

# THE CHRONICLES OF DECLAN PIERCE



A SHADOW  
BETWEEN WORLDS  
DECLAN PIERCE

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## To the Privy

Perhaps the most appealing and enjoyable aspect of magic books for magicians like us is the fact that they all contain secrets. My hope is that, by this measure, the appeal in what I have tried to accomplish in my books comes through for you. I wanted to share my story as well as my own unique magic effects with you. This endeavor has nevertheless proved to be quite a challenging one despite my particular set of skills.

There were challenges at every turn. First, I had to force myself to explore the depths of my own storytelling abilities despite considerable doubt in my skills in artful articulation. Art itself was another obstacle. I wanted to provide at least some imagery to help arouse your imagination. Although I would not claim that I am entirely devoid of talent within the realm of illustration, sadly, I did not find those skills quite up to par for the purposes of my books. I instead chose to dive head first into the world of artificial intelligence for the illustrations presented in my series.

A.I. is a marvelous tool to wield, though it clearly still has some ground to cover. As you read, you may notice that the characters portrayed throughout the book from one image to the next lack a certain level of consistency. Apparently, this is still a well-known shortcoming within the realm of A.I. generated imaging. If it makes you feel any better, you can simply regard the slightly varying character visages as a purposeful layer of confusion intended to keep our true identities a mystery.

Lastly, there was the issue of the tricks themselves. I wanted to stick within the realm of card tricks and mentalism – as is what I am most familiar with in casual settings. There were many presentations I had in mind but I also didn't want to include any effects that were overtly challenging on the fingers. My hope was that the vast majority of my readers would already have at least a basic knowledge of things such as a false cut, false shuffle or pinky break – sleights of that level. I spent a lot of time curating and even revising some tricks to make them understandable in written form as well as manageable enough for the novice magician with at least a few sleights under his/her belt. I hope you find them to be inspiring and as equally enjoyable to perform as I do.

## Chapter 1: Secrets in the Blood



Magicians are quite accustomed to people asking them to reveal their secrets. It's always something like, "How'd you do that?" or "What's the secret?" To which the magician replies, "A magician never reveals his secrets." Ha! Thinking about this always makes me laugh. The irony here is two-fold. Firstly, magicians absolutely will—and habitually do – reveal their secrets, for the right price. Second, the question, "What's your secret?" is particularly amusing to me because, unlike other magicians, knowing my secrets would keep you up at night. Hell, they keep me up at night.

My name is **Declan Pierce**, and I can confidently say that there are very few secrets safe from me. I'm a professional magician here in the small touristy town of **Fairmont** - just another act under the marquee lights of **The Marlowe Theater**. That said, I can also say

that there is no magician in the world with a magic act like mine. Though I'm proud of the skills I've acquired to become a professional magician, there's far more to my life – and my magic—than mere sleight of hand and misdirection. Like any other good magic book, I intend to expose it all here within these pages – and hopefully in many more to come.

Oh, don't worry, I'll share some sleights, tricks, and my own magical musings to try and inspire you. But the real secrets? The real secrets in these pages are unlike anything you could ever imagine. That's because, in my world, magic is both illusion and harrowing reality. It's **REAL**.

Yes, you heard right. **REAL**. You mean magic like Harry Potter? Well, not really. I must admit that I, like so many others, am a huge fan of the Harry Potter series. Perhaps they resonated particularly with me due to the similarity between the secret magical world the series takes place in and the secret magical world I was born into. The use of magic in my world, however, is something else entirely. I could slow-walk you through everything, but I'd prefer to just shove you right off into the deep end and reveal the most important bits up front. You see, for me and those like me, magic runs through our veins, passed down through **ancient bloodlines**. We're all told the history: an ancient war between the **Fae** races and humans who once lived together in relative harmony here on Earth. Technically, we refer to it as the Earth Realm because there are other realms of existence, but more on that later.

Depending on who's telling the story, either the Fae greedily robbed Earth of the magic that was once accessible to all, **OR** the Fae fled to protect themselves and their way of life from the greedy humans who misused magic only to fulfill their own power-hungry ambitions. I

personally come from a more reasonable school of thought that believes there was undoubtedly the presence of greed on both sides, but it matters not. Either way, we all know what happened as a result. The Fae abandoned Earth for a new realm we now call “**The Nether**,” and the ancient Fae mages united to create a powerful spell that drained Earth of all its magic, taking it with them.

However, in a desperate attempt to hold on to some of that magic, several elite human sorcerers of the time—masters of various magical arts—combined their powers to create a powerful counter-spell. These weren’t simple conjurers; they were the greatest human mages of their time – men, and women with powers so legendary they still echo through our secret history today. Together, they cast a binding spell which fused some of the escaping magic into their very blood before it could be lost forever. From them, the first bloodlines were born, and over the years, their magic was preserved and passed down through each generation.

Today, I’m both privileged and, depending on the day, cursed, to be part of this ancient bloodline magic world—a world you’ve likely unknowingly crossed paths with many times. It’s hidden, unknown to the ordinary people of this world. We refer to ordinary people as **Normies** but I find the term **Laymen** equally applicable. And in this regard, it’s how I see you all.

But, if you’ve managed to read this far without taking my words as anything other than pure fantasy, you’re a layman no longer. Consider yourself among **The Privy** – privileged readers of my works and thus knowers of the secret bloodline world I am part of.



There are many secrets in the blood magic that people like me wield. For starters, it's not a passive gift. Magic is a living force, something that must be nurtured, trained, and pushed to discover its true potential. Not everyone is born equal in this world. People come into it with quirks, natural abilities, dispositions, and ambitions that may or may not pair well with the bloodline gift they're born with. Those who dedicate their lives to perfecting their abilities become forces to be reckoned with, while those who rest on their family legacy find themselves sorely outmatched. Like any skill, bloodline magic must be honed. Failure in this regard, comes with far more severe consequences than any layman could imagine.

Another thing you should know about bloodline magic: the original sorcerers who bound magic to their blood were specialists, each a master in a different form of magic. The abilities of each bloodline vary dramatically, and are inherited, not chosen. It is well established that every bloodline can trace their magical legacy back to one of these original sorcerers. Each of their specialties shaped the form and nature of the magic passed down through their descendants. As the bloodlines grew and spread, these powers evolved, expanding into new forms and applications that even the original sorcerers could never have foreseen. This has led to the formation of what we now call the **Orders**.

Members of each Order share the same bloodline gift and therefore access to the same blood-magic traits inherited from one of the original sorcerers. This means that each Order has its own specialty – its own ethos. I belong to **The Order of Shadows**, descended from the ancient sorcerer **Kael Umbros** who was the first to master the art of darkness itself. This was a man who could control shadows at will, slip unseen into darkness and listen in on secrets that weren't his to hear. Over the centuries, our Order has refined these skills,

mastering shadow magic in ways that make us one of the most feared, albeit distrusted of all the Orders. Our magic may not be as overtly powerful as others, but no Order holds more secrets than the Order of Shadows.

And then there are the other Orders. Take, for example, the **Order of Might**—warriors with the ability to magically enhance their own bodies (among other things) allowing them to run much faster, hit harder and jump higher than anything in the natural world of men. They're known more for their brutality than their subtlety. There's the **Order of Embers**, who can summon and control flames to a devastating extent. There are several others, but our fiercest rivals are the **Order of Mist**, masters of illusion and deception. If the Order of Shadows are keepers of truth, then the Order of Mist is truth's greatest manipulator. They relish the idea of warping your senses so much that you can no longer be sure of what's real anymore. They are the only ones capable of playing our game, and the rivalry between our Orders has existed since the very beginning. The only thing more devious than an agent of the Order of Shadows is one from the Order of Mist.

Need a breather? Sorry. I told you I was going to push you off into the deep end. We're just getting started.

Each Order has a leader who represents them in what we call the **Elder's Circle**—an assembly of all Order leaders who occasionally convene to discuss and, hopefully, peacefully agree on magical affairs. You can think of it as somewhat like a parliament without a prime minister.



My father, **Arthur Pierce**, sits at the head of the Order of Shadows—a man whose ambitions are as deep as the shadows we command. To him, it's all about strategy and control, about protecting our Order from rivalries that could tear us apart. He's spent his life building alliances, breaking them, and gathering secrets to keep our family in power—what he calls “maintaining the balance.” To him, I'm just another tool, albeit a valuable one, but a tool, nonetheless. To me, he's not much better than the Order of the Mist, he works so tirelessly to keep in check.

Don't misunderstand me. I know the Order's work is necessary; someone must keep the other Orders in line, to prevent any one of them from gaining too much power. But I also know how quickly such duties can twist into something darker. My father frequently sends me on assignments and it's always with the same justification: “We're keeping the balance.” But I can't help but wonder if the balance he so passionately speaks of isn't (at least in some sense) just a justification for gaining more power?

My older brother, **Alistair**, is a loyal servant to this cause. He believes wholeheartedly in the old ways, in duty and tradition. He's the golden boy, the one who takes to his assignments with pride, the one who thrives in the world of secrecy and subterfuge. He's not as good as me, of course, but he is my brother, and no matter how much I try to distance myself from my family drama, he's always there to pull me back in, reminding me of the roles we play and the legacy we carry.

If all this feels a bit heavy, that's because it is. And so, I've found my escape into the laymen's world as a magician – a fitting irony, I know. I'm quite content being a performer who uses sleight of hand and illusion to entertain tourists. The Marlowe Theater where I

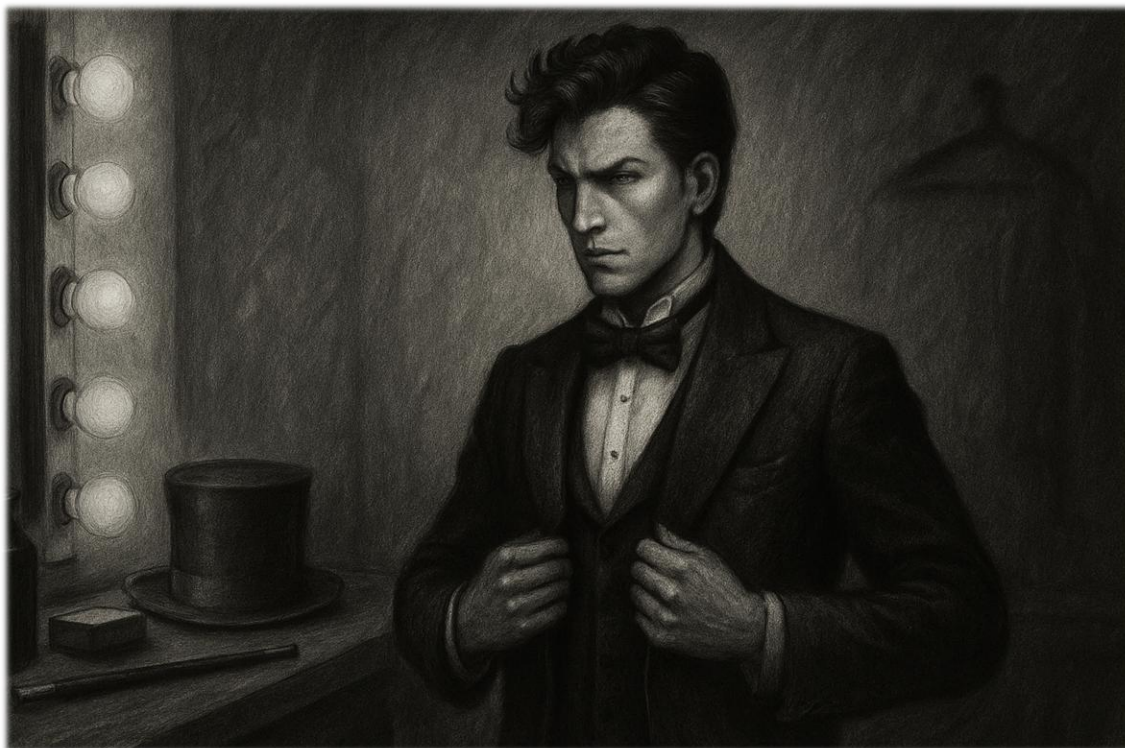
perform draws all manners of curious travelers and weekenders looking for a bit of mystery. They have no idea that the stunning magic they watch me perform is laughable compared to what I'm truly capable of, and that's the way it needs to be. Under the stage lights, I'm just another showman. For me, it provides the perfect excuse for maintaining a secretive and mysterious demeanor.

My father disapproves, of course. To him, it's a waste of my talents, bordering on betrayal of everything our family has worked for. "You have a duty," he tells me. "You're part of something greater." But I've seen what this "something greater" does to people. I've watched my father manipulate and even betray some of our once strongest alliances between Orders. Secrets hold a unique power. And as I said before, among the shadows, there are no secrets safe from us. Of course, my father is far from the only one with a high tolerance for betrayal. The Elder's Circle is essentially a bureaucratic masterclass in how to selfishly form and then break alliances. I've seen betrayal in ways you can't imagine, the kind that makes it hard to look someone in the eye again. I know all too well the weight our bloodlines carry, and if I could, I'd leave it all behind.

It's not as if I have much choice, though. No one can truly turn their back on their Order. My father knows this and uses it to his advantage, summoning my unique skills whenever it suits him. I might as well be an extension of his own shadow, his invisible agent, sent to gather information, making sure the Orders remain in balance – or, at least, balanced in the way he deems fit. He sends me to keep our rivals in check, to uncover plots that might threaten our position. And I'll do it because the consequences of refusal are worse than the price I pay to keep him satisfied.

So here I am, caught between two worlds – the bright lights of the stage in the laymen's world and the shadows of the magical one. After years of living among laymen though, I've developed a taste for using my unique abilities to help solve mundane mysteries for them. It helps me feel like I'm doing something good, something real, even as I slip through the darkness for my father's sake. I tell myself it's temporary, that one day I'll find a way out. But deep down, I know that shadows never let go.

## Chapter 2: Out of the Shadows and on to the Stage



Shadows cling to you, follow you, shape you.

After a long night under the stage lights at The Marlowe, I find comfort in their familiar embrace. The moment I step out of the theater, leaving behind the noise, the crowds, and the artificial glow of the marquee, I let the darkness consume me. It's the only time I can truly be alone.

I live just far enough away from the heart of Fairmont's nightlife to breathe. My flat sits tucked along a quiet, cobbled street, well removed from the clamor of tourists and weekenders who flood the district. The building itself is old, Victorian, like much of the town's historic district – its walls thick with age, its floors whispering secrets beneath every step. It suits me.

Inside, the space is dimly lit, bathed in the amber glow of a single brass lamp that casts long, wavering shadows across the room. The furniture is antique, heavy, and dark – unique pieces that have seen far more than I ever will. A tall, overstuffed bookshelf leans against one wall, filled with aged volumes of stage magic and, in places, far more esoteric knowledge. My desk is an oversized slab of oak that's far too large for the room. It's usually cluttered with playing cards, old notes, and the occasional remnant of a past performance. Two velvet armchairs and a loveseat complete the space, though they remain largely untouched. It is not a place designed for having company.

The few people I associate with at The Marlowe have long since given up trying to understand me. To them, I'm distant. Unapproachable. A man who appears only when the stage lights turn on and vanishes before the applause dies out. I don't usually linger after shows or stay for drinks at the bar across the street. Conversation is limited to what's necessary, and even then, I keep it brief. I think people mistake my quiet demeanor for

arrogance, or as some elaborate effort to maintain a persona, but the truth is simpler than that—I prefer keeping a distance. It's easier and safer this way.

Still, for all my efforts to remain an outsider, I have carved out a space for myself at The Marlowe.

The theater is old, its faded elegance still clinging to its walls like a forgotten melody. The marquee outside flickers in the night, calling in passersby who are looking for an escape – whether through laughter, music, or mystery. It's home to an eclectic collection of performers, each vying for the audience's attention in their own way. But at its heart, The Marlowe belongs to the magicians.

When I first arrived at the Marlowe, I was nothing more than another young magician trying to carve out a place in a town that thrives on illusion. But I learned quickly. While the others practiced in the open, I stayed in the wings, watching. I studied their movements, their misdirection, their control over the crowd. I memorized the way their hands moved, the way they directed attention.

And when mere observation wasn't enough, I used my gift.

People are quite open with their secrets when they think no one is listening – when they believe they are alone in front of the dim glow of a dressing room mirror, muttering their patter and stage direction to themselves. They've let slip to me far more than they realize. I listened. I watched. I learned. Before I had even set foot on stage, I knew the mechanics behind every trick performed at The Marlowe. Mind you, I didn't steal anyone's effects and knowing how they were done was not enough.

With what I had learned, I needed to create my own illusions – the mastery of which required a lot of practice. Late at night, long after the last curtains fell and the theater emptied, I stayed behind, working with the props, refining my sleights, training my hands to obey the subtlest of movements. The classic passes, the false shuffles, the seamless vanishes – I drilled them all, over and over, until they became second nature.

The shadows help, of course, but I never let them do all the work. I have a little more integrity in the skills I've acquired than that.

Still, I would be lying if I said I didn't allow them to enhance certain illusions of mine. My shadow abilities help add a certain flare and style to my performances that no other magician can quite match. A flicker of movement where there should be none. A disappearance just a hair too smoothly. It's enough to make even the most seasoned magicians question what they're seeing.

I know this because they ask for my secrets constantly. They press, convinced that I must be using some secret device they can't see. I give them a knowing smile, and the same typical response: "Well, a magician will give up his secrets for a price, but sorry gentlemen, this one's not for sale."

I shouldn't be surprised though. A couple of my tricks are just beyond explanation – even for professional magicians. Take, for example, **The Spotlight Exchange** – a closing routine I designed myself.

The premise is simple. I have two participants on stage who have signed cards. At the end, the cards are magically found, but when found, the cards don't match the participants that

signed them. To correct this small hiccup and to complete the illusion, the lights dim, and I stand center stage beneath a single beam of light. The audience sees everything – both signed cards, one in each hand. Then, slowly, I extend my arms outward, letting them slip just beyond the reach of the light and into the surrounding darkness. When I bring them back, the cards have impossibly switched places.

To the audience, it looks like a miracle.

To the magicians watching from the crowd, it's feat of magic impossible to achieve.

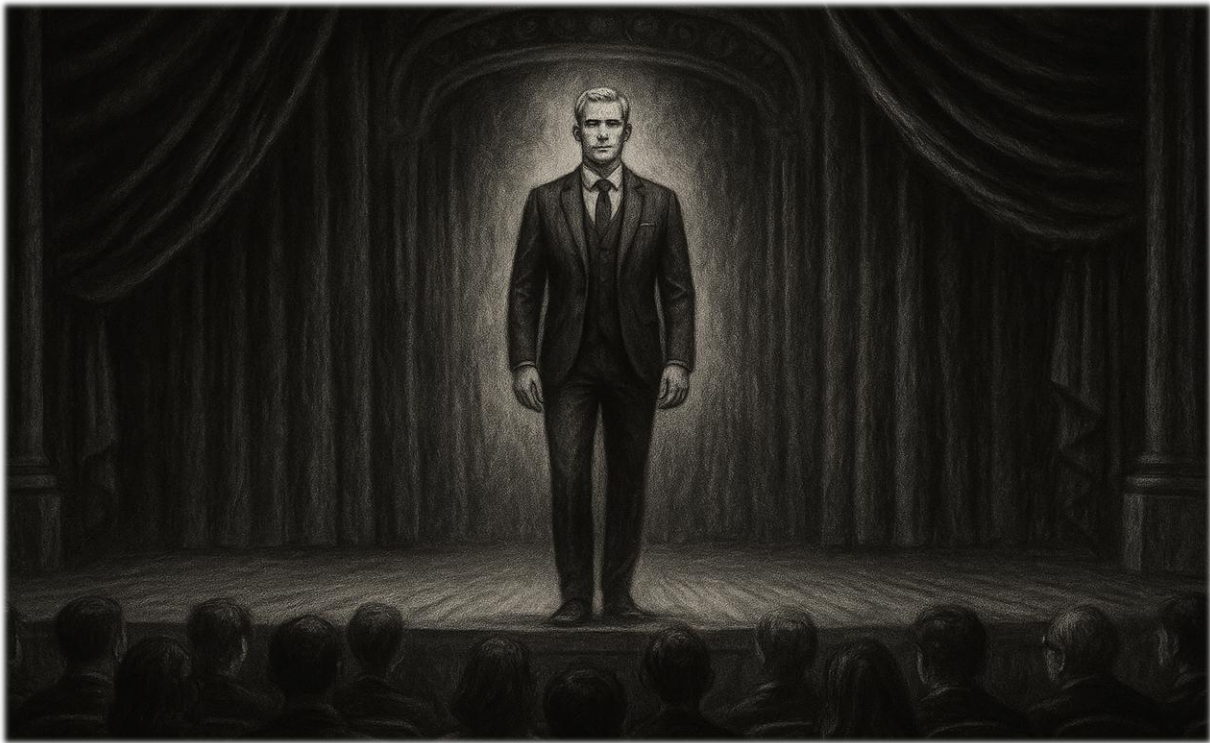
They study the lighting, my hands, my posture. They analyze every angle, searching for the moment of the switch. But there is no sleight of hand. Not in the way they understand anyways. The trick is not in the sleight, nor the distraction – It's in the shadows.

That's the real magic. The kind I can never explain. The kind that keeps them all guessing.

New performers come and go at The Marlowe all the time, some staying only a few months, others taking their act elsewhere when the allure of Fairmont fades. Most pass through without making much of an impression.

**Simon Winters** was an exception.





The first time I saw him, he was standing in the wings, waiting for his debut performance. Even offstage, he carried himself with confidence, his sharp eyes taking in everything around him. He was younger than I expected, his presence commanding but effortless. He had the look of a man who had already won over his audience before he had even spoken a word.

When he finally stepped into the spotlight, it was immediately clear that he wasn't like the others. Simon didn't just perform – he controlled. He had an uncanny ability to lead an audience exactly where he wanted them, to make them believe they had free will when, in reality, every reaction, every laugh, every gasp had been orchestrated from the start. His patter was quick yet precise. His timing was impeccable. He didn't just read minds – he

wove a narrative around the illusion, building anticipation with each calculated pause before pulling the rug out from under the audience.

I watched from the darkness that night, analyzing every movement, every shift in tone, every carefully placed misdirection. The tricks themselves weren't that groundbreaking, but the way he delivered them was masterful.

I won't deny it. I learned from him.

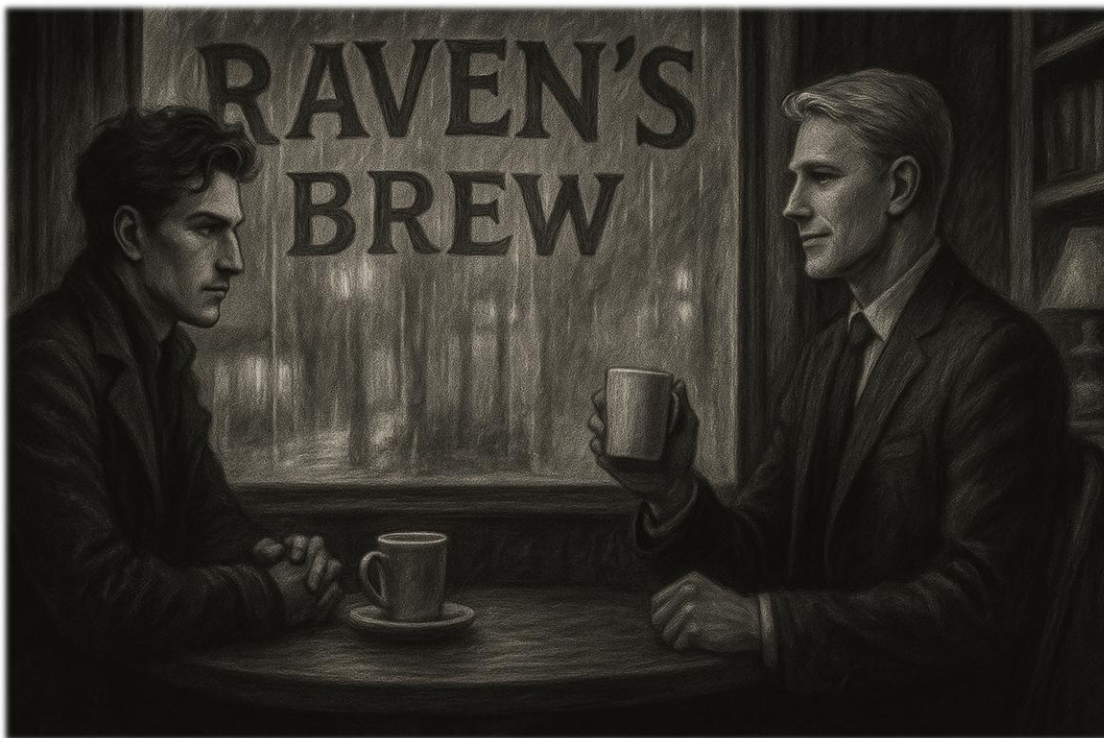
Simon's performance was a lesson in showmanship, in how to captivate an audience not just with technique, but with presence. Over time, I found myself taking notes from his performances, refining my own delivery, and adjusting my rhythm. I kept my act dark, yes, but I began to see the value in a well-timed pause, in the power of silence, in the weight of a well-crafted story.

There's a difference between deception and cunning. Between a trick and a performance. Simon knew how to make masterful use of both - better than most.

I have spent my life in the shadows, collecting secrets, uncovering truths. I have seen deception in its purest form. And yet, that night, as I watched Simon command the stage, I saw something I had never seen before.

I saw a man who could make people **want** to believe.

### Chapter 3: A Whisper in the Dark



That's the real trick, isn't it? Not just fooling people but making them want to be fooled. Making them crave the mystery, the deception, the fleeting moment of believing the impossible before the bitter taste of reason and doubt begins to creep back in. It's why they come to The Marlowe. It's why they stare wide-eyed at the stage, eager to be taken somewhere beyond reality.

It's why I took notice of Simon.

In the weeks that followed his arrival, I watched him work—not just on stage, but off. Simon had a way of commanding attention, of pulling people into his orbit. He had that effortless charm, the kind that makes people want to be near him, to listen to him, to trust

him. Even the most skeptical audience gave in eventually, letting themselves believe, if only for a moment, that what he did was real.

I respected that. I envied it if I'm being honest.

So, when I happened to run into him outside of The Marlowe one afternoon, it wasn't entirely unexpected.

I had slept in late one morning and decided to leave the house, craving something stronger than the weak excuse for coffee I kept at my flat. Fairmont was always in flux this time of day – the lingering quiet of the early hours giving way to the steady hum of foot traffic, the smell of fresh bread from the bakeries mixing with the salt air drifting up from the waterfront. I followed my usual path, slipping through the quieter streets toward **The Raven's Brew**, a small café tucked between a bookstore and a vintage shop. It was one of the few places I could sit without being disturbed, where the world outside felt distant and contained.

I stepped inside, ordered my usual, and turned toward the corner where I always sat. That's when I saw him.

Simon, seated by the window, watching the rain collect on the glass.

He noticed me almost immediately, flashing a smile that was equal parts amusement and curiosity. He had that look—like he already knew something I didn't, like he had been waiting for this exact moment.

“Declan Pierce,” he said, lifting his coffee in greeting. “The man, the myth, the enigma himself.”

I arched a brow, unimpressed. “Hmph, I smirked. “You sound like a man who’s been rehearsing his first words to me.”

“No, not rehearsing, he corrected, gesturing toward the empty seat across from him.

“Though you are somewhat of an enigma.”

I hesitated for a moment, then sat. Partly out of curiosity, partly because I wasn’t in the mood to argue. My coffee arrived soon arrived, and for a few moments, neither of us spoke.

Simon was obviously the one to break the silence with what quickly turned into a relentless series of probing questions.

At first, it was the usual – what it was like working at The Marlowe, what the other performers were like, what I thought of the audiences. I gave him vague answers, just enough to keep the conversation moving while I enjoyed my Espresso. Simon was perceptive, though. I could tell he was watching me just as much as I was watching him, studying my reactions, filing away minute details for later use.

As the conversation stretched on, something shifted. His tone grew more serious, his words more deliberate.

“There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you,” he said, stirring the last remnants of his coffee. “It’s about **Victor Lorne**.”

I didn't react – not outwardly, at least. I knew Victor, of course. Another mentalist, but one with a reputation for being more style than substance. He was all about flare and grandiosity. He had a decent following, but no one would have called him a genius or even unique.

Simon leaned forward slightly, lowering his voice. "I think he's stealing my act."

I set my coffee down. "Stealing? How so?"

"It's not just inspiration," Simon said, shaking his head. "It's not like he's borrowing ideas or mimicking my style. His new material in his recent performance – it's far too similar to a couple new routines I've been developing. The presentation, the timing, the patter – I'm telling you it's mine. I'm talking about brand-new routines that I haven't shared with anyone."

I studied him carefully, weighing his words. Magicians stealing other magicians' material is unfortunately not all that uncommon in our line of work – although some are more blatant about it than others. Simon, however, didn't strike me as the type to jump to conclusions without reason.

"Do you keep notes?" I asked.

He nodded. "I keep several private notebooks. Every trick, every idea, every detail of my performances. I do take them to the Marlowe on occasion but mostly I keep them safe in my house. No one has access to them but me."

"And yet your saying Victor's routine matches yours exactly?"

“Well, pretty damn close!” His frustration was evident, his fingers tapping an uneven rhythm against the table. “I may have just chalked the whole thing up to coincidence except for the fact that it’s happened twice over. He’s performing two effects that I’ve just barely finalized – tricks I’ve been refining for months, things that aren’t published anywhere. There’s no way he just happened to develop two of my own personally and secretly developed effects all on his own. By chance? – come on.”

I said nothing for a moment, considering the possibilities.

If Simon was right, and Victor Lorne was somehow getting access to his notes, that meant one of two things: either someone was leaking information to him, or Victor had found a way to get to Simon’s notebooks himself.

Or, perhaps, it was something else entirely.

“You don’t have proof,” I said, more as a statement than a question.

“No,” Simon admitted. “Not yet. But I’m not crazy! There’s no other explanation. I just don’t know how he’s doing it.”

I sat back in my chair, watching the rain trace slow paths down the window. Simon was perceptive, meticulous. If he said something was off, I believed him.

But this wasn’t just about stolen tricks.

This was about a magician’s greatest fear – the idea that his secrets weren’t his own. It was the feeling that the thing separating him from the rest of the world, the thing that made him special, had been compromised.



I understood that feeling all too well.

Finally, I exhaled slowly, rolling my shoulders as if shaking off some unseen weight.

"I'll look into it," I said.

Simon blinked. "You will?"

"Yeah, I have a soft spot for a good mystery," I said with a small grin.

That, and I was curious.

If Victor was stealing Simon's secrets, I wanted to know how. I wanted to know what I was dealing with. Because if there was one thing I had learned in my years working as a shadow agent for my father, it was this:

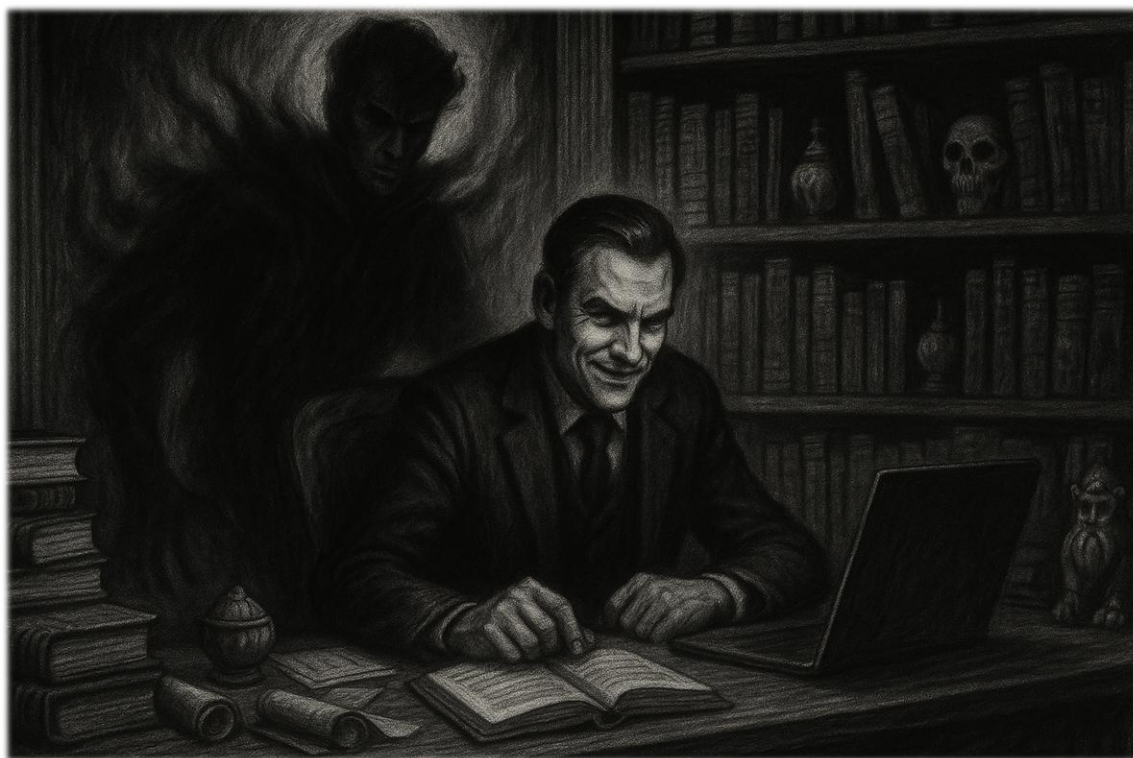
Secrets don't just disappear and coincidentally resurface somewhere else.

They don't just slip through your fingers like stray thoughts, lost to the wind.

They're either willingly given or unwillingly taken.

This case with Simon seemed like the latter and I was going to get to the bottom of it.

## Chapter 4: Into the Den of Thieves



If Victor Lorne had taken Simon's secrets, I was going to find out how.

That night, after the Marlowe had closed down, the streets of Fairmont still hummed with their usual late-night energy – tourists stumbling between bars, neon lights flickering in rain-damp puddles, conversations weaving through the crisp night air. I moved past them unseen, slipping through the shifting glow of the streetlamps as I made my way toward Victor's flat.

It sat at the top of an old, renovated building in the city's entertainment district. The kind of place that screamed success, or at least the illusion of it. He had money, sure, but it was new money, loud money. The kind that lived in minimalist apartments with leather couches

that no one ever sits in, glass-top tables that served no real purpose, and a mini bar stocked for show rather than use.

For most people, getting inside may have been a challenge. But for me, doors are kind of a joke. There's a near infinite number of ways I can enter a house undetected by anyone.

I approached the side alley, slipping into the deep shadow stretching along the outer wall. It's so easy, it's like second nature for me. As long as there's a crack for darkness to exist, I can flow my body right through it – no matter how thin or small. Like any other house, Victor's flat would undoubtedly have no shortage of small fractures – spaces where light failed, where shadows stretched between floorboards, under doors and between window frames. And me, I don't just step in and out of the shadows – I am the shadows.

I let my body dissolve, merging with the darkness, feeling myself sink into the cold. I would say you could compare it to the feeling of your whole body melting but the end result isn't the feeling of being a puddle of goo on the floor but rather weightlessness combined with effortless freedom. Where my mind goes, my body follows. A fraction of a second later, I was inside - accessed through a sliver of a gap underneath his front door.

The flat was just as soulless as I expected. Expensive furniture, a spotless counter, a collection of self-indulgent posters from past performances framed on the wall. But I wasn't here to admire Victor's taste – or lack thereof. I made my way to his desk, where a stack of photocopies sat scattered out in the open.

I leaned over, scanning the pages and then a title caught my eye.

### **Simon's Trick – "The Phantom Echo"**

I smirk tugged the corner of my mouth.

Simon had mentioned this mentalism effect specifically – the one he swore Victor had stolen. And now, here it was, in Victor's flat, with crisp, photocopied pictures of Simon's notes.

I reached into my coat and pulled out my phone, taking quick pictures of each page. Copies of the copies would be enough. I didn't need to take them physically – Victor would notice if they went missing. But photographic proof? This was a great start.

I flipped through a few pages and came across something that made me laugh.

### **"Phantasmio."**

Of course, he did.

Victor, being the creative powerhouse he was, had renamed Simon's ***Phantom Echo*** into something lame yet still over-the-top. It was the kind of name that belonged to a Vegas stage act with too many pyrotechnics.

I shook my head and took the last few pictures. As much as this was all amusing, I still didn't know how Victor had managed to get a hold of these pictures. Simon hadn't shared them with anyone, and there was no evidence of a break-in at his flat.

Then in Victor's study, I noticed that his computer monitor was still turned on even though the screen was black.

It was on a small desk positioned near the center of the room, its glow faint in the dimly lit space. I tapped a key, and the display jumped brightly to life.

What I saw was unexpected.

It was a live feed.

The camera's angle was sharp, well-placed, focused directly on a wooden desk cluttered with notes and props.

It was Simon's home desk.

That's how he did it.

Victor hadn't just stolen Simon's material. He had installed a hidden webcam inside Simon's flat. He had been watching him rehearse, listening as Simon practiced the patter for his routines. All Victor had to do was work out his own minor alterations to the scripting and presentation.

This was next level thievery and surveillance.

I let out a slow breath, keeping my half amazed and half appalled emotions in check. Things were certainly getting interesting though. The only thing I needed to figure out was how to go about catching him in the act.

The answer was simple and fitting – surveil the surveiler.

Years of working as a shadow spy for my father means that I happen to have similar surveillance equipment of my own that I've had to use from time to time. The equipment I use is better, but it looked like I would have to come back later.

I stepped back into the shadows, letting myself blend back into the walls leaving the premises just as easily as I entered.

### **Watching the Watcher**

I returned a little after midnight.

This time, Victor was just arriving home.

From the streets outside, I watched as he entered his flat. He turned the lights on and the glow from his living room flickered against the curtains. There was no need to be patient. It wasn't as if he'd be able to see me anyways. I dipped back into the shadows, glided across the street, up the stairs and through the very same crack underneath Victor's front door as I had earlier that night.

Victor was at his desk, oblivious to my presence. He had changed into something more comfortable – no more stage-ready blazer and polished dress shoes. He looked relaxed, unaware that he was no longer the only one spying tonight.

I moved carefully, molding myself into the darkness along the floor, the walls, the ceiling.

From this perspective, I saw everything.

Victor leaned forward, tapping his keyboard. The monitor flared to life.

Simon's flat appeared on the screen.

And then, as if on cue, Simon himself entered the frame. He was alone, shuffling through papers, completely unaware that someone was watching him.

Victor smiled to himself, settling in.

That was all I needed.

I began to ease myself smoothly toward the bookshelf behind Victor's desk, my form shifting between the shadows along the wall. As long as there's darkness, I can move without being seen and without making a sound. From the shadows, I'm essentially invisible.

Victor had no idea I was right behind him.

I reached into my coat and retrieved the small wireless webcam I brought back with me. I pressed it into a position on the shelf behind him. Not the easiest thing to do from the shadows. I had to leave the flat and return a couple of times in order to check the connection and camera angle which I could view on my phone. It took a couple adjustments but eventually I got the angle right – one that captured both the monitor and the side of Victor's face as he watched Simon.



I'm obviously quite accustomed to seeing things that I shouldn't be seeing but this scene was a little weird, even for me. It was kind of like discovering another Matrix from inside the Matrix. Nevertheless, I had him.

Victor continued watching, completely unaware that, this time, someone was watching him.

I stayed only a little while longer, letting the weight of the evidence settle in place. Then, as smoothly as I had arrived, I slipped back into the darkness, leaving the house for good this time.

By the time I stepped onto the wet pavement outside, I knew I already had to begin planning the best way to bring this discovery to light.

For now, the trap was set.

The moment had been captured.

I had not yet figured out how I was going to handle the situation but one way or another I was going to expose Victor and make him atone for his actions.

## Chapter 5: The Downfall of Victor Lorne



I must confess that the irony of the fact that I was going to punish Victor for doing something similar to what I myself have done on countless occasions is not lost on me. The difference though is the intent. Victor was stealing secrets for his own greedy and selfish desires. The secrets I steal prevent wars within the magical world – even though sometimes I fear our Order’s shadowy acts of espionage tend to do more harm than good. Still, I try to focus on the good intentions of the darker side of my life.

At any rate, Victor was an outlandish and arrogant prick and I’d be lying if I didn’t say that this fact didn’t feel like a bonus for me in bringing him to justice.

Victor had spent weeks watching Simon, stealing from him, thinking himself untouchable. But tonight, for the first time, he was about to learn what it felt like to be the one caught on camera.

All the evidence was in my pocket – video proof of Victor spying on Simon's private rehearsals, along with clear images of the photocopied journal pages from his flat. It was undeniable. The only thing left to do was to expose the truth.

I needed to get Simon and Victor alone, somewhere where this conversation wouldn't have an audience – somewhere Victor couldn't turn the situation into a performance or talk his way out of it.

The Marlowe seemed to me to be the most fitting place.

I waited until just after closing, when the stagehands had finished packing up and the last of the night's crowd had filtered out into the city. The dressing rooms were empty, the corridors silent. Only a few dim security lights cast long shadows along the backstage halls.

Simon was the first to arrive. Earlier I had told him to meet me outside of Victor's dressing room, giving him no details – only hinting that I may have some answers. He was leaning against the wall near the doorway to Victor's dressing room when I approached, arms crossed, his sharp eyes full of curiosity.

"What's this about Declan? Did you find something?" he asked.

I gave a slow nod. "Oh, I found something alright. Just try to stay cool and follow my lead."

Before he could press for details, the sound of footsteps echoed down the hall.

Victor.

He was strutting down the hallway towards his dressing room like he owned the place, completely unaware of the predicament he was in. His usual devilish grin was on full display. He probably thought we were there waiting to talk about some last-minute booking change or some trivial disagreement.

"You guys waiting for me?" he asked, as he opened the door to his dressing room and walked in. "Alright, what can I do for you guys?"

I stepped inside, Simon following tentatively behind.

"Oh, nothing much. Just need an explanation really" I said as I shut the door behind us, pulled out my phone and held it up for both Simon and Victor to see.

I smiled and casually hit play on the recording I already had loaded. As they both watched, Victor's crimes against Simon began playing back at him on full display right in front of his face – a clear image of a monitor that was displaying a live video feed from inside Simon's house. A second tap on the screen brought up the footage of Victor himself, seated at his desk, watching Simon's private rehearsals in real-time, unaware that he was being watched in return.

Victor's grin vanished.

A slow, creeping panic flickered across his face as his gaze darted between me and Simon. You could almost see his brain scanning frantically for answers. His mouth opened slightly, as if forming an excuse, but nothing came. He had nothing. No explanation. No escape.

"You've been a busy man, Victor," I said evenly, my voice calm but sharp. "I think we can skip the part where you pretend you don't know what this is."

Simon leaned forward, eyes narrowed, his expression hardened. "You have a camera in my apartment?" His voice was dangerously low, controlled anger simmering beneath it.

Victor swallowed hard. "I – I didn't – I mean, I was only."

I tilted my head. "Let's not insult anyone's intelligence, Victor. We both know exactly what you did."

I let the silence hang, let the weight of the evidence press down on him.

Then, I went in for the final push.

"Here's how this is going to go," I said. "We're not going to bother with asking for an apology. It won't be sincere anyways. What you **ARE** going to do is compensate Simon for what you stole. I'd say Twenty-five percent of your ticket sales for every show you've performed using Simon's effects should suffice. Of course, you will have to continue paying Simon twenty-five percent for all future shows as well, should you find yourself incapable of getting by without them."

Victor's face contorted with a mix of disbelief and panic. "Twenty-five percent? That's ridiculous!"

I gave him a blank look. "Yes. Cash – by this Friday and every Friday moving forward until you change your act. Unless of course you'd rather I take this evidence to the authorities? Or perhaps we'll start with Marlowe's management? Something tells me they're not going

to want to reward you for this kind of behavior. How long do you think you'll be able to keep booking gigs once word gets out that you're a fraud and a creep?"

Victor flinched. He knew he had no way out of it.

His mouth opened. Closed. Opened again. Then, finally, his shoulders sank.

"Fine," he muttered, barely above a whisper.

"What was that?" I said.

He gritted his teeth. "Fine!" he yelled.

Simon crossed his arms. "And the camera?"

Victor shook his head quickly. "Yes, I'll come remove it."

"No need" I said interjecting. "We'll take care of. Don't expect to get it back though."

I turned, slipping my phone back into my pocket. "Then I think we're done here." I said.

Victor shot me a hateful glare, but there was nothing behind it – no fire, no fight left in him.

He had lost. He knew it.

I gestured toward the door. "Simon. After you." I glanced back at Victor as we left the room.

He started to open his mouth but hesitated. Then, without another word, he slumped down into his chair with a thud.

Glorious.

## **The Beginning of Something New**

The Marlowe was quiet once again, but the tension was still lingering in the air as Simon and I walked out onto the street together. Simon let out a breath, running a hand through his hair.

"That was... brutal," he admitted, looking at me with something between amusement, gratitude, and disbelief. "Not that I'm complaining."

I shrugged. "Eh, He had it coming."

Simon chuckled. "And you – you just happened to get all this evidence? What, you have some kind of private investigation side gig I don't know about?"

I gave him a small, knowing grin. "Something like that."

He studied me, eyes sharp, like he was trying to pick apart the layers of mystery surrounding me. He wasn't going to get anywhere – not yet anyways.

Simon shook his head. "Unbelievable. You really are an enigma, aren't you?"

I simply raised an eyebrow, letting the silence speak for itself.

A moment passed before Simon clapped his hands together. "Alright, well – mystery aside, I owe you one. Big time."

I shrugged again. "Ah, it was nothing. Don't worry about it."



He grinned. "That's not how favors work. Besides, you just casually confirmed my suspicions **AND** destroyed Victor Lorne all in the same breath, right in front of me. I must return the favor.

I let out a short, dry chuckle. "You don't owe me anything."

"Still," Simon said, pausing. "How about this—you interested in checking out some new competition? There's a new stage act in town at the Pemberton on 5<sup>th</sup>. Everyone's talking about it. Could be worth a look."

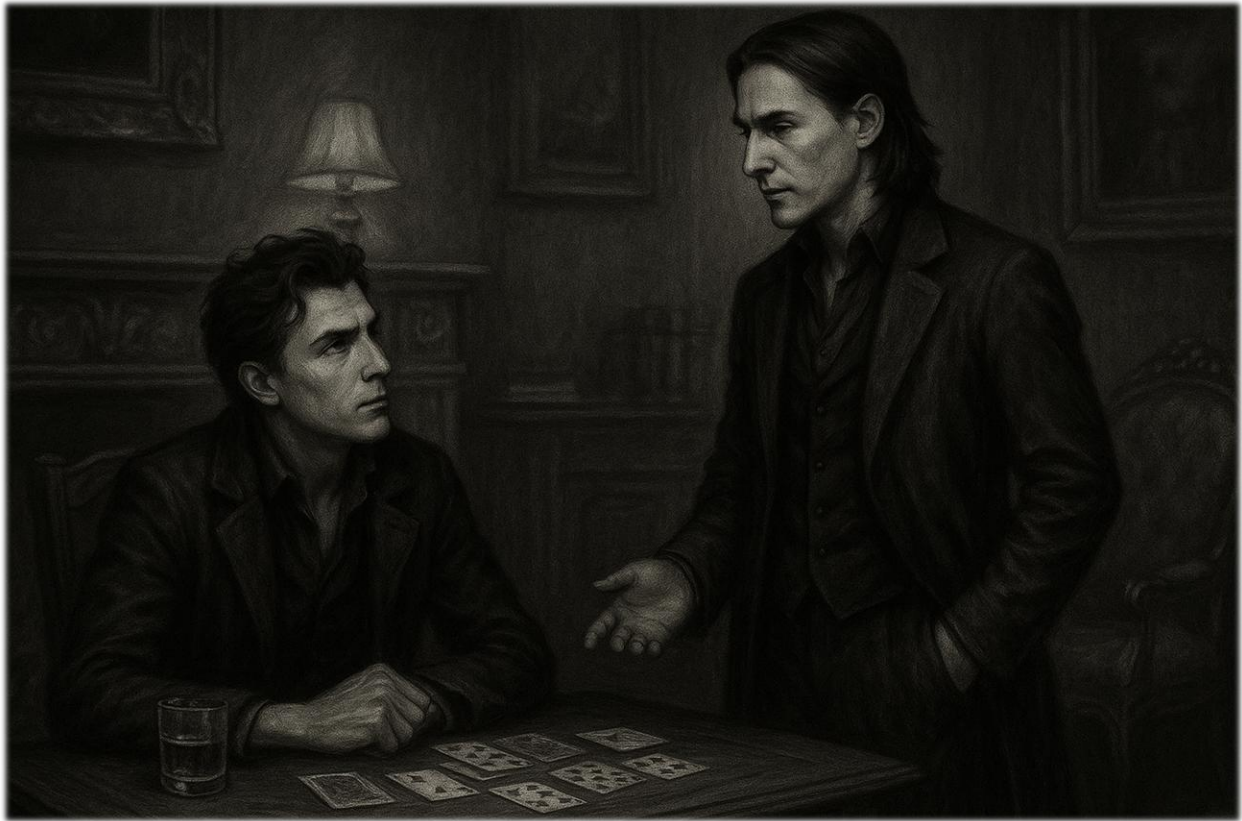
I considered it. I wasn't exactly the type to go out for casual entertainment, but something about the way Simon said it made it seem less like an invitation and more like the start of something.

A partnership, perhaps. Or, at the very least, a friendship.

I exhaled slowly. "Fine. But if it's bad, you're buying the drinks."

Simon laughed. "Ha, deal." And just like that, our story began.

## Chapter 6: The Rings of Asha



As I've mentioned before, shadows never let go.

This was something I had learned a long time ago. No matter how much distance I tried to put between myself and my past, between myself and the Order of Shadows, there was no being completely free of it. It clings to you like a second skin, waiting for the right moment to swallow you whole.

Tonight was no different.

I stepped through the front door of my flat, rolling my shoulders as I locked it behind me. The weight of the evening still sat in my bones – Victor Lorne’s downfall, the quiet amusement of watching Simon bask in the relief of justice served, and the ever-present hum of Fairmont’s nightlife fading to a dull whisper outside my window.

Everything felt as it should.

Or so it seemed.

I loosened my tie, walking toward the side table where I had a bottle of Four Roses ready and waiting. The room was dimly lit, just as I preferred it. I turned on the gas fireplace allowing it to cast soft flickering shapes against the Victorian décor. The scent of old books, candle wax, and aged wood is a settling and familiar comfort.

And yet... something was off.

I couldn’t place it immediately, but the sensation prickled at the edges of my awareness—an almost imperceptible shift in the way the shadows settled in the corners of the room. Not something seen. Something felt.

I didn’t react.

Instead, I poured myself a drink, taking my time, moving the same way I always did in my own home. Then, glass in hand, I walked toward my armchair and sank into it, exhaling slowly.

That’s when I felt it.

A shift—small, but unmistakable. A ripple in the darkness where there should have been none.

I smiled to myself, taking a slow sip of my drink. There it was.

You see, I have traps stationed all over my flat. Not physical ones that you can see, but something far more effective for the types of visitors I receive – shadow tripwires woven so subtly into the existing darkness that no one, not even another shadow magic initiate, could step through my home without disturbing them.

The best way I can describe it? Like setting a shadowy thread within a shadow – so thin, so fine, that even the most elite Master of Darkness wouldn't realize they had tripped it, but once plucked, I can sense it immediately.

And something had moved.

I let the silence stretch, savoring the moment. Then, without looking up, I spoke.

"You're getting sloppy, Alistair."

There was a pause, then a quiet chuckle from the far end of the room. A shadow shifted, peeling itself away from the darkness as my brother **Alistair Pierce** faded into view.

He was leaning casually against the far wall, arms crossed, watching me with the same amused countenance he had perfected since we were children.

"Impressive," he said smoothly. "You used to struggle sensing me. Father would be pleased."

I took another sip of my drink, offering him a dry look. "I doubt that." He prefers it when I play the fool.

Alistair stepped forward, moving with the same controlled confidence he always carried – never in a rush, never out of his element. His sharp eyes flicked over me, assessing, weighing, measuring.

Then, he tilted his head. "How **DID** you know I was here?"

I smirked, swirling my whiskey lazily. "Psychic intuition."

Alistair's brow raised. "Right. Psychic intuition."

I shrugged, enjoying his mild irritation. "Or maybe you just breath too loudly."

Alistair rolled his eyes. "Fine. Keep your secrets."

I would.

He let the silence settle for a moment before his expression shifted into something more serious.

"You didn't used to be this paranoid," he noted, glancing around the room. "Something got you jumpy?"

"You did," I replied, frankly. "Breaking into my flat tends to have that effect."

Alistair grinned. "I didn't break in. Yes, the door was locked, but locks have never been much of a barrier for us, now have they little brother?" He gestured vaguely at the door.

"Besides, I didn't want to wait outside all night. You were taking forever."

I exhaled, rubbing my temple. This was the way of things between us. A constant push and pull, a game of words and restraint.

"Alright," I said finally, setting my drink down. "You clearly have something to say. What does Father want now?"

Alistair didn't answer immediately.

Instead, he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a ring.

Not just any ring.

A simple, dark band, its metal aged and smooth, the engravings along its surface nearly worn away by centuries of existence. But even from where I sat, I could feel it—its weight, its power, its history.

It was one of the two **Rings of Asha**.

He held it between his two fingers, letting the dim light catch its surface.

"Father thought you might find this useful for the task he has in mind for you" Alistair said.

I studied it, then flicked my gaze back to him. "Father thought I might find it useful?"

Alistair gave a wry smile but didn't answer. Instead, he stepped forward and placed the ring on the table beside me.

I didn't reach for it.

Not yet.

Instead, I leaned back in my chair. "Go on, then. Why now? What makes this ring suddenly worth bringing out of Father's collection of things too dangerous to use but too valuable to destroy?"

Alistair's expression darkened slightly. "Well, it appears as though the other one has resurfaced."

That made me pause.

I looked up at him, searching for the lie – but Alistair wasn't lying.

"That's impossible," I said. "The second ring was lost generations ago – since long before we were even born."

Alistair nodded. "And yet, two nights ago, Father put on this very ring and saw something."

I raised my eyebrows. "And saw what, exactly?"

"A glimpse, just a glimpse" Alistair said, his voice measured. "Just a flicker of someone else's vision. It was a vision of the **Media 6 News Network station**."

I drummed my fingers against my glass. Media 6 was a major news network in the big city.

The Rings of Asha weren't just artifacts. They were tools of elite espionage. Their magic allowed their wearers to see exactly what the other ring-bearer was seeing, no matter the distance between them.

It seemed that someone at a major news organization had acquired the second ring.

I exhaled slowly. "So, dad has no clue who has it. Just that it may be connected somehow to Media 6 network headquarters."

Alistair nodded. "Precisely. And that's where you come in. Father wants you to confirm its whereabouts and—by any means necessary – retrieve it."

I arched a brow. "By any means necessary?"

Alistair met my gaze evenly. "If the second Ring of Asha is out there, we can't allow it to fall into the wrong hands."

I tapped my fingers against my glass, thinking.

The Order of Shadows had always dealt in secrets, but this? This was something else. If the second ring had truly resurfaced, it meant that someone—someone likely connected to a major media outlet – had unknowingly gained access to one of the most powerful surveillance tools in history.

If they knew what they had, the possibilities were endless.

If they didn't... well, that could be even worse.

I leaned forward slightly. "Why wasn't this assignment given to you? This one seems like it would be right up your alley."

Alistair's jaw tightened briefly, then he shrugged. "Father has me occupied with something else at the moment."

I narrowed my eyes. "And what might that be?"



Alistair smirked and glanced back at me sideways. "If you were more involved in family affairs little brother, you might know."

I exhaled sharply through my nose, shaking my head. Classic.

Then, finally, I reached for the ring.

The metal was cool against my skin, its magic humming beneath my fingertips.

Alistair watched me carefully. "You'll do it, then?"

I sighed. "Don't worry, brother. I'll do what I do best."

Alistair scoffed. "Hmph, I suppose that's why father chose you for this one."

## **Chapter 7: A Mystery from the Past**



Alistair didn't linger.

He had delivered his message, set the pieces in motion, and like a well-trained agent of our father's design, he had nothing more to say.

I watched as he took a step back, dissolving into the surrounding shadows. I watched as his figure faded into nothing, like it had never been there to begin with.

And then, his presence was gone entirely, leaving me alone in the quiet hum of my flat, the only evidence of his visit - the faint stir of air where he had stood moments ago.

I took a slow breath and let my gaze drift toward the Ring of Asha, still sitting on the table, motionless but far from lifeless.

Even from a distance, I could feel its pull - the silent buzz of ancient magic, the whisper of something long buried coming back to the surface.

A second ring. Lost for generations. Now, suddenly resurfacing - not in the hands of another Order, not locked away in some forgotten vault, but somewhere unexpected.

A news network station of all places.

The thought gnawed at me, curling in the back of my mind like a half-remembered dream. A news station was a place of information. A place of discovery. A place where secrets did not stay buried for long.

If the ring had found its way into that world once again, it meant one of two things.

Either someone had no idea what they had...

Or someone knew exactly what they had, and they were playing a game I wasn't prepared for.

I reached for my glass and took a slow sip of whiskey, letting the fire settle against the back of my throat.

And then, unbidden, another thought surfaced.

Not about the ring.

Not about the danger it posed or the power it held.

But about someone.

An old acquaintance – well, more than just an acquaintance.

A presence that had once been as familiar to me as my own reflection.

The thought of the Ring of Asha resurfacing somewhere in the bustling offices of a major news network station brought with it memories I had tried to leave behind.

Memories of someone who had once meant something to me.

Someone whose curiosity had always been insatiable.

Someone whose return – much like the ring itself – was about to shake the delicate balance I had built for myself.

Whether I was ready for it or not.

## The Nature of Secrets

People ask magicians the same question repeatedly.

*"How did you do that?"*

It's always the first thing out of their mouths. It doesn't matter how grand or small the illusion is, how elegant or deceptive. They always want to know.

They think that the trick itself is the important part.

But they're wrong.

The important part isn't the secret – it's the feeling of wonder.

That's why I perform. That's why all magicians perform – to create the impossible, to craft the illusion of something beyond reality, to give people a glimpse of something they can't explain.

Because the moment you tell someone how it's done, the moment you give them the secret, the wonder is gone.

It's just another trick.

So, let me ask you a question.

Are you sure you want to know?

Are you sure you want to pull back the curtain and see what's waiting behind it?

If the answer is yes, then let me show you something.

A little mystery.

A little deception.

A little something for you to use to create your own wonder in the world.

## **The Jester's Revenge**

This little mystery was inspired by John Scarne's *Allerchrist* card trick published in his brilliant book of sleight-free card miracles *Scarne on Cards*. The trick relied on the use of one Joker and an underlining mathematical principle that I'll never be smart enough to fully understand. I still amaze myself every time I perform this delightful little effect. One night I discovered that the same principle could work with the use of both Jokers. All that was necessary was to tweak the math a little bit. From then on, it became more or less an exercise in implementing Simon Winter's masterful storytelling strategies for maximum effect.

You'll need a full deck (must be all 52 cards plus the two Jokers), a decent sized surface to play out the game/effect on. Having a willing participant is great for the storytelling aspect of this effect but isn't necessary. You can perform this effect on yourself. In fact, you should follow along with a deck of cards as you read. You'll be delighted to see that it works.

There is no preparation necessary to start the effect. Begin by asking your participant if they have ever heard of *The Jester's Revenge* – a game in which the participant makes all the

decisions, makes all the moves, the magician touches nothing and yet regardless of the choices made, the participant cannot win. This is the *lure* - presenting a game that offers the participant a thousand different directions to take but only ever results in the same outcome. Emphasize that you will touch nothing during the game.

Hand your participant the deck of cards and ask them to remove the two Jokers/Jesters and then shuffle the cards to their hearts content. While they are shuffling, bring attention to the two Jokers and state that this is a game *they* designed (in their hysterical style) to be as fair as possible and yet always deceives you, causing you to lose in the end. State that in many card games Jokers are used as wild cards and that this game is no different. The Jokers will be playable cards in the game. Maybe they'll show up. Maybe they won't. If they do, they are wild cards and can be used as any card you desire. Now the *hook*. State that this seems like an advantage, and it may seem lucky when you come across them during the game, "but I'm warning you, they're not your friends."

When your participant is done shuffling and ready to play the game, have them flip the two Jokers *face up*, placing them side by side as you state that this game is one of pure coincidence in which game play involves counting backwards from ten.

You are now going to perform a *Countdown Force* (which is a sleight-free way to force the 11<sup>th</sup> card from the top of the deck). In this effect, however, the identity of the 11<sup>th</sup> card does not matter. What matters is that the starting position for this game requires the selected card to be on top of a pile of 11 cards.

**Side note:** In Scarne's *Allerchrist* trick the starting position was the top card of a pile of 10. My derivation began with nothing more than adding the second Joker to the mix and therefore requiring 1 extra card in the starting position pile.

Point directly in front of the first Joker indicating where you would like your participant to start dealing a pile of *face down* cards. Say that first, "you must *seal* your fate." Explain that with each card dealt, they are to count backwards from ten – calling the number out loud with each card they place down onto the pile. They are then allowed to stop dealing whenever they would like. Let's assume your participant stops at number 6.

**Note:** Regardless of what number they stop on, the number of cards in the pile is always going to be one less. In this case they stopped at the number 6 so there will be 5 cards in the pile. Whatever you do, do **NOT** mention this fact to your participant.

Now bring attention to the second Joker by pointing at it. Have your participant slide their *face down* packet of cards over in front of the second Joker. Say that "now, you must *reveal* your fate." They will now deal more cards - equal to the number that they stopped at earlier. So, the fact that they decided to stop at the number 6 means that they must now deal 6 more cards on top of the pile.

**Note:** If they stopped at number 7, at this point, they would need to deal 7 more cards on top. If they stopped at 2 – 2 more cards, and so on. Regardless of what number they stop at, if you add that many more cards, you will always end up at the card that was at the 11<sup>th</sup> position from the top of the deck. Now, if you already knew the 11<sup>th</sup> card from the top of the deck beforehand, this would be a sleight-free way of forcing that card on your spectator.

This would be a genuine *Countdown Force*. Again, for the purposes of this trick though, the identity of the 11<sup>th</sup> card is not important, only the fact that the starting point of the trick is a pile of cards on the table with exactly 11 cards in it.

When the 11<sup>th</sup> card is dealt by your participant, have them flip it over *face up* on top of the pile to “Reveal” it. Tell your participant that this card marks their own unique starting point. State that *The Jester’s Revenge* is a game that involves gaining points by chance. There are four rounds - at the end of which, all the points are added up. After playing the game, cards are counted equal to all the points they have accumulated. State that the object of the game is, after all the points are counted, to end up **ANYWHERE OTHER** than right here where they are starting (you should point at the face up card while saying this to drive in this point for effect).

Now you will have your participant shuffle the remaining cards in their hand once again before gameplay. The catch this time is that they must shuffle the Jokers in along with the other cards so that they can be available for wild cards during the game. Here is a perfect opportunity to add a little drama to this scenario. Strongly emphasize to your participant that they can shuffle in the Jokers however and wherever they want. This is *The Jester’s Ploy*, but it’s legit. You should iterate to your participant that, if they so desire, they can shuffle the cards and place the two Jokers at the very bottom (thus likely excluding them from gameplay) **OR** they can place them deliberately on or towards the top of the deck (thus ensuring they will be encountered in the game). They can shuffle the cards and insert the Jokers into deliberate places in the deck **OR** just throw the Jokers in and shuffle the whole deck thereby randomizing everything.



It really doesn't matter at all what they choose. The math will make the trick work out in the end regardless. What does matter is that you've dramatized the fact that they have complete and utter control of their choices. I've taken this idea of dramatization for maximum effect directly from the playbook of Simon Winters and put it to use to enhance this simple effect. Presentation should not be underestimated here.

When your participant is done shuffling, have them place the shuffled deck *face down* on top of the tabled packet leaving the starting point card *face up*. Next, have them pick up the entire deck *face down* and prepare for gameplay. Tell your participant to recall how they dealt cards counting backwards from 10 at the beginning of the game to select their starting point card. State that gameplay is quite similar. They are now to deal cards *face up* one at a time from the top of the deck into a pile on the table counting backwards from 10 as they go. They are to deal the first card as they say 10, deal the next card on top while calling out 9, deal the next card while calling out 8 – and so on until 0. Now, the coincidence part of the game is that **IF** by chance the card that they deal *face up* onto the pile coincidentally matches the value of the number they call out of their mouth at the same time – the round is over, and they will receive that many points for the round. State that for ease of math calculations, Aces are worth 1 and Jacks, Queens and Kings are all worth 10 points each. All other spot cards are worth their own number in points. **IF**, by chance they count all the way down to 1 without matching a card value to any of the numbers they call out - 1 more card will be dealt *face down* on top of the cards for that round. The round will then be over, and no points will be awarded for that round.

Next, a little more drama. Ask your participant to recall that the Jokers have been placed in the deck to their choosing. Tell them that if a Joker happens to appear during gameplay, they are considered wild and therefore can be used as any card they would like. State that they may choose to use a Joker to match the number they called out in order to gain points for the round – maybe not. Say that “again, it may seem like they are giving you an advantage but remember, the name of the game is *The Jester’s Revenge* – They are not the friends you think they are.” But nevertheless, the choice is completely up to your participant.

State that there are 4 rounds and at the end, you will count all the points by counting 1 card for each point. Remember, the idea is to simply wind up anywhere other than their face up starting point card after all the points are added up. The stage is set. All that’s left is to play the game. It matters not what choices they make. As long as you follow these rules, you or your participant will always end up back at the starting point. It’s math – but they don’t know that.

*Below is an example game for you to follow for a little more clarity.*

**Round 1** – Participant deals cards *face up* into a pile as they count *OUT LOUD* backwards from 10 (one card dealt for each number called out). They count 10,9,8,7 and on the count of 7 the card they dealt happens to be the 7 of spades. This is a coincidence that gives them 7 points for the round and ends round 1.

**Round 2** – Participant starts dealing cards into a new *face up* pile next to the first pile. Again, they count backwards from 10 (again, one card dealt for each number called out).

This time they count 10 and the card they dealt happens to be the King of Hearts. Kings, Queens, and Jacks are worth 10 points. This coincidentally matches the value of the number 10 they called out - thus giving your participant 10 points for the round.

**Round 3** – Participant starts dealing cards as before into a new pile next to the second pile. The round continues just like the previous rounds. This time the participant calls out 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1 but no card values happened to coincide with any of the numbers as they were called out. Therefore, a final card is dealt *face down* onto the pile. No points are awarded this round.

**Round 4** – Again, the participant starts dealing into a new pile next to the last and continues gameplay as before. This time the participant calls out 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1, and an Ace of Diamonds is dealt right when your participant calls out the number 1. This is a match, and 1 point is awarded for the round.

**Remember** – If a Joker appears at any time during gameplay, the participant is allowed to decide if they want to use the Joker as a match or not. If so, they get the corresponding number of points for the number they called out and the round is over. If not, continue the gameplay where you left off.

In this game scenario we have 7 points for round 1, 10 points for round 2, 0 points for round 3 and 1 point for round 4. This brings the total number of points to 18. Have your participant deal off 18 cards from the remaining cards in their hand and they will always end up at their starting card that was face up from the beginning of the game. If it doesn't work for you, you either miscalculated or there are not exactly 52 cards in your deck.

## The Countaround Force

Some of you may already be familiar with the *Countdown Force* used previously in *The Jester's Revenge*. What those of you familiar with the *Countdown Force* may not know, however, is a clever way to extend its application to the use of small packets. I stumbled across this unique application a while back by accident. I was working on a new trick idea in which I wanted to utilize the *Countdown Force* to force a card, but had too few cards left in my hand to be able to force an 11<sup>th</sup> card. Impossible to do if you're only holding 4 cards. Or so I thought originally. The *Countdown Force* always forces the 11<sup>th</sup> card of the deck. My theory was that if you were only holding a packet of 4 cards, and instead of dealing cards one at a time into a pile on the table, you recycled them to the bottom of the packet in your hand with each backwards count from ten – the end result should still be the 11<sup>th</sup> card within the *cycle* of 4 cards. Turns out, that's exactly what it does. Try it for yourself. Grab 4 random cards holding them *face down* as one but turn the card 2<sup>nd</sup> from the bottom *face up*. Now just like the *Countdown Force*, draw off the top card of the packet calling out the number 10, but instead of dealing it on the table, place it at the bottom of the packet in your hand. Continue with the next card counting 9 while placing it on the bottom of the packet. Continue like this and stop whenever you would like. Let's say you stop when dealing the 5<sup>th</sup> card to the bottom of the packet. That means (according to *Countdown Force* rules) you would need to proceed with the same action dealing 5 more cards to the bottom. Count 5 more cards placing each one at a time to the bottom of the packet as you count. The 5<sup>th</sup> card will be the original face up card you placed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> to bottom position at the start. In practice, this card would obviously be dealt face down to your participant making it look

like it was a completely random selection among 4 cards. Like the *Countdown Force*, with the *Countaround Force*, it doesn't matter which number you stop on. As long as you later deal the number of cards equal to the number that was stopped at, you will always end up at the 11th card in the cycle – which in a packet of 4 cards – will always be the card originally 2<sup>nd</sup> from the bottom.

Interestingly enough, the *Countaround Force* can be executed with any packet of 2 – 10 cards. The only thing that will change is the starting position of the force card. Below is a quick breakdown of all the force card starting positions - as well as a description that helps me remember all the starting positions for future trick construction.

**10 is TOP** – the highest number of cards you can have to do the *Countaround Force*.

2 times 5 is 10, so these packet counts start with the force card on **TOP**.

**Packet of 2** – Force card starts on top.

**Packet of 5** – Force card starts on top.

**Packet of 10** – Force card starts on top.

**3 and 7 are prime numbered packets.** Therefore, the force card will be the card starting at exactly the middle of the packet.

**4 and 6 are even numbered packets – divisible by 2.** Therefore, the force card will be the card starting at the 2<sup>nd</sup> position from the bottom.

**10 card packet** – Force card on top

**9 card packet** – Force card 1 down from top

**8 card packet** – Force card 2 down from top.

**Note:** When performing the *Countaround Force* (or the *Countdown Force* for that matter) it is meant to feel completely random for your participant and you should present it as such. If you want, you can perform it for them. Just ask your participant to call stop whenever they would like. Start drawing off cards one at a time, dealing them to the bottom of the packet and counting backwards from 10 as you go. When they call stop (let's say on the number 3) say "great, you chose to stop at 3, so I will give you the 1 (deal the top card to the bottom) 2 (deal the top card to the bottom) 3<sup>rd</sup> card (deal top card to your participant). Where this force really shines is when you have 2 participants, and you want them both to feel like they have participated in the random selection of a card. We'll look at one such application in the next trick.

## Calispo

This is a personal gem of mine. It has gone through multiple iterations over the years and lends itself to multiple handlings, endings, and narrations that I can change on the fly where I see fit. Here I will provide instructions on how to perform the most involved version of this effect. Later, I'll offer a couple of suggestions for scaling it back a bit. It contains some very clever sleight of hand that is not too difficult and offers an excellent opportunity to execute the *Countaround Force*.

The presentation for this version of the effect is one of demonstrating thought manipulation. You will need 2 participants for this one – one on each side of you. You'll also need a deck of cards (I prefer to use a marked deck though it is not necessary).

*Actually, I always use a marked deck. Why wouldn't you? Yes, it is far from necessary for many effects BUT it doesn't get in the way of performing such effects. It is, however, necessary for certain effects, and furthermore, it can still greatly ease the handling of effects that technically don't require its use.*

Like most of my tricks, I start out by having my participant thoroughly shuffle the cards. In this case I prefer to start with the participant to my left. We'll call her Participant 1. This effect starts out with a move called *The Decepticut*. It is a card selection process that ends in secretly controlling the selected card to the top of the deck. It's quite similar to Lee Asher's *Reverse Losing* control. The derivation I'm using here, I saw performed in a video years ago and have used it ever since, and have never seen anyone else use it this way since either. I have of course made my own small tweaks which I will share with you here.

Before you begin, make sure Participant 1 is positioned to your left while Participant 2 is positioned to your right. Start with the cards *face down* in mechanics grip in the left hand and invite Participant 1 to call stop whenever they would like. Turn your head away and begin thumbing over 1 card at a time into your right hand forming a small spread as you go. See Fig 1.

Fig 1.



Ideally you will want your participant to call stop a little before you get halfway through the deck - so go slowly. Having fewer cards in your right hand can make the next move a little easier. Remember that your head is turned, so when they call stop, move your left

thumb back and forth to the left and right to give your participant the opportunity to really nail down the exact card they want. When you have verified with your thumb the exact card they want, retain it squarely in the left hand's packet.

The right hand now moves the right-hand packet slightly to the right, gripping it with fingers below and thumb on top. The left-hand packet turns clockwise slightly, and the right-hand will now tap the side of the right-hand packet against the top of the left-hand packet as a quick means of squaring up the right-hand packet. See Fig 2.



Fig 2.



Two moves are now going to happen simultaneously. As the hands begin to separate, the left hand's thumb slightly pushes over the top face down card to the right and then turns palm down and reveals the selected card to be secretly viewed and remembered by Participant 1. At the same time, the left pinky, ring, and middle fingers at the bottom, curl backwards so that you are now gripping the packet primarily between your index finger and thumb. See Fig 3 to see how the left hand looks just before it turns clockwise to show to the participant to your left.

Fig 3.



While this is happening in the left hand, your right hand drops down to your side out of view and the right thumb quickly pushes the top cards forward while the fingers at the bottom pull the bottom cards backwards – thereby reversing the direction of the original spread. See Fig 4 to note the direction the spread should now be in your right hand.

Fig 4.



Remember your head is turned away during this entire process thus far. Ask Participant 1 if they can remember their card. When they say yes, you are going to turn your head back towards them, catching their eyes as you say, “are you sure” (nodding agreeably as you do

so). As this is happening your hands will be coming back together to seemingly reassemble the previously spread cards. What actually happens is that when the left hand turns back to its original *face down* position, it will make a similar move that the right hand just made.

The left thumb pulls back the top card (the actual selected card) and the bottom fingers push forward the bottom card which, when both hands come together, will appear as if the selected card is being closed up in the middle of the spread. See Fig 5 to note how the cards should look as they come

Fig 5.



back together. Do not rush to close up the spread. You should allow your participant a split moment to see this before closing up the spread. If done smoothly and correctly, the

protruding bottom card will appear to be their selected card as it naturally fits into place back in the spread.

Finish by squaring up the deck leaving it *face down* in the left hand. This effectively and secretly leaves the actual selected card on top of the deck instead of in the middle (where your participant should believe it is). Now, if you are using a marked deck, as I do, you can simply look down at the top of the deck and you'll know immediately the identity of their selected card. If not, hang on, we'll get there.

Tell Participant 1 that they have had a free selection of 1 of the cards in the deck that only they know the identity of. State that you now want to have Participant 2 (the one on your right side) select a card, but that you're going to narrow the selection process down to only 4 cards. Say that you want Participant 1 to know the identity of these cards beforehand but that you also want to make sure none of them are the previously selected card. Move the deck to your right-hand *face down* and slowly and clearly draw 4 cards from the bottom with your left thumb and fingers and hand them to Participant 1, asking her to view the cards making sure that none of them are her selected card.

If you are not using a marked deck, now is the perfect time to move the deck back to your left hand and casually riffle up the back edges of the cards with your right thumb so that you can glimpse the top card of the deck. When riffling upwards with the right thumb you will also catch a pinky break with the left finger below the top card. If you are using a marked deck, just catch the pinky break. You already know the identity of their card.

Have Participant 1 return the cards to you and then turn them *face up* on top of the deck, adding them to the top of your pinky break. You will then turn to display these to Participant 2 so that they are also aware of their possible card selections. You will do this by performing a simple *secret-addition* move. If you're not familiar with a secret addition, it is performed as follows.

Overhand grip the top 5-card packet *AS ONE* with the right thumb at the bottom right side and the middle finger at the top right side. Begin to draw the packet away toward the right but grip the top card with the left thumb letting it stay in place for a moment as you slide the packet away from underneath. When the right-hand packet reaches about the halfway point underneath the top card, use the packet underneath as a lever to flip the top card over now *face down* on to the packet in the left hand. See Fig 6 to note how it should look as you use the right-hand packet as a lever to flip over the top card.

Fig 6.



Call out the name of the card as you draw it off and flip it over *face down* on the left-hand packet. Continue this exact same motion with the next 3 cards, calling out each card as it is flipped over. As you begin to draw off and flip over the 3<sup>rd</sup> card, the right hand will be

holding only two cards *AS ONE*. As the 3<sup>rd</sup> card lands *face down* on top of the left-hand packet, the right-hand double-card packet must be immediately dropped on top of the deck

*AS ONE* with it. The left thumb must then immediately push over the top card which is called out and flipped over on top *face down* thus completing the secret addition of Participant 1's selected card. It should now be secretly second from the top.

Now you will deal the top 4 cards one at a time into a pile on the table. This will place the selected card 2<sup>nd</sup> from the bottom which, if you remember, is the position it needs to be in if you want to use the *Countaround Force* to force this card from a 4-card packet – which is exactly what you are going to do. I like to have Participant 1 take part in this procedure. I ask Participant 1 to call stop whenever they would like. I start counting out loud backwards from 10, placing the top card to the bottom of the packet with each number I call out. When Participant 1 calls stop (let's say on 4) I say "great, you stopped on 4. I will now give Participant 2 the 1,2,3 4<sup>th</sup> card (again, placing the top card to the bottom with each number you call out and then dealing the 4<sup>th</sup> card to participant 2). I like to end this sequence by saying "you can't get any more random than that." Casually toss the remaining 3 cards *face down* towards the left side of the table.

For a moment, place your fingers on top of Participant 2's card and turn towards Participant 1 as a means of averting your gaze. Ask Participant 2 to look at and remember their card. As you say this, lift your right-hand up and use your fingers to make the gesture of lifting the edges of the card to secretly view it. When they have done this, turn back to Participant 2 and instruct them to close their eyes and concentrate on the card they saw. Casually pick up Participant 2's card and hold it *face down* between the thumb and fingers of the right hand as you turn back to Participant 1.

Catch their eyes as you recap that Participant 1 is still thinking of a card that no one else knows the identity of and that Participant 2 is now thinking of card that was 1 of 4 possible cards – no one could have possibly known which one was going to be selected. As you're saying this to Participant 1, perform a simple top change to switch the card in your hand for the one on the top of the deck. Say, "now I'm going to let you see Participant 2's selection. Flip over the card that is now in your right hand and it will be one of the original 4 cards. Throw it *face up* onto the table and then flip the other 3 cards face up as well. Everything now looks as it should.

Turn to Participant 2 and instruct them to now clear their mind and imagine a blank sheet of white paper. While saying this, palm the top card of the deck into your right hand in the manner you are most comfortable with (remember, your back will be turned to Participant 1 - and Participant 2 has their eyes closed which is more than enough cover for secretly palming a card).

Now drop your right hand down to your side as you turn back to Participant 1. Ask them to recall the card they viewed at the beginning of the trick, pointing out that it still lies in the same position in the deck because nothing has been shuffled. Invite them to hold on to the deck and to concentrate on their card with their eyes closed. Participant 1 should feel comfortable doing this as they should believe that they are holding on to the deck with their card in it. In reality, you have their card palmed in your right hand and when they close their eyes, you place it into your right pocket.

All that's left to bring this grand illusion to a conclusion is a bit of showmanship. Instruct Participant 1 to attempt to mentally transmit the identity of the card they are thinking of to

you. You will then attempt to not only read this thought, but to transfer and replace it into the mind of Participant 2. Pretend to concentrate and then say something to the effect of “Ah, I think I’ve got it.” Allow Participant 1 to open their eyes as you turn back to Participant 2. Fein deep concentration again as you instruct Participant 2 to begin filling up the blank piece of paper in their mind with the card they remember peeking at earlier.

Wait until they say that they can see the whole card in their mind and tell them to open their eyes and say out loud what the card they are thinking of is. It will be the same as Participant 1’s card. What’s more is you can ask Participant 1 to remove her thought of card from the deck. It will not be there because it is now in your pocket. When she is unable to find the card in the deck, you can remove the card from your pocket and state that it was there the whole time – conclusive proof that you have the power to manipulate the mind into seeing whatever you want it to see.

*Now let’s discuss a couple derivations from this elaborate illusion.*

Firstly, you could present this as more of a magical routine in which Participant 1’s card (which is supposed to be in the middle of the deck) magically switches places with one of the four selected cards that Participant 2 views. Doing so eliminates the need to palm the selected card and stash it in your pocket. Ask Participant 1 to mentally tell you the identity of their card. You then magically transform Participant 2’s card into Participant 1’s card.

Second, you could eliminate the need for a second participant altogether and present the effect as a pure transformation/transposition effect. Instead of performing the

*Countaround Force* on a second participant, you perform it on the same Participant 1 as a

second random selection in which they see the 4 possible card choices beforehand. When you force the original selection on them, you can simply snap your fingers and apparently transform the randomly selected card into their thought of card which is supposed to be still in the middle of the deck.

I encourage you to play around with this effect. It has a lot of room for personalized derivation. For example: if you're performing this for one person, an equivoque works just as well as the *Countaround Force*. Hope you give it a try.

## Significard

This is another unique effect of mine that helps develop your story-telling skills without the added stress of requiring perfectly executed sleight of hand. What it does require is the need for a complete deck of 52 cards – no Jokers. The trick works because of a long-utilized subtlety in magic which forces the participant to focus on the fact that you can't possibly know how far down from the *top* of the deck their selected card is while forgetting altogether that this doesn't mean you don't know how far up from the *bottom* it is. It also has the added bonus of being completely customizable. Let's begin.

Start by having your participant shuffle a deck of cards to their liking. While they do so, you should ask if they happen to have a special card or any card that is of any "significance" to them. It matters not how they reply. If they do not have a special card in mind, you will create their own "Significard" for them through the effect. Have them hand the deck back to



you. The next step can be handled in one of two ways. You can either deal the cards out *face down* one at a time into 2 separate piles (which will clearly appear deliberate) **OR** you can nonchalantly toss out *IN PACKETS OF 3'S* a total of 26 cards into a messy pile **Note: to do this you will need to toss out 8 packets of 3 - plus a packet of 2 at the end.** Either way you will be left with 2 piles of 26 cards each. The only difference is that one way looks deliberate, and one way looks unimportant (though it may take some practice to make it look carefree while actually being very precise).

There must be 26 cards in each tabled packet, but you must make no mention of the number of cards in each. What you want to draw attention to now is the special card in their head. State that if their card were really special you would think they would be able to easily find it when they needed it. In this case they have a 50-50 chance of selecting the packet that has their special card in it. Ask them to choose the packet that they believe contains their special card. If they do not have a special card in mind, simply ask them to select a pile that feels more special than the other (for whatever reason).

Once they select a packet, instruct them to pick it up and secretly skim through the cards to see if their special card is among them. If they don't have a special card in mind, just have them select a card that, for whatever reason, feels the most "significant" to them. If they do have a special card in mind, and it is in the packet they selected, have them stick with this selection (you should mention that there is no way you could know what their special card is). If they do not find their special card, state that maybe their special card is not so special after all and that they should secretly look among the cards that they have and select a card the just feels "*significant.*" Next, you should turn your gaze away and instruct your

participant to pull out their selected card and place it *face down* on top of the other tabled packet.

Do not turn back just yet. Keep your head turned and tell your participant that you want to ensure that, before you proceed, there is no way for you to know how many cards they are currently holding. To do this, tell them to secretly remove a “*good*” small packet of cards from the packet in their hands and put it somewhere where it can’t be seen and then put the remaining cards on top of the tabled packet. **Note:** you should emphasize the word GOOD in the phrase “good small packet of cards.” It’s preferable that they remove more than 4 cards. Saying the word “good” here is a safety measure that decreases the chance of your participant remove 3 or less cards. The removal of these cards will help with the next dealing phase of the trick which necessitates that they deal past their selected card. Once this is completed you may turn back to face your participant and proceed.

State that we are going to try a little experiment to see if the card they have secretly selected is of any genuine significance to them. Ask them to pick up the packet and hold it *face down*. Ask them to think of the name of their card in their head. Tell them to spell out the full name of their card dealing a card *face down* into a pile on the table for each letter. Make sure they spell the *OF* in the blank-of-blank card they selected and *make sure they say nothing out loud*. Once this is done, have them now think of any person in the world alive or dead who is significant to them. Once they have done this, have them perform the same procedure as before, but this time, spell the name of this secret person, dealing a card onto the same pile for each letter in the person’s first and last name. It is highly preferable that you require them to spell both the first and last name.

By now, it is likely that they have already unknowingly dealt past their secretly selected card, but just to be sure, I suggest doing the following for just a little more security and convincing. Turn your head away again and tell them to quietly deal a few more cards onto the pile, so that you can't be accused of counting cards. They must deal the cards one at time as before which is why you must instruct them to deal quietly – to keep it a secret from you, but still in a dealing manner. Finally, have them simply place the remaining cards in their hand on top of the tabled pile and square it up.

You can turn back around now. The trick is set. You need only reveal it. How do you do that, you ask? Well, if you have followed the above instructions correctly, your participant's secretly selected card should now be at the 27<sup>th</sup> position from the top of the deck. All you need to do is come up with your own significant card and your own significant person – the combined spelling of which adds up to 27. The more significance you can add to the card and the person the better. Me personally, I use the 9 of diamonds (diamonds are good to use because it has the most letters) and the name of a close relative.

I always like to recap the entire process to my participant, emphasizing how all choices were made by them (that I couldn't have known in advance) and that I even put in a couple safety measures to eliminate the possibility of card counting. I then explain that I have a significant card (the 9 of diamonds) and that it represents what I call my 9 jewels. These jewels represent the 9 immediate members of my family. I then deal a card for each letter in the 9 of diamonds. Next, I tell them the name of the most significant person in my life and deal a card for each letter. The last card will be their selected card (provided the number of

cards you deal total 27). Pause for suspense and then reveal. You might add that they now truly *DO* have a significant card.