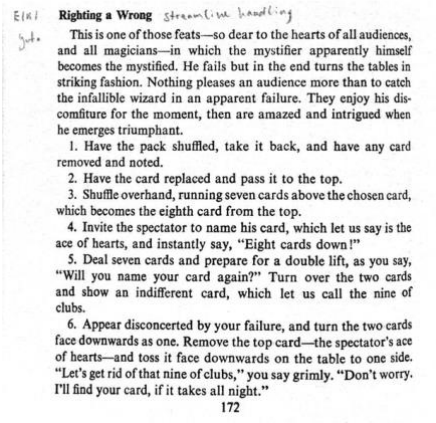
Righting a Wrong Plus

The present essay is a discussion of “Righting a Wrong”, a classic trick from Hugard and Braue's *Royal Road to Card Magic* (p. 172). The book having been published in 1949 and the copyright not having been renewed, the book is now in public domain. Please read the trick description with cards in hand, so you know exactly what will be discussed. To begin, below is a scan and its transcription



Righting a Wrong streamline handling

This is one of those feats—so dear to the hearts of all audiences, and all magicians—in which the mystifier apparently himself becomes the mystified. He fails but in the end turns the tables in striking fashion. Nothing pleases an audience more than to catch the infallible wizard in an apparent failure. They enjoy his discomfiture for the moment, then are amazed and intrigued when he emerges triumphant.

1. Have the pack shuffled, take it back, and have any card removed and noted.
2. Have the card replaced and pass it to the top.
3. Shuffle overhand, running seven cards above the chosen card, which becomes the eighth card from the top.
4. Invite the spectator to name his card, which let us say is the ace of hearts, and instantly say, “Eight cards down!”
5. Deal seven cards and prepare for a double lift, as you say, “Will you name your card again?” Turn over the two cards and show an indifferent card, which let us call the nine of clubs.
6. Appear disconcerted by your failure, and turn the two cards face downwards as one. Remove the top card—the spectator's ace of hearts—and toss it face downwards on the table to one side. “Let's get rid of that nine of clubs,” you say grimly. “Don't worry. I'll find your card, if it takes all night.”

172

[Here is the transcription of the complete text]

This is one of those feats—so dear to the hearts of all audiences, and all magicians—in which the mystifier apparently himself becomes the mystified. He fails but, in the end, turns the tables in striking fashion. Nothing pleases an audience more than to catch the infallible wizard in an apparent failure. They enjoy his discomfiture for the moment, then are amazed and intrigued when he emerges triumphant.

1. Have the pack shuffled, take it back, and have any card removed and noted.
2. Have the card replaced and pass it to the top.
3. Shuffle overhand, running seven cards above the chosen card, which becomes the eighth card from the top.
4. Invite the spectator to name his card, which let us say is the ace of hearts, and instantly say, “Eight cards down!”
5. Deal seven cards and prepare for a double lift, as you say, “Will you name your card again?” Turn over the two cards and show an indifferent card, which let us call the nine of clubs.
6. Appear disconcerted by your failure, and turn the two cards face downwards as one. Remove the top card—the spectator’s ace of hearts—and toss it face downwards on the table to one side. “Let’s get rid of that nine of clubs,” you say grimly. “Don’t worry. I’ll find your card, if it takes all night.”
7. Shuffle overhand, running seven cards above the top card as in step No. 3. The nine of clubs, which is supposed by the audience to be on the table, is now eighth from the top.
8. Weigh the cards in your hand, as if making a calculation, and say in a puzzled tone, “That’s very curious. I still get a vibration of eight. Perhaps your card is at eight this time.”
9. Deal seven cards and say, “This card could be any card except, of course, the nine of clubs, which is on the table—but my vibrations tell me that it is your card.”
10. Turn the eighth card and show that it is the nine of clubs. “Curiouser and curiouser!” you say. “This can’t be the nine of clubs. I put it on the table. Unless . . .!” Turn over the table card and show that it is the spectator’s ace of hearts.

[End of transcription.]

It all started with a comment of mine in *The Magic Memories 55* (16th January, 2022), the topic of which was "Curiosities in Magic":

Curiosity 6: Curious Card Trick

The word “curious” appears three times in the suggested patter for the following trick, so it fits the criteria for this week’s theme “Curiosities in Magic”. It comes straight out of Hugard and Braue’s *Royal Road to Card Magic* (1949), titled “Righting a Wrong” (p. 172) – see the transcription above.

Royal Road to Card Magic was a groundbreaking book at its time, like the Ford Model T was for automobiles, but if you wanted to buy a car today you would not want a Ford Model T, would you?

"Righting a Wrong" is a trick full of flaws (that’s the “curiosity”). However, with the knowledge of modern card magic you will be able to take this inherently interesting plot and turn it into a really elegant card miracle.

If you are curious to know how I did it, I shall be pleased to write about it in one of the upcoming posts.

Since several readers had expressed an interest in my take, led me to write the following in *The Magic Memories 56* (23rd January, 2022):

Thoughts on “Righting a Wrong”, *Royal Road to Card Magic*, and the Pass

Several wrote in to ask about my opinion on “Righting a Wrong”, the card trick from *Royal Road to Card Magic* that I mentioned last week

I will do this in two or three installments in order not to make the posts too long. My first thought refers to the control used at the beginning to bring the card to eighth position from the top.

I quote from *Royal Road to Card Magic*:

> *1. Have the pack shuffled, take it back, and have any card removed and noted.*
> *2. Have the card replaced and pass it to the top.*
> *3. Shuffle overhand, running seven cards above the chosen card, which becomes the eighth card from the top.*

End of quote.

I said it before, and I'll repeat it here: *Royal Road to Card Magic* was one of the most important books of its time, and nobody and nothing can take away its status as a "Classic", in the sense that it belongs to the history of the magical literature as a landmark book, the very first to have systematically rendered the card magic of its time in a didactically attractive form.

Nonetheless, time and many creators have changed the landscape of magic and brought a lot of innovation, some useless, some visionary and beneficial. This concerns not only the techniques and their handling, but also the construction and of course the presentation of the tricks, as well as the challenge of teaching all of that to a modern audience. This is a highly complicated thing to do – there are few who know this better than me, believe me.

The control alone as used in "Righting a Wrong" shows that in this sense *Royal Road to Card Magic* is dated. I know that this is a delicate thing to say as this is a book still recommended by many who can justly be called "experts". The reason, however, they do so, is that they grew up with the book, as I did, they learned from it, and there is no reason for them to relearn what they already can do, so they have no reason to look around for more recent developments. Their recommendation can be looked at as a statement about their own biography, not as a contemporary recommendation.

This said, let us stick to the facts and look at the control above.

The first step contains a fundamental idea that should be identified and defined as it contains a timeless concept, namely that *before a card is selected the deck should be shuffled and cut*, ideally by a spectator, but at least by the performer.

Simply ask a friend to offer you a card for selection from the unshuffled deck, and then do the same thing, but this time you shuffle and cut the deck *before* you select a card. What did you notice? Yes, it feels much "better" to take a card from a *shuffled and cut* deck than otherwise. In my essay "Thoughts on Controls" in *Confidences* (pp. 43) I call this the "Preliminary Phase", and every technique, not just Controls, has such a phase. Identify and define it, and you will have a better technique. So, this is something to be remembered and instilled.
Then, in step 2, a Classic Pass is executed, followed by a False Shuffle retaining the selection on top.

You can find this technical procedure in almost the whole of the magic literature of the first part of the 20th century *and before:* The Pass was THE recognized way of controlling a card. Today, most will agree that this is nonsense, especially if the Pass is followed by a shuffle. First, there are only about a dozen persons in the known universe, if at all, who can do an invisible Classic Pass. And even if they do, it has bad angles. I have nothing to add to what Erdnase said already in 1902 in his *The Expert at the Card Table*:

> The shift has yet to be invented that can be executed by a movement appearing as coincident card table routine; or that can be executed with the hands held stationary and not show that some manœuvre (sic) has taken place, however cleverly it may be performed. (p. 98, lines 18-12 in the CARC Bible Edition).

Second, if you follow the Pass with a False Shuffle, regardless of what type, why do a Pass in the first place?

Either do the Pass *and then do not handle the deck anymore*, or forget the Pass, and do just a shuffle and cut: Simply shuffle to the break and thus control the selection to the required position. Finish with an "Intelligent Injog Shuffle and Cut" (*Sharing Secrets*, p. 55).

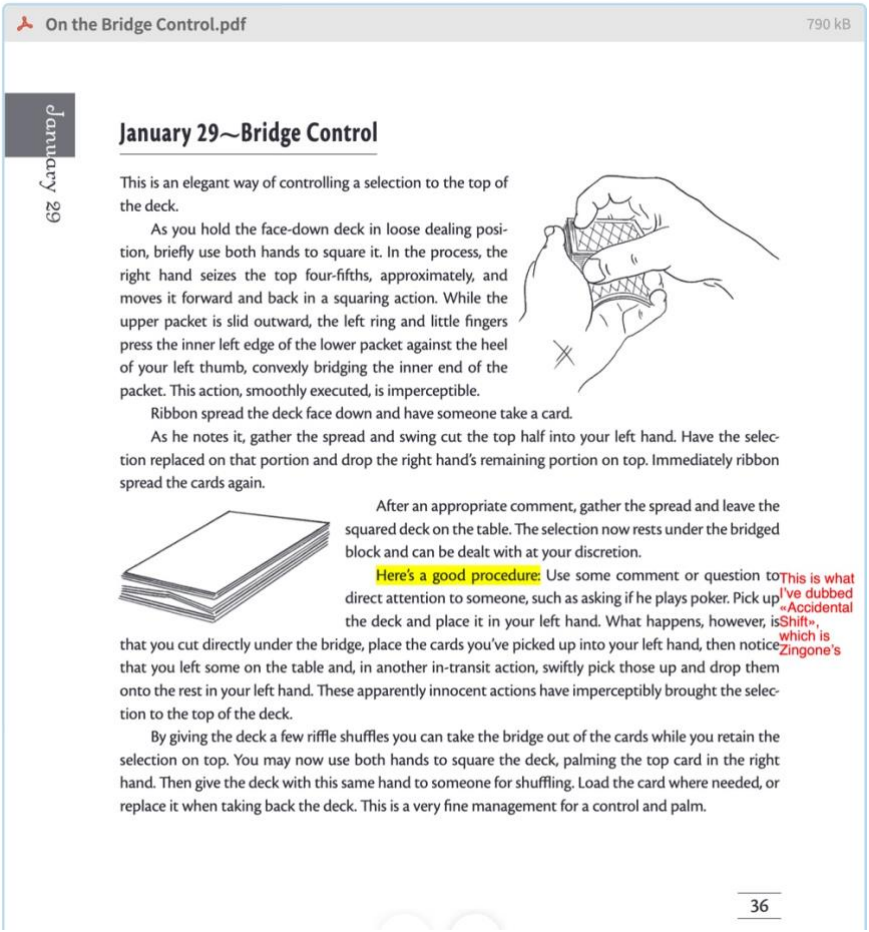
My assumption is that since even the old-timers knew that a Classic Pass would not go unnoticed if done by 99% of the performers, a False Shuffle would at least confuse the issue and (hopefully) still convince the alerted spectator that the card was lost. For let us never forget *what the most important thing of a Control is*: It is not the technique, not the handling, not the presentation, but the fact that the spectators are convinced the card is lost, and that is a purely psychological thing.

Doing the Pass and then shuffling is like doing a Double Lift and then a Second Deal instead of simply dealing the top card.

In the case of “Righting a Wrong” a simple, convincing and safe way of getting the selection to eighth from top could be to start an Overhand Shuffle and ask the spectator to call ‘stop’. Have her replace her selection on top of the shuffled-off cards, then continue the shuffle by running seven cards, injogging the next (or injogging a small block), and then shuffling off. Let the deck slide in Dealing Position, obtain a break with the little finger under the Injog, cut about half the cards above the break to the table, cut at the break, finally drop the remaining cards on top, leaving the cards unsquared (see “Waiter’s Theory & Actions of Recall” in *Sharing Secrets*, p. 118).

A moment later square the cards and pick them up.

This is what Ascanio would have called an “Intelligent Technique” (s. “Intelligent Movements”, *Sharing Secrets*, p. 54), i.e., you have *really shuffled* the cards, you have *really cut* the deck, nonetheless, the selection has been controlled to the eighth position from the top. All are “Active Techniques” (see “Active/Passive Techniques”, *Sharing Secret*s, p. 18), all has an innocent handling Gestalt.
Another method could be to crimp the bottom card as your key card, then shuffle seven cards to the bottom, making the crimped key card eighth card from the bottom. Now do the “Key Card in a Ribbon Spread” from *Card College 1*, p. 138, to have a card selected, and then replaced under the key block. After gathering the cards shuffle and cut to the crimp to bring the selection to eighth from the top. I would use my “Accidental Pass” (see *Secret Agenda*, “Bridge Control” – see the screenshot below for your convenience (and note my comment at the margin).



On the Bridge Control.pdf 790 kB

january 29

January 29~Bridge Control

This is an elegant way of controlling a selection to the top of the deck.

As you hold the face-down deck in loose dealing position, briefly use both hands to square it. In the process, the right hand seizes the top four-fifths, approximately, and moves it forward and back in a squaring action. While the upper packet is slid outward, the left ring and little fingers press the inner left edge of the lower packet against the heel of your left thumb, convexly bridging the inner end of the packet. This action, smoothly executed, is imperceptible.

Ribbon spread the deck face down and have someone take a card.

As he notes it, gather the spread and swing cut the top half into your left hand. Have the selection replaced on that portion and drop the right hand's remaining portion on top. Immediately ribbon spread the cards again.

After an appropriate comment, gather the spread and leave the squared deck on the table. The selection now rests under the bridged block and can be dealt with at your discretion.

Here's a good procedure: Use some comment or question to direct attention to someone, such as asking if he plays poker. Pick up the deck and place it in your left hand. What happens, however, is that you cut directly under the bridge, place the cards you've picked up into your left hand, then notice that you left some on the table and, in another in-transit action, swiftly pick those up and drop them onto the rest in your left hand. These apparently innocent actions have imperceptibly brought the selection to the top of the deck.

This is what I've dubbed «Accidental Shift», which is Zingone's

By giving the deck a few riffle shuffles you can take the bridge out of the cards while you retain the selection on top. You may now use both hands to square the deck, palming the top card in the right hand. Then give the deck with this same hand to someone for shuffling. Load the card where needed, or replace it when taking back the deck. This is a very fine management for a control and palm.

36

But there is yet another implication, maybe even more interesting.

The authors of *Royal Road to Card Magic* (actually Jean Hugard wrote it, and Fred Braue was a contributing editor) had found a very good didactical form: a sleight is described in the first part of a chapter, then one or several tricks using that sleight would illustrate how to apply it in context. This formula is so good, that I took it over for the didactical form of my own *Card College* books!

However, I also know about the weakness of this method: You have to come up with good tricks. And then you cannot use sleights that have not been taught, yet, because they will be discussed in some later chapter. So, you end up at times having to distort a good trick just to fit in the sleight taught in the technical section of the chapter.

I think that this is what happened here. “Righting a Wrong” is a trick to illustrate the chapter on the Classic Pass: the authors looked for a good trick that required a control, and because the Pass had to be used, it was used.

You will have noticed that although the Pass appears in *Card College Volume 2* (Chapter 19), it does not in *Card College 1&2 – Personal Instruction*, the video interpretation of the first two books. This is because *in my opinion the Classic Pass is one of the two most overrated sleights in the entire realm of card magic.*

You do not need the Pass to become successful in magic, and I am not talking about Siegfried & Roy, Copperfield, Silvan, Paul Daniels etc., I talk about high-caliber card

experts such as Juan Tamariz, René Lavand, Ascanio, Pit Hartling etc. – I have never seen any of them use a Classic Pass. Yeah, not because it was invisible :-), no, because they never used one.

Virtually every problem where the Pass is used can be solved by other more deceptive and safer means. And the very few tricks that require a Pass exclusively (I cannot think of a single one right now…), well, you can replace those tricks with similar tricks with the same effect, or just leave them out, there are so many other good ones!

On the other hand – and that's not a contradiction – in *Volume 4 of Card College* I have discussed several other kinds of Passes that I consider useful in certain situations (remember that there is no technique that will solve every problem in every situation – like tools of a tool box).

To conclude these ramblings, you might find it interesting to know that the so-called "Bluff Pass" (*Card College 3*, p. 555), created by the British Frederick Montague and published by Goldston in *Westminster Wizardry* (1928!), was of course not a Pass. It was meant to substitute the Classic Pass, which – as already mentioned – was the established control method, and because of that the author added "Bluff". It might very well have started the search for new control methods, and thus shook one of the prevailing beliefs of its time, creating what would nowadays be called a paradigm shift. As you can see, the small world of magic always reflects the large world of real life. A most relevant topic to ponder… but not today.

The post above again seemed to cause quite a discussion between cognoscenti and led to some final comments in *The Magic Memories 57* (30th January, 2022):

More Thoughts on "Righting a Wrong"

Kenn Ball from South Carolina had some nice things to say on the last post, and then asked, "Finally, I'd like to chime in and say that I, for one, am keenly interested in your further thoughts on 'Righting a Wrong'. Please do share them in a future post!"

OK, your wish is my command. Assuming that you still have the original of the trick and my thoughts on the control in mind, here is how I would handle and present "Righting a Wrong" once the selection has been controlled to the eighth position from the top of the face down deck.
The next problem is a presentational one: Why do you know that the selection is eight cards down as soon as the spectator announces its name? Maybe you just quickly riffle the deck toward yourself, commenting laconically, "OK, I got them." This would be an intriguing remark that makes the following statement, "Eight cards down!", more consistent.

It is not necessary to make a big deal of this, or even to give a talk about subliminal perception, something which would shift this trick from the class of "impossible tricks" to "improbable tricks" (another big subject…). Anyway, think about it.

A completely different presentational approach is to change the phenomenon: As soon as the spectator announces the name of the card, with the tip of your forefinger touch the back of the tabled deck – à la Michelangelo's creation painting in the Sistine Chappell (nothing less!) – uttering, "By magic I will move your card to the eighth position… eight, because that is the sign of eternity and a magic number." (Or anything that you like and makes sense to you… and you can change the position of the card, of course).

Now comes the countdown: Deal seven cards face down in a pile to the table, and then turn the next two cards over as one displaying an indifferent card, not the selection. This is the conflict that requires a magical solution, and it is always a strong emotional hook that has stood the test of time.

However, I feel that to now simply discard the card is fishy… at least, I find that it is not sufficiently motivated.

But how about if this was a Joker? It would make sense to say something like, "Oh, the Joker. I should have put that away at the beginning, it doesn't count." Nobody will now anticipate the climax. Besides, you can do the old gag of saying that the Joker of course represents every card, so you have, after all, not failed. The amusing situation this produces will take the heat off the discarded card (I will discuss below how to handle the situation with the Joker, if you like the idea).

To set up for the next phase, *simply replace the dealt seven-card-packet on top*, and the Joker (or the indifferent card if you do not use a Joker) will be back at position eight.

The original write-up does not say what to do with the cards counted off, and it tells you to again run seven cards. As you know, running a higher number of cards always entails a little risk, especially if you have dry hands, or if the cards are not new. It is so much easier, and logical, to replace the previously dealt cards, and a supreme example of an Intelligent Move. You could follow-up with an Intelligent Injog Shuffle and Cut (*Sharing Secrets*, p. 55) to retain top stock, and then proceed as per original instruction.

When I first read "Righting a Wrong" replacing the previously dealt cards seemed like an obvious solution, and I wondered how authors of the caliber of Hugard and Braue could overlook that. I am sure others will have come to the same conclusion. As a matter of fact, I had my friend Michael Frohnmeyer from Germany write in offering precisely this solution; (many) years ago he translated Garcia's books into German, so he should know ☺

How do you get the Joker in position to do the above, I hear some of you ask?

Although I have come up with several solutions (how else?), here is my latest effort (5th AUG 2025, 12:18), and I think it is the simplest and most direct way of solving the problem:

At the outset the Joker is on top. Deliver your Prologue, maybe, "The following piece I call 'the trick that I would have shown Michelangelo'." (Provided you later use the presentation suggested above…).

Have a card selected and shown to all; although Hugard and Braue do not mention this, it is very important that all see the card, so as to trigger the necessary emotion at the moment of apparent failure.

For the replacement, start an Overhand Shuffle, lift shuffling the first block. When spectator calls 'stop' drop the lifted block that has the Joker on top, and then ask the spectator to replace his selection on top of the lower packet held in your left hand; this brings the selection directly on top of the Joker. Continue the Overhand Shuffle by running seven cards, injogging the next, and then shuffling off. Let deck slide into Dealing Position, and then multiple cut to table thus bringing the selection into the required position.

From here on continue as detailed above, with or without the Joker idea.

With all respect and admiration for a “classic”, this one trick shows why *Royal Road to Card Magic* is outdated, and in the 21st century I would not recommend it to beginners. However, upon rereading it once you have attained expert status, it will make you think about “basic” concepts and questions, which are not that “basic” after all. It is also an excellent source to study how and why magic in general, and card magic in particular, have developed (some to the better, some to the worse).

Roberto Giobbi, Muttenz – 7th August 2025