



Inside Ed's Head

Written by Ed Hass

Edited by Sal Mannuzza

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X Marks the Spot (Finding Buried Treasure Can Be Amazing)

In September of 1992, something happened in my magical life that hadn't happened before—I read a trick in *The Linking Ring* that I made part of my permanent repertoire. It was Ben Harris's "X Marks the Spot," a trick with a "treasure hunt" theme. It required using a gaffed deck, but this was not a problem, as it is brought out as a deck with special properties. Not only did I do it for friends and office mates, I even performed it, to good effect, at a meeting of Ring 244.

I decided this would be a great trick to publish, so I started a search for Ben Harris to ask for permission to use it here. This was not at all an easy task. Finding Ben Harris via Google was easy, he has dozens of effects for sale at various places on the internet, but finding *him*, was not at all easy—I couldn't find an email address. I found myself embarking on a treasure hunt of an entirely different nature.

I did remember that my good friend, Hal, had been raving about a Ben Harris and Steve Shufton trick called "X-Ray." I asked Hal if there was any contact information for Mr. Harris on the instructions. He replied that there were two websites given, one for Ben, and the other for Steve. A search of Ben's website, www.wowbound.com, provided no contact information, but did lead to another interesting path, as I'll mention later.

I next tried Steve's website (www.shufton.com) and Eureka! There was contact information for Steve. I sent him an email explaining why I wanted to find Ben, and giving him a little background information about *Inside Ed's Head*. He replied the very same day, and said he'd pass my request on to Ben.

The next day I got another email from Steve. Ben's email server had bounced Steve's message. He told me this happened occasionally, and he'd try again. He also gave Ben's email address to me, so I could try myself, which I did.

The day after that, I got a reply from Ben. Steve's help had done the trick. (Pardon the pun.) Ben graciously granted permission to use "X Marks the Spot." I had also asked if he wanted to have me include any biographical or promotional material along with the trick. Here's what he gave me: Ben Harris is an Australian magician and author of both fiction and non-fiction.

He is obviously not a man who likes to toot his own horn. It appears he might not even *have* a horn!

Hal has been raving about Ben and Steve's X-Ray for months. Basically, the magician gives the spectator a deck of cards and turns around or walks out of the room. The spectator turns a card face up in the deck, and cases it. When the magician returns, he tells the spectator the card he turned over, and its position in the deck! I think that trick alone might be worth a little braggadocio, but Ben has a lot more output than that.

This leads me to the coincidence I mentioned earlier. Ben's current material is available exclusively (I think) from Lybrary.com, the same source for last month's column, "Rara Avis." As I mentioned, Lybrary.com is a very useful resource for magicians—even more useful, as it has a ton of Ben Harris material.

The following description is from the manuscript Ben sent me of his original write-up. I've modified it a bit, and Americanized some of the phrasing and spelling. (Those wild and crazy Aussies spell "color" with a "u"!)

X MARKS THE SPOT

Effect:

The performer describes a "Treasure Card," one card that is special.

The deck is spread face up on the table and a spectator is asked to name his favorite value. Let's say he says, "The Queens." The four Queens are removed from the spread and the deck is gathered and placed aside.

Now, the spectator is asked to name his favorite Queen. This he does, and that card is left face up on the table. In all, what has happened is that one card has been fairly and completely freely selected—no forces.

The performer explains that the entire deck is really like a treasure map, and the "Treasure Card" is in fact marked.

"X marks the spot," the performer announces, "just like on the old treasure maps, just like in the legends." To prove his point, the performer, one card at a time, shows the backs of the rejected Queens. Each red-backed card has the word "SPOT" written on its back.

He then takes the deck and deals the cards face down to the table. Every card is red-backed; every card has the word "SPOT" written on it in thick marking pen.

The only "X" is, of course, on the "Treasure Card," the performer adds. Slowly he turns over the freely selected Queen to reveal it has a BLUE BACK and a large "X" marked across it!

Preparation of the special deck:

You'll require two packs of cards; one red, one blue. Thoroughly shuffle the red deck and then remove one pair of each value at random. To do this,

ribbon-spread the deck on the table and start at the left side and move towards the right. Remove the first two aces you come across. Then remove the first two twos you come across, etc. Continue until one pair of each value is removed. Discard the balance of the deck.

Take the blue deck and remove the necessary pairs required to turn the culled red pairs into complete sets. For example, if you had removed the AH and AS from the red deck, you'll need to remove the AD and AC from the blue deck.

Repeat with each value until you have a complete deck consisting of 26 red-backed pairs and 26 blue-backed pairs. Discard the balance of the blue deck.

(Actually, by combining both discard piles you complete a second deck which can be a spare. Keep this in reserve, or give it to another magician.)



To complete the set-up, mark a large "X" on the back of each blue-backed card and the word "SPOT" on the back of each red-backed card. Do this with heavy, indelible marker.

[You might also note that by dividing a single deck into two halves of thirteen pairs, you can mark these with Xs and SPOTs, and still have essentially the same effect, losing only the difference in the color of the back. Personally, I recommend using the two colors. EH]

Thoroughly shuffle each half of the deck independently of the other and then place the red half face up on top of the blue half.

Performance:

This trick can go two different ways in performance. This only concerns the dialogue and is something we'll treat after the handling.



Introduce the deck and spread it face up across the table in a ribbon spread. [Because of the red/blue nature of the backs, I don't use a card case. I have the deck wrapped by rubber bands when I bring it out. EH] Ask a spectator to name his favorite value. Assume, as in the description, that he says "Queens." Remove the four queens from the spread, one at a time, and place them in a neat row across

the front of your close-up pad. Notice that the two cards on the left will have the same color and markings on the back as the two cards on the

right. It's important that you recognize how these cards are paired. (Photo 2.)

Now have the spectator name his favorite queen of the four. Emphasize his totally free choice and continuously give him the chance to change his mind.

Once he has settled on one particular card, gather up the other three face-up cards. First pick up the two cards that are on the other side of the selected queen. In other words, if the select queen is one of the leftmost cards on the table, pick up the rightmost cards first. Put these cards, still face up, into your left hand.

Finally pick up the "odd" queen, and place this, face-up, on top of the other two cards.

You will now display the three backs of the discarded selections as having the same colored backs. Don't draw attention to the colors though, draw attention to what's written on the backs. To show all three the same, you must execute a double turnover on the first card. I simply use a two-card push-off, but a pinky pull-down or buckle is fine.

Draw attention to the "SPOT" or "X" on its back. Flip the pair back face up, deal the top card face up to the table, and return to the left hand packet. Flip the second card face down, and call attention to the second "SPOT" or "X." Flip the card back face up and deal it to the table on top of the first. Flip the last card face down and show the third "SPOT" or "X." Again, flip this last card over and use it to scoop up the two-card pile on the table. This will keep you from inadvertently flashing the back of the odd card.

Note carefully that you have either shown three "SPOTs" or three "Xs." "This is what I meant about the effect going either of two different ways. How this is handled, patter-wise, is dealt with now.

You will now take the deck and show either more SPOTs or Xs, as the case demands.

If the first three discards have been displayed as SPOTs:
Pick up the deck, hold it face up and deal cards from the face. Turn the cards over as you deal them to display the required SPOTs. Comment, "You see, no matter which card you could have selected, and you did have a free choice, I would have SPOTTED it straight away—it's my job!"

Continue to deal and display "SPOTs." "This 2, this 6, this King, it's all so easy to SPOT. Deal through until you almost reach halfway into the deck. [Often, I only have to deal six or seven cards before the spectator's body language tells me he believes I'm dealing a deck of SPOT cards. EH] Leave the SPOT cards face-down on the table in a fairly spread pile. Build up quite

a frantic pace as you do this but do be sure to stop just prior to half way through the deck. Then table the balance of the deck to one side and immediately draw attention to the solitary, face-up selection on the table.

If, on the other hand, the case demands that you deal through the deck to show more Xs:

You simply pick up the deck, turn it face down and deal X cards from the top. As you deal the X cards from the top of the deck, turn the hand at the wrist to display their faces. You are drawing attention to 3's, 4's, Kings, etc, all with X's on their backs. (In either case it should be implied that the entire deck is marked in the fashion displayed. It's an implication, don't challenge the audience though!)

Your comments, "Look, more treasure cards, or simply decoys? The deck is like a treasure map and I did mention that, as in the classic saying - X marks the Spot! What spot, you may be wondering?"

After dealing to almost the middle of the deck, throwing X cards to the table in a face-down pile, stop, place the balance to one side and draw attention immediately to the face-up selected card.

To finish, you simply turn the freely selected card face down to reveal the contrasting back color and symbol. Your finishing line that punches the effect home is the same no matter which way the effect goes. The only difference is in the verbal highlighting of the phrase. It's either:

"You see, X DOES mark the spot!"

Or

"You see, X does mark THE SPOT!"

[To briefly summarize the dealing procedure: If the selected card is from the leftmost, LOWER pair, you'll deal the cards from the UPPER part of the face-up deck, turning them face down as you deal. If the selection is from the rightmost, UPPER part of the deck, you'll need to deal off the LOWER cards by turning the deck face down, and briefly displaying the faces of the cards as you patter about the backs. EH]

Next time: Lybrary.com strikes again!

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