

Burn, Witch, Burn

A mysterious twist on a classic effect. A borrowed \$100 bill is marked with a sigil of protection. It is put in one of 3 envelopes. The other envelopes hold slips of newspaper.

Three lighters are proven to operate and are randomly selected by 3 spectators. The envelopes are mixed by the spectators and handed, in order, to each spectator.

You claim the sigil will protect the money through the powers of nature. The first spectator ignites his lighter and burns his envelope. The second

spectator does the same. The final spectator cannot light his lighter! The remaining envelope is unharmed!

When the envelope is opened it contains the borrowed money.

Finally, the sigil is erased from the \$100 bill, and without the sigil to protect it the money starts burning. You quickly extinguish it and take your bows.

With a very few props, this is big theatre that packs a punch!

Add Real Meaning to Your Performance

♣ It's Direct

The sigil protects the money, even when its location is unknown.

♣ It's Fair

There's a completely free choice of envelopes AND lighters.

♣ It's Safe

There is no chance of the lighter burning the money or even igniting.

♣ It's Fun

In this act the spectators NEVER fail; in fact, they succeed!

♣ It's Spectacular

Three spectators, money, suspense and FIRE. That's theatrical!

♣ It's Simple

This really "packs small and plays big". You'll be performing this piece after reading the instructions.

"This is a truly wonderful piece. I'm adding it to my show!
Ted Lesley — International Mentalist

"At last some real meaning to the Banknight effect. None of the spectators fail in this marvelous demonstration."
Kenton Knepper — Author of Wonder Words

"Here is the way to wager your paycheck without fear. **Burn Witch Burn** is extremely underpriced!"
Richard Webster — Author, Performer

Burn, Witch, Burn

Only

\$15

Burn Witch Burn

A truly theatrical
stand-up
performance that
will hold your
audiences
spellbound

Mentalism with a
magical plot



docc hilford

Burn Witch Burn

by
docc hilford

Copyright© 1995 Docc Hilford

First printing February, 2004

No portion of this book or original illustrations can be reproduced in
any manner without written permission of the copyright owner.

"Many a trick has been ruined by improvement." – Al Baker

The creation of magic is a rare and mystical thing. Most magic evolves from one idea into another. Occasionally, there is a dramatic leap so that the new effect resembles very little of the original concept. Such is the case with **Burn Witch, Burn**. The idea came to from a routine in **The New Invocation** by Bruce Bernstein. But as I began to research the history of the Bank Night routine, I saw an amazing line of progression.

Tom Sellers is credited with its invention. In 1927, Harlan Tarbell wrote this about the Bank Night routine in his famous course in magic. *Some years ago British magicians brought to this country an interesting mystery know as "Bank Night" in which a number of sealed pay envelopes were placed on a wooden tray and a number of spectators were each allowed to select one envelope. They were told that one of the envelopes contained a five dollar bill. One was left on the tray for the performer which, of course, when opened turned out to be the one containing the money.*

I'm certain this routine was quite charming when it was topical. In early Twentieth Century England a Bank Night was a game often played in churches. Somewhat like the American Bingo craze, its popularity has declined dramatically and very few people know what a Bank Night was. As a result, no one makes the connection of sealed envelopes and prize money to a once popular pastime. Also gone is the use of envelopes to receive weekly pay. Much of what made the routine charming eighty years ago has been lost.

What was once a gentle amusement has become, in this fast-paced world of finance, an combative demonstration of the spectator's bad luck. How it has become to be regarded as a display of mentalism, I don't quite understand. An audience doesn't need to attend a magic show to see this effect, they can fly to Vegas! Still, I have seen this effect handled well by performers such as Ted Lesley and Richard Osterland.

This standard effect was limited to the repertoire of the mentalist. Magicians seldom used it because no magic is involved. It's my opinion that not much mentalism was involved either. Within a few decades, magicians added a bit more drama by turning the premise inside out. They borrowed the money, had an envelope chosen, then burned the remaining envelopes. Terry Seabrook took the idea a step further by "accidentally" burning the envelope with the bill, only to find it restored in his wallet. It

is very magical, very funny and his signature piece. But it is a satire of the Bank Night routine. His is a Burned Bill in Wallet trick.

One of the appealing aspects of the original Bank Night was that it had a simple plot. But simplicity of plot does not always translate to clarity of effect. It was usually unclear as to what was actually demonstrated by the mentalist. If clairvoyance was being demonstrated, it would make more sense for the mentalist to direct which envelope was burned, instead of letting the spectator choose. If the mentalist was controlling the minds of the participants, how did he know which envelope held the bill? Usually it appears as a demonstration of the spectator's bad luck. And the mentalist's "I'm better than you" attitude.

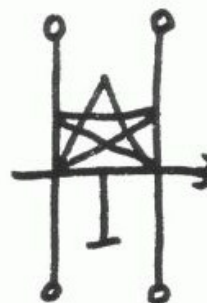
For those of us who perform magical theater, such demonstrations are rarely interesting. We prefer a more mystical story line, something that gives the routine a reason for being demonstrated. We need an illusion that clearly illustrates something magical.

When I read Bruce Burnstein's presentation in 1989, it intrigued me. He tried to burn all of the envelopes, but one refused to burn! It was brilliant. The plot was simple and the effect clear. I reconstructed the method and added to the presentation until it worked for me both in living rooms and on a theater stage. I have performed the routine that follows many times and the audience's response is always that of complete amazement! It is because they are told exactly what is being demonstrated, they know what to expect and thus, know how to react after the illusion is complete.

This routine packs very small, but can be clearly seen on a large stage. It has fire and five other people filling the stage. A little old lady in the back row can clearly understand what is going on because a roaring flame, or the lack of it, highlights each event! It has suspense, humor, and conflict, all elements of good theater. I know you will enjoy performing it as much as your audiences enjoy seeing it.

As the audience sees it

The performer explains that those who performed magic in the past were not always met with applause and admiration. Throughout history many have been persecuted and killed. Most people mistakenly believe that witches were burned at the stake. The fact is that most were garroted until dead and their lifeless bodies were then burned. The charred remains were crushed and spread over the countryside, with hopes that the evil could not resurrect itself.



The Sigil of Astoroth

The irony was that all who died an agonizing death were, in fact, innocent. Those who could actually perform magick used a spell to protect themselves. This magick became known as The Spell of Protection.

The performer decides to demonstrate the power of one such spell of protection; one that Scottish witches used in the Seventeenth Century. Four spectators are called to the stage. Rather than having a human burned at the stake, he borrows something of value, a hundred dollar bill from one of the spectators.

Drawing the arcane markings of a witch on the face of the bill, the performer invokes certain secret powers of nature and requests them to protect the bill. The bill's owner then seals it in an envelope. Two more envelopes are introduced and shown to contain hundred dollar sized slips of newspaper. A spectator also seals these envelopes. The three envelopes are handed to the bill's owner. The bill's owner stands to the far left of the other three spectators, while the magician stands between him and the committee.

The performer explains that the envelopes represent three people accused of performing witchcraft and are to be burned by the committee of righteous citizens assembled on stage. Two of the accused are innocent, however, one of the three is truly a witch and will protect himself with the Spell of Protection.

The performer removes three lighters from his pocket. Each lighter is identical. Each one produces a bright yellow flame when lit. The performer places all three lighters upon his outstretched palm and asks each of the three committee members to select a lighter for himself. A great emphasis is put on the fact that each participant has a completely free choice to which lighter he will use.

The owner of the hundred dollars is told to mix the three envelopes thoroughly. As the performer passes the envelopes out in they're mixed order, he points out that both the lighters AND the envelopes have been distributed by random selection. Everything is as sinless as a Seventeenth Century Puritan!

One spectator is instructed to light his lighter and burn his envelope. He does so, as the owner of the money looks on. A second

spectator is instructed to do the same. Now, two of the accused witches have been burned; one remains. The final spectator is told to burn his envelope! The owner's eyes widen when he realizes that his bill is certain to be burned!

But, when the last spectator tries to light the lighter, it will not ignite! The performer allows the spectator several tries before he takes the lighter and tries himself. Still, it will not ignite. The lighter is handed back to the last spectator and the envelope is handed to the owner of the money to open. Inside the envelope is the hundred-dollar bill!

The sigil is erased and the final spectator tries to light the bill on fire once again. Without the Spell of Protection, the lighter ignites and the bill begins to burn. It is extinguished before any real damage is done.

Arcanum: Four lighters are required for this effect. Three of them will ignite. One of them is gimmicked by not having any fuel and will not ignite. Put a small, but easily seen, secret mark on both sides of the gimmicked lighter. A scratch will do.

Three envelopes are also used. One is marked by a pencil dot in the lower corner. I prefer a pencil dot as it can be identified easily on stage. There are many more subtle methods of marking a single envelope if you prefer. The remaining two envelopes contain slips of newspaper the size of hundred dollar bills.

To begin the routine, two of the working lighters and the gimmicked lighter are in your left pocket. The other working lighter is in your right pocket. The two envelopes are in your left inside breast pocket, with the marked envelope on top. The pencil is in your left pocket with the lighters.

Borrow a hundred dollar bill and invite its owner to join it on stage. He stands to your left. Ask three more spectators to come on stage and be the committee that will burn the "witches". They stand to your right.

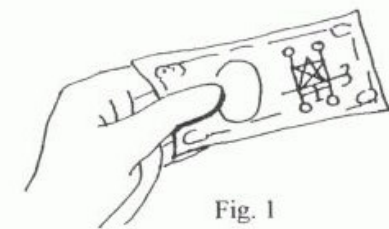


Fig. 1

Draw a sigil (see Figure #1) in pencil on the bill before you put it in the marked envelope. Show the contents of two other envelopes. Seal all three

envelopes, mix them, and hand them to the owner of the hundred dollar bill. Instruct him to mix the envelopes further.

Remove the three lighters from your left pocket and place them on your left palm. The gimmicked lighter is at the rear of the line, that is, nearest your wrist. The first lighter, the one closest to your fingertips, has the hinge pointing to your left fingertips. The second lighter has the hinge facing down, and the third (gimmicked) lighter has the hinge facing up. This positioning will be important later. (See Figure #2.)

The Switch

Take the first lighter by your right hand and light it. As your right hand lights the lighter and holds it up for the audience to see, curl your left fingers and casually drop your hand to your left side. Bring your right hand with the lighter down, as your left hand comes back up to its original position to meet it. Place the first lighter at the back of the line (near your wrist) with the hinge facing down.

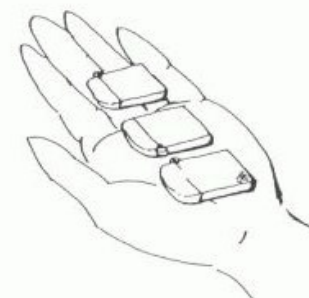


Fig. 2

Pick up the next lighter, light it and show it to the audience. Again, you casually drop your left hand to your side, (the lighters slide to your fingertips) but this time as you close your left fingers, flip both lighters over as if they are a single object. This move secretly switches the two lighter's positions, but retains the orientation of the hinges. The move takes practice and is easier with butane lighters, but can be done smoothly. Bring your right hand down, as your left hand returns to the same position as before. Because of the alternating alignments of the two hinges, everything looks the same as it did before you made the switch.

Put the lighter in your right hand at the back of the line and pick up the next lighter. This appears to be the final lighter, however, due to the secret switch, it is the first lighter shown a second time.

It seems as if all three lighters have been slowly and clearly shown to be operative. The casual movements create the perfect illusion. You must simply be smooth in your actions.

Each spectator chooses a lighter. It is, of course, a free choice. Because of the secret mark on the gimmicked lighter, you can easily see who gets it.

The Force

For explanatory reasons we will refer to the spectator WITH the empty lighter as "Q" and the other two guys will be "Z". The envelope WITH the hundred dollar bill as "X" and the other two envelopes as "O".

Now you must get the marked envelope together with the gimmicked lighter. First, for theatrical purposes, we must arrange the participants so "Q" is on one end of the line of three men. Here is a subtle method of arranging the participants in an order you wish without actually moving them.

If they're already lined up the way you wish, that is with "Q" on either end of the line, you proceed to pass the envelopes out. If "Q" is standing in the center simply tell the participants to re-arrange themselves in any order they wish. They will move around until they all have a new position. This automatically puts "Q" on one end of the line. This also adds to the feeling that everything is done with free, random selections.

There are only three orders the envelopes can be mixed. Either they will be handed to you in (1) X-O-O order, which, for us, is the same as (2) O-O-X or they'll be handed to you in (3) O-X-O order. If the envelopes are in the first or second order, merely hand them out in order, starting at the end of the line so that "Q" gets the "X" envelope.

If the envelopes are in the third order, hand the first "O" envelope to the "Z" participant farthest away from "Q". As you warn the participants not to open the envelopes, your left hand drops to your side and the other two envelopes are casually flipped over. This is not a move. There is very little movement of the envelopes. They are simply turned a bit so the "O" envelope is on top. This is handed to the second "Z" spectator and the remaining envelope, "X", is given to "Q". This subtle distribution appears to be totally above board.

Everything is set. The first "Z" lights his lighter and burns his envelope. The next "Z" does the same. "X" cannot light his lighter because it is gimmicked. While "X" tries to ignite the lighter, reach into

your right pocket and palm the fourth lighter. After "X" tries for a while, take the envelope from him and pass it to your right hand. The envelope hides the fourth lighter. Your left hand takes the gimmicked lighter. You try to ignite the gimmicked lighter, but to no avail. Pass the envelope to your left hand. It looks perfectly normal to put the envelope in your left hand before handing it to the bill's owner because he is on your left. The lighters are kept in the same hands as they are, however, the hidden lighter in your right hand is exposed as the gimmicked lighter in your left hand is covered with the envelope. It looks as if you moved the lighter to your right hand as you put the envelope in your left hand. *This is a very simple, yet convincing switch.*

The envelope is handed to the bill's owner on the far left. The lighter is returned to "X". It is now, of course, a working lighter. The gimmicked lighter is pocketed while reaching in your left pocket for the pencil to erase the sigil. After which, "X" can attempt to burn the bill with success.

Everything is clean. Every move has been covered and has a reason. There are three working lighters in the hands of the spectators and the borrowed money is in the hands of its owner. You may collect the lighters or, if you have prepared butane lighters with your contact information on both sides, choose to allow the spectators to keep them and send all four people back to their seats.

Now you can take a well deserved bow!

Notes:

1. The revelation of the envelope with the borrowed money is what amazes the audience, not the fact that one of the lighters won't ignite. The magical effect is that the sigil protects the bill.
2. All of the audience's attention is on the random selection of the lighters, the participant's positions and the random mixing of the sealed envelopes; no one ever suspects anything about the lighters.
3. Don't omit bringing the bill's owner on stage. He makes for great theater as well as comic relief. Just stand between him and the line of three participants.
4. Be certain to display the lighters openly to the participants. The switch is absolutely undetectable and should be done smoothly without fear. The subtlety of the lighters' positions before and

after the switch makes this a simple, yet very deceptive move.

5. Remember that having four participants on stage, as well as fire in the routine, makes this a large illusion that fits in your coat pocket.

6. If you purchase more lighters from a specialty advertising company, you can have your name and phone number printed on them. Allowing the spectators to keep the lighters proves they are unprepared and puts a great advertisement in the spectator's hands! Just make certain both sides are identical.

Alternate Handling #1

You may choose to pass out the envelopes first. Then you can position the person with the marked envelope in the center of the three spectators. Now, you simply show that all the lighters work and hand the gimmicked lighter to the person with the marked envelope.

Alternate Handling #2

The original routine was designed to be performed by those who wish few bold moves in their performances. If, on the other hand, you feel a bold, yet subtle move is for you, consider this.

Use all three ungimmicked lighters. After the lighters and envelopes have been chosen, simply palm the gimmicked lighter in your left hand. While demonstrating that all three lighters work, switch in the gimmicked lighter for the regular lighter at the marked envelope position.

Here is a simple switch. Keep the empty lighter palmed in your left hand. Light the regular lighter with your right, turn to show the audience, and as you turn around to face the spectator, act as if you place the lighter in your left hand. Actually keep the regular lighter in your right; palm it as you expose the gimmicked lighter in your left. Hand the gimmicked lighter to the spectator holding the marked envelope.

This bold move allows free selection of both envelopes and lighters, but eliminates the possible mixing of the envelopes later. Still, it is not as clean as the original routine.

Alternate Handling #3

If you prefer to have a free choice of envelopes and lighters even at the cost of possibly having to mix the envelopes later in the routine, a simple equivoque force can be used. Allow "Q" to select two envelopes. If he takes the two "O" envelopes, he hands them to the other participants and you give him the "X" envelope.

If he gets one "O" and the "X" envelope, have him give you one. If it's the "O" envelope, he keeps the "X" envelope. The remaining two are offered to the next participant for the choice of one and the final envelope goes to the last "Z" participant. If "Q" hands you the "X" envelope, have him hand the "O" envelope to one of the "Z" guys. Offer him one of the remaining two envelopes. If he picks the "X" you're done. If he picks the "O" envelope, he does what he just did and hands it to the other "Z" guy and keeps the remaining envelope, the "X".

Alternate Handling #4

Proceed as in handling #3. When you reach the scenario wherein "Z" has the marked envelope and "Q" has the gimmicked lighter, position all three spectators in a "witch's circle". Instruct everyone to hold their envelopes out to the side and their lighters to the other side. Each participant lights the other's on fire. Direct the activities so that "Q" tries to light the envelope "X".

This simple ploy works because you give it credibility by naming it, i.e., a "witch's circle". And because it doesn't seem to change anything. The selection of lighters and envelopes were all free, so the action of burning the envelope to the right seems just as fair.

I have always used the original routine, but other professionals such as Ted Lesley have used variations. The point is that unlike many Banknight routines, there is a theatrical reason for the magic to be happening. I have given you everything you need, including stage positioning for everyone on stage. You can't miss with this.

Enjoy.