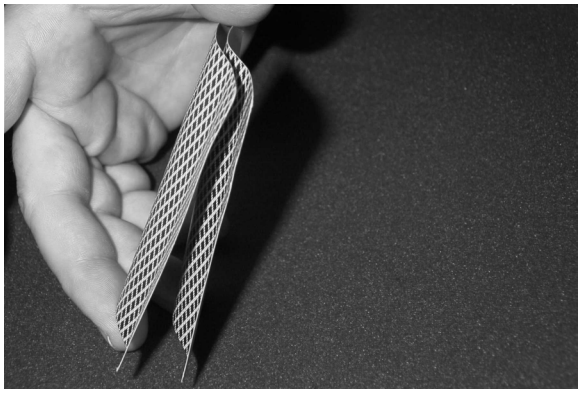
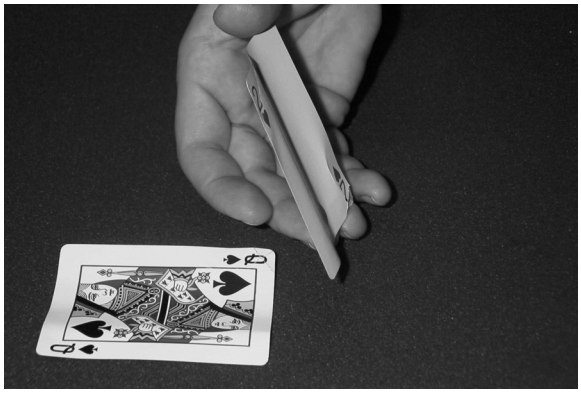


Photo 35



These two photos depict a variation in the *flip* called the *forward-flip*. Once the position in Photo 30 is reached, the right hand pivots up and forward and the top card is thrown face-up.

A variation in method for the *flip* is the *forward-flip*. This is a very effective move that was first shown to me by Los Angeles magician Alfonso, who had learned it from a street hustler. I later found it written up in Garcia's book, **Don't Bet on It!** Garcia suggests it as the perfect move for use with the

daubed card, a procedure we will describe in just a moment. In the *forward-flip*, the right hand comes over the card to be changed just as in Photos 30-31.

Once the two cards are in hype position, however, the hand pivots up and forward as in Photo 34. The top card is allowed to fall forward face-up onto the table as in Photo 35.

The *flip* or the *forward-flip* can be used with the pencil mark, daub or lipstick smudge to show that the marked card is the Ace, when it is actually the Joker. In this ploy, the performer shows the Ace and then hypes the Joker facedown to the center. The operator is distracted by someone, or drops something, and a shill marks the face down card on its upper right corner.

When the operator turns back to the game, it is natural for him to check on the position of the cards. He picks up the right hand card and executes the *flip* or the *forward-flip* with the marked center card, apparently showing the marked card's face. Actually, the marked card is now in his right hand, his second and ring fingers covering the mark.

He uses the card in his right hand to turn the face up Ace facedown (as in the *flip-change* below but without executing the change) the right hand keeps the Joker in position so that it covers the back of the Ace. The operator picks up both cards in the right hand *toss* position. He displays the Ace, and then hypes the Joker facedown to the center of the table. Apparently, the Ace is now in the center with a mark on its back. Actually, the mark was on a Joker the whole time.

An alternative method for showing the mark on the wrong card is to follow the *flip* of the marked card—as above—with the *flip-change*, which we will describe next. See "The Girl at the Bar" in the Appendix. Either of these combinations would be perfect for that scenario.

Flip-Change

The *flip-change* is more difficult than the *flip*. It is used to secretly exchange a face up card for a different card in the action of turning it facedown. It can be used instead of the *hype* as a way of switching the Ace before starting the *mix*. It takes much more practice, but is worth the effort. It can be accomplished with either hand.

Photo 36

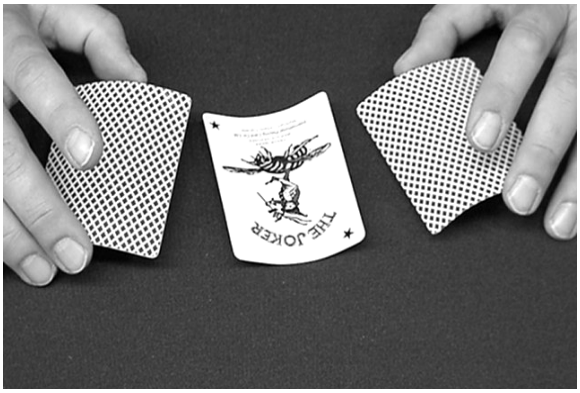
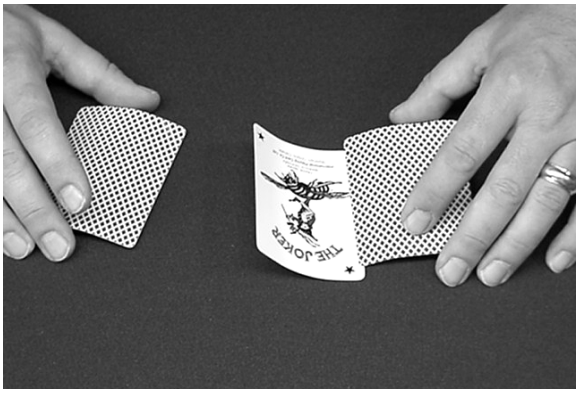


Photo 37



The left hand card presses down on the edge of the face up Joker.

At the start, the Joker is face-up between the two facedown cards as in Photo 36. The Ace of Spades is in the right hand. The left hand presses the edge of its card on the left edge of the face up Joker (Photo 37). The right hand card is brought over to help turn over the center Joker as in Photo 38.

Photo 38

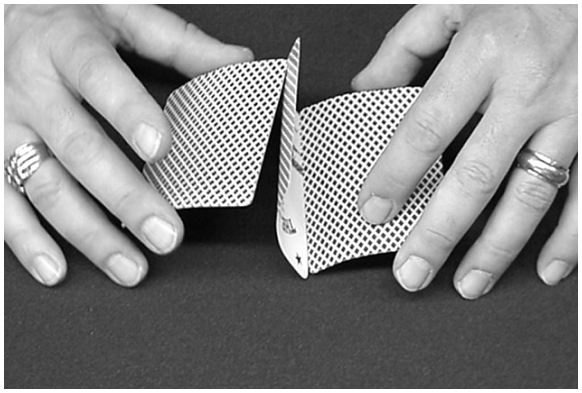
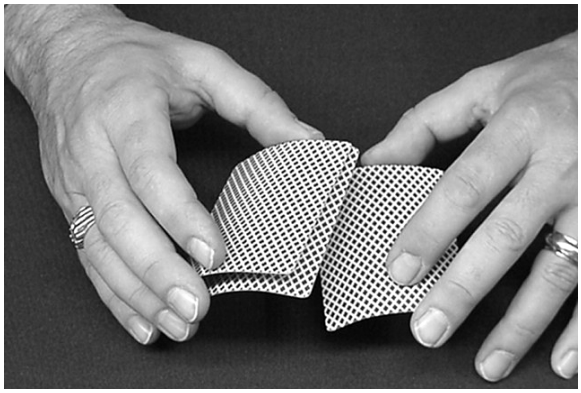


Photo 39



The Joker is turned over with the help of the right hand card, and both cards go into the *throw* position in the right hand.

As the card turns over, the two cards are gripped in the right hand in *toss* position as in Photo 39. The ring finger grips the Joker and pulls it to the right, out from under the Ace which falls facedown in the center as in Photos 40 and 41. The entire action of the *flip-change* is done in one swift and casual motion. The illusion is very good, and can be used in a number of ways. It should be practiced so that it can be accomplished with either hand.

Photo 40

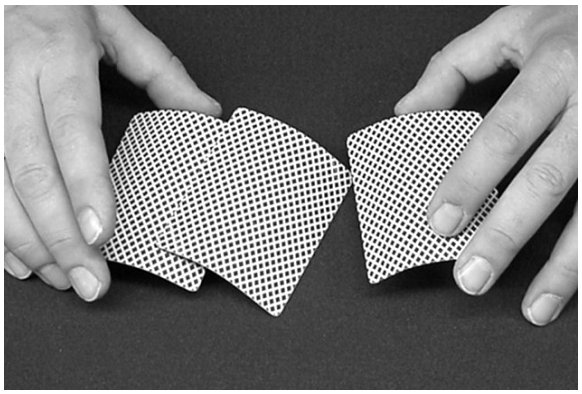
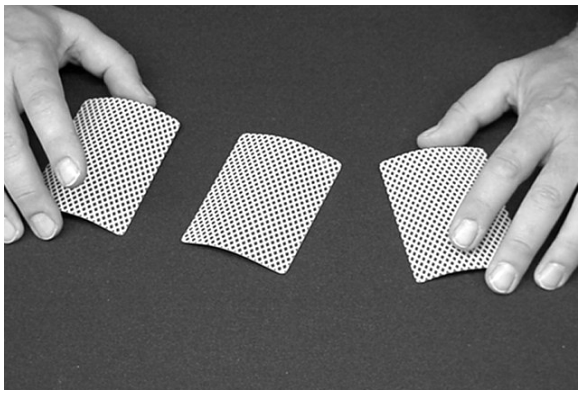


Photo 41



This shows the Ace being dropped into place in the center as the right hand carries away the Joker in the *flip-change*.

Photo 42

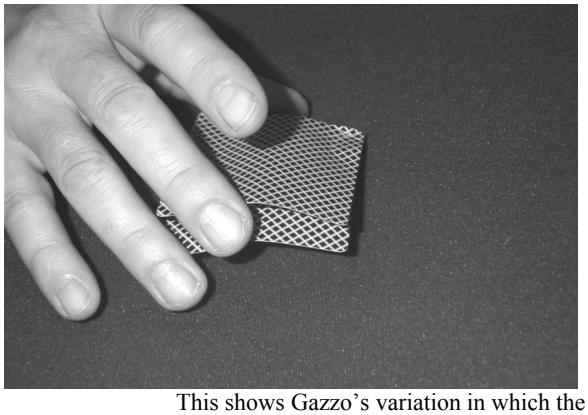
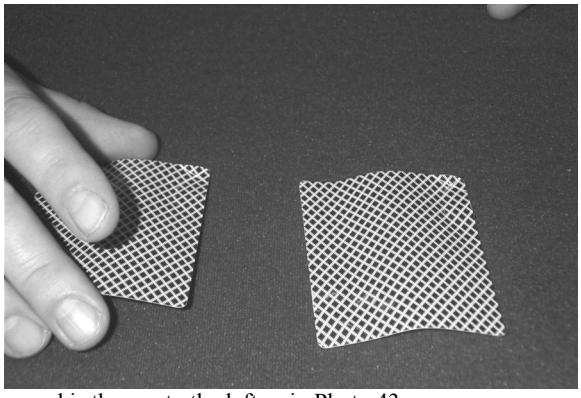


Photo 43



This shows Gazzo's variation in which the top card is thrown to the left as in Photo 43, instead of having the right hand pulled out from under it.

Gazzo has a variation on the flip-change that is very effective as well. In this turnover, the right hand takes up both cards as in Photo 39, and then instead of dropping the top card in place by pulling the bottom card out to the right, the right hand continues its leftward movement slightly and then stops short, so that the top card is thrown to the left, and the right hand holds its position. This action is shown in Photos 42-43.

In actual operation, it is more likely that the Ace will be shown and switched out for a Joker before the mix begins. In an exhibition routine, by combining left and right hand flips and flip-changes, the cards can be shown to be all Jokers or all Aces.

Mexican Turnover

A move that appears in almost every description of the monte, but is of very limited use in practice, is the *Mexican turnover*. It accomplishes the same sort of switch as the *flip*, but it is meant to be used with un-bridged cards. It is very effective when combined with Vernon's *optical move* or Scarne's *monte slide*. This turnover can be made to work with bridged cards, but the *flip* may be an easier and more natural method to use in that case. Behnke credits Senator Crandall with this method for the *Mexican turnover*.

The photos and description below show the Ace in the center position of the three facedown cards on the table being switched for the Joker on the right with the *Mexican turnover*.

Photo 44

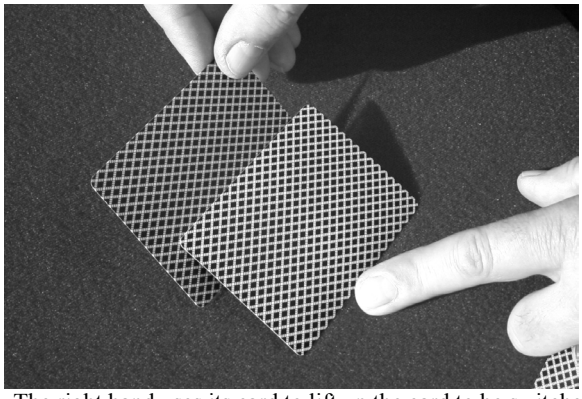
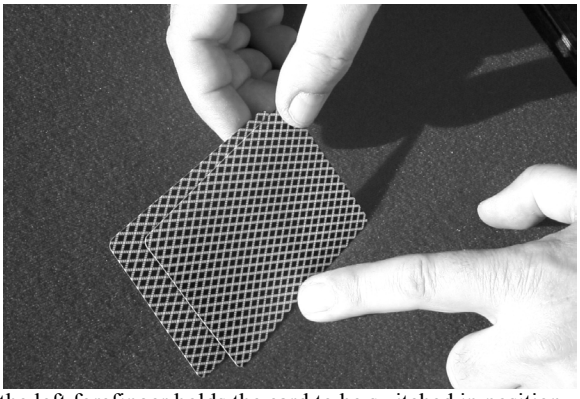


Photo 45



The right hand uses its card to lift up the card to be switched, the left forefinger holds the card to be switched in position.

The card to be switched (Ace) is facedown on the table. The right hand Joker is picked up and held in the right hand at the inner right corner as in Photo 44, held by the right thumb and first finger. The left forefinger is placed at the center of the left long edge of the Ace to hold it in position during the move. The Joker is brought under the Ace, about a half an inch forward of the Ace.

The second finger of the right hand is kept next to the first finger. As the card is pushed under the Ace until the left long edges of the two cards are almost even, the second finger of the right hand will come in contact with the right inner edge of the Ace as in Photo 45. The right thumb moves back so that it is over the second finger, and the corner of the top card (Ace) is taken between right thumb and second finger. The right first finger holds its position under the Joker.

The top card is now gripped between the right thumb and second finger and is lifted straight up, clearing the left forefinger (Photo 46), as the right first finger flips the Joker face up (Photo 47). As the

Ace is lifted up, the right first finger is drawn back under the thumb so that the card is held between the thumb and first finger as in the beginning of the move. When done smoothly and with authority, the illusion that the right hand card was simply used to turn over the card on the table is perfect.

By repeating the move, using the Ace in the right hand to supposedly turn over the second face down card on the left position, the Ace can be shown on the left, and then the Joker remaining in the hand can be shown. The Ace has been convincingly shown to be on the left, when it was actually in the center position.

Photo 46

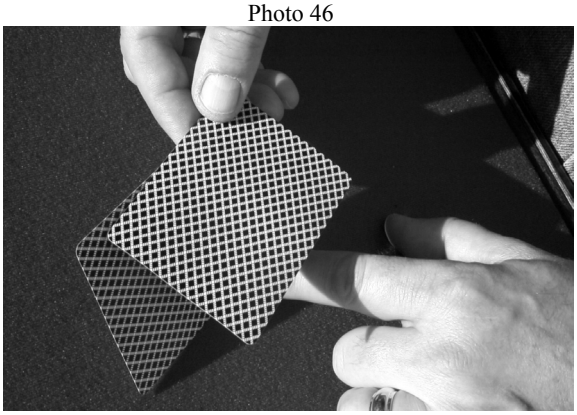
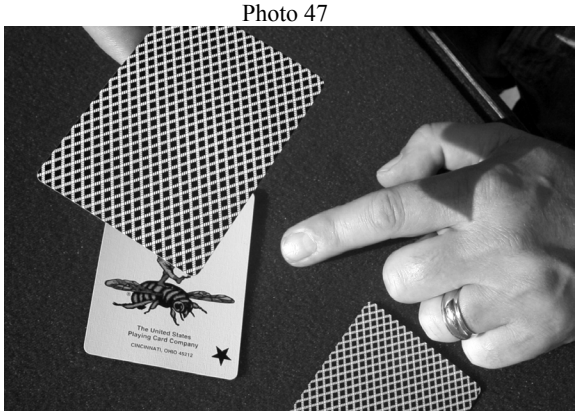


Photo 47



The right hand thumb and second finger take the top card (Ace), as the right first finger turns over the bottom card (Joker).

In actual practice, these turnover switches are never used to prove the sucker is wrong. They are used instead to show that the sucker was right. When there is money down, the spectators are much too suspicious of any fancy moves with the cards.

These moves are very effective, however, in showing the Ace where the spectator thought it should be when the cards are thrown using a hype (or some other switch) and nobody bets. This keeps the spectator thinking that he would have won had he placed a bet ("You had the eyes but not the heart!").

Throws and Patterns

A *throw* is the whole series of moves that show the cards and place them facedown on the playing surface in preparation for the *mix*. The *hype* or one of the other switches outlined above is added to a throw to secretly change the apparent result. There are a large number of potential throws, but they always end up in one of a few possible patterns.

Since the *mix* does not change the order of the cards, it is easy to remember the basic patterns. Remember, nothing tricky is supposed to happen in the throws. The cards are just being shown and placed facedown. The *mix* follows each *throw*. That is when the audience should be concentrating on the action.

Normally, the *mix* is separated from the *throw* by both action and patter. For example, the operator shows his hands empty and says, "Watch the hands," or "Just three cards," or "Nothing in the hands." Since the operator knows where the Ace will actually land, he can focus on the card that is supposed to be the Ace and follow it in his mind through the *mix*.

Sometimes when the spectators are already watching closely, or the game is being run through at a fast clip since only the shills are betting, the cards are thrown down so that the last card thrown is the first card of the *mix*. In this case, it looks as if the throw and the mix are one continuous series of moves.

I. Ace to the Center Pattern.

1. Two-Handed Throw.

A. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. *Toss* Ace to center. Throw the left hand Joker to the right, and then the right hand Joker to the left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

B. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. *Hype* the Joker to center. Throw the left hand Joker to the right, and then the right hand throws the Ace to the left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. *Hype* the Joker to center. Throw the left hand Joker to the left, and then the right hand throws the Ace to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

2. Two-Handed Throw with *Flash-Hype*.

A. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. *Toss* Ace to center. Throw the left hand Joker to right, then pick it up with right hand in *toss* position and look at it, and then throw to left. Glance at remaining Joker in right hand, and throw to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

B. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Hype the Joker to the center. Throw the left hand Joker to the right,

and pick it up with the right hand in *toss* position and look at it, and then *hype* the Ace to the left (*flash hype*). Glance at the Joker in the right hand, and then throw to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Hype the Joker to the center. Throw the left hand Joker to the right, and pick it up with the right hand in *toss* position and look at it, and then *hype* the Ace to the right (*flash hype*). Glance at the Joker in the right hand, and then throw to left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

3. One-Handed Throw from Table.

A. All three cards are facedown on the table: J A J. Pick up right Joker with right hand, look at it. Pick up Ace with right hand in toss position, and look at it. Toss Ace to center. Pick up left hand Joker with right hand in toss position, glance at Joker, and then toss Joker to left. Glance at Joker in right hand and throw to right. Mix.
Ace ends up in the center.

B. All three cards are facedown on the table: J A J. Pick up right Joker with right hand, look at it. Pick up Ace with right hand in *toss* position, and look at it. *Hype* Joker to center. Pick up left hand Joker with right hand in *toss* position, glance at Joker, and then *hype* Ace to left. Glance at Joker in right hand and throw to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. All three cards are facedown on the table: J A J. Pick up left Joker with right hand, look at it. Pick up Ace with right hand in *toss* position, and look at it. *Hype* Joker to center. Pick up right hand Joker with right hand in *toss* position, glance at Joker, and then *hype* Ace to right. Glance at Joker in right hand and throw to left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

4. Flip-Change Throw.

A. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Simulate Flip and Flip-Change moves in the following sequence. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use both Jokers to turn Ace facedown. Drop Jokers to either side of the Ace. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

B. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use *Flip-Change* to switch left hand Joker for Ace. Drop Ace in left hand to left as Joker in right hand is dropped to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use *Flip-Change* to switch right hand Joker for Ace. Drop Joker in left hand to left as Ace in right hand is dropped to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

5. Three in the Hand Throw.

A. Pick up right Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. Toss bottom Joker to left, Ace to center, top Joker to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

B. Pick up right Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. *Hype* Ace to left, toss bottom Joker to center, throw top Joker to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Pick up right Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. *Hype* Ace to right, toss bottom Joker to center, throw top Joker to left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

II. Ace to the Left Pattern.

1. Two-Handed Throw.

A. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Ace is tossed to left position, and then Joker in left hand is tossed to center as Joker in right hand is tossed to right. *Mix.*
Ace ends up on the left.

B. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to left position, and then Joker in left hand is tossed to center as Ace in right hand is tossed to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

C. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to left position, and then Joker in left hand is tossed to right as Ace in right hand is tossed to the center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

2. Two-Handed Throw with *Flash-Hype*.

A. Cards are picked up in *toss* position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Ace is tossed to left. Joker in left hand is tossed to center, Joker in right hand is tossed to right. Right hand picks up right Joker, then center Joker in *toss* position. Glance at Joker, *toss* to center. Glance at second Joker, throw to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

B. Cards are picked up in *toss* position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to left. Joker in left hand is tossed to center, Ace in right hand is tossed to right. Right hand picks up Ace, then center Joker in *toss* position. Glance at Joker, *hype* Ace to right. Glance at Joker in right hand, throw to center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

C. Cards are picked up in *toss* position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to left. Joker in left hand is tossed to center, Ace in right hand is tossed to right. Right hand picks up Ace, then center Joker in *toss* position. Glance at Joker, *hype* Ace to center. Glance at Joker in right hand, throw to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

3. One-Handed Throw from Table.

A. All three cards are facedown on the table: A J J. Right hand picks up right Joker, then Ace (Toss position). Ace is displayed, tossed to the left. Right hand picks up center Joker, displays. Joker is tossed to the center. Remaining Joker is displayed, and then thrown to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

B. All three cards are facedown on the table: A J J. Right hand picks up right Joker, then Ace (Toss position). Ace is displayed, Joker is *hyped* to the left. Right hand picks up center Joker, displays. Ace is *hyped* to the right. Remaining Joker is displayed, and then thrown to the center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

C. All three cards are facedown on the table: A J J. Right hand picks up right Joker, then Ace (Toss position). Ace is displayed, Joker is hyped to the left. Right hand picks up center Joker, displays. Ace is hyped to the center. Remaining Joker is displayed, and then thrown to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

4. Flip-Change Throw.

A. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Simulate Flip and Flip-Change moves in the following sequence. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use both Jokers to turn Ace facedown. Drop Joker in left hand to center, Joker in right hand to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

B. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use *Flip-Change* to switch right-hand Joker for Ace. Drop Ace in right hand to right as Joker in left hand is dropped to center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

C. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use *Flip-Change* to switch left-hand Joker for Ace. Drop Ace in left hand to center as Joker in right hand is dropped to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the center.

5. Three in the Hand Throw.

A. Pick up Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down.

Toss bottom Joker to right, Ace to left, top Joker to center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

B. Pick up Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. Hype Ace to right, bottom Joker to left, top Joker to center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

C. Pick up Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. Hype Ace to center, bottom Joker to left, top Joker to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the center.

III. Ace to the Right Pattern.

1. Two-Handed Throw.

A. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Ace is tossed to right position, and then Joker in left hand is thrown to left as Joker in right hand is thrown to center. *Mix.*
Ace ends up on the right.

B. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to right position, and then Joker in left hand is thrown to center as Ace in right hand is thrown to left. *Mix.*
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Cards are picked up in toss position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to right position, and then Joker in left hand is thrown to left as Ace in right hand is thrown to center. *Mix.*
Ace ends up on the center.

2. Two-Handed Throw with *Flash-Hype*.

A. Cards are picked up in *toss* position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Ace is tossed to the right. Joker in left hand is thrown to the left, Joker in right hand is thrown to the center. Right hand picks up center Joker, then left Joker in *toss* position. Glance at Joker, throw to center. Glance at Joker, throw to left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

B. Cards are picked up in *toss* position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to the right. Joker in left hand is thrown to the left, Ace in right hand is thrown to the center. Right hand picks up Ace in center, then left Joker in *toss* position. Glance at Joker, *hype* Ace to left. Glance at Joker, throw to center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Cards are picked up in *toss* position and displayed: Joker in left hand, Joker and then Ace in right hand. Joker is *hyped* to the right. Joker in left hand is thrown to the left, Ace

in right hand is thrown to the center. Right hand picks up Ace in center, then left Joker in *toss* position. Glance at Joker, *hype* Ace to center. Glance at Joker, throw to right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the center.

3. One-Handed Throw from Table.

A. All three cards are facedown on the table: J J A. Right hand picks up left Joker, then Ace (Toss position). Ace is displayed, tossed to the right. Right hand picks up center Joker, displays. Joker is tossed to the center. Remaining Joker is displayed, and then thrown to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

B. All three cards are facedown on the table: J J A. Right hand picks up left Joker, then Ace (Toss position). Ace is displayed, Joker is *hyped* to the right. Right hand picks up center Joker, displays. Ace is *hyped* to the left. Remaining Joker is displayed, and then thrown to the center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. All three cards are facedown on the table: J J A. Right hand picks up left Joker, then Ace (Toss position). Ace is displayed, Joker is *hyped* to the right. Right hand picks up center Joker, displays. Ace is *hyped* to the center. Remaining Joker is displayed, and then thrown to the left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up in the center.

4. Flip-Change Throw.

A. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Simulate Flip and Flip-Change moves in the following sequence. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use both Jokers to turn Ace facedown. Drop Joker in left hand to center, Joker in right hand to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

B. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use *Flip-Change* to switch right-hand Joker for Ace. Drop Ace in right hand to right as Joker in left hand is dropped to the center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Pick up right Joker with right hand, left Joker with left hand. Display Jokers. Use both Jokers to turn Ace face up. Use *Flip-Change* to switch left-hand Joker for Ace. Drop Ace in left hand to center as Joker in right hand is dropped to the right. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the center.

5. Three in the Hand Throw.

A. Pick up Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. Toss bottom Joker to the left, Ace to the right, top Joker to the center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the right.

B. Pick up Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down. Hype Ace to the left, toss bottom Joker to right, throw remaining Joker to center. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the left.

C. Pick up Joker with right hand, display. Pick up Ace in right hand, display. Pick up left Joker in right hand, display. (*Three in the Hand Toss* position). Turn cards face down.

Hype Ace to center, toss bottom Joker to right, throw remaining Joker to left. *Mix*.
Ace ends up on the center.

These are the major variations of the throws. Other throws can be developed using switch moves such as the *double-lift*, the *glide*, the *optical move*, the *monte slide* or various different combinations of moves. The basic patterns will always be the same. These throws should be practiced carefully both with and without the hypes and switches so that they look identical either way.

Routines of three or four different throws should be put together with the "A" throws. The Ace will end up in different places each time (left, center, right, left, etc.). Then these same routines should be done with the hyped and switched throws. Practice each routine and the accompanying patter thoroughly so that it can be performed without thinking. The operator should always be talking through these moves. He should always control the thinking of his spectators.

Never really show the mark where the winning card is after he makes a wrong guess. Just gather up the cards, shuffle them, and look at them. Then drop them to the table in the correct position to start the next deal. If no one cares to bet, the cards should be picked up and shuffled and re-thrown. It is important not to show that the spectator would have been wrong had he placed the bet, as this will make them shy off from betting even more. The *flip* or the *Mexican turnover* can be used to show the Ace where the spectator *thinks* it should be. On the street, the operator will use the *flip* this way and say, "You had the eyes but not the heart."

Hooks and Come-Ons

These are the money moves. The sucker sees that the money card has been bent-up at one corner, or he sees someone tear off a corner of the card. The sucker is drawn into what he thinks is a sure-thing. It is, but not for him. There are two ways of doing this kind of move, as a *hook* or as a *come-on*.

The *come-on* is when the operator draws the sucker in by promising to make it easy: "Come on, look. I'll put this stamp on the back of the money card. You can't miss." These come-ons are usually done with a bent or torn corner, a paperclip, a tiny piece of wet newspaper, a postage stamp or some other device for marking the money card.

Since the sucker knows that the operator is working the procedure, the only draw is the apparent impossibility of the challenge. The sucker sees it as some kind of bluff, perhaps. Psychologically, it is not strong because the sucker must suspect that the operator is up to something. These come-ons are not very effective for getting the money. They are used rarely in the real scam, and then only when the

operator is working without shills. It is the fact that they can be done without a shill that makes them crop up so often in magicians' exhibition routines.

The *hook* is different. The hook is some apparent mistake or oversight on the operator's part that the sucker notices on his own, or is pointed out to him by a shill, that makes him think he has an unfair advantage in the game.

For example, a shill might surreptitiously mark the money card, or it may be "accidentally" bent during the shuffle. In one hook, the cards have a "one way" back design and the money card is somehow "accidentally" reversed. The psychological strength of the hook is that the sucker is disarmed by his belief that he is in a superior position to the operator because of his "secret" knowledge.

We will focus on the hooks first, since these are the most important for the scam artist. The most common of these subterfuges is the bent corner.

Bent Corner

The switch of the bent corner is easier than it looks. If the fingers are in the correct position, success should come fairly quickly. The first problem is finding a convincing way to bend the corner. In the grifter's jargon, this is called putting the "ear" or the "lug" in.

Photo 48

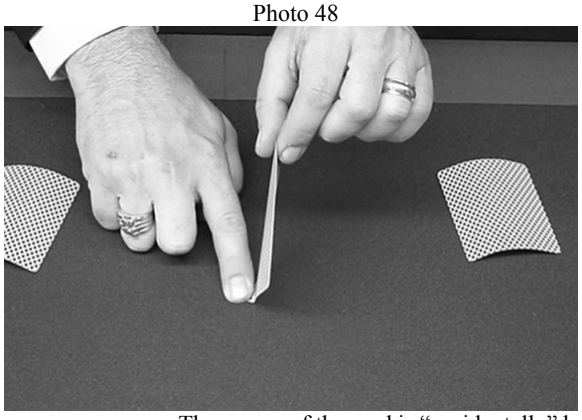
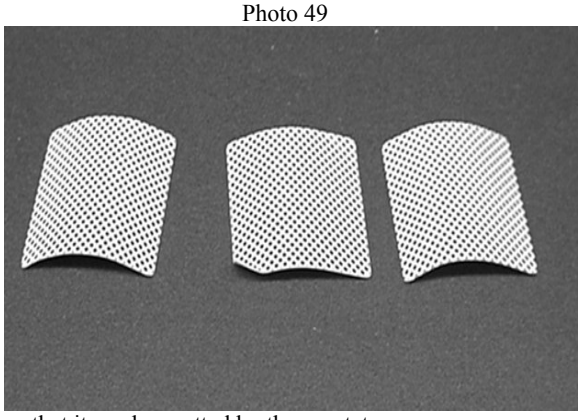


Photo 49



The corner of the card is "accidentally" bent so that it can be spotted by the spectators.

In the street scam, one of the shills usually bends the corner. Jay Ose used to have a stooge in his audience to do it when he dropped the card box, or turned to talk to someone. Sometimes he would "accidentally" bend the corner while using it to tap the other two "wrong" cards.

In the **School for Scoundrels** routine, the card is bent by placing a finger on the corner of the card and then lifting it to supposedly "flash" it to a shill in the audience (Photo 48). The operator may just put the bend in as he is throwing the cards, and let the spectators notice it in play. However it is placed, the bend is put in the corner of the Ace as in Photo 49.

The audience must believe that the performer is unaware of this "mistake." Usually, the cards are thrown and mixed a couple of times, so that the audience can tell where the Ace is hiding. On the money *throw*, the operator picks up two Jokers—one in either hand. He then picks up the Ace in the left hand in toss position and displays it. As the left hand reaches for the Ace on the table, it crosses in front of the right hand.

The right hand is then slightly covered by the left arm. The right third finger pulls up on the corner of its card. The second finger pushes down. Because of the "work" that went into the card earlier, the corner should easily bend upwards (Photo 50). The fingers of the right hand continue to cover the bend.

Photo 50

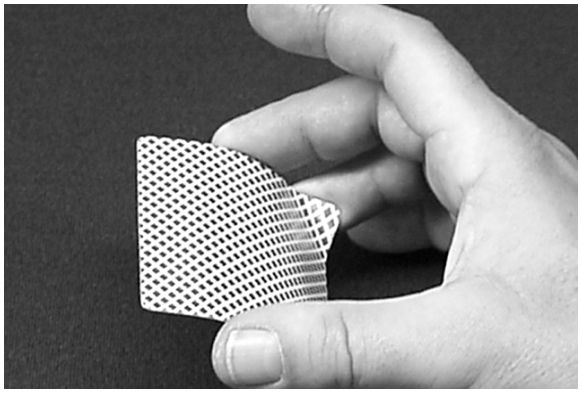
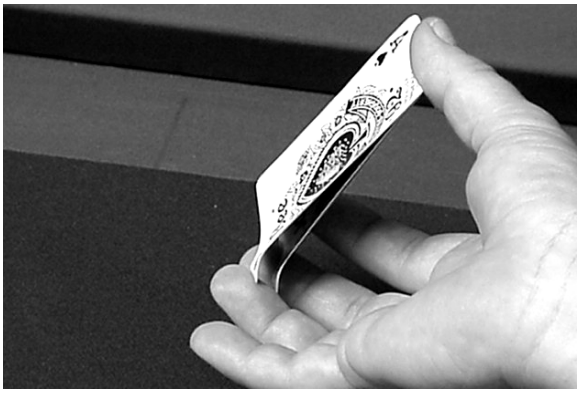


Photo 51



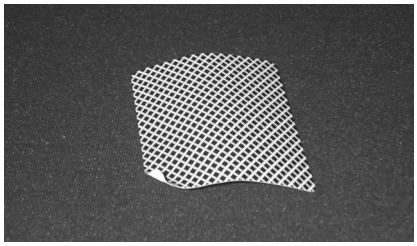
Left photo shows the right ring finger bending up the corner (slightly exaggerated). The first finger points to Ace on table.

The left hand *tosses* the Ace facedown to the table. The right hand then picks up the Ace in *toss* position as in Photo 51. The performer glances at it carelessly, and then *hypes* the Joker to the center. The left hand throws its card to the right. As the left hand throws its card down, the operator's body turns slightly to the right. At the same moment, the corner of the Ace in the right hand is un-crimped by pushing down with the ring finger as the second finger pulls up on the card. The cross of the left arm as it tosses its card to the right provides cover for this tiny action of the right fingers.

The right hand picks up the Joker on the right in *toss* position, looks at it and then hypes the Ace to the right. The same Joker is shown again and thrown to the left. Up until now everything is casual. The operator claps his hands and says challengingly, "Try to follow this!" Then the cards are mixed with some speed and intensity. It is as if the operator is determined to confuse the spectators. But the *mix* couldn't fool a five year old at any speed, so the suckers are convinced that they know where to find the Ace—they could find it even if it *wasn't* bent. But they know the corner of the Ace *is* bent—so it's a sure-thing…

The Double Bent Corner

Ronald Wohl showed us a twist on the bent corner that he learned from a monte-tosser in New York City. He calls it the *Double Bent Corner*. The corners are prepared as above, but then a tiny piece of each corner is creased sharply back at the position of the dotted line in the pictures below:



The dotted line on the Ace in the photo at left shows where the crease is put in. The photo on the right shows the little "flag" that the crease creates in the **Double Bent Corner**.

When the bend is put in the card, the little crease folds back like a white flag and really grabs the eye of the suckers. It is taken out just as easily as the regular bent corner. This is much stronger for the street—especially where the operator is working without shills—since it is so much easier for the fish to notice the bait. This is also excellent for an exhibition routine, and for the same reason. Dr. Wohl tells us that in his opinion, it was the single most effective hook he ever saw on the street, and he has seen many.

Gazzo's *Creased Lightning*

Gazzo has a powerful method of his own device for performing the bent corner. It is a method of putting a crimped corner in and out with ease, with the kicker that the sucker can see the index of the money card on the bent-up corner. This is very convincing, and a sure-fire method for the street. Only certain cards can be used for this clever monte hook.

Either the Queen of Spades or The Queen of Clubs can be the money card, paired with the 2, 8, or 9 of Hearts or Diamonds. The loser cards can match as in two 2 of Hearts, or can be mated as in a 2 of Hearts and a 2 of Diamonds. Gazzo prefers the latter, since sometimes he can use the *flash-hype* with the same suit counted twice as a kind of test to see if the spectator knows about the hype.

He can tell by watching the spectator's eyes if he was trying to follow a *hype*. He can then use a faked *hype* as a feint. The Queen is actually thrown to the table, but the action is exaggerated to look like a *hype*. Gazzo then *flash-hypes* the 2 of Hearts to the right on the table, showing the 2 Diamonds for the second time as he tosses it to the left. The wise guy thinks the Queen is on the right. It is in the center.

The corners of the Queen and the two Eights are creased backwards, and then the line of the red eights above the crease is colored black with a fine-point pen.

When the cards are prepared Gazzo's way, the spectator will be completely taken in by the fact that the bent corner of the card he thinks is the Queen actually shows the top of the black "Q" of that card's index. When he goes for it, it is an 8 of Hearts. Not only does Gazzo's method have this added convincer, but also the special folds in the card make the crimped corner lock into the down position with a light stroke of the little finger.

The cards are prepared in a very special way. First the corner of each of the three cards is bent backward and creased as in the photos above. Using a black ink pen like the "Sharpie" ultra-fine point permanent marker, the line of the red 8 above the crease is filled in with black ink. Now when it is folded back, the top of the eight looks like the top of the "Q" in the Queen's index. A red 9 or 2 can make a similar fake black "Q."

Gazzo says that a black king can also be used with a red 7. Although the corner of the seven is actually off-kilter when it is folded back, the angle of the fold makes it look enough like the top of a black "K" to fool people.

At this point some special folds are put into the cards that make the corners snap into place with just a brush of the little finger. These folds cause the corner to "lock" in the down position, and yet with a little pressure, the corner can be bent completely back against the back of the card.

Photo 52

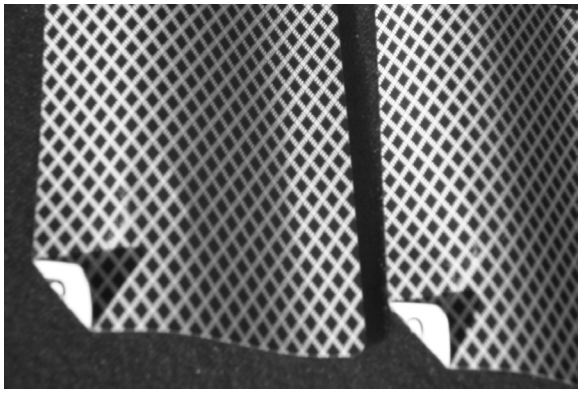
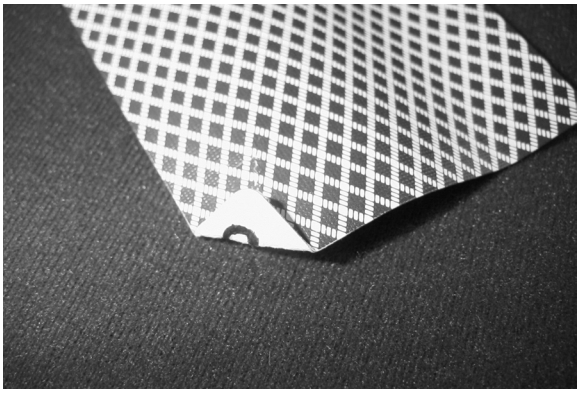
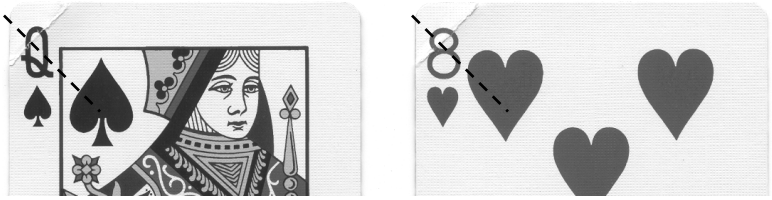


Photo 53



The photo on the left shows a Queen of Spades (left) and an 8 of Hearts (right) with the corners folded back.
Once the top of the 8 of Hearts is inked black as in the photo on the right, it looks almost identical to the Queen.

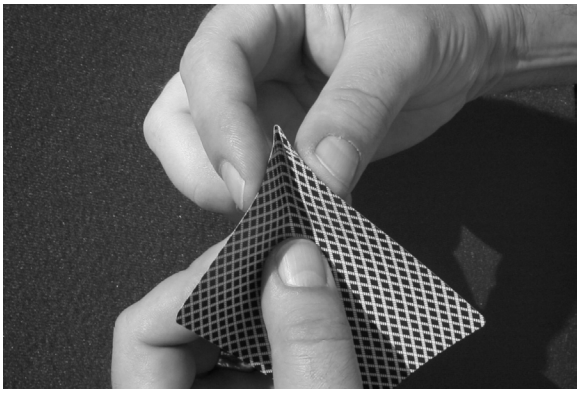


The dotted line shows where the second fold will be made.

The second fold after the corner has been creased back is made in a diagonal line that goes from the very corner of the card perpendicularly through the first crease to about three-quarters of an inch long. This fold is made by pinching the card from the face so that the back is folded against itself, starting at the corner and working back three-quarters of an inch (Photos 54, 55). This is given a fairly sharp crease.

Photo 54

Photo 55



Then another fold is made which forms the actual spring for the lock. The card is held facedown in the left hand, and the right hand thumb grabs the corner of the card and bends it around itself as in Photos 56 and 57. This bend is then allowed to straighten itself back out somewhat. This puts a bias in the card that acts as a spring that locks the corner back down in place.

Photo 56

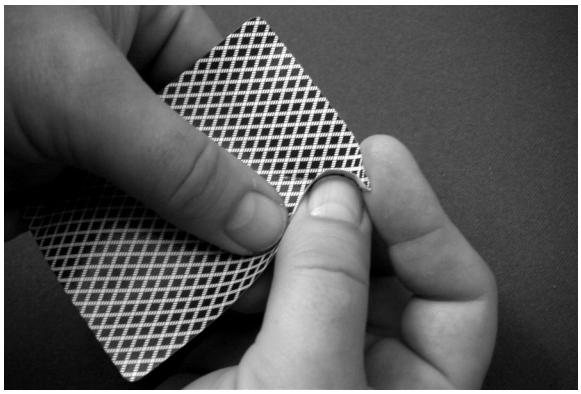
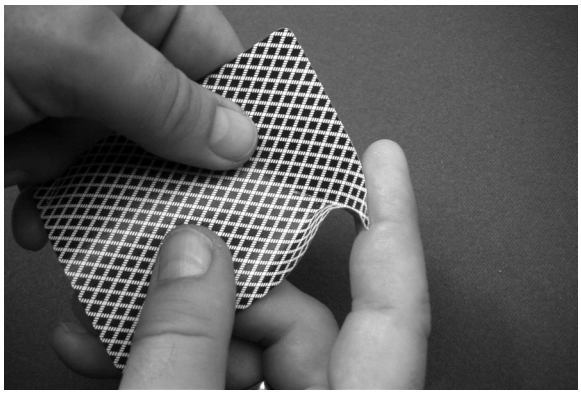


Photo 57



At this point, the card is bent into the "s" shape with the big hump going on the right long edge of the card (Photo 58). All three cards are prepared in the same manner so that they look as identical to each other as possible. On both 8's, the number 8 is inked black above the crimp.

Photo 58

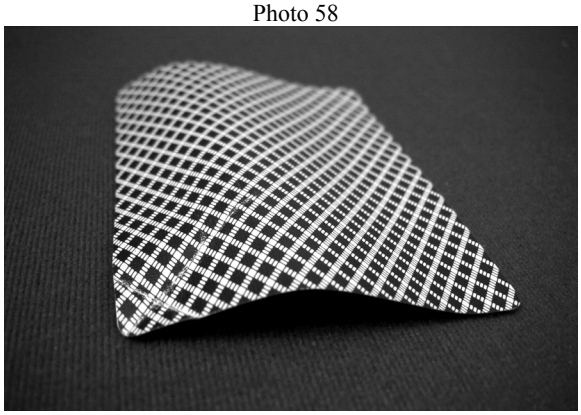
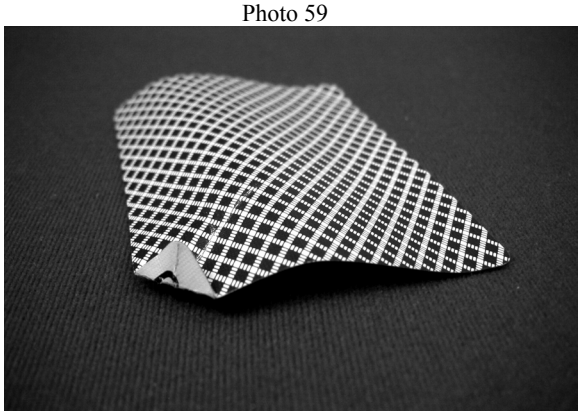


Photo 59



Left photo shows "s" bend in card from spectators view. Right photo shows corner bent back.

If the cards are prepared properly, and it may take a little experimentation to get just the right tension on the folds, the creased corner will stay in position when it is folded back (Photo 59), but when the third finger or little finger strokes it forward (Photo 61), it will fall into the down position as in Photo 58 and lock in place. All three cards look crumpled at this point, as if they have been beaten around on the street. No one would suspect the cards have such machinery built into the design.

The cards can be handled normally. No one will notice the tiny black line of the number 8 that rests on the corners of the two red 8's. It does not seem germane until after the hook is set, and then it is too late. At any rate, people are looking for the "Queen," and as soon as an 8 comes into view, they turn away to look elsewhere.

The right ring finger pulls back on the corner to put the "ear" in, just like in the description of putting in the bent corner. It is sometimes helpful to rest the hand with the card against the table (Photo 60), so that the corner can be pressed all the way back. To take out the crimp, the right little finger just strokes forward until the corner falls into place (Photo 61).

Photo 60

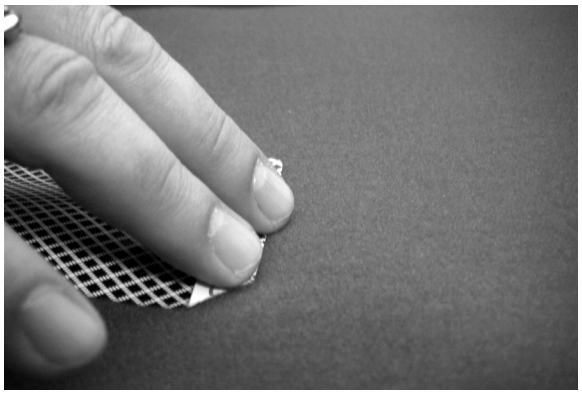
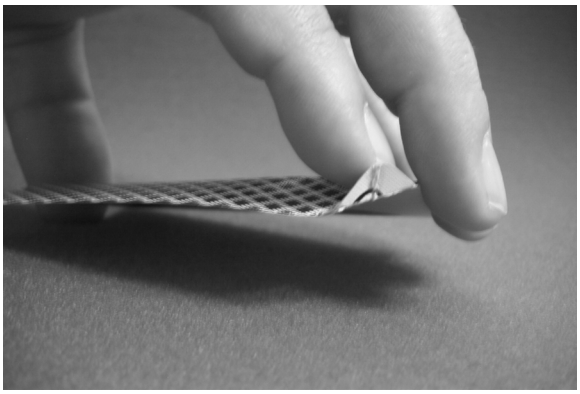


Photo 61



This method is really meant for the street, where it is an awesome thing. It is a perfect hook for the operator working without shills, as the corner is so noticeable that the spectators are bound to see it.

Gazzo's *Down-Turn*

Gazzo always puts a second set of work in his monte cards, after they are prepared for the *Creased Lightning*. This work goes into the diagonally opposite corner from the *Creased Lightning* work on each card. The *Creased Lightning* corner will be partially turned up in the following photos—to aid in orientation. In reality, of course, this corner would be flat. The work put into the opposite corner allows Gazzo to reverse the orientation of the cards and perform another excellent bent corner hook that he calls the *Down-Turn*.

Photo 62

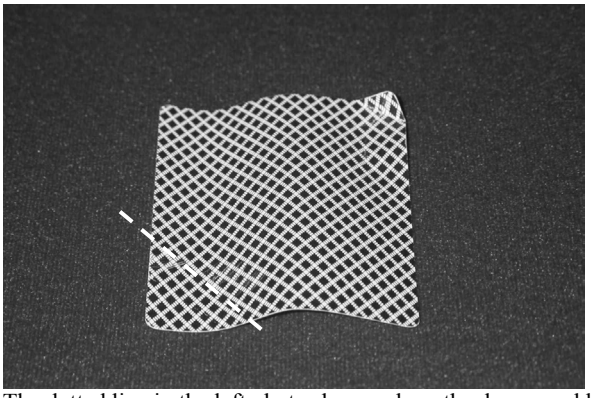
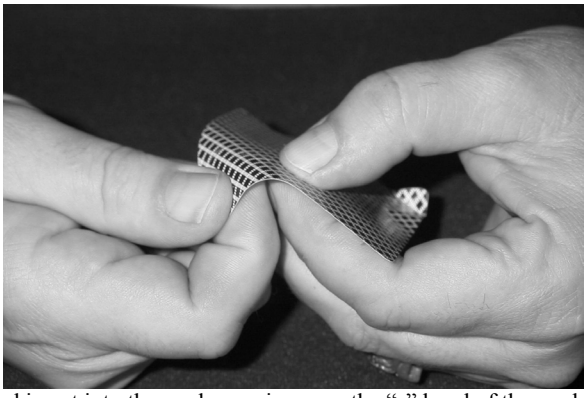


Photo 63



The dotted line in the left photo shows where the downward bend is put into the card, crossing over the "s" bend of the card.

The preparation for the *Down-Turn* is simple. The card is bent down along the line shown in Photo 62. This bends it over the "s" bend in the card. This is important, as the "s" bend bias helps to put the corner in and take it out. The card is bent down as in Photo 63, and then bent back to level several times until it softens. Now when the bend is put in, it will hold its position until it is taken out—and taking it out is made easy by the bias of the card's other "s" bend.

All three cards are prepared identically. Now it is a simple matter for the shill to pick up the Queen and toss it back down in "disappointment," putting a heavy bend in the card as in Photo 65. Alternatively, the dealer can put the bend in the card during play, and it will seem that he accidentally handled the card too roughly. To do this, he uses the same method as if he were bending the loser card as shown in Photo 64. The second finger (resting on the hump of the "s" bend) pulls up on the card as

the third and fourth fingers push down. The photo shows the second and third fingers separated for clarity, but in practice they would be held together.

To perform, the dealer allows the spectators to notice the bend in the Queen. When he is certain that the suckers are hooked, he turns the Queen face up on the table. He shows the two in his right hand, and then as he turns the Queen face down using the two in his left hand, he puts the bend in the two in the right.

The Queen is then picked up in the right hand in hype position, and shown, and the crimped two is hyped to the table. The left hand crosses in front of the right to set its two down to the right, and under that cover, the bend is taken out of the Queen by pressing it against the table with the right third finger as in Photo 66 and Photo 67. This move only takes a second due to the bias in the card created by the "s" bend.

Now the two on the right can be picked up with the Queen in the right hand and flash-hyped, or the Queen can be tossed to the left and the mix begun.

Photo 64

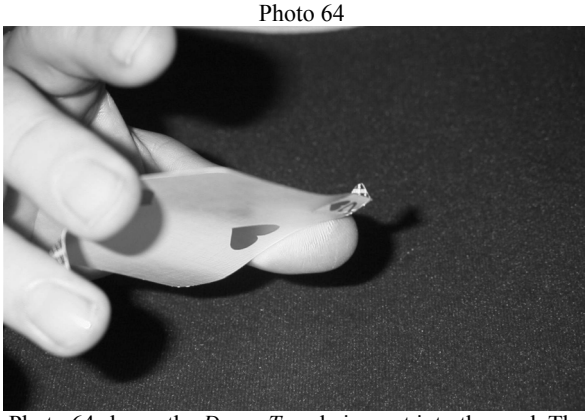


Photo 65

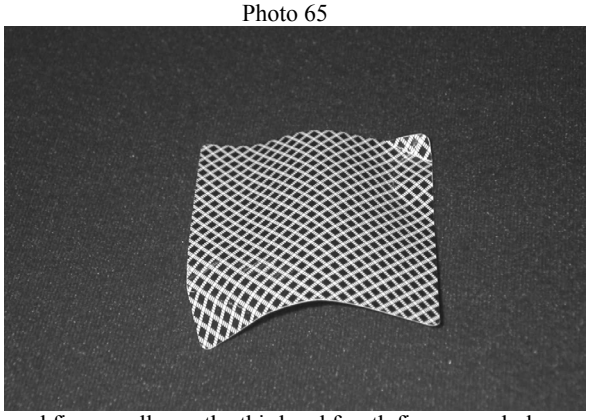


Photo 64 shows the *Down-Turn* being put into the card. The second finger pulls up, the third and fourth fingers push down. These are views from the spectator's angle, and the rear *Creased Lightning* corner is folded up to show orientation.

Photo 66

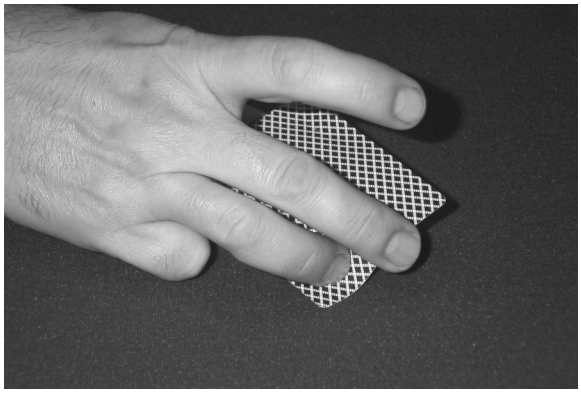
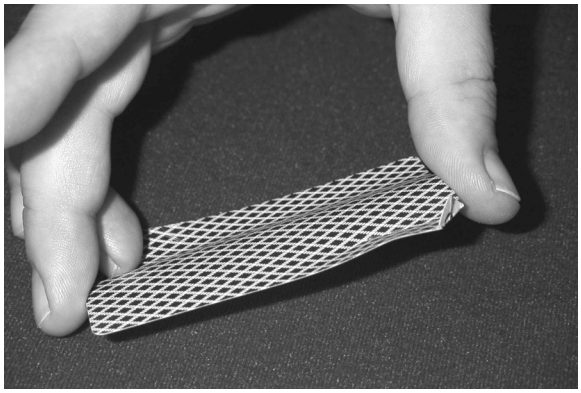


Photo 67



Taking the bend out of the corner. Front and side views of the card being "pressed" against the table.

Gazzo prefers to have the *Creased Lightning* set by a shill, since it looks like such a deliberate work. When that is impractical for some reason—say he is in a hurry to hook a sucker before he walks off—Gazzo sets the *Down-Turn* himself. It looks more like a bend that might happen accidentally in play.

One-Way Backs Hook

Audley Walsh called this the "sleekest and most mystifying" of the monte effects in Scarne's collection. Like the bent corner, the *one-way backs hook* is a true *hook*, in that the spectator notices it on his own or through the whisper of a shill. He thinks he has an unfair advantage over the dealer because the cards have a one-way back design, and the QS has accidentally been turned the wrong way. It is easy to see where it is at all times because it is the only one "upside down." See Photo 68 where the middle card has the eight ball in its design at the left rear. The other two cards have it to the front on the right (from the spectator's point of view).

In some ways, this is better than the bent corner because of its subtlety and believability. It is not too surprising that the dealer might not notice this mistake, whereas a bent or torn corner would be fairly noticeable. No drunkenness, near-sightedness, distraction or stupidity must be contrived to explain why the dealer doesn't notice the obvious. What makes this *hook* even more appealing is that it uses a very clever and imperceptible ruse to reverse two cards right under the suckers nose. This move, the *revolution move*, is useful in several other *come-ons* and *hooks*, as we will explain later.

Photo 68

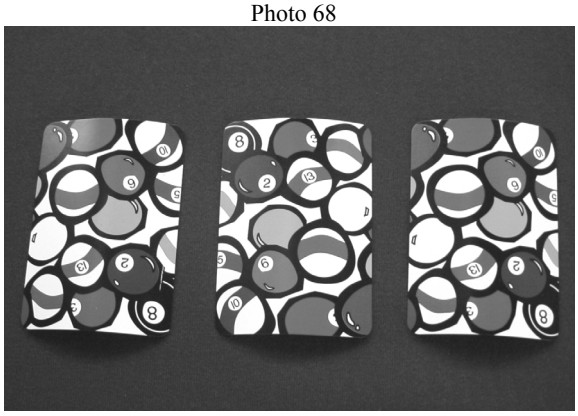
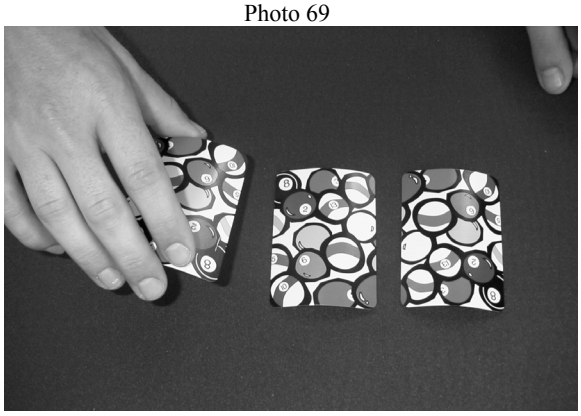


Photo 69



Three cards with a showy one-way back design are dealt in a monte game. After a few throws, the QS is facedown on the table. It is turned face up end over end, and then back facedown, but this time from side to side as in the *flip*. Now the QS (center) is the only card whose back design is reversed (Photo 68). After a few times of playing, the spectator will notice the "mistake." Else, a shill will point it out to him.

Photo 70

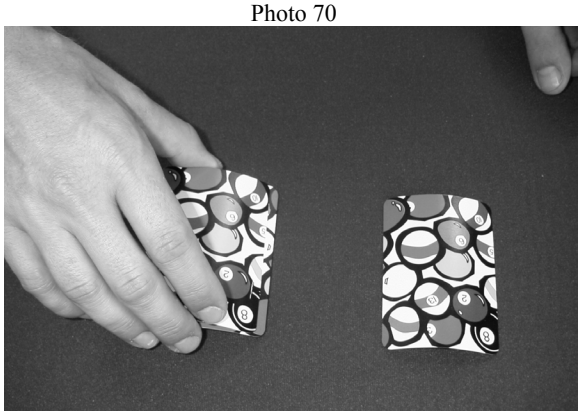
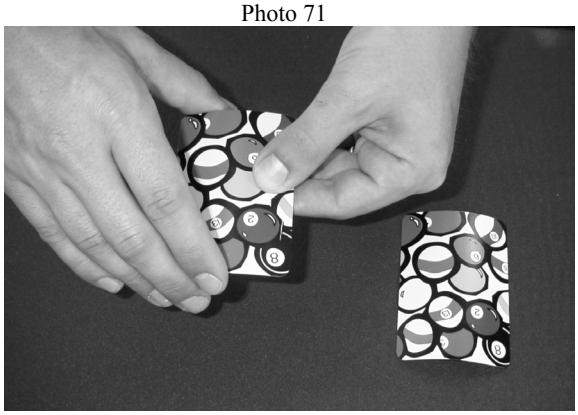


Photo 71



When ready to play the *hook*, the cards are facedown on the table with the QS in the center. The right hand picks up the Joker and places it on top of the QS as in Photos 69 and 70. The two cards are picked up together in the right hand. As the hand lifts the cards off the table, the left hand comes over and grabs the two cards by the left long edge (Photo 71).

The left hand turns over toward the operator, showing the face of the packet (QS) to the spectators. This can be brought over to show the QS to those on the dealer's right, as in Photo 72. In this case, the cards are brought back to the right hand that has turned over to take them so that the thumb is on the top and the fingers on the bottom of the packet (Photo 73).

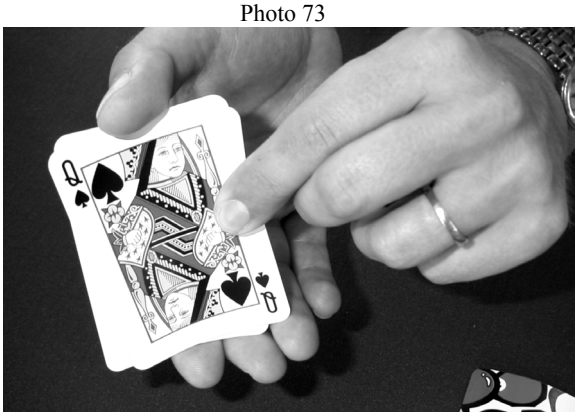
As the cards are taken by the right hand, the left pulls the QS over slightly to the left, making it easy to take the cards in position for a *hype*, with the corner of the QS being taken by the third finger, and the Joker by the second finger. The left hand then picks up the second Joker from the table, and all three cards are displayed with the hands palm up.

The Joker in the right hand is hyped to the center of the table, and the remaining cards tossed to either side of it. The cards are mixed, but now the one reversed card is a Joker, and it is resting on the spot that the sucker was certain is where the QS ended up.

Another way to handle the move is to turn the two cards face up as in Photo 73, but this time the right hand turns over and grasps the cards immediately. At the same time, the left hand separates the QS from the Joker and pulls it away to the right so that both cards can be plainly seen.

Photo 72

Photo 73



The Joker is already in *toss* position, and the QS is placed back into the right hand in perfect *toss* position. It looks as if the dealer merely picked up the two cards, and then as an afterthought, showed them to the spectators. The left hand picks up the tabled card in dealing position and the throw begins. The illusion that the card never turns around is very powerful. It seems to go straight up and down in place. The shift of position of the right hand is covered by the misdirection, although it is so subtle it really only needs justification.

Scarne's Crimped Corner

This is a *come-on* version of the bent corner. The cards have had their corners softened as in the description of the bent corner above. The cards are face down in a row with the QS in the center. The dealer bends up the corner of the QS and explains that that is how people really get taken. The right hand picks up the right Joker and then the QS (Photos 69 and 70). The left hand takes the two cards and

turns them up as in Photo 71 and the right hand turns over and takes them again in the *revolution move* (Photo 73). The QS is shown separately in the left hand and then placed into toss position in the right hand. In the process, the right third finger puts a crimp into the corner of the Joker.

The Joker is hyped to the center of the table, and the right hand takes the QS over to the second Joker still on the table and picks it up in *toss* position. Now the Joker on the table has its crimp on the end toward the spectator, and the QS is in the right hand with its crimp toward the dealer (near the thumb). Both cards are then grasped by the left hand from underneath between thumb on one long side, and second finger on the other. The first finger of the left hand is curled up underneath the packet. The right hand runs the cards back and forth between the left fingers a couple of times in a squaring motion, as if adjusting the bridge, and then the left fingers slide to the rear of the cards.

As they do, the thumb takes out the crimp in the QS which is drawn off into the left hand by the left thumb and first finger and dropped to the left of the tabled card. The remaining Joker in the right hand is dropped to the right of the supposed QS with the bent corner (actually a Joker). *Mix*.

Scarne's Marked Corner

A Joker is marked on the back with a pencil line drawn across its upper left corner. This card is hidden where it can be palmed in the left hand with the back of the card to the hand and the pencil mark near the root of the left ring finger. Scarne recommends that the card be pinned under the left side of the jacket using a paperclip and a safety pin, so that the card can be stolen as needed. A soft pencil is in the left side coat pocket.

Three-card monte is performed up to the point where the operator announces that he will make it so simple a child could follow it. He picks up the Ace between his right thumb and forefinger as in the *Mexican turnover*, and he uses it to turn over the remaining two cards on the table. As he turns over the second Joker, he lets it fall to the floor to the left of the table. As he is turning the cards over with his right hand, his left hand steals the marked card and holds it loosely in the fist, the rear of the card held against the heel of the hand (Photo 74).

Photo 74

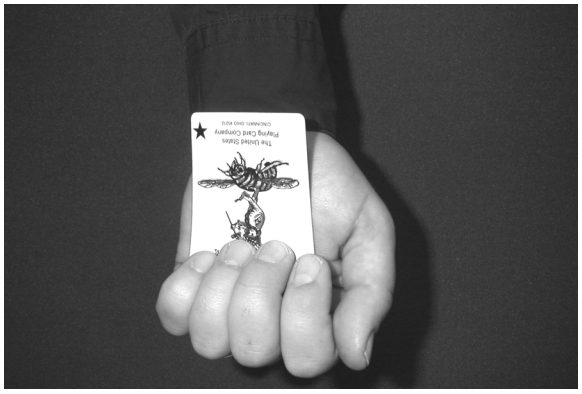
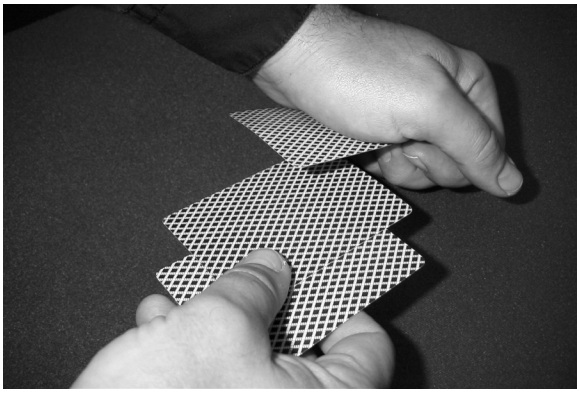


Photo 75



As the joker falls to the floor, the dealer keeps the Ace in his right hand and bends down to pick up the Joker on the floor using the Ace as an aid. As his hands come together, the dealer lets the right rear corner of the Ace come near the right rear corner of the palmed Joker. The Joker in the right hand is above and slightly to the right of the Ace it is resting on (Photo 75). As the dealer stands up, the Joker in his right hand and the marked Joker in the left hand are switched. The left hand holds the fallen Joker in

a light fist grip, just as the marked Joker had been held. The right hand tosses the Ace and the marked Joker face up onto the table next to the first Joker.

In the same moment, the left hand goes into the left coat pocket to retrieve the pencil. The palmed fallen Joker is left in the pocket. The pencil is given to a spectator who is told to draw a little line across the corner of the Ace on the back, and the dealer demonstrates where with his finger. The line is drawn in the upper left corner of the card—just like the marked stolen Joker now face up on the table. While the spectator draws the line, the magician picks up the two Jokers in toss position so that the unmarked Joker is on top—nearest the palm. The marked Joker is shown and the other is then hyped to the left. The marked Joker is now laid over the Ace and it is picked up in *toss* position.

The *revolution move* is made, showing the Ace at the face of the packet, and the Joker is then hyped to the table. It is now marked like the Ace in the upper left corner, and the Ace is in the right hand with the marked corner in the lower right corner of the card. The left hand thumb and finger takes the left long edge of the Ace. The right hand, with thumb on the back and forefinger on the face, takes the right rear corner of the card. As the card is laid down to the right, the right thumb wipes off the pencil mark. *Mix*.

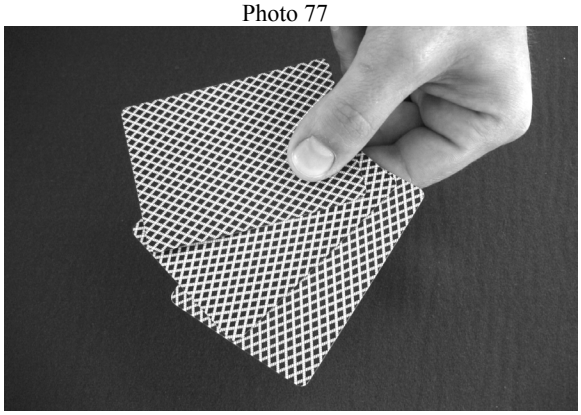
Paperclip

This *come-on* is excellent for an exhibition routine, and with the right attitude to prod the sucker, it could be useful in serious play—especially when the operator is working without shills. A paperclip is shown and pushed onto the Ace of Spades. The three cards are laid face down on the table one at a time.

The Ace of Spades has just that quickly disappeared and the paperclip is now on the Joker. To begin, the three cards, un-bridged, are fanned in the left hand as in Photo 76. The left first and second fingers are on the faces of the cards, and the thumb is on the back. The sequence is much like Scarne's *monte slide*.

Photo 76

Photo 77



A paperclip is shown and fastened onto the long side of the Ace just below the pip with the smaller fold of the clip going onto the face of the card (Photo 76). This smaller fold of the clip can be bent up slightly from the main clip to facilitate both this move and the coming switch. The left hand

Photo 78

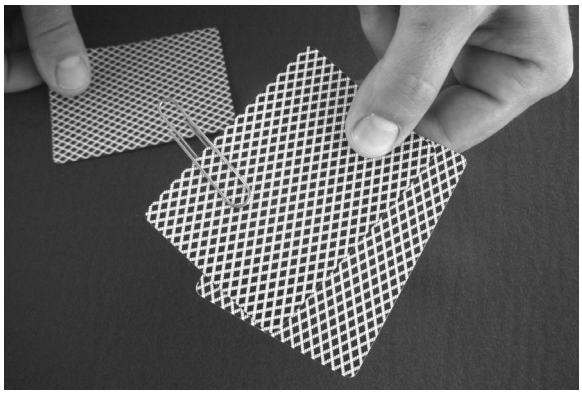


Photo 79

turns palm up to show the backs (Photo 77) and then palm down to show the faces once more. The left hand turns palm up again, and the top card (the performer's right) is taken away by the right thumb and forefinger and laid on the table (Photo 78). This exposes the paperclip again.

The left hand turns palm down again, exposing the remaining Joker and the Ace of Spades with its paperclip (Photo 79). The left hand is turned palm up again. Attention is called to the paperclip on the Ace by showing the two cards back and front again. When the cards are face up again as in Photo 79, the left hand begins to turn palm up.

Photo 80

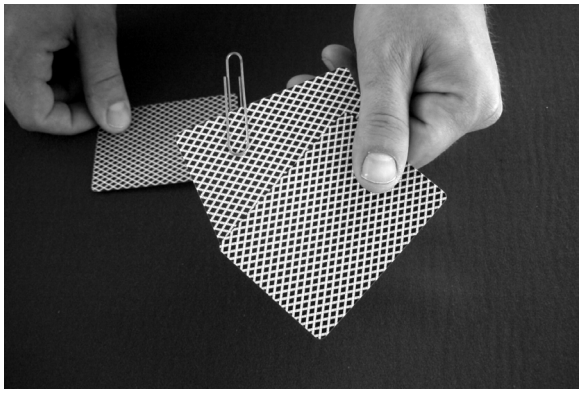
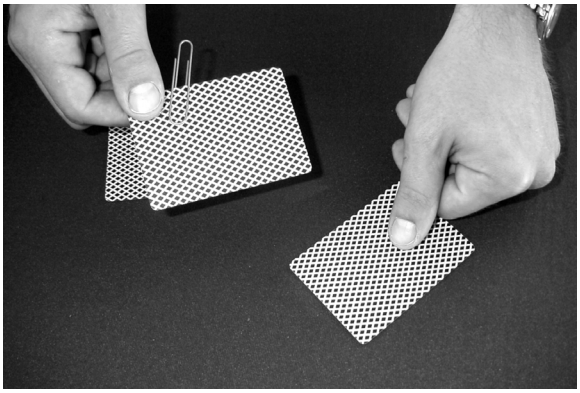


Photo 81



But this time, as the left hand turns palm up, the left fingers and thumb twist in opposite directions. This causes one card to slide across the other. As this happens, the side of the Joker will slide under the clip and take it off the Ace of Spades. Now the Joker is face down to the right with the clip on it as in Photo 80. The right hand takes the Joker (Photo 81) and the left hand tables its card.

Photo 82

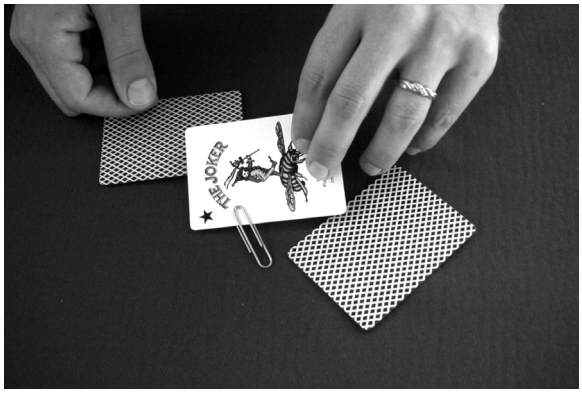
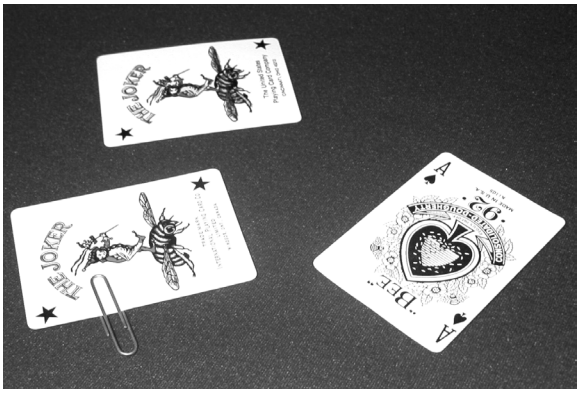


Photo 83



The Joker is now dropped to the center with its clip. The spectator is certain to choose the card in the center with the paperclip. He will be wrong. The Ace is actually on the performer's left (Photo 83).

Torn Corner

The torn corner is too obvious to be of much use as a *hook*. It is just too difficult to believe that the operator can handle the cards and not notice that one of them is torn. As a *come-on*, it has been used with great success, especially in exhibition routines.

Jay Ose had as many as fifteen different endings for his three-card monte routine, each a *hook* or *come-on*. He would change the ending each time he performed the trick for the same person. Ose had a great memory, and could always remember what he had done for someone previously. He had several ways of handling the torn corner, and it was a favorite ending of his.

There are two basic approaches. In the first, the corner of the wrong card is torn. A Joker is switched for the Ace, and as the face down card is torn, the corner of another Ace is switched for the torn index of the Joker and shown.

The switch of the Ace can be handled with a *hype*, a *buckle double-lift*, or a switch such as the *monte slide*. A corner index of an Ace is stolen by the right hand from the pocket or a clip under the jacket. The facedown piece is brought secretly under the upper right corner of the facedown card that is supposed to be the Ace.

The corner of the card is torn off, trying to match as closely as possible the torn corner of the Ace. As the right hand finishes the tear, it moves to the table to place the torn off piece there face up. In the process, the right thumb pulls the Joker's corner back into the hand, and the corner of the Ace is placed face up on the table (Photo 84).

This process can be done by a shill, in which case the torn piece of the Ace may be secretly handed to the sucker or flashed to him. Some very strong misdirection is needed to convince the victim that the dealer is unaware of this procedure. The movie **The Super** shows Joe Pesci being taken with this ruse for two hundred dollars.

Photo 84

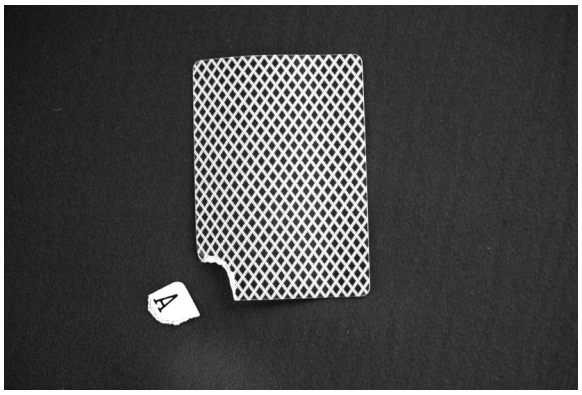
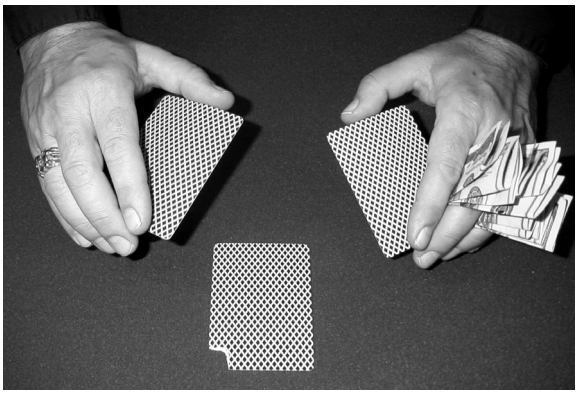


Photo 85



The second approach to the torn corner involves either the dealer or a spectator tearing the actual corner of the Ace. Now another card with a torn corner is switched for the Ace, and the Ace with its torn corner must somehow be hidden. Jay Ose liked to secretly tear off the corner of one of his Jokers while

the spectator was following Ose's instructions to tear off a corner of the Ace. A Joker with a torn corner can also be stolen from a clip, a pocket, or the folds of a newspaper, and then switched in for another Joker as in *Scarne's Marked Corner*.

However the torn card is secured, it is held in toss position in the right hand, with its torn corner hidden by the fingers. The left hand holds the second Joker, and is also holding a number of bills folded lengthwise, and then bent around the second finger (Photo 85). This adds authenticity and color in an exhibition routine, but serves other purposes as well.

On the street, this is a safe way to hold money, since if anyone makes a grab for it, the dealer just makes a fist and he has a tight grip on everything. It makes it convenient for him to count out money without fear of someone ripping him off. Further, the flash and movement of the money helps to flame the heat of the victim's avarice. It also distracts the eye and helps to cover the movement of the *hype*. But in the torn corner *come-on*, and sometimes in the marked corner and other *come-ons*, it can be useful in another way—as an actual cover for the gaff.

The right hand picks up the Ace in *toss* position. The right hand turns palm up so that the performer can take the barest glance at the Ace, and the Joker is immediately *hyped* to the table. The left hand tosses its Joker to the right of the supposed Ace on the table, and the right hand picks it up in *toss* position. The dealer executes the *revolution move*, and the cards are taken in the right hand with the thumb on the top and fingers at the bottom. Now we will use a slightly modified version of the *Flushtration move*.

The right hand turns face down and the left hand takes the Ace by its lower left corner, hiding the torn corner, and sets it down on the table. It immediately uses the folded dollars to hide the torn corner (Photo 86). At the same moment, the Joker in the right hand is turned face up again. It is then brought down on top of the Ace so that it is placed over the torn corner. The left hand moves out of the way just as the Joker replaces its role as shade for the torn corner. Now the situation is just as shown in Photo 87.

Photo 86

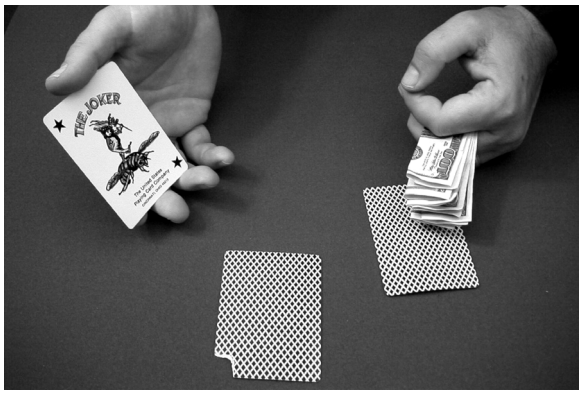
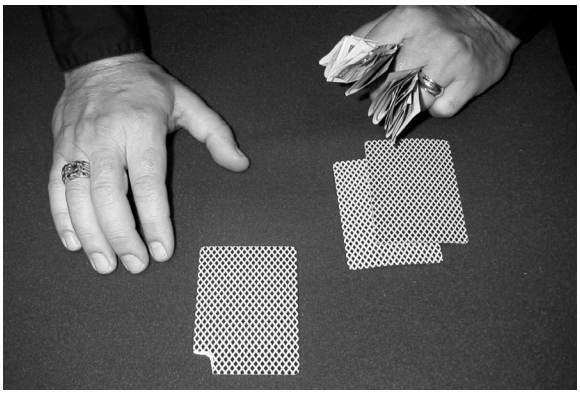


Photo 87



This sequence can be useful anytime a daub, some lipstick or a mark on a second card has to be kept hidden. This type of *come-on* is one that lends itself best to story. The performer can tell how a con man was once challenged, or talk about something once seen on the street. This method is pretty much limited to exhibition routines.

Kohler's *Knifed!*

Paul Curry suggested to Cy Endfield that he should create a method for tacking the money card to the table with a drawing pin and then moving the other cards around. The routine he devised has become a classic of magic, and it appears both in **Cy Endfield's Entertaining Card Magic** and Ganson's **The Three-Card Monte as Entertainment**.

Endfield uses a diagonally cut corner-index of an Ace. This is *blu-tacked* over the index of a Joker at some point near the end of his routine. The prepared Joker is held in the right hand, and the Ace is picked up in the same hand in *toss* position. The Ace is flashed, and then the prepared Joker is hyped to the center of the table.

The remaining two cards are *flash-hyped* and dropped to either side. A thumbtack or drawing pin is pushed through the back of the supposed Ace, and the index corner is lifted up so the spectators can peek and see that it is still the Ace. When the tack is removed, the right hand grasps the top right corner of the card—fingers underneath, thumb on top. As the card is turned over, the corner of the Ace is secretly pulled off and finger-palmed in the right hand. The Ace has become a Joker! This *come-on* usually follows the bent corner *hook* in Endfield's routine, and is introduced as a story, "by the way, only once to my knowledge has the sucker outwitted the operator in the three-card monte…"

Bob Kohler takes this same premise to a very high level of polish and practicality in his routine *Knifed!*. Bob is a prolific and diabolically clever member of the magic underground, and he is well known for his very commercial shell game presentation as well as many other original routines. We greatly appreciate that he gave us permission to publish this *come-on*, which is still a featured part of his high-paid corporate performances.

In this routine, an Ace of Spades is shown and placed facedown on the card box. The two Jokers are shown and placed on the table to the left of the box. A pocketknife is introduced, and a quarter of the face down Ace is cut off and placed face up on the table. The remainder of the Ace is then stabbed through with the pocketknife, pinning it to the box. The quarter of the card is turned face down and the spectator puts his finger on it.

The operator pulls out a hundred dollar bill and offers to make a bet that no one can find the Ace. Both the stabbed card and the quarter card under the spectator's finger turn out to be from the same Joker. The Ace has been resting unharmed on the table to the left of the card box.

Photo 88

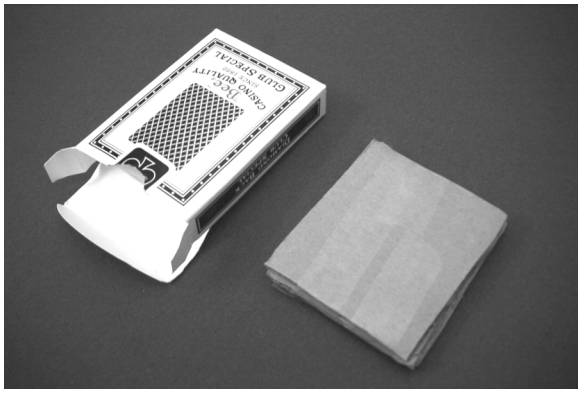


Photo 89

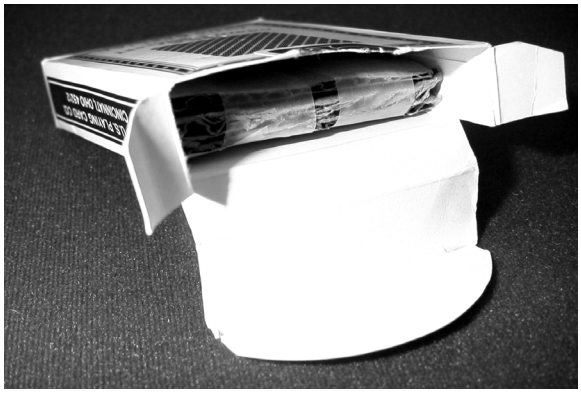


Photo 90

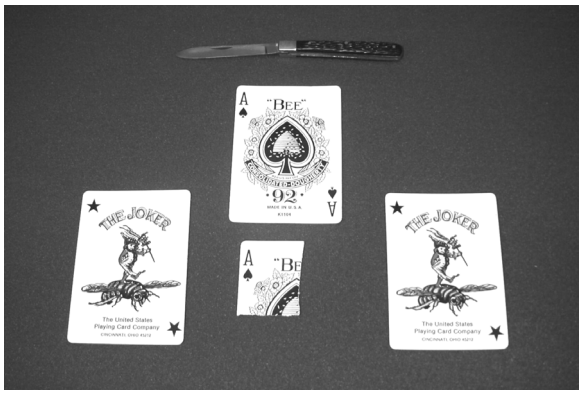
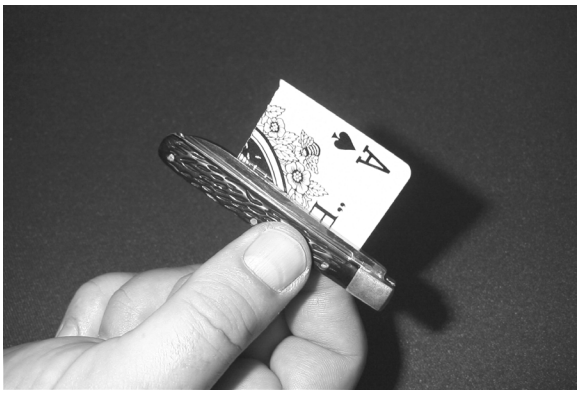


Photo 91



The setup for this routine is simple, yet it makes everything practical under even the most stringent performing conditions. No special table or performing mat is needed. The card box is prepared beforehand so that it can act as a carrying case for the monte cards, but also so that it can be used as a cutting board, and as a convenient and safe surface onto which the money card can be stabbed.

Three or four pieces of corrugated cardboard are cut into squares that will fit comfortably into a card box (Photo 88), leaving about half an inch from the opening of the box, and enough room in the box for three cards. Since the cardboard is shorter than the cards, it is easy to grab them. The three squares are taped together and placed into the box as shown in Photo 89.

The upper left quarter of an Ace of Spades is cut off just as described below in Photos 95 and 96. It is stuck next to the blade of a folding pocketknife as in Photo 91, and this is placed in the right pants pocket with the face of the quarter card away from the body. The right jacket side pocket contains a hundred dollar bill. The Ace of Spades and two Jokers are in the card box.

To begin, the performer introduces the card box, takes out the three cards and then closes the box and sets it to the side. He performs various moves and throws with the cards, and then he takes out the bridge in the three cards by buckling them backwards in his left hand. He places the card box in the center of the table. Then, using the *buckle double-lift*, he shows the Ace of Spades and places it face down on top of the card box (actually a Joker).

Photo 92

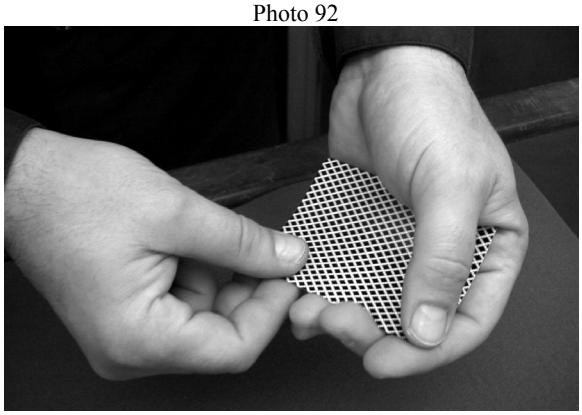


Photo 93

The right hand comes back to the face down cards in the left hand and grasps them both as in Photo 92. These are lifted in the right hand and the face is shown to the audience as in Photo 93. The right hand comes back over to the left hand, and the top card (Ace of Spades) is removed by the left hand (Photo 94) and placed to the left of the card box. The right hand is brought back up to show the

Joker to the audience a second time (Photo 93), and then it is brought back and taken into the left hand as before and set down to the left of the Ace.

Photo 94

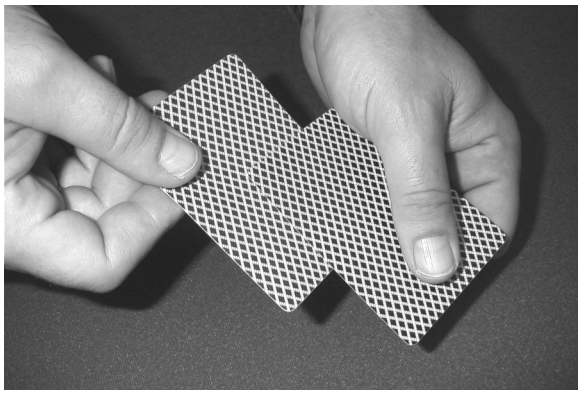
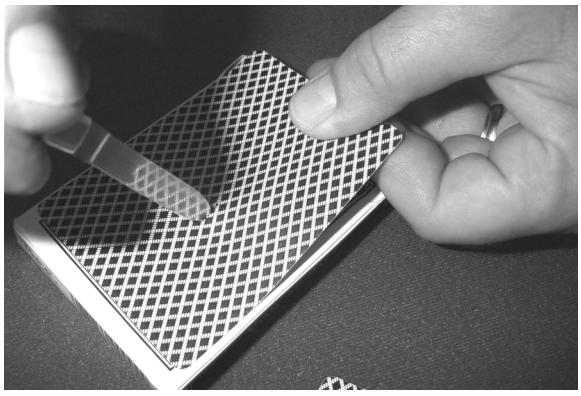


Photo 95



The right hand now goes into the right pants pocket and gets the knife. It finger palms the quarter section of the Ace as the knife is brought into view. The knife is opened and is stuck into the center of the facedown card on the card box, impaling itself into the hidden cardboard support inside. The sharp end of the knife is pointed toward the spectators as in Photo 95

Photo 96

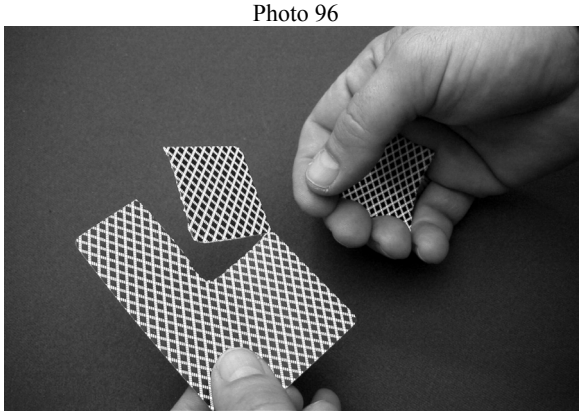
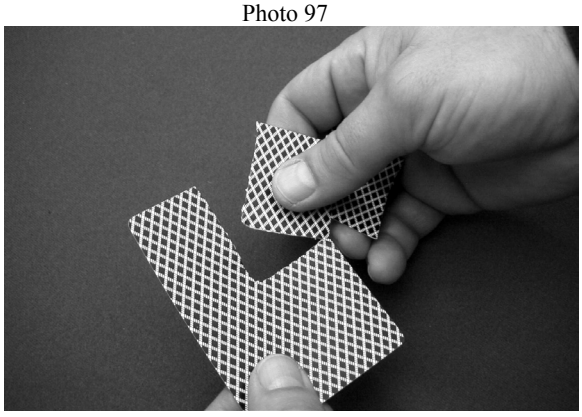


Photo 97



. The card is pulled away toward the dealer, making a clean slit from center to end. The knife is now planted in the center of the card with the blade to the right, and the card is sliced almost to the right edge in a similar manner to before. The left hand picks up the cut card by its lower left corner (Photo 96). The right hand approaches and tears off the quarter, the hidden finger-palmed piece going underneath (Photo 97).

Photo 98

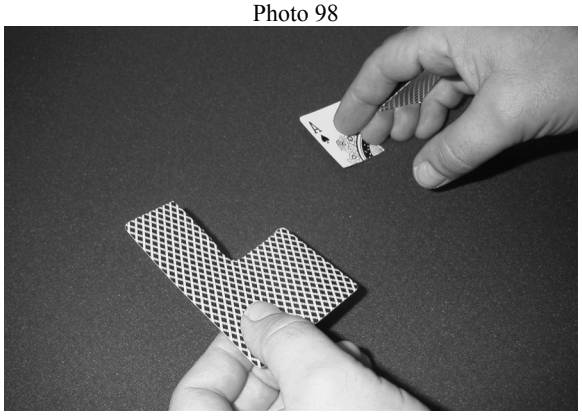
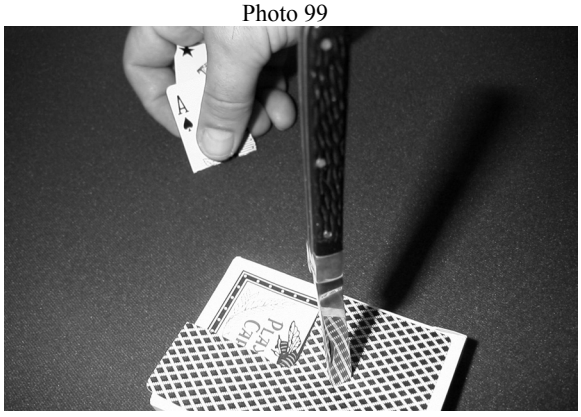


Photo 99



The right thumb pulls up on its piece at the same time the right fingers straighten out, and the quarter of the Ace of Spades is placed face up on the table (Photo 98). The knife is stabbed into the card on the card box, pinning it down into the cardboard (Photo 99). The right hand relaxes to the operator's side or lap, and the finger-palmed quarter Joker is turned over so that its face is away from the fingers.

The right hand then reaches in front of the tabled quarter of the Ace and lifts up, the piece of the Joker right behind as in Photo 99. The left thumb pulls up on the piece of the Ace, and the right fingers straighten out just as before, leaving the quarter of the Joker facedown on the table.

The spectator is asked to place his finger on the corner, the operator using his left finger to illustrate. At the same moment, the right hand goes into the right side jacket pocket to obtain the $100 bill, and leaves the corner of the Ace behind. The dealer places the hundred on the table, "The fact that I am still willing, even under these conditions to offer a bet that you can't find the Ace should tell you something…"

Now the operator is completely clean. The spectator has his finger on the facedown corner of the Joker (Photo 100). This quarter matches exactly the missing quarter of the facedown card stabbed to the deck. The Ace of Spades is completely unharmed resting quietly facedown to the left of the card box.

To reveal, the knife is pulled out of the card box, still stuck through the Joker, and set back behind the card box as in Photo 101. It acts as a support, holding the card upright, with its missing quarter to the upper right. The two cards on the left are turned over to show the unharmed Ace of Spades and the second Joker. The quarter is turned over and shown to match the missing corner of the Joker.

Photo 100

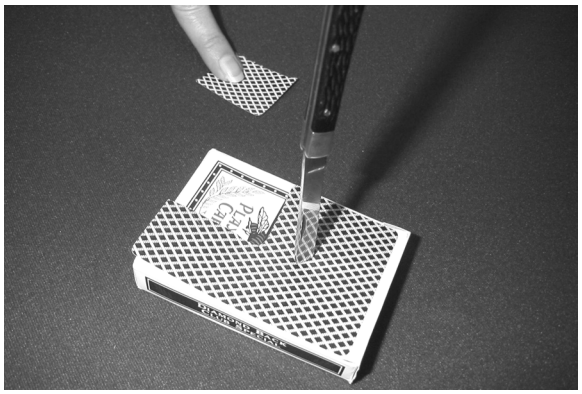


Photo 101

Stamp

The stamp is a unique *come-on* with several variations and methods. A piece of newspaper is used, about one inch by one-half inch in size. A real stamp can also be used, but it needs to be pre-moistened so that all the glue is removed and then allowed to dry. It will only be moisture that holds the stamp in place, not glue.

The bottom half of the piece of newspaper or stamp is moistened, and placed on the left side of the money card as in Photo 102 and 103. Part of the paper sticks up past the middle of the card as in the photos. This is important. The money card is placed back on the table in the center, and the two Jokers are picked up, one in either hand.

Photo 102

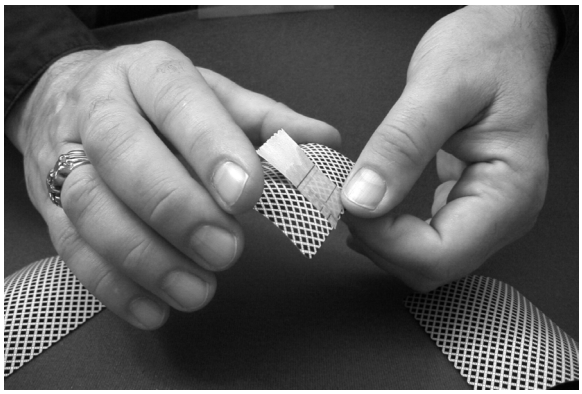
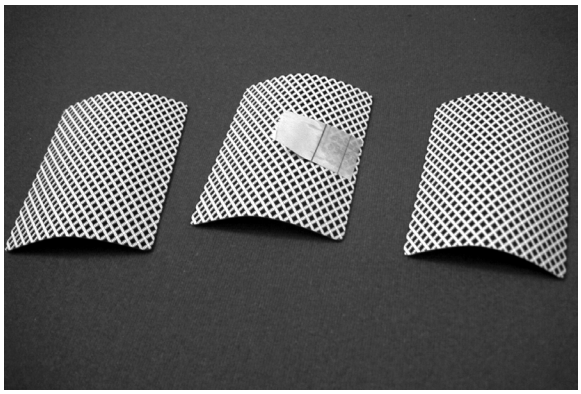


Photo 103



The right hand brings its card over on top of the Ace so that its left edge goes under the flap of the paper (Photo 104). This is covered by the left hand coming over on top of both the other cards with its card and dropping it on top (Photo 105). The hands are turned palm up and the three cards are squared along the long edges by the fingertips (Photo 106). In this process, the stamp has been lifted off the bottom card (the Ace) and is now on top of the middle card (the Joker).

Photo 104

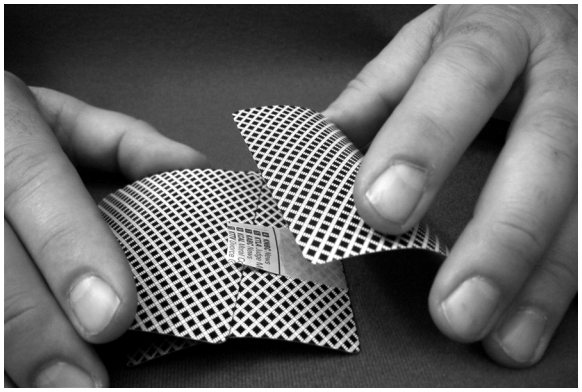


Photo 105

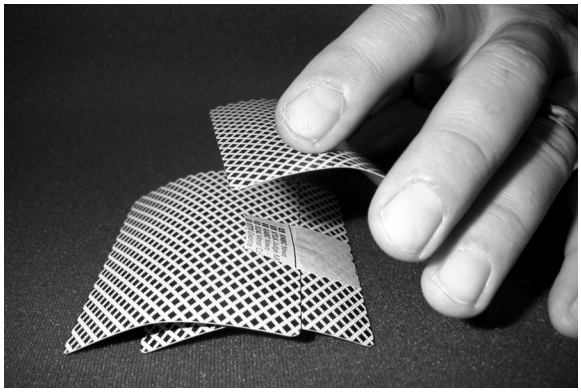


Photo 106

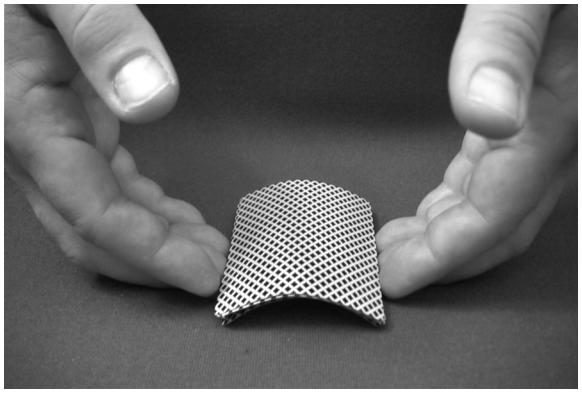
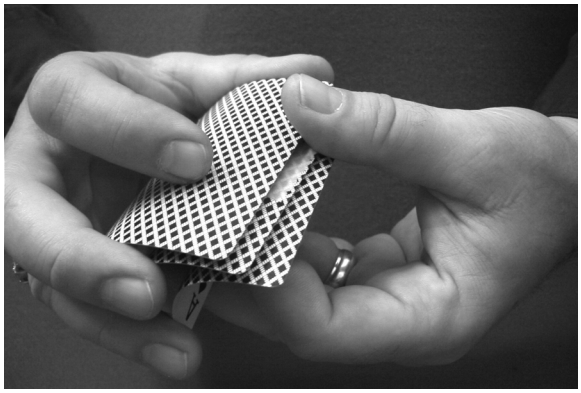


Photo 107



The squared cards are picked up in the right hand in the *Three in the Hand Toss* position. The left hand helps get the cards into correct position, and in the process, helps press down the wet paper on its new card. Photo 107 gives an exposed view of this.

The Ace of Spades is shown and then the stamped card (Joker) is *hyped* to the left. The Ace is tossed to the center, and the second Joker to the right. The cards are mixed. The Joker with the stamp on it ends up on the performer's left; the Ace is in the center.

A very simple method of working the stamp is to place the cards in the left hand with the Ace in center of the packet. The *buckle double-lift* is used to show the Ace and it is then supposedly placed on the table (actually a Joker). The *Flushtration move* is used to show the other "Jokers" and they are dropped to either side of the "Ace."

Now a stamp is glued to the right forward corner of the supposed Ace (actually a Joker). This can be a real stamp, even a self-sticking stamp—it is actually stuck to the card. The real Ace is on the right, and it is picked up in the right hand, the second Joker in the left. The right hand apparently turns the center card face up using its card in the *flip*. The face up card is now the Ace.

The stamped card is now in the right hand, the stamp hidden by the fingers. The right hand uses its card to turn the Ace facedown again. In the process, the right hand card keeps the back of the Ace covered until it is picked up in *toss* position. The Ace is shown, and then the stamped Joker is *hyped* to the center. The right hand picks up the second Joker and does a *flash-hype*. *Mix*.

Pencil Mark, Lipstick and Daub

The method we just described for using the *flip* in the stamped card *come-on* can be used for any of the daub, lipstick and pencil mark *come-ons* and *hooks*. There are many possible variations. A *monte slide*, a *hype*, a *glide* or *optical move* can be used as a switch. The *flip-change* can be used in place of the *hype* after the *flip*. But the basic idea will remain the same.

This procedure avoids the difficulties of having to mark a second card, and of having to get rid of or hide the first mark. So these solutions are highly prized for exhibition, and may work even better in that sort of performance than the more complicated dodges.

But other methods may be more subtle and deceptive for the actual scam, especially in closed monte where the procedures have to be especially clean and fair in appearance, and any overt displays of skill are undesirable.

Photo 108

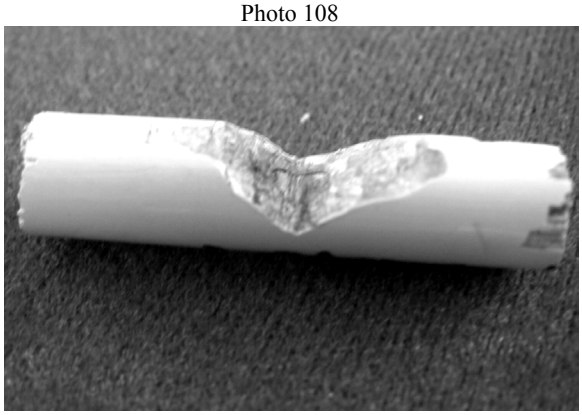
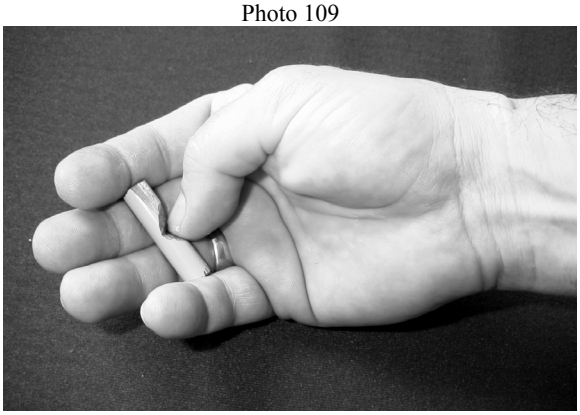


Photo 109



In the photographs accompanying this description, we will be using replicas of nineteenth century Faro cards (Photo 110). These are unfinished paper, and the pencil mark is easier to make and see on these cards than on modern plastic finish cards. The pencil daub is made from a one-inch length of soft (No 1) lead pencil. The pencil is carved down to the center as in Photo 108. When held in the hand as in Photo 109, the thumb can rub back and forth over the lead and pick up quite a bit of graphite.

Photo 110

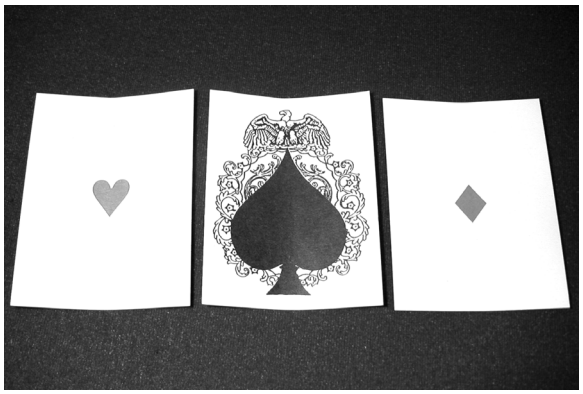
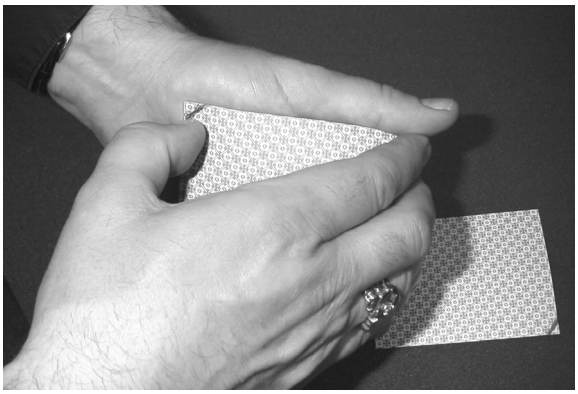


Photo 111



The operator puts some money away, and when his hand is in his pocket, he rubs his thumbnail on the daub stick. This prepares his nail so that it can duplicate the spectator's mark. The spectator is either a stooge or a shill who will draw a line the way the operator wants it, or he is given fairly specific instructions on what kind of mark to make. This would be facilitated by placing the spectator's action within in a story context: *"And so the detective took a pencil and drew a line across the corner of Fast Eddie's Ace* (just like that), *and said 'I bet I can find it now.'"*

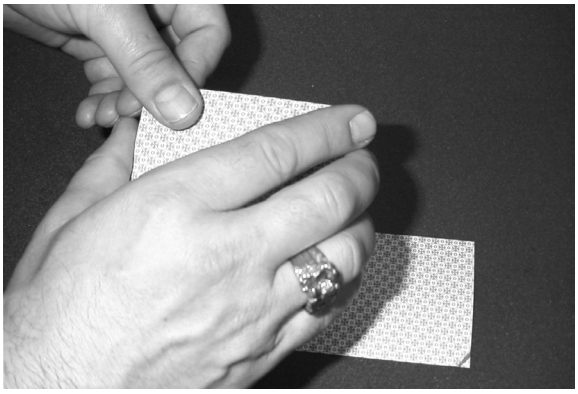
As the shill, or perhaps a spectator, marks the Ace in its upper right corner, a Joker is being marked in the lower left corner by the right thumbnail. The hands are in a relaxed position in the lap or sideways on the table (Photo 111).

The right hand turns palm up, as the left hand with its cards turns palm down. The right hand takes the cards with its thumb on top, fingers underneath. The *revolution move* has just been accomplished. The face Joker is shown and tossed to the right. The right hand, still holding the marked Joker, now picks up the marked Ace of Spades in *toss* position, and displays it.

The marked Joker is hyped to the center. The palm down right hand picks up the unmarked Joker in toss position, and the left hand takes the two cards between the thumb and fingers. The *revolution move* is executed. Now the right hand turns palm down and the left hand holds the long edges of the cards between the thumb and second finger, the first finger is curled underneath (Photo 112). The cards are bent in a squaring motion, as if adjusting the bridge. Then the cards are turned palm up, a Joker is shown, and the cards are turned facedown.

Photo 112

Photo 113



The left thumb and finger take the top card (the Ace), as in Photo 113. As it is set down to the left, the left thumb wipes off the soft pencil mark. The right hand turns palm up to show the Joker a

second time, and then it is turned face down and taken in the left hand as above, and then placed to the right. *Mix*.

There are different types of daub in use by gamblers. Most of these come in a small tin that can be hidden in the pocket, or hung from a pin in the lapel. The colors are often red or blue to match the card backs, or some subtle stain, like say a nicotine stain. These are instantly noticeable to the card cheat, but practically invisible to anyone else. The usual idea of daub is to make an almost invisible mark.

The type of daub that is useful in three-card monte is just the opposite—it has to be seen—so a black or other obvious color is best. Something useful has to come off as easily as it is applied. A piece of carbon paper balled up in the pocket works fine, but carbon paper is not as easy to find as it once was. Finding soft (No.1) pencils isn't easy these days either.

Not all lipstick is the same. Some comes off easy; some is nearly permanent. Do your homework before you get caught short. The nice thing about the *flip* version of the hook is that any lipstick will do.

If you ever want to cheat a monte player using daub (a very good way to get yourself seriously hurt) there is a little trick. Eddie Fields says to daub the backs of the loser cards—not the Ace. The thrower is less likely to notice something on the loser cards. The average dealer constantly searches the Ace for tattle, but doesn't think to look at the backs of the Jokers.

The Moneybag Switch

Cookie Riniti explains the money bag switch using a Crown Royal bag.

Not seen much today, the moneybag was an important element of the scam in the 1920's through the 1940's. The big city street life of that period made it fairly common for gangs of young toughs to suddenly surprise a three-card monte team in an attempt to steal the team's money.

To protect against this, the dealer would often keep his money in a drawstring bag. Hidden in his clothing, he had an identical bag filled with cut scrap paper and washers. If the gang were jumped, the

other members would try to provide interference, while the dealer ran for it. If the thugs got too close, he would “accidentally” drop the fake bag as he ran.

The washers inside made the sound of change hitting the pavement, and this was important psychologically as it made sure that the chasers noticed the bag in the heat of the pursuit—even though there was no reason for the bag to contain coins. Invariably, they would dive for the bait, giving the dealer the time he needed to make his escape. The fake bag was always tied in such a way that it was very hard to open. This gave the dealer as much time as possible for his escape.

This procedure often worked well when it was the police who were chasing the dealer. Few officers would let the moneybag lie on the pavement as they ran by in hot pursuit of the con artist. After all, it might be evidence…

The bag was also useful as a ploy during the conduct of the game. The dealer could stop to put money away, or get more money out of the bag, and this served as valuable misdirection when a shill needed to “peek” at a card, or put in the lug.

Psychology and Shills

In a well-run open monte game, the dealer orchestrates everything. He communicates with the shills with a combination of signals and grifter language that only they can follow. Each of the shills has a specific job to do, and must carry out his task with precision. At the same time, each must be able to adlib and adjust to ever-changing situations as effortlessly as an improvisational actor.

The primary focus of the gang must always be on which card is the money card. The members of the gang must always know where it is after the mix. They have to bet on the wrong or right card depending on the part they play. They must know when to double the bet—which is whenever the sucker puts money on the winning card. The dealer must let the team know where the winner is, because it is impossible for them to follow it visually. This information is communicated in several different ways.

In the verbal method, the operator might call, "I pay twenty to ten on the Ace," when the Ace is in the center. He will call, "I pay ten to five on the Ace," when the winning card is on the right, and "I pay two to one on the Ace," when it is on the left. Or, he may end his spiel and signal the crowd to bet with a final phrase that signals the card: "Who sees it?" (left) "Go!" (right) "Any bettors?" (middle).

In the visual method, the dealer will rest his right hand on the table when the card is on the left, his left hand on the table when it is on the right, and either both hands off or both hands on the table if it is in the center. Another variation is for the dealer to have a cigar, cigarette or toothpick in his mouth, and use it as a pointer—holding it in the right side of his mouth when the winning card is on the left, left side when it is in his mouth, and taking it out when it is in the middle. The head can be used to signal as well, this only requires the dealer to look straight ahead or up or down if the card is in the center. He looks to the spectators on the right if the card is on the left, and to the left if the card is on the right.

All of these signals vary from gang to gang, and are used interchangeably. They are changed frequently so that no outsider can pick up cues from watching. Moving back and forth from verbal to silent cues, the operator and his team maintain constant secret communication. The dealer might order the team to "close the gates," "block her man," or "get rid of the rubberneckers," all in language that no one else can follow.

The dealer and shills will manage the suckers by not letting them bet until they are ready:

"Sorry, the bet is forty, now."
"Double the bet, if I can bluff you, I can beat you."
"Only one bet at a time. This guy doubled you."
"Bet has to be on the table."
"Don't throw your money at me, sir. This is a friendly game. Play nice or leave us alone."
"Only accepting sixty dollar bets, now. If I can bluff you, I can beat you."

The dealer only accepts losing bets.

As Darwin Ortiz points out in **Gambling Scams**, "It hardly takes much intelligence to realize you can't make a profit in any game where the house accepts only losing wagers."

Since the cards are rarely hyped until the big money is down, the sucker becomes convinced that he has a vastly superior ability to follow the card. Everyone else seems to bet on the wrong card, when it is very clear to the sucker where it is most of the time.

Since the sucker believes that those around him are bettors just like himself; their enthusiastic tips and superior knowledge of the rules easily sway him:

> "Go for the jackpot."
> "Just show him your money, and you win."
> "He's doesn't want to play with you, he can tell you can follow it."
> "Let's bet together, that way his shill can't double our bet."

If the sucker balks at any point, the other players around him will reassure him everything is fine. "No, don't worry about it. He just needs to **see** your money so that he knows you **could** have made a bet." This peer pressure is very powerful, since the victim is in an unfamiliar situation and will tend to lean on those around him who seem to have been playing the game longer.

No one likes to feel stupid or not "with it." Con men like to put someone off balance by confusing them, and then offering them an easy way out. They can then take over the victim's thinking, by doing the work for them. The dealer might say, "Of course I need to see your money. How do I know you **could** play if you wanted to? I might start to think you're just trying to take advantage of me, and you wouldn't want me to think that, now would you? Of course not."

A confidence man gets the trust of the victim partly because he exudes confidence and competence just at the moment the victim begins to feel that he is in over his head, "Don't worry, just follow my lead." This pattern is familiar to anyone who has been taken by a short-change scam.

A short-change artist creates a confusing situation for the clerk at the register, and the clerk is embarrassed that he can't quickly settle up in front of an impatient line of customers. The con man helps the clerk through the awkward moment with his patient, confident and slightly condescending instructions, "Here just take back all this twenty dollars in change, and give me back my twenty dollar bill and we'll be square. You got your twenty; I got my twenty. Simple. That's right, isn't it?"

The monte dealer and his shills use a similar approach. It is surprising how willing some otherwise intelligent people can be, when in an uncomfortable situation (say in front of a crowd), to let someone who seems faster on his feet do the thinking and decision-making for them. Like a game show contestant, a normally bright person can be flustered when under pressure. This makes him gratefully accept any help that promises to make him look better in front of the group.

The shills will use flattery to make the victim feel an instant comradery. "Hey, you've got a pair of eyes on you." "You're all right." "She's a game one, isn't she?" If the victim makes any kind of joke, you can bet that all of the shills will think it very funny. "That's a good one. You give it to him!"

The dealer always appears to be having a good time, and seems very approachable and pleasant—at least at first. Certain things will change once the gates have closed on the victim. The dealer then must get the victim to the point that the victim wants to take unfair advantage of the dealer.

The dealer needs to help the victim to turn against him. So he shows that he can be a cheat by taking advantage of some other poor sap (actually a shill). Suddenly it turns out the dealer may not be as lovable and as fun as he first appeared.

The dealer might make a racist or sexist remark: "Look honey, you should let your boyfriend bet for you before you lose all your pin money." He might hook the ego of the spectator with a deprecating

comment: “You don’t look like you have that kind of money on you, sir.” “You don’t have that kind of money. You sure don’t spend it on your clothes.” He wants to get the sucker to the point that the sucker is ready to conspire with the shills around him to teach this broad tosser “a lesson.” Once a hook is set in the victim’s ego, the team can prepare to land him.

A dealer from Tennessee who worked on the streets of New York back in the Sixties found it easy to put an ego hook in. He liked to tell a street-wise New Yorker (using a thick Tennessee accent), “You know, I already took you for forty bucks. Why don’t you set back and watch me play with these Puerto Rican boys a while ’til you get a better handle on the game.” The city boy would tear his pockets grabbing for the money that would show up the little hick and, of course, “teach him a lesson.”

A close friend of mine, also a magician, once told me that he had seen a monte group set up just outside the magic store where he worked. He told me that he was just itching to go out and beat them at their own game. “That would be so cool,” he said. I told him, “They’ve already beaten you.” As soon as the victim wants to teach the tosser a lesson, he is already ego-hooked and most of the team’s work is done.

Getting someone to want to bet on such a proposition is the hard part. Once someone is ready to bet, he has already lost his money. A monte mob will never pay out. They have no ego investment in the game. They don’t care if you outsmart them. They will take the money and run. Remember, the dealer has the money in his hands before the card is turned.

In **Gambling Scams**, Darwin Ortiz outlines several methods by which the monte gang can score by sheer acting—without using sleight-of-hand at all. The victim doesn’t even always have to bet, a concept pointed out to me by magician Jim Lewis (see the news article Lewis gave us for our Appendix: *Even a Man About Town Can be Taken in the City*.)

Ortiz describes one scenario in which the dealer hypes the Queen and then takes a bet from a shill on one of the loser cards. The dealer looks at the chosen card without showing it, pays off the shill as if he’d won fair and square, and then mixes the cards again without showing them. This time slowly and fairly. Since the marks are following the card the dealer just paid off on, instead of the money card, they don’t have a chance.

A second script that Ortiz describes has the dealer throw and mix the cards. A shill peeks at the Queen while the dealer is distracted, bets and wins. Later when he tries the same trick—taking a peek at the card before making his bet—he doesn’t realize that the dealer spotted him cheating. The dealer tells him to double the bet, and when the shill turns away for a second to get more money, the dealer switches the chosen card for the one on its right, and when the shill turns back around to complete his bet and turn over the chosen card, it’s a loser.

When the dealer then offers to let someone bet on the remaining two cards, the suckers are tearing their pockets trying to get the money out. They don’t realize that the two cards that were switched are both losers. The shill peeked at a loser and bet as if it were the Queen. When the money lands on the card that the shill had peeked, the dealer lands another sucker.

This ploy is similar to one that Gazzo describes from the Cracker Parker mob. The shill peeks, is spotted, and is told to bet more money. When he turns to retrieve his money, the dealer switches the cards. At this point a second shill excitedly gets a sucker to bet with him on the switched out card. “We double. We double the bet. $120 on the card on the right!” The dealer acts reluctant to take the bet, as

the first shill tries to re-double and raise the stakes again. Eventually, after the original bet is sandbagged as high as possible, the second shill and his sucker are allowed to make the bet, and of course, it is a loser.

As the scam progresses, certain potential logical objections to the entire procedure must be systematically dealt with. The subtlety and apparent effortlessness in the gang's handling of these points is a good sign of the quality of their training and background. These objections include: 1) "Why can't the dealer overhear all these plots being hatched against him just a few feet away?" and 2) "Why doesn't the dealer notice the card is bent?"

Cracker Parker's mob had a wonderful handling of these problems. The hearing aid and the coke bottle thick glasses meet these objections even before they are raised. The short article *Race Monte* in the Appendix shows a completely different approach to handling all of the same obstacles.

Most of the knowledge and experience that goes into the monte is inherited from earlier con men. Some minor things are developed independently and then quickly snatched up by other mobs. Still, so much of the swindle needs to be learned by example and through mimicry (the timing, acting, attitude), that the best mobs are usually ones with a long history, or run by a well-trained and experienced con man such as Cracker Parker who can play and therefore train all of the parts competently. Cracker's mob played the same small area of London for more than thirty years.

David Maurer describes a 1930's short-con known as the smack. In it he gives a verbatim description of the con men's conversation that could have been lifted directly from Tarbeaux's description of the rube act depicted in the second chapter of this book:

> The mark says he is waiting for a connection to, shall we say, Marion, Indiana. "I'm going out on that same train," says the roper. "It doesn't pull out for an hour. Let's walk uptown and look over the city a little." The mark sees no harm in this, so the two stroll out of the station, the roper meanwhile asking the mark all kinds of questions about Marion, Indiana, which is to be his destination also. A short distance down the street they are accosted by the insideman, who has a marked Southern accent. "I beg your pardon," he says, "but could you tell me where the Merchants' Bank Building is?" The roper turns to him rather rudely and says, "No, we can't." The stranger takes offense at the roper's curt manner. "You wouldn't tell me if you did know," he sneers. "What's that?" says the roper, annoyed. "I said you wouldn't help me if you could, you damned cheap Yankees."

The description goes on and the similarities with the script of the "rube act" are amazing. Con men can take the same basic form and apply it in many different situations. The *Texas Twist* is an example of a "form" of a con being reworked and reused in a new context—black vs. white. "You wouldn't tell me if you did know; you damned cheap white folks." City folks, Russians, Japanese or any other logical target could just as easily replace the term "white folks." It would not be surprising to find the same simple ruses involved in a con game from the sixteenth century with a Basque blasting the Castilians.

It's not just that human nature is the same from generation to generation, but that the actual script of the swindle has been passed down from con man to con man. A history of crime published recently showed a direct lineage between the members of notorious bank and train robbing gangs in the mid-nineteenth century to gangs of desperados that flourished during the 1930's.

Socio-paths don't just come from nowhere. By their very nature, they have to arise out of a group. The values, skills and point of view that make a con man successful have to be taught and passed down. Even if a swindler had no previous familial or social connections to a continuous line of

confidence men, he at some point will be brought into one and “turned out.” You really can’t learn a trade like this from books alone.

Many of the techniques of manipulation used by the con man are similar to those of the salesman, the advertising copywriter and the motivational speaker. Anyone in a field that involves influencing the behavior of others can learn from these masters of human behavior. The magician, who himself is essentially a con man, can learn a lot that is of value for his own harmless frauds from studying the methods of these “ministers of mistrust.”

It is not just the specific techniques of the con man that are valuable for the magician, but rather the whole process—the fact that so much time and thought have gone into analyzing what the victim is going to think and feel at each stage of the scam. If magicians were to focus with the same intensity on understanding what their audiences were thinking and feeling through each step of a magic routine, magic would be a much more powerful art form.

It is not just the script and the psychology that the open monte mob follows that makes the scam work. Most importantly it is the dealer himself—his ability to draw the suckers in, hook their attention, and engage them intellectually that determines how successful the game will be. He needs to shuffle the cards around, keep his mob operating smoothly and play the sucker along; but he must also spiel the game.

Spieling the Broads: Monte Patter

The patter of the monte dealer is an essential part of the scam. It is his way of drawing a crowd and entertaining them, as well as a means of misdirection, and often a code by which he can direct the members of his mob. Darwin Ortiz in **Gambling Scams** tells of a situation in which a young man was trying to pull his lady, already firmly on the hook, away from the game.

The operator used his rhyming patter to direct his shills to "block her man." A shill then interrupted the young man and kept him busy while the woman was cleaned out. (By the way, Ortiz has one of the best and most helpful descriptions of the game we've found in print.)

The dealer will often go from the rhyming patter which he uses with his repetitive throws and displays, to asides and jokes with the crowd, and then to direct instructions and one-on-one give and take with the suckers. He has to establish a fun and non-threatening environment, and at the same time project energy and excitement.

His sing-song ballyhoo, much like an auctioneer's spiel, gives a sense of urgency and confusion at the same time. He can't just stand and wait for a crowd to come over. He has to be moving the cards around and making a pitch at all times. His nonsensical doggerel helps overcome the monotony of the necessary constant repetition of the same themes.

Once he has drawn a crowd, he switches to a method of speaking that sweeps up the spectators and forces them to think along with him, following his line of reasoning uncritically. Professor Maurer writes about this type of speech:

> Any grifter who *spiels the nuts* or *tosses the broads* will superimpose on his regional and social dialect certain synthetic elements which can be best described as a kind of artificial platform English. It is used to control people of a certain kind for a certain purpose. It must be clear and plainly understood. It glories in excesses of hypercorrectness, both in usage and pronunciation. Its intonation, stress, and juncture pattern is time-tested and guaranteed, when used by a master, to produce exactly the human responses which the grifter needs to operate his racket. It is the speech of the medicine show. We hear echoes of it in the speech of certain backwoods politicians and fringe-type evangelists. The great comedian W. C. Fields thoroughly mastered this style of speech, then based his acting career on a subtle burlesque of it.
>
> —David Maurer, **The American Confidence Man**, p. 258.

The con man adopts a tone of patience and confidence, but that is slightly condescending. He takes on the manner of authority. In adopting this sort of speech, he wants to take over the thinking processes of his listeners. He seems to always be making good sense, and always seeking agreement. "I always have two chances to your one, you understand? I only pay on the Ace."

Beyond the style of speech, patter itself is a powerful tool that can work as misdirection. It can cover a discrepancy in a move, or distract the audience in their thinking. A joke or line that makes the audience think can be like a thrown barstool when someone is being chased—it slows down the pursuers.

We talked earlier about how a ploy like "calling a card face down" can lead the audience past a switch like the double-lift or top-change. The throw of the cards should always be made with appropriate patter that *leads* the spectator's thinking into *agreement* with what the operator wants them to believe.

The following lines come from the literature, from magicians' patter, and from the contributions of our students and others that have collected lines used by actual monte dealers. This is an important resource for creating authentic-sounding routines. We are always on the lookout for this type of material, and appreciate any contributions to this ongoing effort to make a record of it.

Some lines will fit in with a performer's chosen character and some won't. Be careful to always choose from the lines that fit both the period and the style of your performance character.

Names for Three-Card Monte

The Broads, *Tossing the Broads*—American grifter slang
Three-Card Monte—American
Chase the Ace—American
Three Card Molly—African-American slang
The Three Card Trick—English
Find the Lady—English
Cherchez La Femme—English
Bonneteau—France
Texas Twist, *Texas Tornado*, *Country Boy*—Texas version of closed monte.

Patter for Three-Card Monte

***

"Here you are, gentlemen, this **Ace of Hearts** is the winning card. Watch it closely.

"Follow it with your eye as I shuffle. **Here** it is, and now **here**, now **here**, and now—**where**?

"If you point it out the first time, you **win**; but if you miss, you **lose**.

"**Here** it is, you see; now watch it again. This **Ace of Hearts**, gentlemen, is the winning card.

"I take no bets from paupers, cripples or orphan children. The **Ace of Hearts**.

"It is my regular trade, gentlemen, to move my hands quicker than your eyes. I always have two chances to your one. The **Ace of Hearts**.

"If your sight is quick enough, you beat me and I pay; if not, I beat you and take your money.

"The **Ace of Hearts**; who will go me twenty? It is very plain and simple, but you can't always tell. Here you are, gentlemen; the **Ace**, and the **Ace**. Who will go me twenty dollars?"

— Albert D.Richardson, **Beyond the Mississippi,** 1869.

***

"All right, folks, this is a playing game, not a watching game. Ten will get you twenty and twenty will get you forty. I don't get sore when I lose and I'm glad when you win."

"Hi diddle diddle, the Queen is in the middle. When the money goes down, the lady can't be found!"

"Red you choose, black you lose!"

"You bet too fast—You'll never last.
You bet too slow—You got to go."

—Frank Garcia, **Don't Bet On It,** 1978.

***

"Up today, down tomorrow;
Rich man's luck and poor man's sorrow…
Maybe you win, maybe you lose—
It all depends on what you choose.

If you pick the queen, then you win…
If you pick a black card—you play again…
Find the Lady! Find the Lady!
Cherchez la femme!"

—Black monte-tosser who worked Sportsman's Park and Race Track
on the outskirts of Chicago as related by Johnny Thompson, Jan 98

***

"Chase the Ace, don't ride the Bee. Only a little fool would ride a bee like that.
He's gonna get stung.
The Ace—that's where the hive is. That's where the honey is, that's where the money is…"

—Anonymous

***

"This is the sugar, this is the honey.
This is the one that gets you the money.
Sometimes it creeps, sometimes it crawls;
Sometimes it's not where you think at all…"

—Gary Norsigian, Las Vegas, 1999.

***

Hey, diddle, diddle, the Ace is in the middle
When the money goes down, the honey can't be found!
My hands are faster than your eyes.
Not one man in ten can follow the Ace.
I've got two chances to your one.
I only take one bet at a throw,
And that the highest wager…

Place your bet, I pay on the Ace;
Not on the Jokers.

Chase the ace—
It's a walk in the park
With a smile on your face.

No bet counts, no card is read—
Until there's money on the barrelhead.

We're playing a game called Chase the Ace,
You have to guess from the back what's on the face.
Once I mix the cards around,
You tell me where the Ace is found

Hey! Step this way!
Come here and play!

This is the game for the sporting fan,
Try your luck with the Monte Man!

—Anonymous

***

Money comes and money goes;
You must adopt a sanguine pose…

You drop a buck; here comes a fin.
I don't cry when I lose;
I don't laugh when I win.

Place your bet, take a chance again.
I don't cry when I lose;
I don't laugh when I win.

You never gain if you don't start,
You've got the eyes but not the heart.

Easy come, easy go—
You get up in the dark,
You stub your toe…

when a woman loses:
It's another case of smart women, and bad choices…

—Anonymous

***

I didn't start tossing the monte until I was ten,
I pretty much wasted the first nine years of my life.

—old magic line

***

When shill and sucker keep raising each other:
First day on the job and I hit the big time!

—monte player in the movie **The Super,** 1991

***

Holding up a $100 bill:
Oh, filthy lucre! What crimes are committed in your name?
If you pick the Ace you walk away with this suitably engraved memento of the occasion.

—Clarke Gable, in the movie **Honky Tonk**, 1941

***

By the hoodoo, voodoo, hindoo
Ancient and noble art of prestidigitation…

—Riverboat gambler in the movie **Davy Crockett**, 1955. Great line from the thimble-rig sequence at the Alamo.

***

Ladies and gentlemen, you will notice I have three cards crimped vertically so as to be indistinguishable. I mix the cards up. I mix you up. I don't get mad when I lose, I get happy when I win. You sweatin', or bettin'?

I say you can't find the queen. You might think you can. And if you can, I suggest you do, and make yourself a little moola.

Black you win, red you lose,
It all depends on the card you choose. Who sees it?

—Galperin, Jeffrey, *What it Takes to Win at Three-Card Monte*, Esquire Magazine, October, 1979.

Three-Card Monte in Film and Video

Television and the cinema can sometimes provide a source for performing and patter ideas, although the depictions of three-card monte in film are often inaccurate. There are a few performances, however, that are especially notable.

Honky Tonk, 1941. Funny scene with Clark Gable as a con man about to be tarred and feathered by a mob of suckers. He talks his way out with an offer to explain three-card monte. Pretty authentic in its depiction of the con men's gambling paraphernalia as well as of the process of tarring and feathering and riding the rail. The hand inserts were done by magician John Calvert.

Mississippi Gambler, 1953. Tyrone Power as a professional gambler who takes an old pro at his own game of three-card monte. Good depiction of the "rube act."

The Flim-Flam Man, 1967. George C. Scott and Michael Sarrazin take a country store full of yokels with the monte. Shows him using a roll of fake money wound with a real bill, a common practice even back in the steamship days. Jay Ose is the consultant and plays the part of the grocer.

Waterhole # 3, 1967. Includes an excellent sequence with James Coburn throwing the monte. The insert hands are Jay Ose's, who also appears in the scene as the bartender. The play ends with all three cards having bent corners—one of Jay's many, many endings for his routine.

Kiss the Blood off my Hands, 1948. Burt Lancaster throws monte on a train for an amateur magician with disastrous results. Shows the importance of qualifying the mark.

The Sting II, 1983. This is a terrible movie featuring Jackie Gleason and Mac Davis in the roles originally played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford, but it features Tony Giorgio doing an excellent three-card monte sequence on a pool table.

My Chauffeur, 1986. Penn as a con man and Teller as his oil-sheik victim at three-card monte, plucked while riding in a limousine. Funny though improbable scene.

The Super, 1991. Joe Pesci as the sucker in a very well done three-card monte scene. Everything is true to the game—the cardboard boxes with a windbreak and newspaper, the way the cards are bent and handled, the way the shills operate, and the operator's patter and attitude—excellent consultant work by someone not listed in the credits. Pesci displays a rare, extremely good-natured reaction to being burned.

Mo' Money, 1992. Damon Wayans as a con-artist. Lackluster three-card monte game.

Hearts in Atlantis, 2001. Anthony Hopkins helps a young boy to use his ESP to beat the monte.

***

Darwin Ortiz was kind enough to point out the movie **Mo' Money** as well as these episodes from television's cartoon series, **The Simpsons**:

"Bart's Comet" - 2/5/95 (Bart tosses monte at a school fair.)

"The Springfield Connection" - 5/14/95

(A recurring character named Snake throws monte on the street and swindles Homer out of $20.)

"Scenes from the Class Struggle in Springfield" - 2/4/96

(While the family gets ready to visit an exclusive country club, Bart practices his monte throws until his mother warns him, "Bart, I told you, 'No grifting.'")

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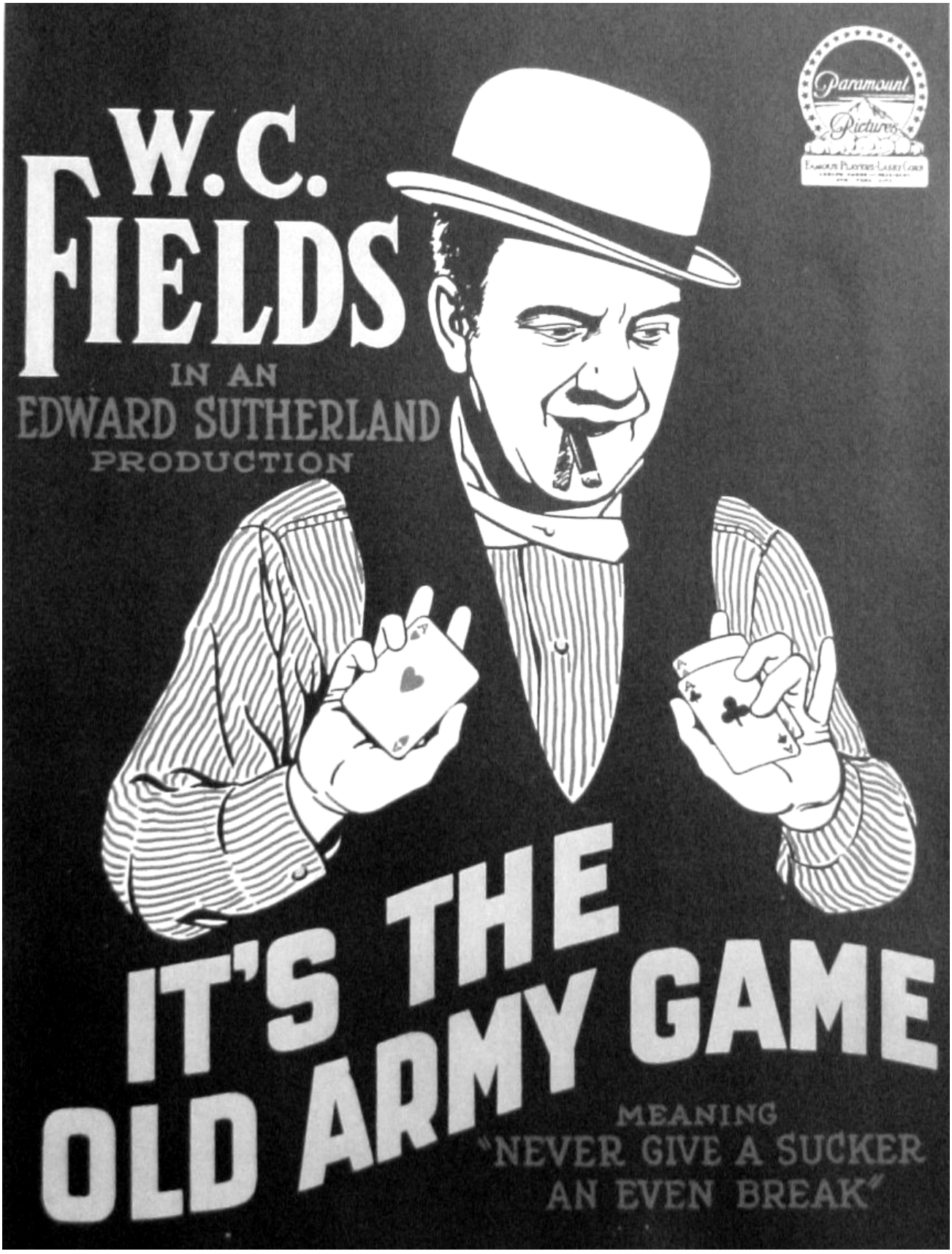
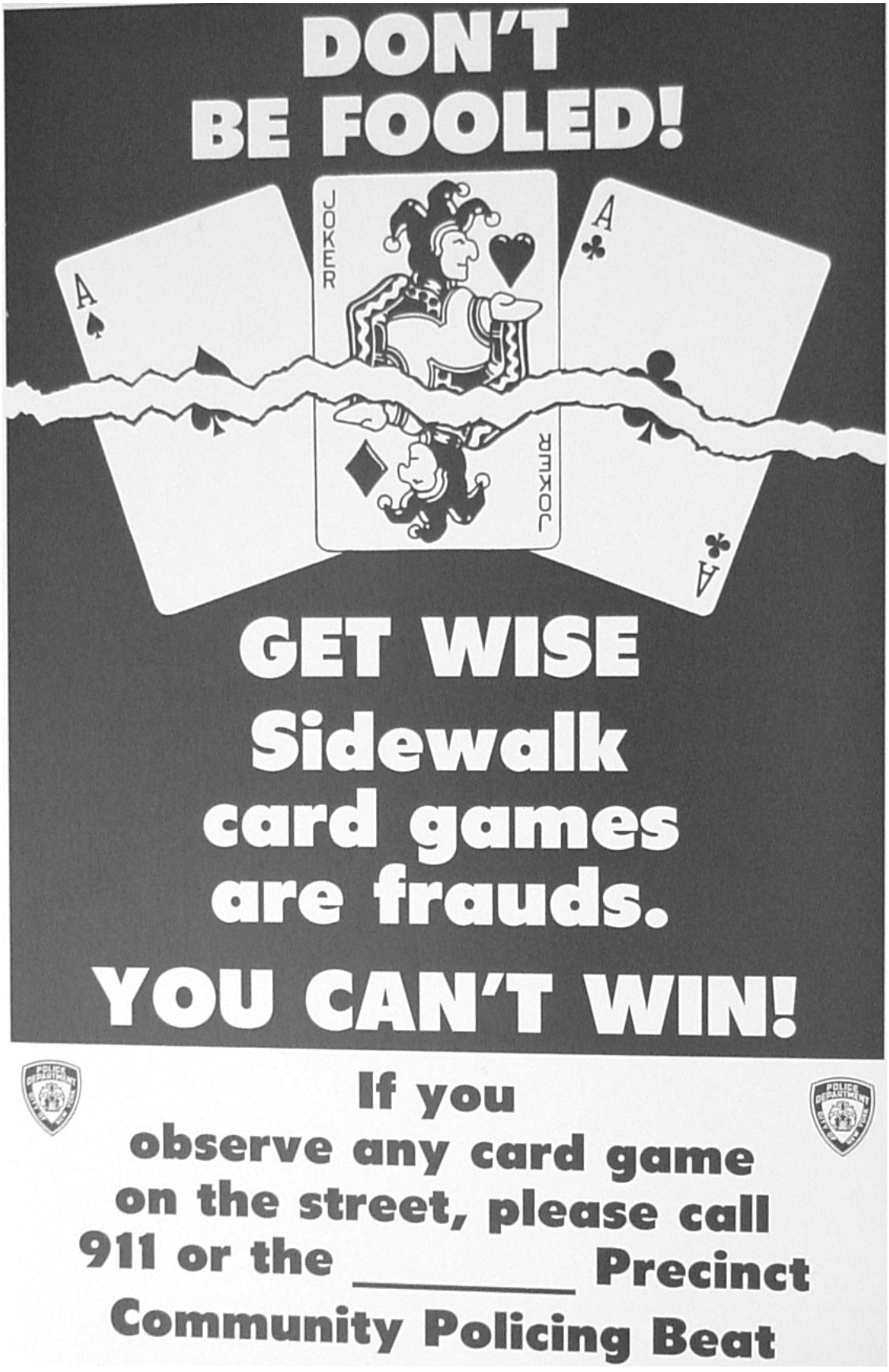
The School for Scoundrels is always on the lookout for depictions of street-cons in film and television, and appreciates any contributions from our readers of any sightings.



From a reproduction. Ronald A. Wohl collection.



NYPD warning poster, 1990's. From the Ronald A. Wohl collection.

Monte and the Law

by Chef Anton

Phone calls were made to the Police Departments of Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, Atlanta, and New York. Each station was asked for the department that patrols three-card monte scams. I spoke with the persons in charge and asked each the same series of questions. Here is what we found out:

Los Angeles

I spoke with Detective Fernandez of the Bunco Department. He was extremely helpful and knowledgeable about the game. He said the game has been "a problem continuously for the last 20 years, but not a huge problem."

Typically the gangs are made up of four to six members and are almost exclusively locals between the ages of 25 – 55. The game is most prevalent in front of stores and in the commercial areas of Black or Spanish neighborhoods.

The police get two or three complaints per month from local merchants who do not want the crowds around their stores. When they receive a grievance, a uniformed officer is sent to break things up.

Most victims are women who are taken for $200 or less. If a victim reports the crime, it is classified as either Petty Theft or Grand Theft depending on how much money was involved. For the record, petty theft is defined as taking $400 or less. Grand theft is for crimes involving more than $400. If prosecuted, there would be a fine plus up to 1 year in city jail based on the criminals past record.

See the L. A. Times article reprinted in our Appendix "Rise in Con Games Reported in Downtown Shopping District."

Chicago

I spoke with Sergeant Honeywood of the Gambling Unit of the Vice Squad. I found this conversation the most interesting because he was very analytical about the game and the players. I am glad he is on our side of the law, because he would make one great con man. That is a compliment based on his analytical skills, not a statement about his character.

Detective Honeywood said, "Due to the harsh winters, the game is a street game mostly played in the summertime near or around the stadiums such as Comminsky Park or the United Center." The victims are normally tourists, he says, "because three-card monte is not a city game. It is an amusement locals would not look at twice."

The police get phone calls about three times per summer per stadium from victims and shop owners. During the tourist season, district officers or the gambling unit will actively look for crews at ballparks. There are one or two crews who bounce from ballpark to ballpark.

The gangs were independent of each other and were made up of three to five locals "…who were in the early 20's and 30's and in good shape." When asked why he thought that was the demographic he laughed and said, "…that's because they normally escape by fleet of foot. I can't catch a 25 year old kid, but I sure as hell could catch a 45 year old beer-drinker."

If prosecuted, the criminal receives a misdemeanor *Court Ordinance Complaint*. The penalty for this crime is a ticket ranging from $10 to $50 without an arrest. The penalty is very lenient, acting as a deterrent targeted at persons the authorities do not believe will repeat the crime. For the repeat offender, the statutes provide for 6-12 months of jail time, $100 bail, plus 2 years of court supervision.

Dallas

I spoke with Detective Grady who says he is "one half of The Swindle Squad." He got a good laugh when I said, "We must be related, I am one half of The School for Scoundrels." Evidently, three-card monte is not currently prevalent in the Dallas area.

According to Detective Grady, "There is an underground mall in downtown Dallas with shops and eateries inside. Most people who work downtown go there for their lunch break. During the day, nobody is on the streets and the con men would not want to work underground. This type of environment is not conducive to working the old *Texas Twist* (three-card monte) because there are no escape paths." Four to five years ago, when downtown was more traditionally urban the game was more popular. Visitors from the small cities were perfect targets because they were "amazed by the big city games."

Grady felt the key ingredient to scamming "the *Twist*" was the patter. He said, "If you ever heard a real three-card monte dealer's banter—well, it puts people in a trance-like state. They are willing to do anything he says just like people in a church listening to a sermon." Although gambling is illegal and he will arrest someone if he catches them, he is amazed that people would ever fall for such a silly game. "City folk would not get taken because they are wise to the game. But people from the country or the suburbs are too naïve to know any better."

He said they have not arrested anyone in the last eight years and only get a handful of calls in a year. He said people who would report the crime were either people on a cell phone who happened to see the game in progress, or storeowners who felt the crowds were blocking the entrance into their establishments or otherwise interfering with business. The police rarely get a call from a victim because "most people are embarrassed and feel too stupid after they get taken."

Detective Grady told this story: "The last guy who we caught in the act was a kid over ten years ago. You have to be pretty stupid to get caught at this game because it is supposed to happen so quickly. Well, this kid was that stupid. Apparently, the kid was new to the game. His skills were not as refined as they should be, so he kept losing. He would not let this one lady go because she had all of his money."

"He kept on playing with her so that he could win his money back. We caught him still working on her, but since he did not win anything, we had to charge him with *Attempted Theft*. This is a misdemeanor without a fine or jail time. That is more embarrassment than punishment, the proper judgment for an inept criminal."

Detective Grady belongs to the N.A.B.I. (National Association of Bunco Investigators) which is an organization based in Maryland. Once a month they publish a booklet which notes swindles and scams that are currently in practice. Grady says, "three-card monte scams are not high on our list because it is small potatoes compared to the latest money-making scams—internet crimes."

San Francisco

I spoke with Detective Siragusa of the Gambling Division of the Vice Squad. When I told him who we were and what we did, he laughed and said, "Where were you last month. We just brought in a big three-card monte gang and the case was dismissed because we could not find an expert on the game. I would have done it myself but I do not play the game and would look like a horse's ass trying to demonstrate how the con works."

He went on to say they have had only eight cases reported in the last two years, although he says he knows the cast of characters that are doing it. According to the detective, "They are a couple of New York gangs who work Fisherman's Wharf during the tourist season (Memorial Day to Labor Day). They have relocated to the Bay Area because the camera-huggers in our area are like, pardon the pun, shooting fish in a barrel." A camera-hugger is a tourist who has a camera wrapped around his neck and takes pictures of everything he sees. He said, "A camera around your neck is worse than a chalk mark on your back."

For the last ten years, there has been one major player with quite an arrest record, and several gangs whose members will interchange. The gangs are normally 3-4 people (a dealer, a shill who will walk up like he is a tourist, and two lookouts), mid 30's to 40's and have a lot of experience playing. By getting descriptions from patrol officers, he knows members of one gang have been seen fleeing the scene by foot with members of another gang, although he also made it clear this is not what he would consider "organized crime."

The people who file the complaints are normally storeowners. The police will patrol the area and break up games. If caught, the crime is considered a misdemeanor—theft by trick or device. If prosecuted, the gang would have to reimburse all the money that was take, pay a $500 fine, and could face up to a maximum of one year in jail.

(Note: I have seen a shell game on one corner of the Fisherman's Wharf area and a three-card monte on the next corner, with the shills moving back and forth between the two games working with both dealers. The gangs may be more organized than the police realize. When a dealer is arrested, he usually will not offer information as to who trained him, who is bailing him out, and other details that would clarify the nature of the mob, a mob that may not be quite as local as it seems to the police. — Whit Haydn)

Atlanta

I spoke with Lieutenant Biello of the Vice Squad. He was quite proud that his department had eliminated three-card monte in the Atlanta area. He said "it was a problem back in the early 90's but over the last seven to eight years we have not had a single report of this scam."

He attributes this success to having uniformed patrol officers actively looking for the game on the streets. In Atlanta there was one well-known gang of three to six locals who were responsible for 90% of the scams. Biello said the mob consisted of the dealer, two lookouts and three "sharks." I had never heard the last term before but he said, "Sharks were the ones responsible for keeping the victims in the inner circle of the game. You know, they would win and lose and make a big fuss but if someone tried to leave the game too early, they would bite them."

Lieutenant Biello said they had arrested members of the gang numerous times and on the first offense the penalty was a minimum of three days in jail plus a $300 fine. Jail time would be extended if they could not pay the fine. Since the police had become so familiar with this group, the mob has "moved on to greener pastures or at least greener pockets."

New York City

Detective Burnes who is in charge of the fraud unit of Brooklyn South gave some information on the three penal codes that govern three-card monte in New York. These include: Fraudulent Accosting (Penal Code 165.30), Possession of Gambling Tools or Devices (Penal Code 225.30), and Promotion of Gambling—First and Second Degree (Penal Code 225.05). First Degree Promotion of Gambling is when one knowingly advance or profit from five bets or $5,000 in any twenty-four hour period. While the money seems high for three-card monte, the number of bets is not.

Apart from these statutes, a three-card monte mob can also be charged with Grand Larceny and Robbery, although both laws require special circumstances. For example, if a victim does not relinquish his money and someone in the monte mob takes the money from the victim, the mob can be charged with larceny. Even though the mob "fairly won" the money, the activity is illegal, so therefore taking the money from the victim is also illegal. Finally, if a fight ensues and the victim is hurt, the monte mob can then be charged with robbery.

Detective Burnes closed with a story of how he used to make arrests of a monte gang:

> Catching the gang in the act is difficult because they have lookouts. At the first sign of trouble, they run away. So, I used to ride on a public bus. I would instruct the bus driver to stop right in front of the three-card monte game. When the time was right, I would jump out of the back of the bus and arrest the gang. This was an extremely effective way of catching them in the act because they never saw me coming.

This was the first ruse we have heard mentioned that allows a uniformed police officer to capture a monte mob.

Final Thoughts

After researching this information, some conclusions come to mind. Regardless of where three-card monte is being played, tourists are usually the number one target. Tourists tend to have a lot of cash, are willing to spend the money and are more likely to be unfamiliar with the game. They are easy to identify, especially if they are "camera-huggers" and are the least likely to go to the police because they will only be in town for a couple of days, and do not want to get involved in a court trial.

Three card monte gangs are usually made up of three to six members, who in most cases are locals—although they are willing to commute if necessary. They are typically in their 20's and 30's and fairly athletic. Due to the nature of the sting, they are thoroughly versed in their roles and do not stay in one area for a long time. The gang works like a well-oiled machine with each member knowing his or her role. At the first sign of trouble, they seek to avoid any confrontations with victims or police by fleeing the scene on foot.

Although the police are aware of the game, they apparently have a hard time eliminating it, and are content with just controlling the game. This prioritizing by the police is understandable because—compared to internet crimes and some of the larger and more profitable scams—the three-card monte swindle is not a major threat. It is more of a nuisance for the shop owners. While some cities claim to "actively" try to stop the games by having patrolmen walking the streets, most police departments will wait until they receive a phone call before they go to break things up.

This procedure makes the gang hard to catch because due to the quickness of the actual game, by the time a patrol officer gets to the scene, the game has already broken up and all they see are a couple of empty boxes. The police know exactly what the boxes represent; but there is no way to prove it.

What I found most interesting is the police are exceptionally knowledgeable about three-card monte. Most officers understood the basic workings of the game including the division of roles among the shills, how long the scam normally lasts, and how the psychology of the game works.

The police know where the mobs like to work, who their targets tend to be, and generally when the scam is most likely to take place. The investigators sometimes know which members belong to which gangs and if they are working together or not. However, with all of this knowledge, it is still difficult to "catch them in the act" and even more difficult to prosecute them.

If caught, the laws from city to city were pretty diverse. Most places categorize the crime as a misdemeanor with penalties ranging from a small fine ($10 in Chicago) to extended jail time (up to 1 year in jail in San Francisco).

Although most cities report only a handful of three-card monte games annually, the police admit they are not aware of the majority of cases because the victims are too embarrassed or ashamed to file a complaint. In fact, most reports of the three-card monte do not come from the victims. On the contrary, it is normally a non-involved witness who calls in. In most cases this is an irate storeowner who feels the monte mob is hurting his business.

Beating the Monte

In July of 2000, I was in N.Y.C. for a trade show and saw a three-card monte game in action. There were about seven or eight people hovered around a table covered in green polyethylene. A lady wearing an "I Love New York" tee-shirt was standing impatiently on the outside of the crowd and kept calling to a gentleman I assume was her husband. He had a camera strapped around his neck.

During the course of the play, I saw a patrol officer coming purposefully straight toward us. He obviously knew what was going on even from a distance. I thought to myself, "This could get exciting."

Just at that moment, one of the lookouts noticed me watching the game from the outside of the circle. He came over and snarled, "What the f**k are you staring at?" I know that monte mobs don't like non-participants watching, and normally I would have quickly walked away from such an implicit threat. But I knew what was about to happen, so I just smiled at him.

That's when he saw the cop coming toward us from across the street. He quietly motioned to a shill who got the attention of the dealer. "Slide." Like bees, the whole crowd around the table seemed to tense, shift focus, and then it suddenly began to disperse.

In a split second, the table was turned inside out. Suddenly, it was not a table at all. It was a large plastic garbage bag with a couple of cardboard boxes stacked together inside. The dealer flung the sack over his shoulder like he was Santa Claus, and coolly sauntered away down the street. The gang split into several small groups and calmly strolled off in different directions. They all seemed as if they were in the middle of various conversations that had been going on for a long time.

As for the cop, he never said a word. He never spoke into his radio. He did not try to disguise his presence. He just continued walking up the street. When he reached the spot the game had been taking place just moments before, he stopped, folded his arms and smiled as if to say, "Well, that takes care of that." The game was over. Better than any disappearing act you will ever see, the gang had just vanished—like a snowflake falling into the river. No noise. No fuss. No problem.

That leaves the startled camera-hugger and his wife. They seemed befuddled, and they both walked away from the cop without saying a word. They avoided eye contact like he was old snake-haired Medusa. As they were scurrying down the block, I could only wonder, "Did they get taken, but are too embarrassed to say anything? Were they afraid the cop would arrest them for gambling?"

I walked over toward the police officer. He was standing right where the table had been, quietly watching the man and his wife arguing with each other as they hurried off. I stepped next to him, folded my arms and sighed in admiration at the gang's efficiency. Quietly I said, "That was impressive." He laughed and nodded, and said, "It never ceases to amaze me. The cops can't even beat the monte. So what makes that guy think he can?"

***

—Chef Anton

Exhibition Routine

Three-Card Gold
By Whit Haydn and Chef Anton

Set-Up:

Two Jokers and an Ace of Spades are in a small folder. In the left front pants pocket are two matching Aces—they are facing away from the body. The three cards are removed from the folder, and the folder is placed into the right front pants pocket or right side jacket pocket.

All directions are from performer's view, forward is toward the spectators, back is closer to performer. Right and left refer to the performer's right and left.

Phase 1. Fast Eddie

The cards are in a straight line:

J A J

While the game is being explained, the cards are tossed in the same simple pattern. One Joker in each hand, the right hand picks up the Ace in *hype* position. The cards are tossed Ace to center, left hand Joker to the right, right hand Joker to the left. This is designed to get the spectators used to the throws, as well as to the method of displaying the Ace of Spades.

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"Here's a little game of chance I learned on the streets New York City. I used to watch an old character known as Fast Eddie. His hands were so fast and his line of ballyhoo so distracting, street-wise city folk were skinned as easily as the greenest tourists. I've seen Fast Eddie take a crowd for over a hundred bucks in less than five minutes flat. I even timed him…

"Five minutes."

As you say this, look at watch and press button as if starting stopwatch function. Do this without calling any attention to it. You could tell he was tossing the broads from a block away by his chant:

"Inky, Dinky, Parlez-Vous, I'll tell you what I'm going to do.
A little game from Hanky Poo, The Jokers for me, and the Ace for you.
Follow the Ace, folks. I pay on the Ace, not on the Jokers.
Step right up, folks...Learn the secrets of the ancients."

The cards are thrown several times during this patter, always in the same pattern. On the final toss, the Joker is hyped so the cards are (left to right) Ace, Joker, Joker. Reveal the center card to be a Joker.

"I'll leave out the snappy line of patter, since I don't want to confuse you."

Phase 2. Introduction

The cards are tossed fairly, but this time the center card (Ace) is tossed slightly forward of the others, forming a triangle:

A
J J

"When I do it, I do it slowly. So you always know where the Ace lies (Show Ace)***. In fact, when no one is betting, I always do the same patterns. But once we begin to bet, I will change the pattern."***

Toss again. This time, *hype* the right Joker to the left, toss the left Joker to the right, and toss the Ace into the center. This time the Ace is tossed slightly back of the other two cards:

J J
A

It now appears to spectators that the Ace is on the left.

"You see how the pattern is different?"

Show Ace in center.

"It doesn't affect where the Ace goes, of course."

With right hand, pick up right Joker. *Flip-change* the Ace so that the cards lay:

J J A

Pick up the Ace in right hand, and then the Joker in the right hand *hype* position. Show the Joker and then *hype* the Ace to the right.

"So if the Ace is in the center, it can't be on this end…"

Show Joker in right hand. Toss Joker to left.

"And it can't be here..."

Pick up Ace in right hand and layover Joker in center. Pick up both cards in *hype* position and show Joker. *Hype* Ace to center, toss Joker to right.

"It has to be in the center, right?"

The spectators will protest that the Ace was not in the center. Look confused, and pick up Jokers one in each hand and look at them. Show. Then pick up Ace and show.

"Relax. You're getting a little too anxious. I haven't started cheating yet. Let's take it from the top. I may be going too fast…"

Phase 3. I'll give you a hint

The cards are in a row:

J A J

Pick up the right hand Joker and layover the Ace, picking up both cards in *hype* position. Show Ace, then *hype* Joker to center. With the Ace in right hand, and the other Joker in the left, pull the Ace to the right and toss the left hand Joker between the two cards. Pick up the left hand card and move it to the left as the right hand drops its card between. Now the right hand pulls the card on the right over to the right and the left hand drops the left hand card into the center. This is the *mix*. The cards are left as follows:

A J J

Now the Joker on the right is pushed forward.

J
A J

"If you really want to sucker someone in, you have to let them win once. You do this by giving them a subtle hint. This makes it so easy, he can't possibly miss...So where's the Ace this time?"

If they pick the card in the upper right. Show the Joker:

"The hint was, that it's not this one. I told you it was a subtle hint."

If they pick one of the cards in the lower left, lay the Ace over the Joker and pick it up (*hype* position). Show the Joker. *Hype* Ace to left.

"I'll give you another hint...It's not that one and its not this one."

Show the Joker again, and then toss the Joker to the right of the Ace. Now they will choose the upper right. Show it with a slight air of exasperation.

"If you had gone for my first hint, it would still be there."

Phase 4. Bent Corner

"By the laws of chance, after a while, someone in the crowd will guess correctly. Even a broken watch is right twice a day. So that is why, as we start playing for money, a real sharper, that's me, always has some honest-looking, but totally unscrupulous, shillaber working with him. You look like just the sort I need."

Point to a man on your extreme left.

"The shill, or confederate, is also known as a stick, a capper, a booster, or a bonnet. You are going to be my partner. If by some freak lucky streak, anyone guesses correctly, I will give you a secret signal like this one:"

Rub nose.

"If you see the signal, it's your job to yell out 'I double the bet!' That way, since I have to take the highest bet, I take your bet on the card instead of his. If he guesses wrong, then I take his bet. This way we can never lose. So this is your chance to get rich with me...Got it? Now you folks will begin to see why you just can't beat the Monte."

Toss the cards so that the Ace is in the center:

J A J

Mix the cards slowly and deliberately, making sure the Ace always ends in the center. The move we call the *mix* is almost always the same. The right hand pulls the right hand card to the right, and the left hand tosses the card on the left between the center and right hand cards. The left hand card is pulled to the left, and the right hand tosses the card on the right between center and left hand cards. The right hand pulls the right hand card to the right, and the left hand tosses the card on the left between the center and right hand cards. This exchanges the left and right cards, and leaves the center card back in the center. It is meant to be easy to follow.

"I don't believe in taking any sort of unfair advantage. That's why I always start with the Ace in the center and the Jokers on the side."

Visibly toss the Ace to the left. Show the other two cards to be Jokers. With your right first finger on the upper, right-hand corner of the Ace, bend the Ace up and flash to the person on your left. This will put a sharp bend in the upper right hand corner of the card.

"When the Ace doesn't start in the center, I have to flash it to my ever-vigilant shill. That way he can always follow the throw of the cards. He has to know where the Ace is at all times. That way, when anyone guesses right, my partner will know when to double the bet and close him or her down. He also keeps an eye out for the local constabulary—who tend to take a jaundiced view of this harmless little enterprise. Since this is for money, please don't give any help. Only money talks. This is your chance to win something, folks. Step right up—get your money out. I don't cry when I lose, I don't laugh when I win."

With the corner still bent, *mix* the cards in any manner you wish.

"Alright, who is feeling lucky? Where's the hive? Where's the honey? Show me the card that wins you the money…The opening bet is twenty, folks."

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Someone will guess correctly. Look surprised, pick up and glance at the chosen card, and then set it back down. Casually rub your nose. Stall. Point to the chosen card. Rub your nose.

"This one?"

The designated shill will now yell, “I double the bet!” If he doesn't, clear your throat and rub your nose till he does. Then look at the confederate and say:
“I heard a double on that bet. The bet's forty bucks now. Forty to you, pal, if you've got it right... Turn over the Ace. That's right on the money. You've got some sharp eyes and the guts to bet some real money. Now that's what I call confidence...and this is a confidence game.”

Give shill a thumbs up and a wink. Look at the original bettor and shrug:

“Lucky guess...”

Mix the cards even faster and more confusingly.

.
“The smart operator never lets a winner play more than once. So I'll play with someone who isn't paying such close attention. How about you Ace?”

Once again our new client goes for the bent corner. Act bewildered. Start rubbing your nose vigorously.

The shill yells, “Double the bet!”

“I heard a double over here. The bet is forty now. I pay $40 for the Ace. Where is it, sir? Congratulations! Twice in a row. This must be your lucky day, sir! What a pair of eyes you have!”

Turn to the original bettor, chuckling:

“Better luck next time, sport.”

As you are saying the next line, you will do three things. First, put a bend in a Joker then pick up the Ace in *hype* position. Second, show the Ace fairly and then *hype* the bent Joker to the table. Third, as you point at the 'suckers' you take the bend out of the Ace.

“Man, the chance of that happening twice in a row is like a zillion to one. Remember how I said, 'You can never beat the Monte?' There's one thing that could mess the operator up. If all of you were friends, say, and had pooled your money together to back one card, my confederate wouldn't have had enough to double the bet.”

Mix the cards.

Okay, folks, I skated through that one, well now the Ace is in hiding again. Who'll bet twenty on the Ace of Spades?

Someone bets twenty. Turn to shill:

“We got a live one! Do I hear forty?”

Someone bets forty.

“Okay, I got forty. Do I hear eighty? Would you back his play, pal? Fine! We got two here for eighty.”

Accidentally rub nose. Shill yells. “Double!”
Look surprised. Smile.

“Yes, Yes. We got a hundred and sixty over here. Who else wants apiece of this action? You guys get it together and give me an even two hundred.”

When the action and joking subsides, say:

“Okay, okay. You guys are really getting into this! But if you all bet together, you have to let someone pick. Who's going to pick? Okay. There's over a hundred dollars riding on you, pal You want one, two, or...?”

Then, startled, notice the bent comer.

“Wait! Wait! Foul! The comer is bent. All bets are off! This one doesn't count!”

As you start lifting the card to take the bend out, you casually show the face of the Joker to everyone and say:

“I wouldn't want anyone to have an unfair advantage taken of ‘em. You don't mind if we try to keep the game square, do you?”

Glance at watch. Act as if pressing the stop on a stopwatch function, and to yourself chuckle,

“Eddie would be so proud.”

Smile at audience with self-satisfaction.

Phase 5. Three Aces

Start with the cards all face up in any order. Turn to the spectator that the crowd chose to pick the card. Have him turn the three cards face down .If he is not close enough to the table, have him select someone else to do the mixing—he will direct the procedure.

“If I personally guarantee that you will win, would you bet $50.00 on it? (if he says yes, say ***“Where angels fear to tread! Don’t worry I’m not going to bet you.”*** and if he says no, say, ***“I should hope not!”***) ***But I really am going to let you win this time.”***

To crowd:

.
“You seem to be exactly the sort of simple, honest folk with whom I prefer to associate. I don't want you to leave with any mixed feelings about our little time together, so we will close on a positive note!”

To the spectator:

"You turn the cards over. That's fair so far, right? I won't even touch them. Put them in any order you like. Now mix them as slowly as you wish. There's no way you can lose under these conditions."

They turn over the three cards and begin to mix them. Meanwhile, as you say, ***"I won't even touch them."*** put both hands in your front pants pockets, as if to keep them out of trouble. Step back a step, and with a pause remove both hands from the pockets and bring them to your sides. In the process, steal the two Aces from the left pocket and get them in a gambler's cop in the left hand (Photo 114). The left hand rests against the side of the leg, the thumb covering the cards from the front.

"Now don't peek at the cards again. I have to give myself a fighting chance. Slide me one of the Jokers."

Its important to tell them to "slide" the card, since if they pick up the card they might be tempted to glance at it. They slide a Joker across the table, which you take with the right hand. Put it into the left hand covering the two Aces, but keeping a break between the Aces and the Joker (Photo 115).

"Great! Now slide another Joker over to me."

Again, you take the Joker and lay it flat on the other Joker in the left hand. Point to the remaining face down card on the table:

"Is that the one you're picking? You 're saying that's the Ace, right?"

Photo 114

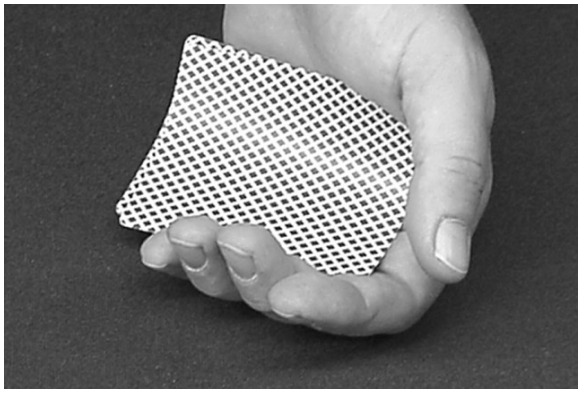
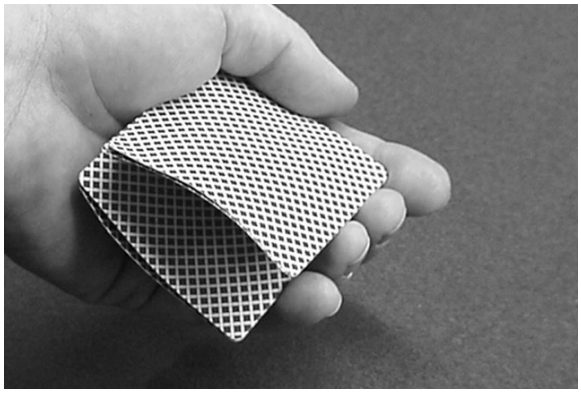


Photo 115



Two aces in the gamblers palm, and the two cards laid on top of the aces.

Photo 116

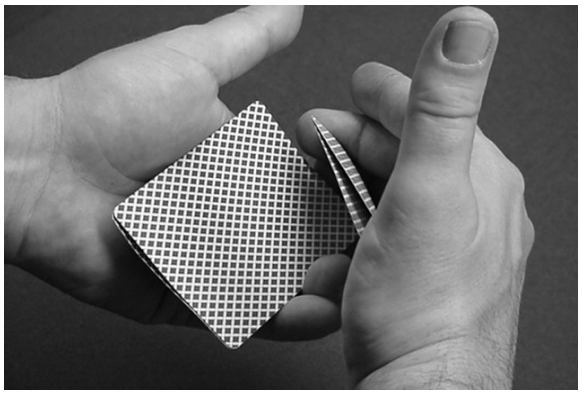


Photo 117

The right hand palms the two cards and turns over the aces, a slightly exposed view. Right thumb will come under inner end of Aces.

Photo 118

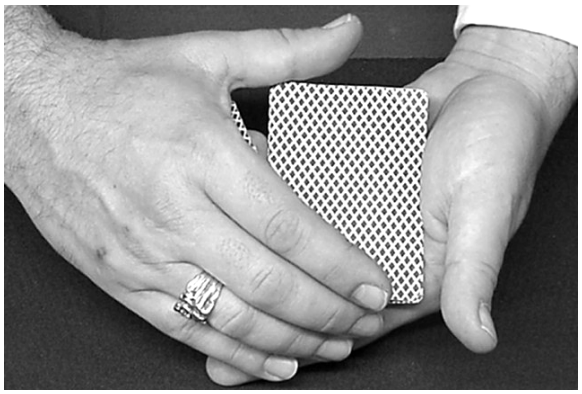
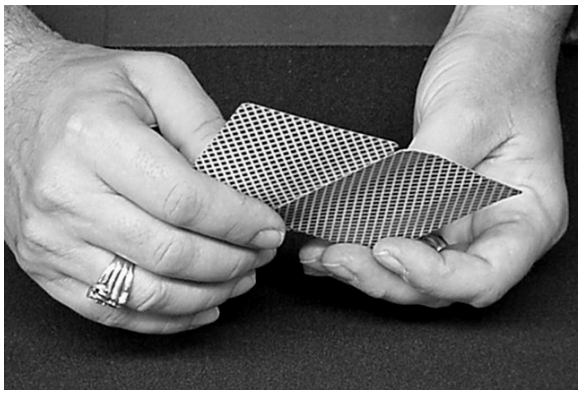


Photo 119



The turnover from the spectators' point of view, slightly exposed. Right thumb comes around inner end of cards (photo 118).

As they answer, your right hand comes back to the left hand and palms off the two Jokers in a classic palm during a squaring action—assisted by the left third finger (Photo 116). The left hand slides the two Aces to the left until they clear the right thumb (Photo 118), which then pivots them up so that the two Aces are facing you, held between the right thumb and first finger (Photo 117). The two Jokers are still palmed in the right hand.

Glancing down at the two Aces, as if to check, you spread them slightly (Photo 119), look back up and say:

"I don't want to influence your decision, but you can still have one of these if you'd rather..."

First Ending:

If he confirms that he wants the card on the table, tell him to turn it up and show it to everyone.

"See! I told you you'd win!"

Toss the two Aces face up on the table, one at a time.

"And I made darned sure of it!"

At the same time that the Aces hit the table, the right hand casually reaches for the folder in the right pants pocket and ditches the Jokers. The Three Aces are picked up and replaced in the folder.

The Second Ending

If the spectator loses his nerve and decides to change his mind about the tabled card, take one of the Aces in the left hand, leaving the other in the right with the palmed Jokers. Holding the hands a few inches apart say:

"Okay. Which one is the Ace?"

Whatever he says, drop the chosen card face up on the table and say with surprise:

"Good call! I told you you'd win!"

Pause, then drop the other Ace face-up on the table beside the face-up chosen card. Immediately turn over the facedown card.

"And I made darned sure of it!"

Reach in to the pocket for the folder as above and ditch the Jokers.

END

***

—Whit Haydn and Chef Anton, 1997

Note: One idea that Chef and I have toyed with, but not really experimented with yet in front of an audience, is to give out play money to members of the audience at the beginning of the routine. These would be twenty-dollar bills that have the performer's address and phone number on one side, folded lengthwise so that only the twenty-dollar side is showing. No one really gets a much of a chance to bet, but the "shill" spectator keeps getting paid off when he doubles the bet. The point would be to see how much money we can get the audience to put up on the bent corner—to keep the "shill" from doubling the bet. Also, this justifies the performer keeping money wrapped around the fingers as is done on the streets, and this has many technical and psychological advantages.

Exhibition Routines

A description and listing of all the wonderful exhibition routines available for three-card monte is beyond the scope of the present work. The magic literature (and now video) offers a wide variety of routines that are different from each other and entertaining in unique ways. Famous routines in print include those of Dai Vernon, Cy Endfield, Mike Rogers, Mike Skinner, Roy Walton, and Darwin Ortiz.

Exhibition routines can be done straight using the actual methods of the street-artist, or they can be faked with magic cards and moves that would not work under fire. It really makes little difference. In exhibition, the impression is all that matters.

Creating an overall effect that convincingly informs the spectators that the game is impossible to beat is about all that can be hoped for—we have yet to find a way to actually demonstrate the game as it is really played that is both accurate and entertaining. In exhibition, the three-card monte—of necessity—becomes a magic trick.

Afterthoughts

Right on Cue
Performance Notes from Chef Anton

Having grown up in pool halls, I can offer a unique perspective to the classic three-card monte. After proving an unassailable superiority at the pool table, I have seen many hustlers double their winnings by giving some sucker "a chance to win their money back" at some other game. Since card playing is so prominent in poolrooms, three-card monte is a natural scam to finish cleaning out the skittish mark. It is an art form when it is done correctly.

Just like pool hustling, a good monte thrower will "rack" their sucker with clever come-ons, "draw" them in by occasionally letting them win (or at least get close to winning), and then "break" them with one bad roll (or in this case, *throw*). All that is left is for the sucker to "chalk it up" to a learning experience.

By this point, you already know how the game works both physically and psychologically. The big question is how do you practice? I have always felt that until you play the game for an audience you cannot improve. Perhaps it is better said, performing for a live audience will speed up your growth.

Practicing by yourself or with a friend is fine when you are just beginning, but once you have learned the mechanics, it is vital to perform in front of strangers. They will be your best judge and jury. It is only at this point, you will know if you are fooling them or not. But what if you get burned? So what!

Getting burned is the quickest way to learn the game because there is not a worse feeling in the world then hearing someone say "I caught you" or "I saw what you did." This moment will be permanently burned in your mind forever. You will be sure to never make that mistake again.

Granted, you don't want to "practice" like this when you are getting paid to perform, but the lesson is the same. So do the game for as many people as you can. Then go home, work out the problems, and try again. Don't be afraid of getting burned. Be afraid of "the fear of getting burned." Practice the mechanics on your own, but don't kill yourself over every little detail. This is a giant pitfall of many magicians.

Some people may disagree with me on this point, but I think most magicians spend way too much time worrying about being mechanically perfect. You do not need to have the smallest break, the most ideal finger placement or the cleanest *hype*. I don't mean that mechanics are not important, because they are. But, they are not everything—not even the most important thing.

The big question is "why do many magicians fail to even try the trick in front of an audience?" The answer is that many magicians are constantly working to fool fellow magicians, not lay people. This is a giant mistake.

While you may think frying other magicians would be the ultimate feeling, it won't be. Even if you kill them, most magicians will not give you any more satisfaction than a nod and a "That's nice." Moreover, magicians are trained to see things differently than laymen. They will be looking where most people don't even think to look.

Therefore, you will be training yourself for the wrong audience. Just because a complex routine can beat a magician, does not make that routine an entertaining and commercial one. I would much rather have a simple, yet solid routine. This will allow me to work on my character and presentation, not the mechanics.

In his book **Wise Guy**, Harry Anderson says:

> "If the ultimate goal is to break through and separate yourself from the general magic population, you can't do that with a trick. It can only be accomplished with a distinctive character and that can't be stolen. Magicians spend too much time trying to invent their own original magic tricks and not enough time trying to invent their own magical character. A character that they are comfortable being, in or out of their magic act."

That paragraph transformed my life forever. Rather than trying to re-create the wheel, re-create the driver. Your character is the driving force behind any routine. Your attire, personality, patter and even your mannerisms should all be an outgrowth of your character. A pool hustler will perform three-card monte much differently than a southern hayseed, or a W.C. Fields type of sharper. So develop a character which is appropriate for you, and you will find your three-card monte routine (and all of your routines) to be much more fulfilling, as well as entertaining.

My character, which is an exaggeration of my real self, is that of a pool hustler. This may seem threatening, but in actuality, it is the exact opposite. Unlike what you may have seen in the movies, a real pool hustler is not cocky, loud and obtrusive like Tom Cruise in the **The Color of Money**.

On the contrary, he is inviting, warm and friendly like Jackie Gleason in the 1955 classic, **The Hustler**. He roots you on and empathizes with your inability to win. He gives you tips and suggestions as to what you are doing wrong. Most importantly, when he is finished, you don't have the feeling you were taken. You have the feeling that you almost had him. Sound familiar? It should.

***

—Chef Anton

The Meaning for Magic

As magicians have known since the days of Erdnase, three-card monte makes an excellent entertainment when exhibited for fun. People find it fascinating and colorful. But in some ways, three-card monte can't be effectively demonstrated in exhibition. The monte tosser on the street counts on the fact that the sucker will always know where the Ace is until the final bet when the big money is on the line. The sucker is supposed to think that his eyes are way sharper than the scoundrel's hands are fast.

If an entertainer began his demonstration of monte by letting the audience catch him six or seven times in a row, people would walk off and dismiss him as an incompetent. In order to convince an audience that he is good at the game, the magician must turn the game from a swindle into a magic trick, and instead of letting them think they have an edge on him, he must convince them that his sleight-of-hand with the cards is uncanny. In fact, his abilities will probably have to surpass the average tosser on the street in order to fool people over and over again with the same few moves.

Even if the magician were to be able to set up the exhibition with plants (shills) in the audience, and perform the game with slightly modified hooks or come-ons, so that it actually did get someone in the audience hooked and landed just like the street con, it might not be very entertaining for the spectators. They will tend to sympathize with the sucker. There could be bad feelings generated in the audience as well as a conviction that the performer somehow cheated or took a "cheap shot."

In fact, to perform the monte as entertainment, it is important to disengage the egos of the antagonists—the implicit challenge has to be deflected in a way that makes the audience feel that they are participants without being victims.

This can be accomplished in different ways, but one very effective way is to use story. By setting the game back in time, e.g. telling how the performer, a kid, or a magician got taken once by a con man a long time ago, the audience can watch the story and realize that they would have been taken as well, and yet they did not have to make any public commitment that would have exposed them to ridicule.

They can sit back and sympathize without being put on the spot. I am not a great fan of story magic because it does tend to place magic at a distance, at an emotional remove. In this particular case, I feel it can be very useful—since a remove is just what is needed to protect the audience's sensitivities.

I remember seeing Vernon do his monte routine at the **Magic Castle** in the *Close-up Gallery*. I was very impressed with the fact that he never allowed anyone to choose a card. He did the effect as a demonstration, and at the end of each throw, he showed everyone that the card was not where they thought it would be, but without asking anyone to admit that they were fooled. When he came to the bent card, I was completely floored by the way he handled it.

He mixes the cards, which doesn't fool anyone since by now everyone has noticed that the corner of the Queen of Spades has been accidentally bent. Just before he is to turn over the cards, he notices that the corner is bent, and in picking up the card to straighten it, he reveals that it is an eight of hearts. He doesn't call any great attention to it. He doesn't beat anyone up over it. They quietly discover that he was playing with them, and just as quietly he lets them off the hook.

He beats the audience twice. Once, because they would have bet on the bent card if he had let them, and twice because he was more of a gentleman than they would have been had they been in his position.

One of the advantages that the street swindler has over the magician is that the swindler is more likely to know exactly what he is trying to accomplish. The goal of the broad tosser is always "to get the money." Since he has such focus, it is easier for him to bend all of his efforts to the accomplishment of his goal.

This focus gives him clarity, because he sees everything in terms of his goal. The natural skepticism, good will and sportsmanship of the sucker are seen merely as obstacles to be overcome in the effort to take money from him. The victim's avarice, narcissism, arrogance, lust and cupidity are seen as convenient handles that can be grasped and pulled in one direction or another.

Most magicians do not spend enough time thinking about what they are trying to accomplish. If the performer walks out on stage without a purpose, then the audience will assign some purpose. Usually, the audience will assume that the performer is there to impress them and win their approval. This is one of the worst possible performing situations. The audience is now placed in the role of critics or judges.

If the performer comes out on stage with the attitude, "I'm the best magician you've ever seen," then the audience will sit back and think, "Show me." If the magician really is good, the audience responds with grudging approval. "I have to admit, he really is good." If the magician isn't good, he will be crucified. The performer seems to be asking for approval, and the audience becomes the critic, deciding whether or not they should give it to him.

On the other hand, if the performer walks on stage with the goal, "I am going to give these people a real scare," and then does something that scares the pants off the audience, the audience will look at each other and go, "That was really scary. That was great!" and they will applaud with enthusiasm in response to what has been given them.

Whenever the performer comes out with the attitude that he has something to give or to share with the audience, as opposed to walking out on stage wanting something from the audience, he is in a stronger performing situation.

If the magician's goal is to make people laugh, or to just kid them and pull their legs, or to bedazzle them with beautiful lights and effects, or to present them with an unsolvable mystery, or any of a hundred things that he might choose to gift them with, and he accomplishes his goal, then they will respond with applause that is a return for what he has given them.

If the magician's goal is to offer the audience something—an experience, a feeling, or an idea—and the performer gives the audience what he promises, then the audience will reward him with applause that is based on true appreciation—not the empty applause that comes with scorecards.

The magician may have more than one goal in mind in a single trick, or it may change from routine to routine. The important thing is that he knows what he is trying to accomplish, what he wants to give the audience, and not stand there in front of them seeking vain approval. Once he knows what he wants to give the audience, he can start to analyze everything from the perspective of his goal.

The scam artist always looks at every step of his operation from the spectator's point of view. He wants to remove any suggestion, image or situation that might scare him off. He recognizes the importance of controlling not just the thinking but the feelings of his victim as well.

Magicians need to be more aware of the importance of this kind of analysis. I have seen audiences turn against a performer in the middle of a show for one misplaced joke that suddenly set the contest in different terms, and made the audience now want to see the magician "lose," and the spectator "win."

The experience of magic is not necessarily a pleasant one. The magician is hoisting the spectator onto the horns of a dilemma: "There is no such thing as magic/There is no other possible explanation." This can be a very creative and exciting place to be, but for most people it is not very comfortable. Part of the magician's job is to somehow make them feel comfortable in this pointy place. It is not enough to fool people; the magician must also make people like being fooled.

Magic is a purely cerebral art, much like chess. Bobby Fischer once said the object of chess was to "crush the mind of your opponent." The same could be said for magic. When magic is successful, the spectator has been forced to swallow an entire argument that he knows to be false, and yet he can't find the fallacy—hopefully never will.

The magician must then help the spectator to learn to **like** being in that condition. He uses humor, theater and story to distract and charm the spectator, and to deflect and hide the direct challenge to the ego. The sword of magic is hidden behind the cape of theater.

That is why it is so important to keep in mind how the audience might feel in response to any particular step in procedure or line of patter. One wrongly planted suggestion or ill-timed joke, and the audience could turn against the performer.

But even more important to the creation of magic is the block-by-block building of the argument—the false syllogism that is a magic trick. In order to accomplish this, the magician needs to lead the thinking of the spectator in much the same way as the con artist. He must use his patter and acting ability to help the spectator remember some things and forget others.

The magician should seek to take over the spectator's thinking, and lead him through the argument of the trick in such a way that the spectator believes he is thinking for himself. This is the type of manipulation at which the street swindler excels.

The magician can use some of the same techniques of acting and patter that the con man might use. For example, the broad tosser will "call the card facedown" and shift the moment of agreement. This is an extremely useful way to help the spectator's powers of observation slide past certain moments that otherwise might be awkward to fit into the case we are trying to build.

The technique of piggybacking one assertion on top of another in order to force agreement to a false premise is also useful in magic. This would be a ruse like that when we show the three cards, make the *hype* and ask for agreement that there are "only three cards." The same technique can be used in a magic trick.

But by far the most important thing that we as magicians can learn from the broad tosser is how to grab and hold the attention of the crowd. The street con will seek to engage the audience intellectually, to offer them a peek or hint about the inner workings of the scam. The audience always thinks they see something that may give them an advantage, and they will stick around to see if they are right. This sort of cat and mouse game, this engagement of the audience is one of the hallmarks of great magic.

The magician wants to help the audience members to think of each and every possible explanation for a feat, and then to help them dismantle each one. This leaves a member of the audience with no way out but to admit to himself that he is trapped in the box, “There is no such thing as magic/There is no other explanation.”

So in all these ways and more we believe that the magician can profit from studying the techniques of the scam artist. We can improve our own work through understanding how the con man approaches his task. We want magicians to learn to think more like swindlers. That is the premise of the **School for Scoundrels**.

Appendix

Closed Monte:
Canada Bill's Rube Act

(Mason Long, p. 104)

During my stay in Utica I was so "light," financially, that I was unable most of the time to attend the races. The city was crowded with people, and there was much gambling and robbing going on. The confidence men and monte players were in clover and counted their gains by the thousands. Among them was the most notorious and successful thief who ever operated in this country, "Canada Bill," whose name is familiar to every newspaper reader. He had rented for the week, at an exorbitant figure, a saloon on one of the principal streets of the city.

Here he made his headquarters, and he had scores of "ropers" and "decoy ducks" on the streets, in the saloons, at the track, and, in fact, every where capturing "suckers." To these "cappers" he paid fifty per cent of the amount realized from the "bloaks" they brought in. At the rear of the saloon there was a little room, carefully guarded, in which the robberies were committed. Only one party was allowed in this place at one time, so that the game might not be exposed to prospective dupes.

(Mason Long, p. 105)

We drank two or three times together, and, getting into conversation, we learned that the stranger was a leading attorney from Albany, who was in Utica trying an important canal case…I suggested to "Dan" that if we took him to Canada Bill's place, he might drop some money, and we would thus make a raise. "Dan" scouted the idea, saying he was too smart a man to be caught on three-card monte. But I thought not, and we determined at all events to make the effort.

(Mason Long, p. 106)

Meeting us, he suggested another glass of beer, whereupon I remarked that the best beer I had found in Utica was at a saloon in the next block, and asked if we should not go there. All were agreed, and we proceeded to "Canada Bill's." While en route there the attorney spoke of the large number of confidence men in the city, and the rich harvest they were reaping. "Dan" and myself exchanged significant glances. This rather discouraged us, but we continued on our way.

Arrived at Bill's establishment, we stepped into the back room, and I motioned for "Dutch Charley," of Chicago, the principal "capper," to come in and work the case, as I didn't understand it. We sat down at the table and were enjoying a glass of beer, when a rustic looking creature entered the room, munching a huge piece of pie, which he ate with palpable relish.

He was a large man, dressed in coarse clothes, with a sun burnt countenance, a nose highly illuminated by the joint action of whisky and heat, and an expression of indescribable greenness and "freshness" about him. He at first seemed to notice no one, but sat down quietly at our table, and devoted himself strictly to his pie, until it had disappeared into his capacious stomach.

This strange looking creature naturally attracted our attention. The Albany man was particularly startled by the apparition, and after a careful survey of the new comer, ejaculated, "My God, see what we're coming to."

"Yes," responded I, "and we haven't got far to go unless we stop drinking."

The subject of our remarks, who seemed to be in blissful ignorance of the fact that we were discussing him, at this juncture, looked at us and said: “Gentlemen, wont ye’z huv a drink of suthin’ with me?” We all declined the invitation, but continued to study the appearance and actions of the supposed “Hoosier,” with much interest and amusement. He took no offense at our refusal, but quietly produced from the recesses of his greatcoat pocket, a large roll of money, with a five hundred dollar bill for a wrapper. He noticed that we were watching him closely, and said:

“I done better with this ‘ere druv of cattle than I done on t’other trip. This time I cleared five thousand dollars from my druv, but last time afore this them New York chaps skinned me, confound ‘em.” After a pause he continued: “But I had a little streak o’ bad luck comin’ down on the train from New York this mornin’. I met some strangers, and we had a little game with tickets like, and they bet me I couldn’t turn the ticket, and won thirty-five dollars from me, durn their buttons.”

“Why, man, you’ve been playing three-card monte,” said our legal friend. “Don’t you know better than that?”

“Thar, thar, that’s what they called it; three-card monte, that’s it. Wal, if they did get my thirty-five dollars, I took their tickets away from ‘em, plague on ‘em. I am goin’ to larn that ‘ere game myself, so I kin git my thirty-five dollars back.”

With this remark, Canada Bill (for it was he) produced the cards, or tickets, as he called them, and began throwing them on the table in a very awkward manner. His clumsiness amused the party, and finally he said, “Wal, I want to get even, and I’ll bet any man ten dollars he can’t turn that ‘ere ticket.”

“Dutch Charley” was on hand, and promptly took the bet. After winning he said, “I’ll bet you twenty, now.”

“O, you’re too lucky,” said Bill, “I won’t throw ‘em agin for you, no how; but I’ll try *you* for twenty dollars,” continued he, turning to me, “and see how your luck is.”

Charley slipped me a twenty dollar bill, and I won the bet. I offered to bet again, but Bill said:

“Thar, thar, I lost again. Wal, did you ever see sich luck. I’m out now nearly one hundred dollars on these durned tickets. I won’t bet yer twenty dollars, but I’ll just put up five hundred dollars agin any ov ye’z”

With this he turned the cards to win, the old gent from Albany meanwhile watching every movement closely, and evidently wholly engrossed in Bill’s words and actions.

“I have only eight dollars, or I’d bet you,” remarked he.

“Wal,” said Bill, “I’ll go yer two hundred dollars agin yer watch and chain.”

“How do you know my watch and chain are worth two hundred dollars?”

“Wal, I didn’t allow that a man o’ yer standing wud war one that cost much less; of course I’d have to luk at it afore I’d bet that much agin it.”

“It didn’t cost me that much,” said the gentleman, as Bill examined it.

"I couldn't go yez no more'n one hundred and ninety dollars, stranger, on that 'ere watch and chain."

The cards in the mean time had been lying on the table, and the attorney's eyes had never been removed from them. The bet was taken. Bill put his one hundred and ninety dollars in my hands, and the lawyer covered it with the watch, retaining the chain about his neck. In his excitement and haste to make the winning, which he considered a certainty, he reached to turn the card, when Bill covered the "tickets" with his hands, remarking: "Stranger, yer stake isn't all up yet."

Thereupon the gentleman removed the chain from his neck, handed it to me and then turned a card. Of course he lost, and as quick as a flash of lightning, a complete understanding of the situation dawned upon his mind. He leaned back in his chair, rubbed his eyes, took a careful survey of the gang by which he was surrounded, and propounded the following conundrum:

"Is it possible that I've been beat at three-card monte at last!"

"Yes, you've got beat," quickly answered the shark as I handed him the watch.

"Well boys," said the victim, who cared little for the pecuniary loss, but seemed humiliated at the fact that he had swallowed the bait, "I don't want to part with that watch and chain, because it was a present to me; how much will you take for it?"

"I've taken more than half a bushel of watches this week, and I don't know what to do with them, so I'll return this to you for one hundred dollars," said Bill, as quietly as if he were discussing the most legitimate business transaction.

"I don't think my fun has been worth over fifty dollars to me," responded the attorney, "but I will give you that amount."

"Well, I'll take it, as I didn't have a great deal of trouble with you."

A check was produced, the attorney filled it out for fifty dollars, signed it, and recovered his watch and chain. Bill sent a messenger with him to a business house to get the money. Arriving at the door of the establishment, the gentleman said he was well known there and desired to enter alone to avoid any suspicion.

He asked his companion for the check, saying he would go in, get it cashed, and bring out the money. The fellow handed the check over, the lawyer hastily tore it into fragments and dismissed the young man with a kind message to his master.

Upon reporting the facts he found himself out of a situation. "Bill," after all, lost his swag, and "Dan" and I failed to get our percentage. This was my first and last experience as "capper" for a confidence man. Canada Bill made many thousands of dollars that year during the races. He was a most expert operator and among his victims were many persons of intelligence and experience.

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Long, Mason. **The Life of Mason Long, the Converted Gambler**. Chicago: Donnelley, Loyd and Co., 1878.

Closed Monte:
Devol's Bent Corner and Pencil Mark

(George Devol, p. 183)

A man by the name of Charlie Adams, Tripp, and myself, started out from Chicago on the Michigan Central Railroad one day, to turn a few honest dollars. We took separate cars and began looking for game. I was in the ladies' car, and thought I saw plenty of material, but the most of it was handicapped with female riders.

There was one old gentleman sitting alone, so I took a seat beside him and began to feel his pulse. He had sold a pair of horses for $800, and an interest in a patent for $1,600. I did not want to play him in that car, for I wanted some of the others a little later on; so I invited him to join me in a smoke. He declined, and told me that he never smoked a cigar, chewed tobacco, or drank a drop of liquor in his life.

Then I knew he would be a darling sucker; so I invited him to go over in the smoking-car until I could have a little smoke myself. He consented, and we went over. We took a seat just behind a green looking countryman who was smoking a cob pipe, and it was not long until he turned round and asked us the name of a station we had just passed.

We did not know the name, so he said: "I don't wonder you can't tell the names, for I never saw so many towns strung 'long a railroad. Why, out where I live we don't have a town only about once in fifty miles."

I asked him where he lived. He replied: "When I'm to hum, I lives on a ranch in Colorado; but I've been to Chicago sellin' of my steers, and them thar fellows came nigh getting' the best of me with some of their new-fangled games; but they gave me some of their tickets, and when I get home I'll make the boys think I didn't take my critters to Chicago for nothing.

"I guess as how they would have got more of my money, but I left it up at the tavern with the feller that had his hair all glued down to his forehead as if he thought it would fall off. So when they got all I had with me they thought I was broke and let me go."

The old gent asked him to show us how they beat him with the tickets. He said, "I've not larnt it yet, but I will try and show you," so he got out his three tickets and began to throw them on the seat, explaining that we must guess the ticket with the little boy on it. We guessed, sometimes right and sometimes wrong.

I bent up the corner of the little boy ticket, and told the old gent not to turn that one until we got a bet out of the old fool; so we would miss it every time after that. Finally I offered to bet him $500 that I could turn up the boy ticket the first turn. He said, "No, I wont bet on her yet, for I can't play her good 'nough."

Then I offered to bet him five to two, so he got out his big roll, saying, "This is the money I left up to the tavern, so I'll just try you once." I put up my $500, and he put up $200. I turned the ticket with the corner bent, and won.

He looked at me a moment, then said to the old gent, who was holding stakes, "Give him the money, for gol darned if he didn't get her fair."

Then I offered to bet him $1,000, but he said, “You got an eye like an Indian, and I don’t want to play with you any more; but I will play with your pap” (pointing to the old gent).

The old fellow said, “I am a church member, and never bet; but I expect some one will win all that fellow’s money before he gets home.”

“Certainly,” said I; “and we may as well have it as any one else.”

The old gent got out his money and wanted to bet $100, but the fellow would not bet less than $1,000. I then offered to put up the balance, but the fellow would not have it, saying, “Your eyes are too good.” Then the old gent put up the money in my hands and turned the card; but it was not the winner, for somehow, in mixing them, the corner of the boy card had got straightened out and the corner of another was turned up.

I put a mark on the boy card with my pencil while the fellow was putting away his money, and then told him as he was a little winner he should let me bet once more. He said, “All right,” so I put up $1,000, turned the marked card and won.

The old church member could not stand it to see me win all that fool’s money, so he put up $1,000 more in order to get even. The fellow told him he would make it $1,500; and as that would get him out ahead, up she went, and he turned the marked card; but, as was the case with the crocked corner, the little mark was on another card.

The old gent dropped back in his seat with a groan, and just then a gentleman who had been sitting across the aisle got up and said, “You fellows have been trying to rob this boy out of his money. I have been watching you, and will report you to the officers at the next station.”

The old gent got up and started back to his car, saying to me in a whisper, “You had better get out of this, or you may get into trouble.” I replied, “I think so myself.” So I got up and started back with him, but he was in such a hurry that I got lost from him. When the train got up to the next station, there were three less passengers on board than when that fellow said, “I will report you to the officers.”

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Devol, George: **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, facsimile edition. First published by Cincinnati: Devol & Haines, 1887.

Closed Monte:
The Dry Cleaner/Tailor Play

When Eddie Fields was staying in Los Angeles with Brian Gillis in 1997, he described this play to Whit Haydn:

At one time, Carmen D'Amico worked the monte exclusively on dry cleaners and tailors in the Chicago area. His partner Bob Perry would pose as a salesman. Perry would be in the establishment chatting up the proprietor. D'Amico would walk in eventually, with a coat that needed mending in an impossibly short time. As he explained his problem to the tailor, three cards fell out of the breast pocket of the coat and onto the counter.

"Excuse me, sir," Perry said as he leaned toward him. "May I ask you why you have those cards in your pocket? Are you a gambler?"

"Oh, no," D'Amico laughed. "That's just a little game that we used to play back in my neighborhood."

"What kind of game do you play with just three cards?"

"Well, its sort of a guessing game. It looks easy—but it's harder than it looks. We used to play it for money in the old days, but now I just like to play it with the kids in the neighborhood. I drive 'em nuts with it."

"Show me," Perry insists.

D'Amico explains the game and tosses the cards. He has an irritating, smug attitude. The proprietor watches with interest. Perry picks and loses. This surprises the tailor, since he could easily tell where the Ace had landed.

Perry insists on playing again and again. He loses both times. Both times, the tailor was certain of the right card—and both times proven correct. The tailor begins to think that he must have a better than average pair of eyes.

D'Amico starts to put the cards away, and Perry insists that he play one more time. D'Amico refuses. Perry offers to bet him 20 bucks that he can find the ace this time.

D'Amico relents. The tailor holds the stakes, and when Perry loses, he hands the money over to D'Amico. It is obvious that the tailor is getting frustrated and probably wants to bet.

D'Amico looks back outside, and claims, "Okay, this is getting out of hand. I'm not a gambler and you guys are taking this whole thing way too seriously. I got more important things to do than sit around playing cards all day…"

As D'Amico is talking, the tailor sees Perry bend the corner of the ace and wink at him.

Perry grabs D'Amico's arm. "I'll bet you a hundred dollars I can find the damn ace."

Now D'Amico is put off. D'Amico steps back, pulls away from Perry's grip, and takes out a big roll of bills. "Put your money where your mouth is. I'll bet you five hundred you can't."

"I've only got a couple hundred on me," Perry says, "but my friend here might put up the rest." He gestures toward the tailor.

"Now wait a minute, only one guy can play…" argues D'Amico.

"Okay, I'll let him pick then, how's that?" He turns to the tailor and winks again conspiratorially, "Is that okay with you friend?"

The tailor nods.

D'Amico agrees to one more toss—the cards are thrown. The tailor picks the card with the bent corner.

It is not the ace.

D'Amico picks up the cash and the three cards and waltzes out.

Perry and the tailor stare at each other in shocked disbelief. They discuss the turn of events for a few minutes. Perry points out, "We can't go to the cops 'cause we were all gambling."

Angrily, Perry decides, "I'll find that cheat and get our money back myself…"

The tailor is left waiting next to his empty register.

"Can you imagine?" Eddie Fields grinned. "In D'Amico's play, the sucker was always standing next to his own cash register full of money. That's what you might call a sitting duck!"

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—as told by Eddie Fields, 1997

Closed Monte:
The Texas Twist
by Detective S. M. Haines

Texas has, during the past 15 years, produced more three-card monte suspects than possibly any other state. They have been so good at the con game that the variation used by the suspects years ago became known as the "Texas Twist."

Three-card monte began as a pure gambling game. Years ago, grifters would play this game on the bus, in the pool halls, or on the downtown streets where a crowd would gather much like the shell and pea game players. Black neighborhoods were familiar with this card game and anyone who got took was considered a real sucker.

The game graduated in the 70's to truck stops where sophisticated mixed teams of four to seven players would fleece the truck drivers out of their money. The teams were made up of shills, dealers, and enforcers who settled disputes. When the truck drivers caught on that they were never going to win and refused to pay, some teams resorted to robbery. When these teams came to town, offenses were generated and this strong arm approach brought a new change in officers' attitudes toward what was once thought of as a game of skill.

Somehow, the really smart con men who knew how to play the handkerchief switch got together to form a new game called the "Texas Twist," The players did not have worry about any strong arm approach because the victims were going to put the money right in their hand. They would perfect a story that was believable and designed to lure the victim into a situation that would reveal the "mark's" own greed.

No longer would they have to fleece truck drivers out of a few hundred dollars or play the game on a cardboard box in a downtown alley. They could work a few hours for thousands of dollars and when the victim went to the police, detectives who were not trained in bunco crimes, would raise their eyebrows in disbelief. Detectives would consider this nothing more than a gambling game or a civil case, and there was nothing they could do.

Many very old players will still relate how several cities in the United States had a "tree." Bunco detectives, rather than have their city ravaged by con men coming from all over the country, would let certain players make some money playing con. In return, these players would inform on new con men coming in from out of town and taking off huge scores. The detectives got to make some arrests and control the offenses. The snitches got their mug shots removed from the mug books and if there was a big uproar over a particular score, the con men would simply kick back the money to the mark.

A typical good "Texas Twist" team will consist of about four players. At least two of the players will be white males and at least one player, the key to the entire team, will be black. The last player will be a driver who will make sure that he will never be seen by the victim. His role is to pick up the team after the money changes hands and to watch the victim inside the bank. Typically, his take is 20% of the score. Although several all white teams have tried to play the game alone, not many have succeeded.

The black player is often referred to as the "lame," the "catch man," or the "hit man" because he approaches the victim first and entices him into the game. He normally looks for white males between the ages of 55-75. The victim, although he might look like a farmer, might have a big diamond ring on or drive a new pickup truck and appear to have money

Most of the time the team will choose businesses which attract many people such as Wall Mart, Payless, and Home Depot. Most teams like these businesses, if they are playing small towns, because they are close to the freeways and they can be miles away before the victim decides to contact the police. Sometimes, the suspects will consistently work bank parking lots to select victims and follow them from that location.

The story used by the particular team may vary but is usually consistent and predictable. The Black player introduces himself as Roscoe Duvall or some similar name and says he is from Tupelo, Mississippi or some small town in the South. Roscoe has just come to town from the farm because his relative died in some kind of accident and he is there to pick up some insurance money.

He has a lot of money at the bus station and flashes a large money roll frequently assuring the mark that he is not going to rob him. Roscoe met a girl at the bus station who offered him sex for $500. After giving her the money, she gave him a piece of paper with her address on it. Since he doe3s not read or write, he asks the mark for some help in finding the woman and shows him the "catch card" with the address on it. Roscoe offers the victim money for assistance but rarely gives him any.

As quickly as he can, he gets into the victim's vehicle and they begin driving away from the scene. The other members of the team will follow the victim's vehicle and have been given a hand signal that the victim shows promise. As Roscoe Duvall and the victim drive along, Roscoe will ascertain whether or not the victim has any money, how he feels about gambling, whether he is prejudiced, and will use any of these characteristics to his advantage. Roscoe emphasizes that he does not trust banks and has always let his boss man keep his money for him because he only charges him 25%. He gives the appearance of being an ignorant country fool to be pitied and can be easily taken advantage of.

As they are driving, Roscoe asks the mark to pull over into a fast food restaurant while he gets something to drink. At this point, the second and possibly a third suspect is introduced into the con game. After Roscoe comes back to the vehicle, he tells the mark that someone else might be able to help them find the address and the lady he met at the bus station.

As they are talking, the second suspect, often called the "cap" man, walks nearby pretending to be a total stranger. Roscoe calls him over to the vehicle, still waiving his money roll, and begins to tell his story all over again. Both the second player and the mark attempt to get Roscoe to put his money in the bank because he is going to get robbed flashing the money roll. Roscoe will hear none of it and may insult them both, acting more ignorant then ever.

Roscoe will often describe how he has been waiting to have sex with a white woman and goes into a graphic description of how he was having sex with his boss man's daughter who was 13 at the time. This may illicit feelings of anger from the mark and the second suspect. The goal of a "cap" man is the have the mark identify with him and to cheat the stupid country bumpkin out of his money.

Many times this does not work. Many times victims do not want to cooperate with the second suspect and want them all out of their vehicle. Most professional con men believe that every mark is dishonest and this trait alone is responsible for their being taken. But if the mark refuses to gamble, the team might continue as a simple handkerchief switch game where the victim holds the money while the country fool is taken to a prostitute.

The “cap” man’s job is to get the victim in a *three-card monte* card game by suggesting to Roscoe that the lady Roscoe met at the bus station was a prostitute and they play a card game to fleece people of their money. Roscoe is only too eager to gamble.

The “cap” deals the cards and tells Roscoe how to win by selecting the red card from the two black ones. He and Roscoe draw the mark into the game and the “cap” will tell the victim which card to select to cheat poor Roscoe. If he is mad enough at Roscoe, the mark will willingly play the card game. If the mark is not interested he still has no way to get the two con men out of his vehicle. Good teams are able to select good victims and if everyone does his job, the mark is hooked.

After a sizable bet is made, the victim selects the card he is told will win the game and Roscoe’s money. But it’s the wrong card! The “cap” gets mad and he and the victim give all their money and jewelry to Roscoe. Roscoe might wrap the jewelry and money in a bandanna. There may be an introduction of a third man, called the “hose man” who might mediate in case of arguments or hold the property while the victim goes to the bank. He often poses as the manager of the fast food restaurant and pretends to have no interest in the results of the gambling game.

The cap man instructs the mark again about which card to select and for the first time in hours, Roscoe shows some kind of intelligence. He says that he will pay off but they did not have any money put up when they made the bet, and he is not sure they could have paid off if they had lost. It’s time to go to the bank and get some money to win their possessions back and Roscoe’s money. Both the victim and the “cap” go to the bank and withdraw money.

At this point, after the victim returns from the bank with his money, the con game can take several turns. They can make a simple handkerchief switch and leave with the victim’s money. The victim gets a bandanna with cut up newspaper inside.

In recent years, the suspects perform a simple “walk off.” The “house man” or “cap” comes out to meet the victim and tells him to give him the money. He will go inside the fast food restaurant and get the mark’s possessions and half of the money. Since the mark has met the manager of the restaurant, he suspects nothing and waits in his vehicle. The suspects simply walk out another exit door and leave the scene. Within minutes, they are on the freeway and out of town.

Now the victim must decide how he is going to report his role in this swindle to the police. Is he an innocent bystander, a willing participant or basically an honest person who was manipulated by a professional team of con men? Will he be believed or laughed at by the police?

Most good con men believe that if all the evidence came out in a trial, no judge or jury would convict them of this theft. Very few detectives have ever been involved in a trial of three-card monte players. Most don’t feel confident in explaining the game to a jury. It is difficult to go beyond a mere gambling game and make a jury understand how a person can be manipulated to the point where he is under the control of a team of con men.

Prosecutors had rather plea bargain these cases for restitution and easy punishment because they do not understand the victim’s role in the con game or how to put the victim in a favorable light. It is easy to understand the mechanics of the swindle but difficult to have, in some cases, sympathy for the victim.

At one time, there were many three-card monte teams playing across this country. But in recent years, this game, like the pigeon drop, has declined in popularity. Most teams had rather play a "South African Switch," or as it is often called the "Donation Game," which involves less time, less skill, less problems with getting the mark to gamble or cooperate, but usually less profits. Black players do not have to go looking for a white player to help them play the South African switch.

In large cities there may be so many players that victims have to look an hour through mug books with photos which are out of date. In small communities, players know that police are not equipped to maintain large photo mug books and, as always, the victims may not be able to identify anyone. The players also know, however, that small communities make more in-the-act arrests than in large metropolitan cities. No one will deny that the con men still have the advantage over the hard-working detective.

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—article by Detective S. M. Haines, Swindle Squad, Dallas Police Department

Mike Rogers quotes a story from the San Antonio Express dated March 8, 1969 in his book **The Complete Mike Rogers**. The story is by Sam Kindrick, and it details how a local man was taken for $10,000 at three-card monte. The scheme takes place in the sucker's car, and is almost identical to that described above but without the handkerchief switch. Rogers says:

> It seems there are about twenty of these monte teams in the area, and they all operate the same. In each case a shabby fellow asks directions, finally getting the sucker to take him for a small amount of money. Once in the car they are always joined by a slick looking guy also needing a ride. One thing leads to another until the slicker and the sucker take the shabby guy for a bundle. Finally the shabby guy bets it all and the sucker goes home broke.

Like the *Texas Twist*, this short-con involves a send. Rogers also points out that in more than ten descriptions he had read about this con—taken from this newspaper over a ten-year period—not one of them mentioned the bent corner.

Closed Monte:
The Girl at the Bar
by Whit Haydn and Sophie Evans

Mark is in town on business, and is sitting in a quiet, expensive bar near his hotel. It is late, but he is intrigued by a beautiful, sexy lady who is sitting alone at the bar. Mark watches until he's sure she isn't waiting for someone. He approaches her, and the two begin to talk.

The girl, Dianne, is both flirtatious and in high spirits. She is dressed well and acts like she has money.

Mark buys her a drink. Dianne warms up to Mark, and he begins to think this night might be more interesting than anticipated.

A second man, Jack, comes over to the bar to order a drink. Dianne engages him in conversation, and pretty soon Jack begins to compete with Mark for the lady's attention. It turns out that Jack is an amateur magician, and he does a few simple card tricks, but they are not very impressive.

Dianne is wild about them. "You're really great! Do you do that thing with the three cards? Like they do on 42nd Street?"

Jack launches into a lecture on the trickery involved in that swindle, and explains that no one can keep up with the cards when they are thrown by an expert card sharp such as himself.

Dianne insists on a demonstration, and gets ticked off when she is wrong several times in a row. She is obviously very competitive, and doesn't like to lose.

Jack tries to quit as he begins to sense that the game frustrates her. She refuses to let him quit. "Look, I'll bet you twenty. Don't be such a chicken. It's only money for Chris' sake. Come on. Twenty on the ace this time."

She shames Jack into playing for money.

Each time she plays, she misses.

Dianne turns to Mark all in a twist, "Can you follow this? I can't figure it out…"

Mark says he can keep up with it pretty well. He was right every time so far, after all.

Dianne bets another twenty, and when Mark suggest a card, she turns it and wins. She puts her palm on Mark's chest, "You're great!"

Jack says, "Well look, I'm not going to play against the two of you."

As Jack orders a drink and is talking to the bartender, Dianne winks at Mark to get his attention, and then touches her lips with a finger. She then marks the back of the ace on its corner with a smudge of lipstick and gives Mark's hand an excited squeeze.

When Jack turns back, Dianne is insistent that he give her a chance to get the rest of her money back. Jack is now obviously unhappy with the way things are going. He refuses and starts to leave.

Dianne holds him by the arm. “Oh, come on. I’ll bet you $500 that I can get it this time. I’ll put up $250 and my boyfriend here will put up $250.”

Mark starts to protest. Dianne squeezes his knee and whispers into his ear, “Let’s you and me spend his money tonight! Come on, baby, help me show this sleaze up!”

Mark still hesitates. Dianne whispers again, “Oh, you’ve got the money—I saw it when you bought the drinks. Don’t be an idiot. Nobody passes up a sure thing!”

Mark gives in.

Jack is now copping a real attitude. He puts down his stakes, and Mark and Dianne match. Jack throws the cards and turns to Dianne, “But you have to pick the card, not him. And no help.”

Dianne stands right up to Jack. “The bets already up. We didn’t agree to that. We both put up money, its up to us to decide who chooses. Go ahead, Mark. You pick one.”

Mark reaches for the card with the lipstick on the back. The card that he knew was the ace… It’s a loser.

Jack looks up at Dianne and Mark. “You two tried to cheat me, didn’t you?” He picks up the money and turns away, as he walks off he says, “Shouldn’t try to kid a kidder…”

Dianne turns to Mark. “I can’t believe it! I think I’m going to be sick. How could that have happened? Look, buy me another drink, I go to go to the ladies room.”

Mark sits at the bar nursing two drinks for what seems like a long time.

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—a scenario created by Whit Haydn and Sophie Evans

Open Monte:
The Denver House, 1859

The Denver House was a long low one-story edifice, one hundred and thirty feet by thirty-six, with log walls and windows and roof of white sheeting. In its spacious saloon, the whole width of the building, the earth was well sprinkled to keep down dust. The room was always crowded with swarthy men armed and in rough costumes. The bar sold enormous quantities of cigars and liquors. At half a dozen tables the gamblers were always busy, day and evening. One in woolen shirt and jockey cap drove a thriving business at three-card-monte, which netted him about one hundred dollars per day. Standing behind his little table he would select three cards from his pack, show their faces to the crowd, and thus begin:

> "Here you are gentlemen; this ace of hearts is the winning card. Watch it closely. Follow it with you eye as I shuffle. Here it is, and now here, now here and now" (laying the three on the table with faces down)—"where? If you point it out the first time you win; but if you miss you lose. Here it is you see," (turning it up;) "now watch it again," (shuffling.) "This ace of hearts gentlemen is the winning card. I take no bets from paupers, cripples or orphan children. The ace of hearts. It is my regular trade, gentlemen—to move my hands quicker than your eyes. I always have two chances to your one. The ace of hearts. If your sight is quick enough, you beat me and I pay; if not, I beat you and take your money. The ace of hearts; who will go me twenty?"

By this time some bystander who has watched the winning card closely is confident that he can point it out. It seems perfectly simple. Beside, he noticed that one corner was slightly turned up; and is it not there face downward with the corner still elevated? Confidently he throws down a twenty-dollar gold piece. The gambler covers it with another. The victim points to the card with a raised corner when lo! It is not the ace of hearts after all. At the last moment the operator dexterously turned down the corner of *that* and turned up the corner of another!

> "My friend, you have lost. It is very plain and simple, but you can't always tell. Here you are, gentlemen; the ace, and the ace. Who will go me twenty dollars?"

The last sufferer, from sheer anger, bets again and loses again. After being mulcted of a hundred dollars he goes his way. But there is always a fresh victim ready to take his place. Sometimes the gambler permits a stranger to win once or twice for the sake of leading him on. Again a bystander familiar with the game wins two or three times in succession; then the sporting orator refuses to take more bets from him. When the game flags, a secret confederate or 'pigeon' in the crowd offers a few wagers and wins, refunding the money when they are alone.

As a class, the gamblers were entertaining in conversation, had curious experiences to relate, evinced great knowledge of human nature and were specially kind to each other in misfortune. Some were gentlemanly in manners. Like all men who gain money easily, they were open-handed and charitable. I never saw a place where more dollars could be obtained in less time for a helpless woman or orphan than among those gaming tables.

I saw the probate judge of the county lose thirty Denver lots in less than ten minutes, at cards, in this public saloon on Sunday morning; and afterward observed the county sheriff pawning his revolver for twenty dollars to spend at betting at faro. There were no women and children; and hence none of that public opinion without which few men can stand alone.

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Richardson, Albert D: Beyond the Mississippi; From the Great River to the Great Ocean. Life and Adventure on the Prairies, Mountains, and Pacific Coast.1867. Pages 187, 188.

Open Monte:
Devol and The Boys from Texas

(p. 66)

I got on the steamer *B.L. Hodge* at Baton Rouge, bound for New Orleans. It was on a New Year's Eve; everybody was feeling jolly, and I felt somewhat that way myself. There were five tables of poker going at one time, so I opened up the good old game of monte for the benefit of a lot of Texas boys that didn't play poker. They all got around the table and watched me throw.

In a short time my capper came up and wanted me to show him how to play the game. I showed him, and he wanted to bet a dollar. I told him if that was all the money he had, he had better keep it. He got as mad as a wet hen, and told me he had just as much money as I had.

He pulled out a big roll and slashed down $1,000, saying, "I will bet you I can turn the winner."

I said, "You can't bluff me," and I put up. He turned one of the cards and lost.

While I was putting the money away, he picked up the cards and turned up a corner on the winner, letting the boys see what he had done; then he said to me, "Mix them up again," which I did, and he put down a roll, claiming it to be $500. He turned and won.

Then the boys began to nudge each other and get nervous. The capper then said, "I will let it all lay, and bet you again." He turned and caught me for $1,000; and then you should have seen the boys from Texas. There never was such a cutting of cloths. One fellow pulled off his new coat and cut the lining nearly all to pieces; another took off his undershirt; others had their money down their bootlegs tied to a string, so they could pull it up when they wanted it.

They all wanted it just then, and they were in the biggest hurry of any suckers I ever saw. They all put up their pile, except two or three who had more than the rest. I told them to pick out one boy to turn the card, so they selected Jim, who was their leader.

Jim made a grab for the sure thing; but when he turned it over, all the boys were sure they had lost their money. They took it good-naturedly, and said it was fair.

One said I was the greatest man in the world, and if he could do it as slick as I did he could get all the money out in their country. I promised that I would come out and see them, and that they would all be in with me. I did not say just when I would keep my promise; and as I do not like too many partners, I have put it off over thirty years…

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Devol, George: **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi**. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, facsimile edition. First published by Cincinnati: Devol & Haines, 1887.

Open Monte:
Race Monte

New York City. A Puerto Rican guy was throwing the three cards. There are three shills at the game, and evidently only one sucker.

The shills are so different from each other in dress and manner they don't appear to belong together. There is a pretty lady in a business suit, an old touristy looking guy and a dweeb with a big paper shopping bag. His bag is where the cards, money, etc., are dumped when the mob splits the scene.

The blonde in the business suit has just won for the first time after taking the advice of the sucker. "Hey, you're good at this…" she says, resting her hand on his shoulder.

A black transvestite walks by the group, stops, and then pushes forward. She grabs the Queen from the top of the box and flips it over. In the process, the corner of the card gets bent badly.

"You guys blind? I could see that Queen from a block away. What do I win, Mr. three-card molly man?"

The grifter explodes and threatens the transvestite. "Don't you ever mess with me like that again! I'll tear your head off you freak!"

The transvestite smarts off to him as she hurries on down the block. An exchange of insults and awful language ensues. The grifter shouts out the most racist, homophobic, and threatening things he can think up. The two keep arguing as the transvestite hurries away.

"I mean it, jerk-off! I catch you back here again, you'll be plenty sorry! Messing with me while I try to make a living. I hate them queers anyway. Who's bet?"

The shills and sucker are tearing their pants trying to get the money out of their pockets first. The sucker of course, gets to make his bet.

The mob has used the transvestite shill's disturbance in a number of ways. She bends the card in a convincingly accidental manner, and she is the distraction that helps justify why the operator fails to notice the corner of the card is bent. The mark doesn't suspect that the two are working together, and at the same time, the foul mouth, racist heart, and homophobic bluster of the operator help convince the sucker that the tosser is not such a nice person, and probably deserves to be taken.

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—as told to Whit Haydn by Anonymous

Open Monte:
Even a Man About Town Can Get Taken in the City

As a California urbanite and a man who writes about crime and punishment, I am hardly naïve when it comes to cons. But as a tourist in New York City, something happens to me: I become a rube. Recently I got taken by one of the world's oldest scams: the "game" of three-card monte.

For those not familiar with it—and they number enough to keep this trick popular—three-card monte is a simple variation of the old shell game: A makeshift table is set up on a busy sidewalk, usually in a neighborhood popular with tourists. A pleasant-appearing man stands behind the table quickly manipulating three well-worn cards, two black and one red. In non-stop patter, he announces to the assembled on-lookers that winning is as simple as picking the red card.

"I pay on red, not on black," he repeats in endless variations, as he mixes the three cards now face down before him.

I watched from the crowd's edge, admiring the dexterity of the trickster's hands, riveted by the rhythm of his pitch. A young woman standing next to the table pulled a $20 bill from her bag, hesitated, and then plunked it down on the middle card.

"Is that it? Are you sure? You want to put $50 down?" the dealer asked, in machine-gun pace. I had clearly seen where the red card was. It was not the card she had picked, and I knew it. He gave her one more chance to win big.

"Fifty will get you a hundred," he tempted. When she did not respond, he told her to turn the card over.

Others in the crowd took up the dealer's chant: "Turn it over, turn it over."

She did. The card was black, the seven of clubs. I smiled condescendingly.

"I pay on red, not on black," he repeated, pocketing the money. "Anyone want to double their money?"

I had $20.

I moved through the crowd to the table and selected the card on the right.

"Turn it over," several voices in the friendly crowd urged. I did.

Bingo! The queen of diamonds.

I had won $20.

My lucky day!

He did not hand me the $20, however. “Where’s your money?” he asked. “I’ve got to see your money before I pay.” I drew out my wallet, opening it for all to see. Without a pause, he said, “If you’ve got $50, you’ll earn $100. You probably don’t have $50, though,” he added, pityingly.

I smiled. Of course I had $50. In fact, I had a total of $120 for four days in the city. As I fished in my wallet, an internal voice tried to tell me something, but events were happening much too fast for me to pay heed.

“Let’s see your money,” he said, and I plunked down a $50. He snapped it up and in the same motion turned the cards face down again and began muddling them on the table. I tried to protest.

“Wait, I picked the red card,” I said. “You already owe me money.”

“No, no,” the other friendly voices advised. “you have to pick the red. Go ahead. You’ll do it.”

The little voice grew louder, but he had my $50. “There,” I pointed. The seven of clubs. I felt as though I had been hit in the stomach. The internal voice was trying desperately to holler. Before it could, one of the other players whispered seductively in my ear, “Look, the red card is bent. We’ll bet together. We’ll both win. You’ll get your money back. You’ll see.”

Before I could say anything, he announced grandly, “We both bet $50.”

“Wait,” I managed to croak. “I don’t have $50.” It was a futile gesture. “You have it right there,” my new friend corrected, pointing to my wallet. He winked conspiratorially. After all, didn’t we know which the red card was?

As in a dream, I handed over the bills, and the hustler behind the table picked up the cards and began a quick shuffle again. I paid little attention, knowing as I did that the red card was the bent card. It all seemed so simple. And still the voice inside was pushing its way to the surface.

My partner put our combined $100 down on the bent card and turned it over. The seven of clubs. But that’s impossible. How had a black card become bent? “Damn,” my friend said, comfortingly. “Next time you can win it back.”

I stood in a daze in a sea of strangers passing in both directions.
Suddenly, the voice that had been struggling to free itself burst from my lips. “No,” I wailed.

A few startled tourists glanced nervously in my direction.
The natives paid me no mind. In a literal state of shock, I stumbled to a park behind the public library.
Between suicidal thoughts (I’ll step in front of a taxi!),

I vomited repeatedly. The dope dealers working nearby ignored me.

A crying, mumbling man throwing up in the park was nothing new. Their ignoring me was my only consolation. I went over it a hundred times in my mind. I had just given away everything I had to a total stranger, and the entire process had taken less than five minutes. I called myself every name I could think of, including a few that cannot be printed here. I swore I’d never smile again, never eat again,
never leave home again.

I'm back now, not only recovered from the trauma, but also having salvaged a silver lining: Had the cops collared my con man and his co-conspiring shills, they might have busted me, too, for gambling. I could have been the rube that died of embarrassment.

Michael A. Kroll is a writer in Oakland who specializes in crime-related issues.

Michael A. Kroll, **Los Angeles Times**, 8/19/84
Reprinted With Author's Permission

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In an email to the **School for Scoundrels** (4/18/01) Michael A. Kroll writes:

"I'm both flattered and abashed that anyone would want to dwell on that humiliating experience… Unfortunately, every word of it is true (I had to sell a piece about it to recoup my losses).
It was not the legality or lack thereof that I pondered on that busy Times Square sidewalk 16 years ago, but the incredible speed and fluidity of the operation—from their initial reeling me in as I took the bait to their ability to vanish utterly into the frenetic pedestrian background in a matter of seconds (folding up a portable tray, pocketing the evidence, assuming a different demeanor)—as I, bewildered and somewhat in awe, tried in vain to identify any one of the now-anonymous backs walking away. However, I've got to tell you that one of the nicest thing about the entire experience is your telling me that it was the best victim's account you'd seen. Thanks.

As to the morality of their behavior or the appropriate legal response, I make few judgments; I'm a legal relativist—as long as our government in Sacramento and in Washington, D.C. can morally justify and actually carry out the deliberate putting to death of symbolic selections from our slave population (California has the largest death row in the country and the country has the largest prison population in the world)--I can't get too worked up over a few artists of the street who managed to get me to hand over $100. As Mother Jones said more than a hundred years ago about the American justice system: 'Steal a loaf of bread and go to prison; steal a railroad and go to the U.S. Senate.'
I'm happy you found your way to my piece, and I hope it is useful to your students."

Open Monte:
Piccadilly Ploy

If you had seen me stepping out of the London American Express office that day, fingering my money belt, squeezing my wallet, scrutinizing, with a series of quick eye movements, the people on Haymarket, you might have guessed—with justification—that here is a man cautious with a buck.

A gambler I am not.

The smallest of financial fliers, even the purchase of a Girl Scout raffle ticket, will leave me alert and tangled in my blankets that night thinking, "Fool! Blue eyes, green beanie, dimples in the knee: the oldest scam in the world, and you fell for it."

So how I came to drop about $90 in the meanest of crooked sidewalk shell games in the Guinness Record time of two minutes is a little hard for me to explain.

I remember well enough stepping away from American Express that day with intentions of grabbing a quick lunch and heading off to the British Museum. But then my eye lighted on a huddle of men on a Piccadilly sidewalk. I looked in over some shoulders and saw that a man was manipulating three facedown cards and taking bets on the whereabouts of the King of Hearts.

Probably crooked, I thought, and a moment later this was confirmed. A middle-aged man with wire-rim glasses and the square alert face of a good office worker had his hand on the winning card but had to lift it momentarily to separate a £10 bet. "He switched it on you!" bellowed a husky Englishman. To no avail. The man slapped down his £10 note and lost it.

The dealer was a slight fellow, half bald, with even, not unpleasant features. I wouldn't say he looked harmless, but his hungry look was that of a sparrow rather than an adder. He was chattering in cockney, using the whole mouth to form syllables. "Foind the king, gen'lmen, 'at's all you do. I don't cry when I lose and I don't laugh when I win."

He mostly won the bigger bets and lost the smaller ones. The more he won, the more agitated became the husky Englishman who shouted the warning.

This man, dressed in a T-shirt and vest, had a big belly and ruddy cheeks. A moistness about the lips and eyes led me to believe that he had been on his way from a pub when he stopped by the game, and that, I supposed, was the source of the passion he invested in the game.

"'Ere it is!" he would boom, hurling a chubby finger down at a card. "No, no, the end one!" He was usually right, and when someone lost by ignoring his advice, he would clap himself on the forehead and groan.

Once the cards went down and, after notifying everyone where the winner was, he reached out and turned it over to prove it.

"Don't turn over the cards, mate!" whined the dealer as he picked up the aborted hand. "I know you're big and strong and all 'at, but let's have it fair. If you don't want t' play, just pass me by."

The big man was momentarily chastened, but when the cards went down again, he slapped a hand on one of them. “Ten pounds!”

“I don’t see any money,” said the dealer.

Keeping the card pinioned to the table, the big man fished out a roll of bills and, fumbling with both hands over the card, separated out £10.

The dealer flipped over the cards and paid up. The big man waved the bill in the air with delight and stuffed it in his pocket.

A couple of hands later the cards went down again and he banged a fist down on top of one. He looked around and grabbed my hand. “Hold this for me.”

I placed my finger on the card (and my other hand in my pocket to anchor my wallet. I told you I know my way around).

The big man excitedly shuffled out some bills and placed them on the card. “Fifty pounds.”

“That’s too much,” complained the dealer with a thrust of his head that added, “and you know it.”

“Forty, then.”

“’Ow about thirty?”

“I said *forty!*”

The dealer half turned up the other two cards and looked at his situation. I saw them too; they were both black. The dealer pulled 40 pounds from his roll and flung them on the table.

“He had 40, too,” said the big fellow, pointing to me.

I shook my head, but the dealer was looking at the big guy. “I don’t see any money.”

The big man inhaled to control his temper. “Show him your money. Go on, show him!”

The crowd came alive. The other men could see the dealer’s predicament, and he was being roundly hooted. “Show ’im! You’ve got ’im now!” one gloating voice called out. I whipped out my wallet and deposited four £10 notes on the table.

“Go for the jackpot!” someone else advised.

Jackpot? I stared.

“Put in another £20 and go for it,” insisted another voice through the clamor. Before I was quite clear what the ‘jackpot’ was, the bustle and excitement created a kind of gust of wind that whisked another 20 pounds out of my wallet and onto the table.

At this point—oh, reader, if only I had suspected then what you have already guessed!—the dealer flipped over a black card (where a third black card came from he didn't explain) and scooped up my money.

My stunned condition in the next several seconds was like that of a master lumberjack when a good-size tree smacks him on the noggin: The pain is bad, but worse is the throbbing knowledge that you did it to yourself.

The fat-faced shill in the T-shirt who had led me into the trap had moved across the circle. I caught his eye, but he immediately scraped a hand over his jaw and looked skyward in feigned amazement.

Dumbly I stepped out of the crowd and started up Shaftesbury Avenue, a well-named street if ever there was one.

Over the next two days I managed to compose myself with the thought that the loss was, after all, only about $100—an amount that would seem insignificant after the suicide.

The third day was Sunday and, feeling in a mood to be converted to something, maybe something that put a premium on disposing of worldly wealth, I showed up at Hyde Park Corner.

I had just entered the thick crowds along where the paintings are displayed when I came upon a man shifting three cards back and forth and encouraging some men to pick out the king.

The face was different but all else was the same. One of the men in the crowd was agitated. "He switched it on you!" "'Ere it is!" (and finally) "Hold the card for me!"

When the shill said, "He had 20, too," I got next to the man whose arm had been tugged and explained to him what was about to happen. He eased his wallet back in his pocket.

Two other men in the crowd heard this and became intrigued by my obvious savvy. I stood over the makeshift gambling table and analyzed for them the whole swindle, like a professor presiding over an autopsy. My narration made it a bit awkward for the shills, and I don't think they were too disappointed when a cop was spotted and they had to head for another site.

I followed along, thinking I might keep up my missionary work for the rest of the afternoon. It was fun.

As I pushed my way through the crowd looking for them, a certain balding head caught my attention. I maneuvered around for a better view and found myself looking at the cockney dealer who had vacuumed my billfold.

Close by was the office worker with the wire-rimmed glasses and right next to him was a younger hawk-nosed fellow who, I realized, had also been in the crowd of card players three days earlier. Then I glanced again and found myself looking straight into the eyes of the bulbous, bellowing blackguard who had led me into the trap.

His eyebrows suddenly shot up in recognition of me. Then he quickly recaptured his composure, pushed himself away from the car he had been lounging against and approached me with a grand smile.

"Piccadilly, wasn't it?" he asked as he pumped my hand.

I glanced down at the finely tailored pin-striped suit he was wearing in place of the T-shirt and vest. "You're dressed better. Did you buy the suit with my money?"

"How much?" he asked, concerned.

"About £60."

"Ahhh!" He scoffed, slapping me on the chest with the back of his hand. "That's nothing. It was an experience!"

Then he reached into his pocket and produced the three little chameleons of his trade. "Are you going to play some cards today?"

Now that hurt. "Do you think I'm stupid!" I screeched. It was purely a rhetorical question, but the answer was so obvious that I quickly added, "I mean, I know I'm stupid, but I'm not *that* stupid!"

As if to dispute this, he walked over to the curb and stacked one mild carton on top of another. Then he plunked the cards down and the three shills loitering about closed in like sharks to a carcass.

Within seconds other men started sidling up to see what the action was. A short dark gentleman in a trim suit and topcoat asked some suspicious questions in a foreign accent and placed a few bets.

A tall young man with wide blue eyes, a camera over his shoulder and a wife behind him, peered into see what was happening. A minute later he was winning small bets, and the next thing he knew his arm was being tugged—"Hold this for me!"

I smiled in appreciation. It was like seeing a familiar Shakespearean play rendered well. From across the crowd I said, "Watch it, pal, that man's working with…"

A space behind me opened up, some elbows buffeted me and suddenly I was standing outside the crowd.

I skirted the circle with the intention of tapping the victim on the shoulder, but before I reached him the short foreigner plowed into me.

"Don't push me!" he hissed as he swung an arm out at my neck and pushed me away from the crowd. *Him too!* That meant that no fewer than six were in on the game—they outnumbered the suckers.

Another of the shills, the hawk-faced one, came over and grabbed my arm. "You're going right over that fence if you don't shut your mouth—and that's in plain English," he explained through gritted teeth.

I replied to the effect that this was Hyde Park Corner and I should be able to say what I wanted, but realized even as I was saying it that under the circumstances, this was a pretty academic point. So I pushed past the little bulldog in the topcoat and went back around the crowd.

"Hey, buddy! Watch out! They're all working together!"

The blue-eyed tourist looked around and picked me out. He started backing out of the crowd.

As he did, a lookout spotted a cop a hundred yards away. In three seconds the entire game, crates and all, vanished into the stream of people.

I was so relieved to see this that when the chubby cheater who had stolen my money turned, his amiable face now hardened into a glower, I smiled and waved to him.

The tourist and his wife passed me as they headed in the opposite direction. They whisked by without saying anything. From the look on his face, the look of a lumberjack whose last clear memory is a whooshing sound above his head, I guessed that my warning had come too late.

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A New York Times Article
Reprinted from:
Garcia, Frank: **Don't Bet on It!** 1978.

Rise in Con Games Reported in Downtown Shopping District

Michael Krikorian, L. A. Times, 10/31/96

Two classic con games are being revived on Broadway, causing tourists to lose their money, downtown merchants to lose business and some victims to be beaten up if they are unlucky enough to win. 'three-card monte,' a swindle in which a dealer quickly scrambles three playing cards on a makeshift table then bets onlookers that they cannot pick out the one red card, is causing major problems on the popular shopping thoroughfare between 4th and 8th streets, police said. A similar shell game, in which bottle caps are used, is also creating a nightmare for merchants.

"The con men take up all the space on the sidewalks," said Luz Patricio, owner of Abel Jewelry on Broadway. "People can't even walk by. It is unbelievable on the weekends. Shoppers sometimes lose all their money before they can get to the stores."

The cons have been played on Broadway for more than a decade, but in recent months police have reported a large increase in complaints, especially from merchants. They have arrested 46 people on Broadway this year for the crime, formally known as 'theft by trickery.'

Victims are often unwilling to report the crimes to the police because many of them mistakenly believe they are gambling, said Sgt. Ellis Imaizumi of the Central Division's vice squad. "But this is not gambling. They are legitimate victims of deception."

The dealers usually work with a secret companion or shill who masquerades as someone taking a chance on picking the red card. The dealer makes a show of paying off the companion. To egg customers on, the dealer will often let the intended victim win a few small bets before upping the ante. When the stakes go up, so does the speed of card switching.

If the customer does happen to pick the right card when the stakes are high, the dealers will not pay off, police said. In some cases, just as the customer picks the right card, a companion will yell "Police!" and everyone will scatter. In other situations, if the customer complains or starts a fight, the dealer's companions quickly come to his aid.

This year has seen a marked increase in violent incidents caused by the cons, police said. One of the reasons is that some new card dealers are unskilled.

"The newcomers are just not that good with moving the cards around, and often an intended victim is able to pick out the red card or the bottle cap," said Imaizumi. "That's when the fights start."

Some operations are so sophisticated that police find it difficult to arrest dealers for the misdemeanor crime. Some groups have cellular phones, pagers and up to four lookouts to warn the card dealers when police are near, Imaizumi said.

Even when they are arrested, they are usually back on the streets within two hours because of a shortage of jail space.

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How to Photograph Three-Card Monte and the Shell Game

by Ronald A. Wohl

Ever since I got into magic, I was fascinated by three-card monte and the shell game. In London during the summer of 1954, I finally encountered the real life three-card monte myself. I observed three different teams, all operating on English men's umbrellas.

I was fairly amused that the operators told me they were Greek, having read all about the "Greeks at the Palais Royal" or Robert-Houdin's **Tricheries des Grecs**. The French have used the term "Greek" for a "swindler" or "card cheat" ever since a Greek chevalier named Apoulos was caught cheating at cards in the court of Louis XIV.

Now my only problem was how to photograph these activities. I did not have a camera with me, so in some nearby store, I bought a cheap "spy" camera at a price of something like five pounds (at that time approximately ten dollars).

Equipped with this camera, I photographed the three "Greek" teams. The film size was 14 mm. Not all camera shops were willing to develop film of that size. I still have the original negatives. You can find two of the most interesting of these pictures in the chapter of this book titled "Trays, Boxes, Tables and Umbrellas—the Layouts." This was the only and the last time I had seen the game performed on the classic umbrella.

Two years later in 1956, I was back in London. The three-card monte gang was still there, but the umbrellas were gone! Instead they performed the hustle on a small collapsible metal chair with a canvas top. What had happened to the umbrellas?

I eventually learned from a shill that at that time plainclothesmen frequently arrested the monte tosser (they rarely get the shills or the sides), or at least they confiscated the umbrella when the mob dispersed after an alarm signal. And the replacement of solid English men's umbrellas simply proved too costly in the long run!

Back to the topic of photographing street hustles. The easiest way to photograph such activity is from above. If you can go into a building, and photograph from a terrace, or an outside stairs, you will almost never be discovered. The very few photographs of three-card monte, published before 1990 in American books or in New York City newspapers have been mostly taken from above.

However, this is rarely practical. My standard procedure is to ready my camera before joining the crowd, and then holding the camera out of view behind my right leg. I wait until the tosser begins to pick up and toss the cards.

At that time, the tosser always looks down onto the surface, as usually do all spectators including the shills. I take one or two rapid photographs—you still have to find a suitable gap between all the onlookers—and then go down with my camera and hide it again, before the tosser looks up to challenge the onlookers, suckers and shills alike, to bet their money. This works fine in many circumstances.

It has never been the tosser that has discovered me. Usually it is one of the shills who suddenly looks around, and occasionally one of the sides.

If I am discovered, I normally use an old ruse. I smile very stupidly and act like a totally clueless tourist who cannot even speak the language in which I am addressed—at most saying something like

"me, tourist." This has worked in many cases although I would not advise anyone caught in this position to continue taking snapshots.

On the other hand, in some isolated cases, I could convince the operators with gestures to even pose from me; an example can be seen in one of the photos taken at the Paris flea market. One of the shills tried to insult me, but the operator saw me as a pigeon to be plucked. After I had taken the posed photographs, the tosser encouraged me to bet my money. I once more played the dumb tourist.

When I started in this activity, most con men were by nature non-violent, and at most, once they discovered me, stopped me from taking any pictures. (They were obviously afraid of being recognized by the police one way or another).

In recent years, it seems that the gangs have become much more violent. I have seen a shell game gang in Berlin, Germany brutally beat up a customer (that probably somehow had won some money), and I have heard of other beatings or stabbings. Accordingly, I have become somewhat more cautious in recent years.

I now have a large collection of more than 250 photographs taken all over the world of three-card monte, the shell game in its many incarnations, and other street hustles such as selling fake gold jewelry.

November 2001—Editor's note:

Since we first published this account, Gazzo and Dr. Wohl were able to compare notes and have positively identified the three London teams that Dr. Wohl described above as the Cracker Parker gang. They called themselves "Greeks" to further confuse their identities. The photos by Dr. Wohl on Page 23 show both Polish Kilczynski ("the Bear") and Cracker Parker throwing the cards on umbrellas. On Page 33, the photos from Alan Wykes' wonderful book, **Gambling** show Kilczynski tossing.

We don't know when these later pictures were taken, put were presumably sometime after Dr. Wohl's 1954 photos and 1964 when the Wykes book was published. Gazzo did not meet Cracker Parker until the mid 1970's, more than twenty years later. Gazzo thinks that Cracker Parker was born in Australia, although Parker himself never spoke of it. The gang members used to tease him about being a pome (which stands for "Prisoner of Mother England," and was used to describe the English prisoners who were shipped to Australia to colonize the land) and made smart remarks about it. The name "Cracker" came from Parker's own constant wisecracking.

Parker did say he was a boyhood friend of both Buster Edwards and Ronnie Biggs. Edwards served time for his participation with Biggs in the "Great Train Robbery" of 1963, Biggs escaped to South America, and in 2001 returned to England and gave himself up, after suffering several strokes. Gazzo says he never saw Cracker Parker toss the cards, but that Parker had often told him that he used to act in that capacity.

Scoundrels' Glossary

The argot of the grifter changes over time, but you may run into a number of these terms in your reading about short-cons. These words are from the lingo of short-con operators past and present. You might want to check out more general underworld slang online at miskatonic.org/slang.html. You can sprinkle some of these words in your patter to add a little color.

Much of the material in this glossary comes to us from the **American Confidence Man** by David Maurer, but we also have to thank Darwin Ortiz for his wonderful book **Gambling Scams,** and Ronald A. Wohl whose linguistic and historical research and collection of photos and illustrations have been such a huge help in this work.

This glossary also contains words of importance for our other set of notes on *fast and loose* and the *shell game*.

Some of these terms were in use in Devol's time and are still heard today, others are obsolete. Some terms are from the carnival, some from the swindlers of England or France, but most are from the mid-twentieth century slang of the grifter underworld.

The purpose of underworld slang is to keep outsiders "out of the loop." Every underground society changes the meaning and usage of slang words as soon as they become understood beyond the culture in which they were created. If you say "groovy," "far out," or "out of sight" to a group of teenagers today, the chances are that they will not be impressed with you and will not think that you are really "with it."

In the same way, the use of any term that is not current among the *hep* guys you are speaking with immediately brands you as a *fly gee* for using a *sucker word*. If you ever do talk with shell game or monte hustlers, don't try to use any of these words in order to impress them. You will sound like a *detective* (see *dick*, below).

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Ace. A decent or good-humored guy. A sport.

Apple. (1) A mark or sucker. (2) Any person.

Addict. A mark that can't be *knocked* (see below). He believes so much in the con that he comes back again and again to be taken.

Alibi Store. A rigged carnival game, supposedly of skill, in which the operator (alibi agent) falsely convinces the player that he can win if he just follows the operator's advice.

The Bank. Faro (See below).

The Bat. The gold brick scam.

Beef. For a mark to complain to the police.

Behind the Six. Short of money. Also light, chick, chicane.

The Best of It. A sure thing, a cinch. A mark always thinks he can profit with some prearranged method for cheating, which offers him "the best of it."

The Big Mitt. A short-con game played against a store with inside men and ropers. The victim is enticed into a poker game, and then cold-decked on his own deal.

To Bill (Them) In. For swindlers to induce marks to enter a swindling establishment.

Block Game. Shell game played with small hollow boxes weighted on top. Also called the blocks, the boxes, the dinks, the hinks, the nuts, the peeks, the shells.

Blow. 1. To allow the mark to win some money in a short-con. 2. To lose. "I blew my stake." 3. To realize. "He never blowed it was a gaff." 4. To leave. "Let's blow this joint."

Blow-Off. Any technique to get rid of the mark after he has been taken. Also used for the climax of a scam.

Bluecoat. (American grifter slang) A uniformed policeman.

Boat-Rider. A professional gambler who works ocean liners and often steers for confidence games.

Bonnet. An old British swindler term for shill. May be derived from the French *bonneteur*.

Bonneteau. This is the French name for three-card monte. Literally, a little cap or hat. *Bonneteur* came to mean a con man (from an earlier usage that meant a stranger who greets "too friendly"—presumably by lifting his hat). Some writers have claimed that the word came from the bend in the cards, which resembles the bill of a man's cap. But the word used to be used for thimble-rig and almost any street con, and was predated by the use of *bonneteur* for con man. See *Bonnet* above. (Thanks to Ronald A. Wohl for this information.)

Booster. Shill who acts the part of a bettor.

Broad. A playing card. The O.E.D. dates this term to 1812. Broads were cheaper made cards, and were wider than the better quality cards used for the more aristocratic sort of games such as *whist*. Also, a railroad ticket.

The Broads. Three-card monte.

Broad Tosser. Three-card monte dealer. Also called *springer, tosser, dealer, operator*.

Bucking the Tiger. Playing Faro.

C Note. Hundred-dollar bill.

Camera-Hugger. A tourist, made obvious by the camera hanging around his neck.

Cap. Expenses connected with roping and fleecing a mark, especially the roper's expenses on the road. Also called *the nut*.

Capable Support. Assistance of good shills in monte or other short-con.

Capper. Shill who acts the part of a bettor.

Chick, or Chicane. Short of money.

To Chill. For a mark to lose interest in a con game—cold feet.

Close the Gates. Shills crowding out unwanted observer to the monte.

Closed Monte. Version of monte played with outside man and inside man. Played "privately" in monte store, train, or bar.

To Come Off. To be consummated, as in the cheating of a sucker. "The play came off just as the cops showed up."

The Come-On. Helpful information about, or an apparent advantage for, a street or carnival game that is offered to the sucker by the operator: "I'll mark the winning card with this paper clip."

Come-Through. A fleeced mark who refuses to be blown off and follows con men in attempt to have them arrested.

Cool Out. Pacifying a mark after he has been taken.

Cop a Heel. Run away.

Cop and Blow. For con men or shills to win and lose bets with the sucker, to make the play look fair.

Country Boy. A complicated version of closed-monte popular in Texas and the South. Also, *Texas Twist*, *Texas Tornado*. (See Appendix, "Closed Monte: Texas Twist").

Crack out of Turn. For shill or con man to miss a cue or speak his lines out of place.

Cross Fire. A conversation in grift slang between the outside man and inside man so that a mark or bystanders can't understand.

The Crow. Fake or cheap. See *the quill*.

Daub. A colored paste used to mark cards.

Deadhead. A mark that is not likely to bet much money.

Deap-Sea Gambler. Same *as boat-rider.*

Dick. Police detective.

Dollar Store. The first version of the monte store created by Ben Marks in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Eventually spawned a legitimate business as well as the so-called "big store" of the big con.

Drop-in. Something easy; very easy money. It is called this because sometimes a fat mark will *drop-in* on a confidence game without being steered.

Duking In. Getting a mark to involved by getting him to play for a shill, or a shill makes a bet for him. Same as *mitting in*.

The Ear. The bend put in the corner of the winning card at three-card monte as part of a play to swindle the mark. Same as *the hook* and *the lug*.

Earnest Money. Money required from the mark as a show of good faith.

To Fall. Go to prison.

Faro, sometimes **Pharo.** Named from the French game *Pharao*. The foremost gambling game of the nineteenth century. Played on an oilskin layout painted with the faces of thirteen cards. Dealt from a *shoe* or *box*. Players bet on the order cards would come out.

Fin. Five-dollar bill**.**

Fly Gee. An outsider who understands confidence games, or thinks he does.

G Note. Thousand-dollar bill.

Gee. A thief or con man. Short for gun (see below). Common in Australia (ca. 1900) according to M.P. Adams. Also, a grand ($1000).

The Grift. A group of criminal professions that employ skill rather than violence.

Grifter. A criminal who lives by his wits rather than violence.

Gun. A thief or con man. From the Yiddish word *gonif*—a thief.

Gun moll. A thief-girl, especially a female pickpocket. Has nothing to do with guns, but comes from the Yiddish word gonif—a thief.

Handler. Same as *stick handler* (see below)—he directs the betting of the shills.

Heat. Pressure from the law, or tension caused by a mark's beef.

Heavy Racket. Criminal activity involving violence or threat of violence.

Heel Grifter. Cheap, small-time grifter. Implication is that he is poor and travels on foot.

Hep. Wise to what is happening. Probably from Joe Hep a Chicago saloon owner. His place was a grifter hangout.

Hey, Rube! From the carnival. A fight between grifters and victims, or a call for help in a fight.

The Hook. (1) The bend in the corner of the winning card in three-card monte. Also called *lug* and *ear*.

(2) An apparent advantage over the operator that the sucker sees on his own or has pointed out to him by an outside man or shill.

Hungarian Monte. A version of three-card monte using three metal disks, one of which has a red dot painted on it. Dates back to before communist takeover of Hungary. See *Trinidad Monte*.

Hustler. Any kind of gambling cheat.

Hype. (1) In three-card monte, a false throw in which the unexpected of two cards held in one hand is placed or dropped to the table. Also, *overthrow*. (2) A highly skilled short-change racket. Also, the *flop*, *laying the note*, the *sting*.

Inside Man. The con man who actually operates the swindle.

Knock. For an outsider to convince a victim that he is being swindled.

Leak. To fail to hide a cheating move, as when a palmed card is spotted.

Lop-eared. Stupid. Usually a mark who is too stupid to see his advantage in a con game. So stupid he can not be trimmed.

The Lug. The bent corner of the winning card in monte. Also *hook* or *ear*.

Mark. A sucker or intended victim. From the chalk mark carnival grifters placed on the back shoulder of a potential "easy victim." Also: vic, Bates, John Bates, Mr. Bates, winchell, chump.

Mitt. A hand, either a human hand or hand of cards. Same as *duke.*

Mitting In. Getting a mark to involved by getting him to play for a shill, or a shill makes a bet for him. Same as *duking in*.

Money Card. The winning card in a monte game.

Monte. Usually three-card monte. Sometimes referring to the Mexican card game, *Monte* which was very popular in Mexico and the South-West in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Monte Store. A fake store, back room, or saloon that fronts for a three-card monte game. See *closed monte*, *dollar store*.

Monte Tickets. The cards used to play three-card monte. In nineteenth century these were manufactured specifically for the purpose and usually featured an old woman, a man, and a boy with a hoop.

Mug. Face as in "mug shot." Also, a nobody—a "face in the crowd."

Oakus. Wallet.

On the Barrelhead. A version of *fast and loose* played with a loop of string or chain. Name comes from nineteenth century when it was commonly played for sailors on barrels along the wharves.

On the Wall. The lookout who watches for police for an open monte game is "on the wall."

Open Monte. Monte game played outside or in the open for all comers. The game itself draws the suckers, as opposed to having a sucker qualified and steered to the game by an outside man.

Outside Man. The con man who locates a mark and gets him involved in the swindle by bringing him to the *inside man* who actually operates the scam.

Peek the Poke. To catch a glimpse of the money in the mark's wallet so the gang can size him up for the touch.

Picket. English grifter's term for the shill that acts as a lookout for the police.

Pickup Guy. A "wise" outsider who hangs around the monte or shell game hoping to beat the operators at their own game.

Pigeon Drop. A short-con routine with many variations—often involving a found purse, a winning lottery ticket, a stake for a bet, etc. and a promise to share the proceeds with the sucker if he puts up 'earnest' money. The *Texas Twist* combines the *Pigeon Drop* with closed monte.

Playing the Bank. Playing the game of Faro.

Poke. Wallet.

Pricking the Garter. Elizabethan English term for fast and loose played with a belt. See *the strap*.

Put on the Send. Sending a mark off to get more money from his home, bank, or ATM.

Put the Mark Up. For a roper, or a roper's agent working on commission, to locate a good prospective mark. "Mason Long put the mark up for Canada Bill and Dutch Charley."

Queer. Counterfeit money. Also can mean to ruin or cause something to go wrong as in "queer the deal."

The Quill. The genuine article. As opposed to *the crow*, above.

Roper. Outside man. The con man who locates a mark and gains his confidence, and then brings him to the inside man to be taken.

Round. To cause someone to turn around so that he won't see a cheating move by a partner.

Rube. A country bumpkin. As W.C. Fields would say, a naïve luddy-duddy, moon-calf, or jobbernowl.

Rube Act. A script for short-con games in which the inside man plays the part of a naïve country bumpkin, of whom the sucker and the outside man conspire to take advantage. Use in three-card monte credited to Canada Bill Jones. From the ancient dodge known as "playing the peasant."

Sawbuck or Saw. Ten-dollar bill.

The Score. Proceeds from the con game. Also called *The Joint*.

The Send. Stage of a swindle in which the victim is sent home or to the bank for more money.

Shade. Misdirection. Any kind of cover or distraction that covers a cheating move.

Shill. Any partner in the con game, skilled or unskilled. From the Welsh *shillaber* which meant a "fellow participant in a job of work."

The Shiv. A short-con game played with a knife, the blades of which can be locked at will. Described in Devol's **Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi** in a funny story where Canada Bill Jones is mistaken by two swindlers for an easy mark.

Short-Con. Any con game that takes place in a short time, usually without a *send*—as opposed to the big con which could take days or weeks and usually involves a *send*.

Shortcake. For a con man to shortchange his partners by under-reporting the take.

Side. A street-con shill whose job it is to keep a lookout for the police. Also *wall man*, *picket*.

Skin Game. Nineteenth century term for short-con.

Slide. A monte lookout, whose job includes signaling when the police come, and as protectors for the dealer. 'Slide' can also be a term used by a monte lookout to warn that police are coming and the gang should disperse. Also called *side*, *wall man*.

Smoother. English grifter's term for the shill that cools out the mark after the *sting*.

Soap Game. A short-con game in which the grifter appears to wrap up a twenty-dollar bill with each cake of soap he is selling. It is worked with a number of shills and heavy cross-fire. Invented by Old-Man Taylor, and developed into an art-form by Jeff "Soapy" Smith.

Spieler. The front man who herds a crowd into a circus or carnival show. Also *talker*.

Spiel the Nuts. To play the shell game under the cover of a brisk cross fire.

Spring. For a mark to make a wager at three-card monte.

Springer. Three-card monte tosser. Also called *broad-tosser, dealer, operator, store*.

Steam. Same as *heat*.

Steer. (from nineteenth century) To lead a mark to the inside man. "He used to steer against the broads for Canada Bill."

Steerer. (from nineteenth century) Outside man. Same as *roper.*

Stick. Shill who acts the part of a bettor. Also called *capper* or *booster*.

Stick Handler. Con man whose job it is to handle the activities of the shills.

The Sting. The point in a con game where the mark's money is taken from him.

The Strap. Con game using a belt—the *Pricking the Garter* version of *Fast and Loose*.

Sucker. Anyone who is not a member of the hustling sub-culture.

Sucker Word. Any cheating term that is only used by non-cheats or amateurs.

Sure-Thing. A term coined by Soapy Smith for a skin-game or rigged bet.

Swag. Booty—ill-gotten gains. Same as in the pirate days.

Telegraph. To unwittingly signal to other players that you are about to make a cheating move through a clumsy preparatory move, or nervousness.

Tell. An unconscious signal or discrepancy which may be spotted by a knowledgeable observer as evidence that a cheating move has taken place.

Tell Box. A Faro dealer's crooked dealing box. Also a *two-card box*, or *two-card shoe*. The top card can be sighted, and a second card dealt.

Texas Twist. A complicated version of closed monte popular in Texas and the South. Also *Country Boy*, *Texas Tornado*. (See Appendix, "Closed Monte: Texas Twist").

Three-Card Molly. Black grifter slang for three-card monte.

Tiger. The game of Faro.

Tip. (From the carnival) A crowd of people. "He was a good talker, and quickly gathered a tip."

Toss. In three-card monte, a fair throw in which the expected of two cards held in one hand is placed or dropped to the table.

Tossing the Broads. Dealing three-card monte.

Touch. The money taken from a mark. Same as *score*.

Trim. Cheat, as in to "trim a sucker."

Trinidad Monte. A version of three-card monte using rubber disks, one of which has a dot underneath drawn in chalk. See *Hungarian Monte*.

To Turn Out. To train a grifter in some special line of work. "Old Man Taylor turned Jeff Smith out on the soap game."

Twist. A woman or girl connected to the underworld or involved in a racket.

Two-Card Box, Two-Card Shoe. See *tell box*.

Veal Cutlet. Overcoat spread over the knees as a playing table.

Wall Man. Three-card monte lookout. See "on the wall."

Weight. Psychological persuasion used by a grifter.

Wide Boy. British slang for dishonest person—usually a sucker. "Since the punter was a wide boy himself, he didn't mind that the registration was faked—just so long as he got the vehicle cheap."

Yap. 1. Stupid victim. 2. A person's mouth.

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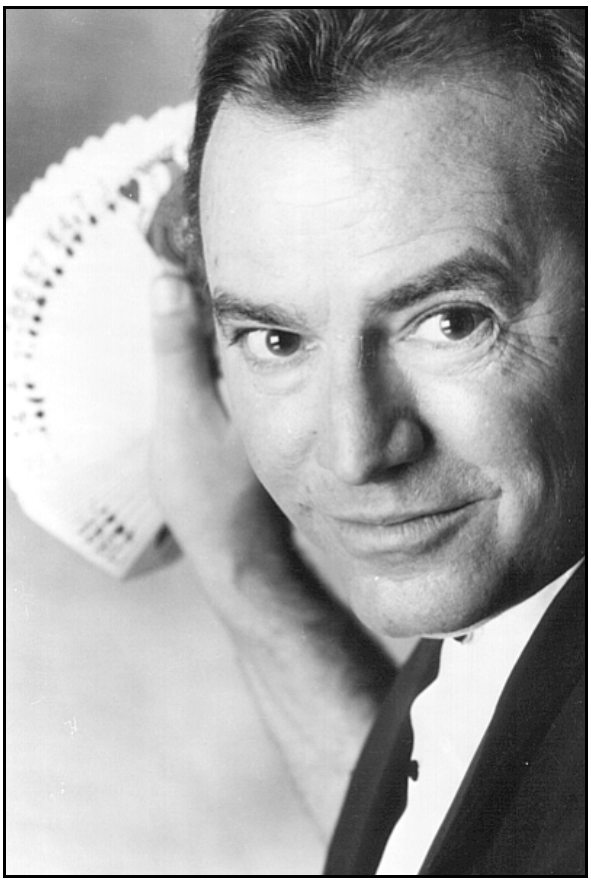
The School for Scoundrels

Chef Anton



Whit Haydn

The Magic Castle has offered a course to its magician members once a year since 1996. This unique four-week course teaches the history, theory, technique, and application to magic of the ancient street swindles the *Shell Game*, *Three Card Monte*, and *Fast and Loose*.

Whit Haydn and Chef Anton are the creators and teachers of this course, and it is known as the **School for Scoundrels**.

Whit Haydn has worked on some of the world's largest and most prestigious cruise ships, including the **QE2**, the **Norway**, and the **Westerdam**. He has performed as an opening act for Jerry Seinfeld, Loretta Lynn and many others. Whit works for top of the line companies in trade shows, hospitality suites, and corporate banquets. **The Magic Castle** has named Whit Haydn both *Stage Magician of the Year* and *Parlor Magician of the Year*. For thirteen years the members of **The Magic Castle** have named Whit Haydn among their top five favorite close-up performers. He was the chief magical consultant for the movie **Bogus** starring Whoopie Goldberg and Haley Joel Osment. He has worked as a consultant for the film, **Houdini—They Came to See Him Die**, and for a 30 part documentary for **Canadian Discovery Channel**—*Grand Illusions*. He appeared in the PAX television special *Masters of Illusion*. His nightclub performances include **Caesars Palace**, and **Caesars Tahoe**.

Defeating former world champions at the **Commerce Casino's** *Legends of 9-Ball Tournament,* Chef Anton became the first two-time *United States Trick Shot Champion of Pool*. Chef Anton is also a unique close-up and stage magician. Due to his unusual blend of pool, magic, and comedy, **The Magic Castle** featured Chef Anton as its first ever billiard trick shot artist in a special evening performance. He has appeared on television in *Crook & Chase, Prime Time Country*, and *Talk Soup*. His latest appearance on ABC's *Monday Night Live* was one of the highest rated programs of the season. He works as a technical consultant on billiards and magic for **ABC**, **NBC**, **CBS**, and **FOX**. Chef Anton performs regularly for trade shows with his combination of magic, hustling, and trick shots.

Gazzo

Gazzo is one of the world's foremost street entertainers, and has worked in major cities all over the world. He still works festivals and fairs and other outdoor events throughout Europe and the United States.

Born in 1960, Gazzo has had an interest in magic since the age of nine. As a teenager he worked as a lookout for one of the great London three-card monte mobs run by the notorious con artist Cracker Parker. Later he would become the only student of the legendary Walter Irving Scott, the subject of the book *The Phantom of the Card Table*. This famous work by Eddie Maquire was originally a manuscript written in 1929. It was put into book form by the Gamblers Book Store in 1969. Gazzo is currently working on an updated version of this book that is soon to be released. Written by David Britland, it will be published by Martin Breeze in England.

Gazzo performs on cruise ships as well as in comedy clubs and in nightclubs. He was a consultant and performer on the Canadian Discovery Channel series *Grand Illusions* and is a favorite at the **Magic Castle** in Hollywood. His rare appearances at magic conventions (F.F.F.F.; Close Encounters) are always a hit.

Gazzo still likes to spend his downtime working the streets between Boston and Key West.

Ronald A. Wohl

Ronald A. Wohl was born in 1936. He received a Ph.D. in Physical Organic Chemistry in 1965 at the University of Basel, Switzerland. He came to Yale University in 1966, and was at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1967-1974. Dr. Wohl has been in the pharmaceutical industry since 1975.

Interested in magic and allied arts since 1947, Dr. Wohl has published in German, Swiss, French, and English. His English language articles, early under the artist name "Ravelli," include *the Gen*, the (old) *Pentagram* and U.S. magazines—mostly *Ibidem* and *MUM*.

After all these years, he is still interested in magic and the allied arts. He owns a big collection in gambling, confidence games, and street swindles that includes many rare books, hundreds of old postcards, and more than 800 prints. His collection includes posters, cheating equipment and paraphernalia, and the many photos he has taken over the years of street hustlers in action all around the world.

The **School for Scoundrels** is deeply indebted to Dr. Wohl for his many contributions to our project, including his insights and information, as well as permission to publish so many photos and other items from his collection.

This three book series called the **School for Scoundrels Notes** is a part of a larger project—a forthcoming book on *Fast and Loose*, *Three Card Monte* and the *Shell Game* called **Unfair Advantage**.

We want all our attributions to be as correct as possible. We welcome any and all contributions of ideas, moves or routines on any of these three scams, as well as corrections, suggestions, or questions. We don't claim to be experts in this field, only fellow students.

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For information on obtaining this manual and other **School for Scoundrels** products for the discerning professional, including:

The School for Scoundrels Chain for *Fast and Loose*. This beautiful five-foot length of steel chain in the French Rope design is formed in an endless loop. It comes heavily plated in gold or nickel. Includes a handsome black suede carrying-bag.

The School for Scoundrels *Shell Sets*. These are sets of three shells, seven of our *Perfect Peas*, shot glass and black suede bag. The shells are expertly designed by Whit Haydn, and include little known features such as the *Chanin Dip* that when used with our *Perfect Peas* allow them to work smoothly on any surface—even glass or marble. The *Golden Shells* are cast in heavy pewter and heavily plated in 24 K gold. The *Antique Copper Shells* are the same, but plated in an antique copper finish. The *Street Shells* are made from the same original model as the metal shells, but cast in museum-quality plastic resin for the look and feel of real walnut shells.

The Perfect Peas. These peas are a bright green color (like a fresh pea) that shows up well on almost any surface. They are injection molded of solid synthetic rubber and are perfectly smooth and uniform. They are washable, never wear out and never lose their friction. They will work on glass or marble surfaces. Set includes five working peas and two plastic peas that can be examined and will not slide out from under a shell.

Check out the **School for Scoundrels Store** at www.SchoolforScoundrels.com and get on our mailing list. We accept both Visa and Mastercard.

Or write to:

The School for Scoundrels
6213 Sacramento Ave
Alta Loma, CA 91701

www.SchoolforScoundrels.com

The *Tetley's* from The School for Scoundrels Video on *Three-Card Monte*

Left to Right: Billy McComb, Chef Anton, Whit Haydn, Jeff Thomas, Gazzo, Paul Wilson, Zack Dubnoff, Adam Siefke.

The **School for Scoundrels DVD on *Three-Card Monte*** is now available**.** In November of 2001, in a three-camera shoot on the streets of Glendale, California, the members of the **School for Scoundrels** *Tetley's* re-created the entire three-card monte scam as it would appear to the sucker. This sequence will be part of this new DVD that is meant to accompany this book.

The *Tetley's* include Billy McComb as the smoother, Whit Haydn as the sucker, Gazzo as the dealer, and Paul Wilson, Zack Dubnoff, Jeff Thomas, Adam Siefke and Chef Anton as the shills. This provides an up-close look at how a sophisticated monte mob operates, and why an otherwise intelligent person could fall for such a scam.

The DVD also contains a performance by Chef Anton of the *Three-Card Gold* routine and explanations and demonstrations by Chef Anton, Whit Haydn and Gazzo of the important moves and ruses described in this book.

It always helps to see how a move is supposed to look, and to see an actual performance of a routine. The section of the DVD that shows the actual scam in action on the street is invaluable in understanding the swindle.

The DVD is now available from the **School for Scoundrels** at www.SchoolforScoundrels.com, or from your local dealer.

The School for Scoundrels continues to add to our line of books, videos and products on street-scams, pool hustling and street, bar and restaurant magic—featuring top-of-the-line products for the professional magic performer, gambling demonstrator and collector. Hustlers too, of course.

What people are saying about **The School for Scoundrels Notes on *Three-Card Monte*:**

“I’ve been interested in *Three-Card Monte* for a long time. Living in New York City, I have seen the game played on the streets hundreds of times. I’ve seen big money go on the bent corner; I’ve seen dealers busted; I’ve even taken an operator for 20 bucks (which I do not recommend). I’ve also performed the *Monte* for many, many television appearances, both national and overseas, not to mention of course, in countless live appearances. I’ve read everything on the *Monte* I could ever get my hands on. And I can tell you: This is the best single reference on the *Monte* to date.”

—Jamy Ian Swiss, **Genii Magazine**, November 2001

"I'll make this review short and sweet. The **School for Scoundrels Notes on *Three-Card Monte*** is the best resource for information on this con that I have ever read. You'll find fascinating historical information (including Gazzo's descriptions of the London monte mobs, discussions of monte and the law, and Ronald Wohl's photographs of monte mobs in action), a complete description of the various sleights involved, various tosses and patterns, and some brilliant hooks and come-ons, including Gazzo's "Creased Lightning" and Bob Kohler's "Knifed!" (Bob must be getting generous in his old age. I have no idea why he gave this away).

"There is much, much more. The book is well written, and clear photographs accompany the text. Whit and Chef Anton have produced something amazing—a technical manual that is enormously entertaining to read. For lovers of gambling routines and close-up magic, The **School for Scoundrels Notes on *Three-Card Monte*** is a must buy—I highly recommend it."

—Michael Close, *The Marketplace*, **MAGIC Magazine**, December 2001

“Your **School for Scoundrels Notes on *Three-Card Monte*** is an impressive achievement. I’ve never thought that any of the subsequent works on monte (Ganson, Garcia, etc.) added much to Scarne’s definitive treatment. That has changed with the publication of your book. This is clearly the new definitive book on three-card monte. Nothing else even comes close.”

—Darwin Ortiz

“Whew! Just finished your book on three-card monte. All I can say is Wow! What a labor of love. If you’ve missed anything, I can’t find it! Your historical research is astounding.”

—Gary Ouellet

“The number of true professionals who will immediately understand the value of this stuff is very limited, so I just can’t recommend **The School for Scoundrel’s Notes on *Three-Card Monte*** for the average magician. Don’t spend any time or money on this book. We love you guys just the way you are.”

—Bob Sheets

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