

Fried and Seek

Matt Baker

Effect and Presentation: On the table is a deck of cards which David is invited to shuffle.

“David, in a moment I’m going to have you make a series of decisions. We’re going to eliminate cards until we’re down to just one. I’ll then try to divine which card you’re left with.”

*“Now, despite what some people think, I’m not an **actual** wizard: behind everything I do there’s a method. In this case, my prediction will be based on observing how you make decisions. So, David, I’m going to take out a few cards and then ask you to make some choices.”*

The magician spreads the shuffled deck face-up and removes three cards, which he places in front of David. *“We have two red cards, both low values, and a black face card. On the count of three, you’re going to place your hands down on **two** of these three cards. One... two... three.”* David places his outstretched hands on the two red cards.

“Interesting... I’m not sure if you chose those because they’re both red or because they’re both number cards. Let’s try again... this time all three cards will be red.” The magician removes three more cards. *“Again, place your hands down on any **two** of the cards, on the count of three. One... two... three.”* David places his outstretched hands on two of the cards.

“I wonder, did you go for those cards because they were the closest to you, or because they’re both diamonds? Let’s try one more test to see.” David and the magician repeat this ‘observation test’ one last time. *“Exactly what I expected you to do - I’m getting a good read on your decision-making process now.”* The magician returns all the cards which have been removed to the deck.

“I’m also going to have you do some cutting, because I haven’t observed you cutting the cards yet. Let’s cut the deck into three piles: here’s a small pile, a large pile, and a medium one.” The magician cuts the deck into three different-sized piles.

“We’ll start with the small pile.” The magician pushes the small packet toward David and instructs him to give it a cut and complete, which David does. The magician watches the cutting process intently. *“OK, a little more than half... that’s useful for me to know. And now let’s do the large one. Once again, please cut and complete.”* David does this. *“I thought you were going to cut about half again, but you cut deep that time. Alright, let’s do the medium pile.”*

David cuts the final packet. *“Just as I thought, you cut off only a few cards. I think I’ve got you figured out now! That means we’re ready for the marquee event.”*

The magician pushes all three piles toward David. *“We’re going to eliminate two of these piles, because we only need one of them. So, with your left hand, pick up one of the piles.”* David does this. *“And with your right hand, pick up a second pile.”* David again does as he’s been instructed. *“As I said, we’re going to **eliminate** those piles, so please place them over here on the card box. That will be the discard pile from now on.”* Two of the packets are placed onto the card box.

“Now, to make things even more fair, I’ll turn my head.” The magician turns his head away. *“David, if you would, please cut and complete the remaining packet. Have you done that? Good. And now deal into three piles, like you’re playing a game of cards.”* The magician, with his head still turned, pantomimes dealing back and forth as a dealer would do in a three-handed poker game. *“If you can’t make three even piles and there are cards left over, just discard those. Have you done that?”* David says yes.

“Now put your hands out, just like we did before, and on the count of three you’ll place your hands on two of the piles. One... two... three. And discard those two piles.” David does this.

“Please cut and complete the packet remaining on the table.” David says OK. *“And again, deal into three piles. As before, if there are any extra cards left just discard them.”* When David is finished, the magician continues, *“Once again, place two hands out, and you know what to do: one... two... three. And discard.”*

“Alright, you’ve got a pretty small packet left, probably just two or three cards. I’m guessing two?” David confirms. *“Place those two cards next to each other, and this time just put one hand out. On the count of three, place your hand on **one** of those two cards. One... two... three. And discard.”*

*“We’re finally down to just one card, as promised. Without even looking at the face, I’d like you to just **sit** on that card, so there’s no way I or anyone else could see it. When you’ve done that, I’ll turn around.”* David says OK, and the magician turns his head back toward David again.

*“David, you just made a whole series of choices while my back was turned. You cut the cards several times, you dealt them back and forth, and you chose which piles to eliminate. Now, before we began, I carefully observed how you make such decisions. Actually, the only thing I **didn’t** observe is whether you deal cards from left to right or right to left. Don’t tell me what you actually did, but – before I commit to a prediction – please deal just a few cards into my hand.”* The magician briefly pantomimes what David is to do. David picks up the discard pile and deals a few cards into the magician’s outstretched hand.

“OK, you can stop. It’s all clear to me now.” The magician hands the cards back to David. *“So, you cut the cards **this** way, dealt them **this** way, and put your hands down like **this**...”* The magician pantomimes various actions as he says all of this. *“...which means that you **must** have ended up with the Jack of Clubs! Go ahead, take a look.”*

David takes out the card he's been sitting on and turns it over. It's the Jack of Clubs.

Preparation: None. A regular shuffled deck is used.

Overview of the Method: The initial phases, where the magician is apparently observing how the spectator makes certain decisions, are surreptitiously used to prepare an 18-card stack on top of the deck. Only nine cards have to be arranged, however. (This will make sense in a moment).

Equivoque is then used to force one of the three piles (the 18-card stack). Thanks to what I call the "Sierpiński principle", all of the cutting, dealing, and discarding that the spectator does with the magician's head turned ends with a selection that will always be the **mate** of the top card on the discard pile. It remains to glimpse the latter card; this is done in the process of 'observing how the spectator deals cards.'

Let's break all of this down a bit further now.

Setting the secret stack

Spread the shuffled deck face-up from left to right in such a way that you're able to see the indices of all the cards. The first three cards you pull out of the spread will be the **mates** of the top three cards in the deck (i.e., the leftmost cards in the spread). The next three cards you pull out are the mates of the next three cards, and similarly for the final three.

When you pull the cards out of the spread, place them in order from left to right (the same order in which their mates appear in the leftmost portion of the spread). Have the spectator place his hands on two of the cards and comment on his decisions, as in the sample script above. You should always be able to say **something** interesting about why you think he went for those specific cards, as opposed to a different pair. This part of the trick can drag if you let it, but it can also be quite engaging if you really play up the 'observation' thing.

After the spectator has made his decision, and you've commented wittily upon his choice, pick up the three cards from **right to left** with your right hand and place them face-up to the side. Do the same with each of the next two sets of three. Situation check: at the conclusion of the opening phase, you should have a stack of 9 face-up cards which are the **mates** of the top 9 cards of the deck, and in the same order. Close the spread, turn the deck face-down, and place the 9-card stack you just created face-down on top. As you do this, remember the **face card** of the 9-card stack – this will serve as a key card in just a moment.

You can false shuffle here if you wish, but I usually don't bother.

Situation check: the top 18 cards of the deck should now be in the pattern

A B C D E F G H I A B C D E F G H I

where identical letters correspond to mates; e.g., the top card is the mate of the 10th card, and so on. The leftmost 'I' card, which is the 9th card from the top, is your key card. Its mate is the bottom card of your 18-card stack.

Splitting the deck into piles

Spread through the deck face-up, and after about 10 cards, split the deck, turn these 10 or so cards over, and place them into a face-down pile on the table. This is your 'small' pile. Now spread until you reach the mate of your key card, and do the same thing, creating a 'big' pile of about 24 cards. The final 18 cards, which make up your secret stack, get placed down as the 'medium' pile.

Have the spectator cut and complete the small pile, then the large one, and finally the medium pile. Push them toward the spectator in such a way that the medium pile is to his left.

You now force the medium pile using a 'magician's choice', or equivoque, procedure.

Cutting, Dealing, and Discarding

This phase of the routine is self-working, so I don't think much else needs to be said about the handling. After you turn your head, just follow the script above. (There will never be extra cards left over in the dealing, by the way, since the spectator begins with exactly 18 cards.)

Once the spectator is down to a single card, turn your head back around.

Glimpsing the mate of the selection

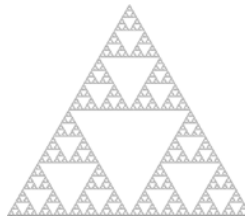
As I've already mentioned, the spectator's selection will always be the **mate** of the top card on the discard pile. Why? Well, that's the beauty of the Sierpiński Principle. I won't spoil the fun: try it a couple of times with the cards face-up and you'll see exactly what's happening.

It remains to glimpse the top card of the discard pile. One way to do this would be to use marked cards. A sneakier way, which doesn't require a marked deck, is to have the spectator deal a few cards into your hand. You justify this by saying, "*Actually, the only thing I **didn't** observe is whether you deal cards from left to right or right to left. Don't tell me what you actually did, but – before I commit to a prediction – please deal just a few cards into my hand.*" When he's dealt a few cards, one by one, onto your outstretched palm, tell him to stop. Hand the cards back to him, catching a glimpse of the bottom card in the process.

You now name the **mate** of the glimpsed card as your 'prediction'. Et voilà.

Final thoughts

- (1) The first phase can be significantly sped up by beginning with the 18-card stack already on top of the deck and performing a false shuffle. The tradeoff is that the trick is then no longer ‘from a shuffled deck in use’. Up to you to weigh the pros and cons, depending on your performing situation.
- (2) If you are a memorized deck user, you can perform this routine with the top 18 cards of your memorized stack instead of with mates. The stack number of the selected card will differ by 9 from the stack number of the card you glimpse (and will belong to the top 18 cards in your stack).
- (3) Instead of using mates, you can take advantage of “invisible deck pairing”. (I assume most readers can figure out what I’m getting at here.) This has the advantage of camouflaging the setup a little better, and it also leaves no visible trace of a setup at the conclusion of the trick (whereas in the standard handling there are some pairs of mates on top of the discard pile at the end).
- (4) Here is a picture of the Sierpiński triangle (also called the Sierpiński gasket), the fractal shape from which the principle gets its name:



Credits

I also teach this trick in my Vanishing Inc. Masterclass, under the name “Single-Fried”. The routine is a new presentation and handling for the trick “Triple-Fried”, from my book *The Buena Vista Shuffle Club*. That trick was originally inspired by Alex Elmsley’s “Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral”, published in *The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley, Volume 2*. Max Lukian provided the inspiration for switching from a 27-card stack to an 18-card stack, and the idea for setting up the stack on the fly comes from Juan Tamariz’s impromptu version of “Triple Coincidence”, explained in Disc One of his DVD set *Magic from my Heart*.

Here are my (Andy’s) thoughts on this trick from an old newsletter of mine. Back then the trick was called Single Fried:

The first trick in the lecture is called Single Fried and the method relies on something Matt refers to as the Sierpinski Principle. This is the trick that has gone directly into my “Borrowed, Shuffled Deck” repertoire, although the trick looks different when I do it.

In Single Fried, a group of cards is narrowed down to one card by the spectator freely choosing which cards to eliminate. All of this is done while the magician's back is turned, and he legitimately can't see anything. The spectator sits on the remaining card without even looking at it. When the magician turns back, he can tell the spectator what card they're sitting on.

In my variation of the trick, the deck is shuffled and one card is removed by the magician and placed in his breast pocket. The spectator then whittles the rest of the deck down, by eliminating cards in smaller and smaller groups until she is down to one card.

The magician shows the card he set aside at the beginning, let's say it's the 3 of Hearts. Only now does the spectator reveal the card she chose, the mate of the 3 of Hearts, the 3 of Diamonds.

Now, there are certainly similar tricks in the literature, but here is what I like about this one:

- The deck can be borrowed
- The deck is shuffled at the start of the trick.
- There are multiple genuine free choices made by the spectator.
- You can show them how their choices are affecting the situation in real time. For example, if they eliminate a packet of cards, you can show them some of the cards that are now "out of play."
- You can frame the trick as you predicting what card they would eventually land on **OR** them gradually narrowing in on the mate of the one card you set aside.

Now, ultimately, being able to predict the mate of the card a spectator will freely choose isn't an overwhelmingly captivating trick. A lot of tricks in magic will "feel" similar. But the nice thing about this is that you can dress it up to be a demonstration of whatever you want it to be. Maybe they eliminate cards based on the "pull" of some sort of dowsing instrument or a pendulum. Maybe you do it for a couple and they have to come to a consensus on which cards are eliminated each round. Maybe the decision as to which cards get eliminated is done randomly, via the roll of a die, or something like that. Maybe you label the options before each decision so there is a psychological element to the eliminations, i.e., "Okay, so this packet represents waffles, this one French toast, and this one pancakes. Which do you keep?" You know... psychology type stuff.

What I mean is that this is a Blank Slate effect that you can make about anything.

In the Masterclass, Matt goes through the elimination procedure rather briskly, which is fine for an audience of magicians. But in real life, **the elimination procedure should be the focus of the whole thing.**

I should note that there is an introductory phase to the effect that gets you set- up. I left it out of the description above not to hide that fact, but just because it's not super important. Whatever you decide to make the trick about (you being able to predict their actions, their intuition, luck) you can use this brief introductory phase to set the stage for that.

Here is how I do the trick:

1. Deck is borrowed and shuffled.
2. I do the initial phase to get the deck set-up.
3. I reassemble the deck and overhand shuffle the cards that don't matter onto the ones that do, keeping a break.
4. I spread the deck towards myself (noting where the break is) and remove any card that's not in the set-up. I place this card in my breast pocket or on the table.
5. I split the deck into three piles.
6. I equivoque to the target pile and form the other cards into a "discard" pile, which I hold in my hands.
7. They eliminate cards from their pile until they are down to one card, which they cover with both hands.
8. I pick up the card I set aside earlier, off the table or out of my pocket. I have them turn over the card they landed on and I do a top-change while they're focusing on the seeing what card they have. **Or**, I place the card I set aside on the top of the deck for a moment while I gesture or adjust something. I then do a double turn-over to show the card I set aside. After that, they turn over the card they ended up on. Both methods work well. It's just a matter of whether I want them to show their card first, or me to show mine first.