



## VIDEOS

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### Card College 3 & 4: Personal Instruction

Roberto Giobbi

€78/\$78 (both volumes)

€49/\$49 each MP4 Video Files

If you don't like cards, or if you don't perform close-up, then you

might assume that this month's column, dedicated in full

to a course in close-up card magic, isn't for you. I ask you to consider reading the review anyway, because there's something bigger going on here and I think it deserves your attention.

Roberto Giobbi is a FISM winner and author of some 80 publications including the five volumes of *Card College*. He wrote for *Genii* for 14 years and continues to publish important books, ebooks, articles, and other content. If he had done nothing else but write *Card College* anonymously and then vanish from the scene like Erdnase himself, he would still be one of the most significant contributors to magic literature in a century.

Fortunately, he did not stop with just those books. Nor

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did he even limit himself to the print medium. In addition to his dozens of live and virtual lectures, Mr. Giobbi has released many videos over the years, the most recent of which is my immediate subject.

*Card College 3 & 4: Personal Instruction* is a collection of 27 video files—over 19GB—comprising more than 22 hours of teaching, all designed to correspond (mostly) in order with the chapters in the original books. It is a massive amount of content; even Mr. Giobbi's own summary of the material is a 13-page outline. I will attempt to convey some of the highlights and my reactions, a couple of caveats, and then touch on an underlying issue relevant to this and other such projects.

The collection begins with a welcome message from Mr. Giobbi. He establishes up front that this collection builds on the information from the first two volumes of *Card College*, either the books or his previous video instruction (originally released on DVD, now available only via download).

Volume three consists of lessons 24 through 34, picking up where volume two left off. While the typical structure of a book or video might conclude with a chapter of "assorted techniques" that didn't fit elsewhere, this collection begins with those items. In this selection Mr. Giobbi covers numerous touches on the Biddle counting and stealing techniques, methods to count cards quickly whether in a fan or spread between the hands, and the practical use of the Bluff Cut. Additional segments on holding cards back in the case, transfer moves, and the Kardyro-Marlo Move are followed by a close look at the Vernon Addition, a move that I confess I found daunting when I first read it. This is followed by performances and explanations of two tricks: the "Invisible Card" and the "Four Seasons," exactly as included in the corresponding print chapter.



In this first lesson the pattern is set for the remainder of the collection. Mr. Giobbi sits across a table, cards in hand, and introduces the topic with some general remarks and possibly some initial references to other teachers, books, and artists. Scene by scene, he teaches each specific move or concept as if you were sitting there with him. There are three camera angles to provide both close-ups and the larger context of body position and movement. In addition to the camera shots, there are multiple onscreen text cues providing detailed references not only to the *Card College* series, but to other works that help to deepen the insight

on practical and theoretical concepts along the way.

In this review it would be impossible to present a detailed menu of all the specific sleights that are covered, so I'll only spend the space necessary to touch on some of the major points. Even so, this will take some space.

Lesson 25 covers "Breaks, Jogs, and Injogs," and provides practical modern handling on the use of these techniques. Giobbi describes multiple methods for getting breaks and the contexts in which they are useful. In Lesson 26, "Controls: Part 2," prepare to explore Marlo's Convincing Control, the Bluff Pass, and Giobbi's Logical Control.

A welcome point of discussion in Lesson 27, "Multiple Shifts," is the need for magicians to think about why someone might remove cards from the pack before reinserting them. "So that you can control them with a Multiple Shift" is the real reason, but it's not a pleasing justification of the action. Mr. Giobbi offers several ideas for you to consider, but the most important point is that he encourages you to think about the question in the first place. The Neal Elias shift is covered under the title Swing Cut Multiple Shift, though John Bannon's excellent finesse for this technique is not included. (You should look it up in Bannon's book *High Caliber*.) The Vernon Multiple Shift and even an Overhand Shuffle Multiple Shift are other useful techniques taught here.

A highlight of Lesson 28, "The Double Lift: Part 3," is Mr. Giobbi's teaching of the Stuart Gordon Double Lift, though many other handlings are also explained. Besides the execution of the sleight itself, however, this lesson examines many techniques for replacing or unloading the double. In Lesson 29, "False Displays, Counts: 2," Mr. Giobbi dives into the Ascanio Spread, the OIram Subtlety, and the D'Amico Spread, among others.

In Lesson 30, "Riffle Shuffle: 2," Giobbi teaches the Zarrow Shuffle and Pull Through Shuffle, along with many top and bottom stock controls, red-black false shuffles, and related techniques. In Lesson 31, "Faro Shuffle," Mr. Giobbi gives the most careful instruction on the topic that I've seen with the sole exception of Mike Close's work. If you've struggled to learn the Faro Shuffle, this is a great place to get on the right track.

Lesson 32 turns our attention to "Advanced Palming Techniques," covering One-Handed Palming, Cops, Bottom Palms, as well as replacements, transfers, and ruses for removing palmed cards from pockets. In Lesson 33 you'll learn the "Side Steal and Diagonal Palm Shift," the first of which is one of the top workhorse sleights in the whole field of card magic. The DPS is included for completeness. Volume 3 concludes with Lesson 34, "Color Change," in which you'll learn a number of classic Color Changes as well as some different movements that you can use to motivate the effect magically.

Volume 4 opens with Lesson 35, "Forces: 3." Ten different forcing techniques are covered. Lessons 36 and 37 are related, as both involve techniques for switching cards, either single cards or packets of cards.

Lesson 38 moves away from the almost guaranteed

precision we've experienced so far into the realm of estimation, fishing, and outs. If, like me, you have embraced memorized deck work, then you are well aware of the importance of good estimation skills. If you're still working to develop those skills, this will help.

Lesson 39, "Culling," is more than just an exploration of the Hofzinsler Spread Cull. Lennart Green's Angle Separation is featured, along with other useful techniques. "Stacking" is the topic of Lesson 40, and Mr. Giobbi teaches some basic, relatively easy approaches for stacking cards in riffle and overhand shuffles. A classic poker deal routine is presented as a practical, entertaining application.

Lesson 41, "False Deals," begins with an admission that you could dedicate your entire career to studying the fine details of these maneuvers. Double Deals, Push-Off Second Deals, One-Handed Seconds, and Bottom Dealing are all demonstrated and explained, but unlike some things you can pick up quickly in magic, it will take a lot more than an hour of instruction to get comfortable with any of these techniques. Nevertheless, you will learn good fundamentals here and if you wish to dig deeper, there is no shortage of excellent literature to explore.

Dr. Jacob Daley's "Itinerant Pasteboards" from *Stars of Magic* contains a switch that is a highlight of Lesson 42, "Sandwich Techniques." This and the Kosky Switch may be familiar to you, but don't overlook the elegance of the lesser-known Daley Triple Lift Switch. Even when you know what's happening it is a truly deceptive operation. Lesson 43's exploration of lapping with playing cards concludes with a "Card Through Table" effect that generates a sincere gasp of astonishment from the woman who experiences the magic.

The final five lessons focus on technique, finesse, and applications for Tilt (or the Depth Illusion, to let the Vernon folks know I'm paying attention); "Advanced Pass Techniques" including Spread, Dribble, Turnover, Classic, Half Passes, and more; "Reverses" including palming, cutting, and shuffling approaches; "Turnovers," and "Flourishes."

It is interesting to note that while multiple camera angles are employed throughout the teaching segments, the performances tend to use the fixed front camera with some, but comparatively few, cuts to the tighter close-up views. This approach discourages any suspicion of selective editing and allows you to experience the performances in the manner most like watching them in person in one of Mr. Giobbi's audiences.

The production value is excellent, though the choice of a simple backdrop and a minimalist set design surely makes it easier to maintain consistent lighting and sound.

The only technical suggestion I would make for future releases of this kind relates to the nature of playing video from a file rather than from an authored DVD. In fact, it has roots in some VHS releases from two decades ago, when viewers did not have direct access to specific content on a tape. Some smart producers put visual indicators in the corner—like a network "bug" or onscreen watermark—that served as a way for someone to see instantly which

segment was playing. If you were fast-forwarding through a tape, you could stop when you got to the segment you needed.

In this case, fast-forwarding is generally just touching a point on the timeline on screen, but a visual cue to identify which particular chapter or segment of a lesson was currently playing would be a useful addition for a student who, having watched these segments as continuous lessons, might also wish to use them as reference tools. This production makes excellent use of pop-up graphics showing references, almost like video footnotes. The addition of some kind of visual index would be a valuable feature for large video files that are distributed without an organized, authored menu.



One other suggestion I'll make is targeted to those who wish to download these large files but prefer to store them in the cloud rather than on their device. Some storage solutions provide direct streaming to devices like a Roku or Chromecast, but others—including Google Drive—do not allow direct streaming to Chromecast from the Drive folder. There are excellent apps available (I use XCast "Cast to TV" for Android) that can help you bridge the gap from a cloud storage location to streaming onto a larger screen. Depending on your technical environment you may not need this kind of tool, but it has been indispensable to me for streaming from my own private cloud storage using my phone.

Ideally, you'll plan to work through these lessons with cards in hand and the corresponding book in front of you. I spent part of my review time doing just that and found it an effective way to benefit from both forms of teaching.

In the remaining space I will return to an issue to which I alluded earlier. That issue, frankly, is the perception of value and cost as it relates to large projects like these.

I know it will bother some and sound like hyperbole to others, but I think this collection is infuriatingly underpriced based on the value it contains. These files contain 22 hours of instruction covering over 150 techniques and nearly 50 tricks, not to mention the theoretical and philosophical discussions. When you consider that a single downloadable trick might cost \$10 on average, then even with a discount this collection should be priced on the order of hundreds of dollars, or hundreds of euros. What is going on? I think one problem is that long-term exposure to too much less valuable, less thoughtful, less well

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produced, but lower-priced product has conditioned many people to stop thinking about anything the minute they see a price point higher than \$30. Many of the same people complaining that \$80 is too much for 50 tricks and 150 techniques will spend \$20 for three tricks and a PDF, then spend \$20 more the next day or week, and \$20 more the day after that. There is a big difference between "consuming magic content" and "investing in your magical growth and development." True, magic shops depend in some measure on the former, but anyone reading this column is capable of thinking more about the latter.

Another problem, well known and yet to be solved, is the issue of piracy. It is inevitable that someone will buy this content and it will appear on a pirate website for pennies. The shame of piracy is that creators like Mr. Giobbi and others have to underprice their product not because of honest questions of supply and demand, but to try to price it low enough that piracy represents less of

a discount. In blunt terms, creators have to forego money they rightly should have earned for their creativity and productivity by underpricing their output sufficiently to bribe enough of us in the magic community to buy honestly instead of dishonestly. If complaining about high prices because we can't save up for a while for important purchases isn't a shameful enough cultural commentary, the idea that we must be bribed not to steal is even worse. It is a moral travesty that this collection is priced under \$200, much less under \$100.

You can find more details and discussion about this collection on Mr. Giobbi's blog. You should purchase it directly from his web site.

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