



Inside Ed's Head

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More Cyclical Stacks (Si Stebbins Rides a Jackass to See Eight Kings.)

Last month I wrote about cyclical, or rotational, stacks. They involve two rules: one to determine the numerical value of the next card and the other to determine its suit. The rule I illustrated was the one Si Stebbins used in his act. He later published a different system in his book *Card Tricks and the Way They Are Performed*. This system, generally known as the Si Stebbins stack, uses the “add 3” rule to determine the value of the next card.

There have always been concerns that this type of system would be prone to discovery if a sharp-eyed spectator noticed its mathematical nature. Once, to test this notion, I created a trick where I gave the spectator the task of looking through the deck to find a particular card. I did it for several magicians, and *none* noticed that the cards were stacked. (It was an excellent trick—I wish I remembered what it was!) This proved to me that fears about using Si Stebbins are rather overblown.

Nonetheless, some clever people came up with ways to disguise the mathematical nature of the stack. The most ingenious of these was to *remove* the mathematics but still have one card lead you to the next. Two of these that I’m aware of are called “Jackass” and “Eight Kings.”

These involve mnemonic systems embedded in the following doggerel:

Jackass ate live tree
King intends to fix
Several for benign queen

Or

Eight kings threatened to save
Ninety-five queens
For one sick knave.

The point of these is that the thirteen card values are buried within each, so one card leads to the next.

Jackass ate live tree/ King intends to fix/ Several for benign queen.
J A 8 5 3 K 10 2 6 7 4 9 Q

Using CHaSeD order, the first few cards of this system are **JC, AH, 8S, 5D, 3C**, etc.

Eight kings threatened to save/ Ninety-five queens/ For one sick knave.
8 K 3 10 2 7 9 5 Q 4 A 6 J

The first few cards of this system are: **8C, KH, 3S, 10D, 2C**, etc.

A little practice with either of these mnemonics makes them just as fast and easy to use as the Si Stebbins systems.

I should mention one other cyclical stack that you might find interesting, Richard Osterlind's "Breakthrough Card System." This system uses suit and value rules that do not have thirteen card banks. The formulas take you from the first card to the fifty-second, then to the first again, with no easily discernable pattern. (This is still a cyclical stack, in that the last card takes you back to the first; you can cut the deck and the stack will always work.)

Although this stack looks quite random, under normal circumstances, so do the other systems. Only you can decide if the random look is worth the extra bit of math you need to navigate to the next card.

When I was a teenager, "Eight Kings" tickled my fancy and I used it for years. As mentioned in my very first article, I eventually switched to Si Stebbins, modified by Simon Aronson's suit-order rule. I wasn't worried that a spectator would notice the mathematical relationship of the values but I was (needlessly?) worried that some spectators might notice the alternating colors. I eventually memorized this stack as well. Once I found myself comfortable with a memorized deck, I created the "Aladdin Stack," which I designed to spell to any card. That's been the memorized stack I've used ever since. (Someday, I hope to publish it in a best-selling book.)

Looking at the collection of tricks in my database that used cyclical stacks, I found some good ones by Peter Duffie and James Swain. Since Peter had contributed to this column before, I had the nerve to ask for two of his tricks, and he graciously concurred. I asked James for one, and he agreed also.

If you're not familiar with James, he is a top-notch card man with three great books: *Don't Blink: The Magic of James Swain* (1992), *Miracles with Cards* (1996) and *21st Century Card Magic* (1999). James also uses his writing skills to reach a much larger audience. He's written a boatload of best-selling, award-winning novels. I can't begin to go over them here; all I can do is suggest you check out his web page: <http://www.jamesswain.com/>.

A Tribute to Dunninger By James Swain

Effect

The performer asks three spectators to partake in an experiment. One of them is given a shuffled deck. He cuts this deck a few times, and removes

three cards, which he pockets—the performer’s back is turned throughout. The pocketed cards are distributed to the other two spectators in a random manner. All three spectators now memorize their cards and pocket them.

The performer correctly reads the minds of all three volunteers.

Setup

You will need a stacked deck in CHaSeD or SHoCkeD order. A Si Stebbins stack will be your easiest alternative but a Jackass or Eight Kings works fine.

Method

Ask for the assistance of three spectators. As they are gathering, remove your deck and begin giving it some Charlier shuffles. (See *Inside Ed’s Head*, August 2017, p. 3. www.edhassmagic.com/edshead/EH-2017-08.pdf.)

Once the spectators are assembled have them stand in a row somewhat behind you, Larry to your left, Mary in the middle, and Rachel on the right. Spread the deck briefly in front of the volunteers to show its “random” order and then give it a cut or another brief Charlier shuffle. Give the deck to Larry and have him cut the cards—just so you can ascertain that he can do so properly.

Turn your back and ask him to cut the cards one or two more times. Then ask him to take the top or bottom card and place it in his pocket. Once he’s done, give him the same choice again—make the choice between top and bottom cards seem important. You could make it a serious or humorous situation. After he pockets the second card have him pocket a third card—same choice. (Feel free to have him pocket three cards at once if you wish, although you should give him the choice between top and bottom.)

Once he’s done, reach back and retrieve the pack. Glance at the bottom card, and then pocket the deck. If you see, for example, the Queen of Hearts (and your deck is in normal Si Stebbins order) you’ll immediately know the spectator has two black cards and one red—Two of Spades, Five of Diamonds and Eight of Clubs.

With your back to the volunteers, take another step or two away from them. Ask the volunteer with the cards in his pocket to remove them, mix them and give a card to each of his other compatriots. Ask all three to memorize their cards and pocket them. Now ask them to concentrate on an “image of their card”—pretend to concentrate as well.

Say, “I’m getting a clear image of two black cards and one red; will the two people thinking of the black cards please take two steps forward.” They will do so. The audience will already be impressed by your accuracy.

There’s a little better than a forty per cent chance that one of the people who has stepped forward is thinking of a picture card. If not, he’s thinking

of a seven or higher. You'll now use the following patter. "One of you thinking of a black card is thinking of a [picture card/card with a lot of spots.] I'm having trouble receiving the image clearly. Could you please close your eyes and try to project a sharp image of your card to me? (If you're worried that the person with the two might close his eyes, you could rephrase: "I'm getting a clear image of a two but I'm not getting a clear image of a card with more spots. Could the person holding that card please close his or her eyes")

You'll now turn around to face the volunteers. You'll see the following picture. Mary has stepped forward and has her eyes closed. You know she is thinking of the Eight of Clubs. Larry has stepped forward also. That means he has the Two of Spades. Rachel, standing forlornly up stage, is thinking of the Five of Diamonds.

Turn to Mary first (she has her eyes closed; you don't want her to get dizzy), thank her for her remarkable job of projecting the image of her card to you and reveal the card as you wish. Turn to Larry next. The audience is aware that he has a low black card. You might want to miscall it, and make an immediate recovery—mentalism is hard, is it not?

Finally, turn to Rachel, reveal her card and along with her astonished look, accept the applause of the audience.

If this isn't a paid show, don't forget to take your cards back!

James points out that you get *five* effects from this one trick. Your first is when you prove that you know two volunteers are thinking of black cards. The second is when you announce that one of them is sending you a picture card (or a card with lots of spots). The last three are when you name each card.

James credits Bob Farmer for helping influence his thinking on this effect. I've modified James's approach a bit concerning the reason for having one of the spectators close his eyes; I hope I haven't inadvertently stepped on anyone's toes.

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