

# The Elmsley Count

A lecture by **Steve Truglia** to The Young Magicians Club  
at *The Magic Circle* July 2012

**Alex Elmsley** (2 March 1929 – 8 January 2006), was a British Magician and computer expert. He was noted for his invention of the *Ghost Count*, later named the Elmsley Count in his honour. He created mathematical card tricks, and published on the subject of the mathematics of the faro shuffle.

He began practicing magic in 1946, as a teenager. He studied physics and mathematics at Cambridge University; whilst there he was also secretary of the Pentacle Club. His day job was as a patent agent, and later computer expert. He was an amateur card and close-up magician. He was awarded an AMA Creative Fellowship in 1972.

He created a number of magic tricks, including the *Ghost Count*, *Between Your Palms*, *Point of Departure* and *Diamond Cut Diamond*.

He wrote *Elmsley's 4 Card Trick* in 1967, in which the Ghost Count was first published, *Cardwork* in 1975, and was the subject of *The Collected Works of Alex Elmsley* (vol. 1 1991, vol. 2 1994).

**The Elmsley Count** was developed from the Eye Count by Edward Victor and the Jordan Count. In previous years it was often performed 'at the fingertips', as popularised by Dai Vernon's 'Twisting The Aces', but in more modern times, is performed from the dealer's grip.

**The Effect** is to count cards from one hand to another in a casual manner. Depending on the routine it can show all the cards face up or face down, or to be all of one colour etc. The count can then be repeated to make it appear that one card is now turned face up, for example, or that one card is now a different colour etc. In fact a huge type of stunning visual effects along these lines, can be achieved with the Elmsley Count.

As a rule of thumb, the count will hide the third card from the top as displayed to the spectator, (if there are four cards in the packet), but still appear to show four cards fairly. It can be used to hide more than one card, and as many as three can be 'hidden' if they are together from position three. The rule of thumb for multiple cards being hidden is that the top, (as presented to the spectator), second and bottom cards need to be the cards you want to show. The cards to be hidden are at position three, through to the second from last card.

**Learning the Count** is all about finding which handling suits your hands, and slowly developing a 'feel' for it. Once the skills are in place, practice, practice, practice; but only once it's looking correct. With any skill development remember practice does not make perfect, PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT, so be careful how and what you practice.

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**The Mechanics** for my handling are as follows:

Take four cards and arrange them top to bottom in the order, face down, face down, face up, face down. We are going to hide the face up card.

- 1) Hold all four card packet in the right hand at the fingertips, meaning thumb on top of packet, first and second fingers underneath in the middle of the right hand, (long), side of the packet.
- 2) Casually show the left hand empty as it moves over to the right hand packet as if to count cards from the top.
- 3) As left thumb contacts the top card, the left first finger settles under the packet at the top edge of the packet. As the thumb draws off the top card, the first finger acts as a guide to allow only one card off the top. The top card is thus dealt off the top into left hand dealer position.
- 4) The left hand comes back to the packet, still holding the single card. As it does this two things are going to happen at the same time, (and here's the crux of this move); as the card in the left hand moves under the packet, and the left thumb comes over the top to simulate drawing off another card. At this very point the card going under the packet is going to be wedged under the fingertips of the right hand AND the right hand thumb pushes off all the cards above the original bottom card of the packet, which are taken away by the left hand. Your position should now be two cards in the left hand moving away, and two cards left in the right hand. It appears that you have just drawn two cards off the top of the packet. This is a very 'knacky' move so stick with it until it falls into place. It is well worth the initial effort.
- 5) Now the easy bit; the left hand takes off the top card in the right hand, then again for the last card.

Try to keep an even pace, and don't speed up for the easy moves at the end. Try to keep the cards square as you practice, and keep the movements relaxed. It's a good idea with any sleight, to practice doing the movement for real, (so really draw off four cards in this manner), then perform the sleight, noticing if it looks the same.

**Taking it further** involves adding more cards to be hidden from the spectator, experimenting with the dealer grip or 'at the fingertips', where the fingers are at each long side of the packet. This handling is particularly useful for larger sized cards. Using the count handling to show three cards as four is also very useful.

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**The Tricks** I perform in the lecture are chosen for their relevance to the count, and are at different levels of difficulty, showing some of the lovely visual effects which can be performed using this wonderful sleight.

- 1) **The Think Ace Trick** is based on an idea that both Marlo and Martin Gardner independently worked out. So I would give credit to Marlo/ Gardner. Marlo used it purely as a one-off effect, name an Ace and it has an odd back; and Gardner used it in a four phase routine where each Ace is seen to have an odd back, one after another
  
- 2) **Bedazzled**, which is a Peter Duffie trick based on Alex Elmsley's Dazzle, which is a great trick, but it involves Elmsley's Everchange Count, which shows four cards as five. It using a buckle, and each move involves a half pass, repeated seven times! Bedazzled uses Elmsley Counts and no half passes, so it's cleaner. This handling of Bedazzled is credited to Tom Whitestone MIMC. If you see him around HQ, ask to see it; in his hands it is truly Bedazzling.
  
- 3) **Your Favourite Number** is my own routine based on a Cull, JK Hartman's Secret Subtraction, Elmsley Count and Ascanio Spread. I thought it would be nice to personalise a trick for the spectator, and this is one method I regularly use in an impromptu situation.
  
- 4) **Reswindled** by Caleb Wiles is a fantastic spectacle. This is Caleb's reworking of Paul Harris's Reset, which began life as Bro. John Hamman's Underground Transposition. Although an advanced routine involving a mixture of sleights, the beautifully dramatic moments are courtesy of our old friend the Elmsley Count.

I hope that these effects have demonstrated what can be achieved with the Elmsley Count. If it has inspired you to learn it, then I've done my job. Find a handling method that suits YOUR hands, enjoy the magic and above all, have fun ;-)

**A Video Tutorial** I made for you on the Elmsley Count can be found here:  
[http://youtu.be/\\_MUjqxMRIU0](http://youtu.be/_MUjqxMRIU0)

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July 2012