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## CRIME PROBLEMS

Often, the general public may display a certain amount of apathy toward the "friendly" card game. However, this apathy will quickly disappear if it is learned the friendly game involves marked (gaffed) cards.

The Gambling Unit of the FBI Laboratory considers the detection of

considerable sleight of hand. Simply knowing certain cards are marked is valuable, but it is much more advan-

*"As compared to the use of crooked dice, cheating at cards often requires considerable sleight of hand."*

hand or voice signals, unc customary movements, or oral expressions to gain an advantage in the game.

### The New Deck

Players should not be fooled when an apparently new deck is opened and

# The "Friendly" Card Game

gaffed cards to be the most difficult type of examination it undertakes. In order for such an examination to be successful, it is usually necessary for the examiner to possess experience, patience, keen eyesight, and often special equipment. But once the crooked nature of the cards has been discovered, benefits in prosecution may be reaped; the friendly nature of the game is unmasked for the unwary participants and the public in general.

Although a laboratory examination of suspected playing cards is recommended, certain pointers outlined in this article may be of assistance in the field study of evidence obtained in gambling raids.

### Dealer Gambits

As compared to the use of crooked dice, cheating at cards often requires

tageous to also be able to deal certain cards to certain players. Furthermore, cheating may be effectively accomplished without marked cards, but rather by palming, second or bottom dealing, or use of signals to a confederate. The detection of such techniques by skilled card mechanics is next to impossible. Thus, the game may be crooked although the cards are straight.

In many instances, card mechanics adopt a telltale grip of the deck with the fingers surrounding the edges of the cards to a greater extent than usual. This maneuver tends to conceal dealing cards other than the one on top. Oftentimes, dealers or other players may pay conspicuous attention to what are believed to be unrevealing backs of cards, which could indicate "reading the backs," or use

dealt. It is a common practice for crooked gamblers to unseal the cellophane wrapper carefully at the seam, slit open the box, mark the cards, and reseal the deck with colorless glue, so that the deception is hardly detectable with the naked eye. New decks should be thoroughly shuffled prior to dealing, inasmuch as they are packaged in the same value-suit order. If this is not done, a player can tell what cards the others may be dealt simply by the ones he possesses.

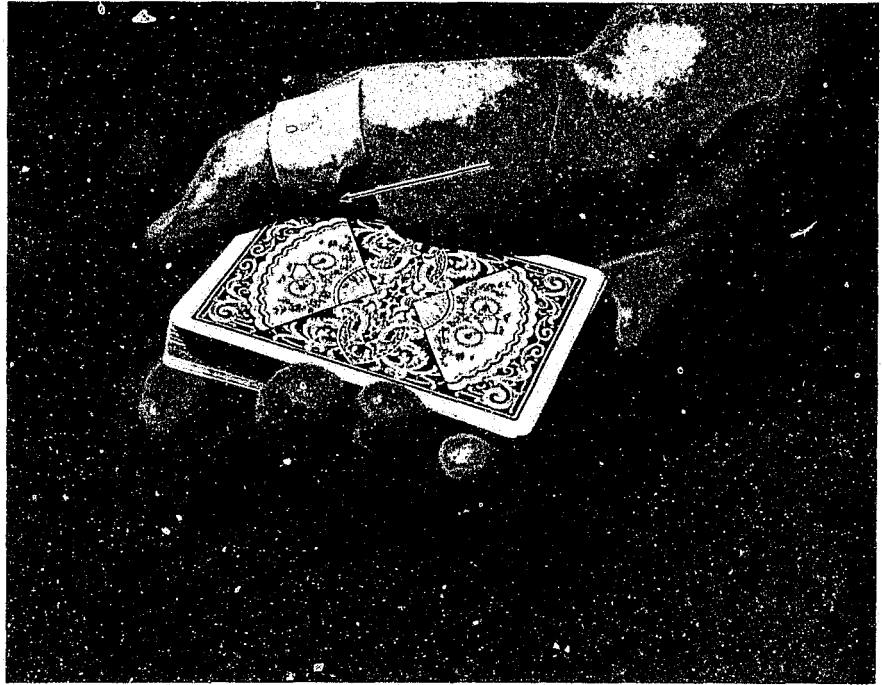
### Marking Techniques

Experience has shown there are literally hundreds of places or formats for the marking of decks. The main concern in marking is to follow some systematic pattern so that the one using the deck may easily remember

the system. One popular method is to select a portion of a design which is essentially circular and to mark around this design in either a clockwise or counterclockwise manner. Another marking is widening portions of the border to form a sort of hump.

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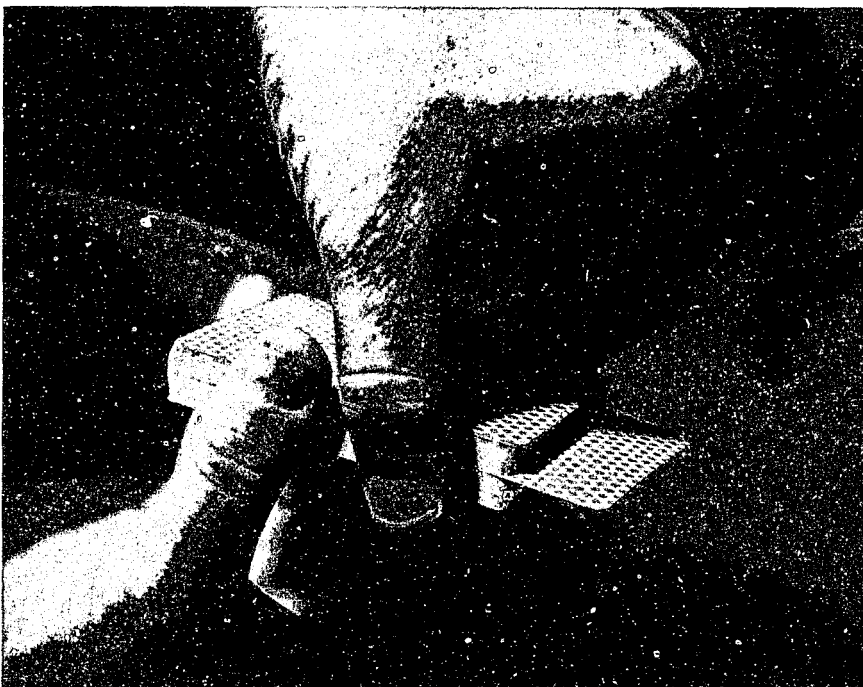
Many adept cheats can make certain limited markings on cards during the course of play. Simple methods include using a fingernail or sharp objects protruding from a ring or bandage to make a slight indentation on certain positions about the tops and edges of key cards. In such games as blackjack or poker, this manner of marking aces and/or face cards can be beneficial to the player “in the know.” These markings are hardly detectable and may appear to come simply from wear and tear on the cards. Sandpaper may be used in a related manner either before or dur-



Sharp protruding objects from a bandage can be used to mark cards. (See arrow.)

ing the game. However, instead of marking the cards on the back, it is generally used to roughen certain portions of the edges.

**Key cards with slightly protruding edges can be stripped from the deck.**



In addition, various types of gambling daubing materials are available in colors matching the common blue or red ink on playing cards. Here, the cheat surreptitiously puts a bit of daub on a finger and then strategically transfers it lightly to certain portions of certain cards. This imprint can be quite effective in identifying high cards rather than value and suit and has the advantage of possibly disappearing after the cards have been in use a certain amount of time and being indiscernible thereafter.

One type of marked cards, “illuminous readers,” are shaded with a form of paint or ink that becomes readable when one wears specially treated dark or tinted glasses. Thus, a player may harbor some suspicion when he notes others wearing dark glasses. Of course, this same type of colored lens is also available in contact lenses. There even exists a type of eye drops that will enable the user to read the specially marked cards.

“Strippers” are another type of gaffed cards, so named because cer-



Decks with intricate scroll designs offer fertile areas for marking. Colored ink or pencil has been used to thicken lines in this design. (See arrow.)

three most common brands—"Bee," "Bicycle Rider Back," and "Bicycle Fan Back." This is because of their familiarity to cardplayers and the generally accepted feeling that these popular types cannot be marked (or at least are not marked by the reputable manufacturers). To the contrary, any deck may be marked by card companies other than the original manufacturer or by the cheat.

*"[A]ny deck may be marked by card companies other than the original manufacturer or by the cheat."*

tain cards may be literally "stripped" from the pack. Key cards, such as aces, are made so that the side edges protrude slightly from the rest of the cards when the deck is squared for dealing. Then the dealer surreptitiously strips or slides one or more of these cards from the deck for dealing to whomever he may desire. Although this type of deck is usually purchased in this altered fashion, a deck of strippers can be made by the cheater with sharp scissors or a paper cutter. A similar type of deck has all or some cards more narrow at the "top" than the "bottom," so that if the card is turned end-for-end, there will also be a very slight protrusion ready for "stripping."

It should be noted that occasionally cheats will substitute key cards from another deck of the same design, but with a slightly different finished surface. As a result, when the deck is laid on the table and the upper portion is twisted slightly, the pack will break or slide immediately above or below the card with a different finish. Such a deck may also be rigged by

applying a slick or sticky substance to key cards; e.g., clear wax.

Although numerous designs of card backs are available and used in gambling games, gamblers tend to use the

Since the three most common brands of playing cards have either red or blue coloring in the design on a white backing, these three colors of ink or pencils are obviously used for

This comparison photograph shows the manner in which a colored ink may be used to mark a card.



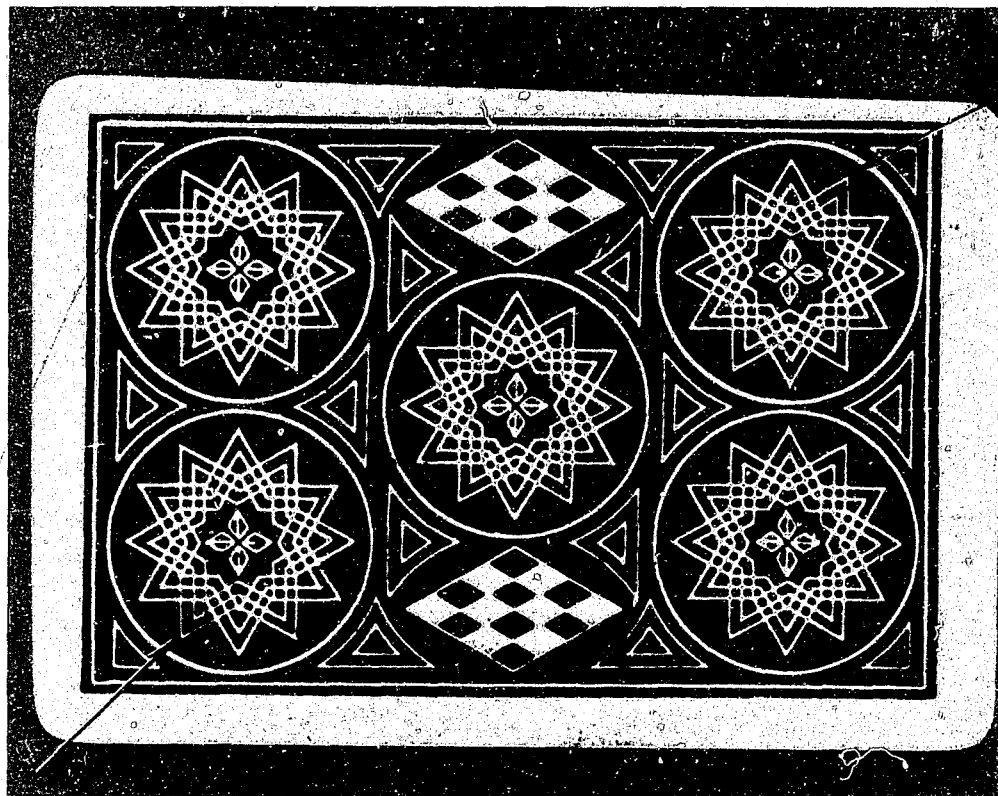
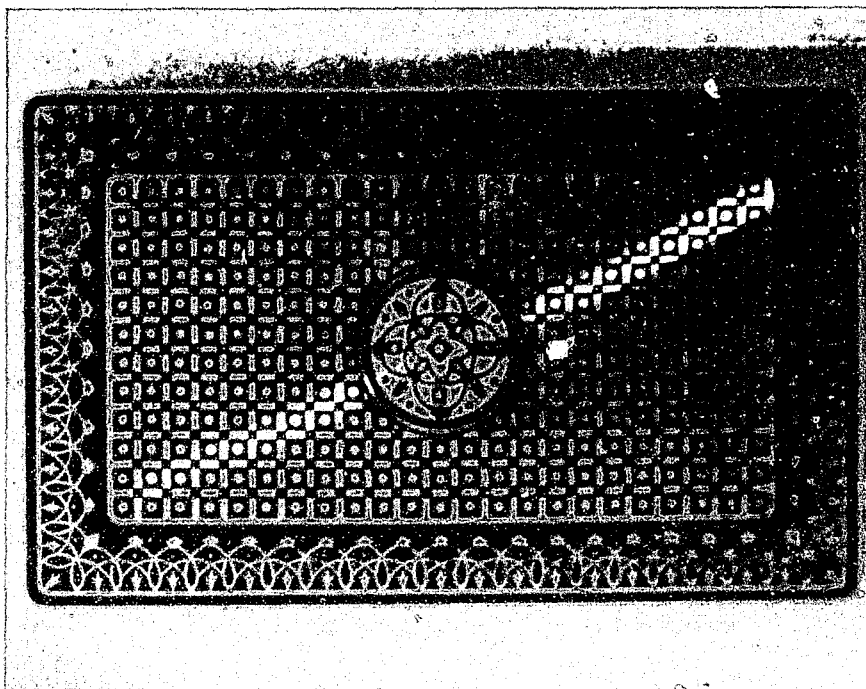
marking: The red or blue coloring, to add or thicken lines in the design; white coloring, to obliterate or make more narrow certain lines.

The type and extent of marking depends a great deal on the design(s) appearing on the back of the cards being used. There are far fewer ways to mark the regular, simple design; the more intricate the design, the more possibilities for marking.

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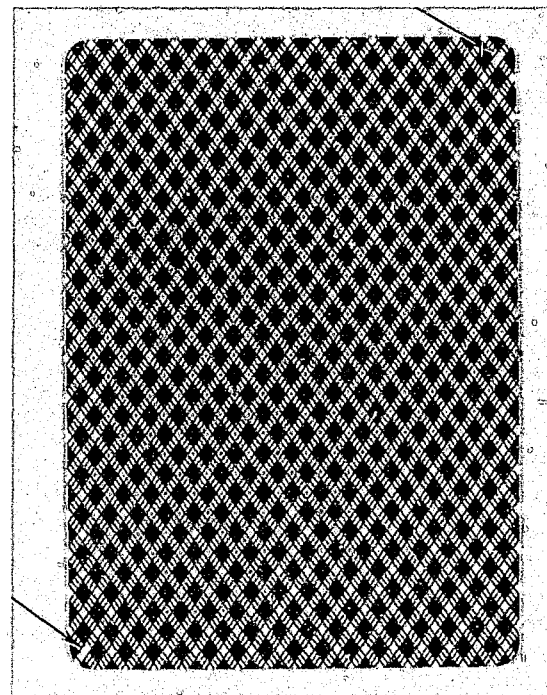
Generally, it can be stated that there is a tendency to favor marking the upper left corner of the cards since this is the portion normally exposed to the other players' view. However, no fixed rule can be made in this regard. At any rate, the very centers of the cards are usually avoided, and the markings are made about the upper halves of the cards. However, since

Marking as seen with specially treated glasses or contact lenses.



One type of marking is to make more narrow certain lines in the design. (See arrows.)

Arrows indicate where portions of the design have been obliterated to mark the card. Note identical markings on upper and lower portion in the event the card is inverted.



the cards may be inverted by the player, identical markings must also be made on the lower halves of the cards.

***“[T]he cheat is interested primarily in [marking] only 2 classes of cards—face cards and 10’s as a group and aces.”***

Determining what cards to mark varies with the type of game. In most gambling games, the suit is of little or no importance. Therefore, the four suits are not usually marked. Furthermore, the cheat is interested primarily in only 2 classes of cards—face cards and 10’s as a group and aces. Often, as a result, only 2 types of marks are required—1 for aces, 1 for face cards and 10’s. This makes detection more difficult, while greatly benefiting the crook. Some decks have been found merely with the high cards and low cards marked as groups.

## Detection

Because of the myriad of ways of gaffing cards, no complete set of instructions can be formulated. Nevertheless, some helpful hints can be made:

1. Square the deck to ascertain if all cards are of the same size and shape, running the fingers along the sides of the deck.
2. Check the finish on the playing card backs for a difference in type

of surface. This can best be done by holding the card obliquely to a light source.

3. Since the markings usually affect the reflective characteristics of the cards marked and are not absolutely perfectly done, some markings become quite apparent when the cards are held obliquely to the light source or are observed under magnification, if only a simple magnifying glass.

4. Select key cards for careful study and comparison; e.g., face cards or aces, and compare these with normally insignificant cards, such as the 3’s or 4’s. The real effort is particularly in this comparison of key cards, which may take considerable effort and painstaking examination.

5. The study of a card should not be limited to the card as a whole but to the individual portions of the card. This can be very tedious but is required to detect many markings.

6. If some irregularity is found, such as that which might occur through wear and tear, check the same location on the bottom of the card and on other cards of the same value. Of course, if only one card bears a marking, such as a dirty spot or an indentation, that card may be thereafter spotted by the knowledgeable player.

7. A final method of field testing is to square the deck in one’s hand and riffle or flip through the cards. This will be more effective if the cards are put in numerical order. During this procedure, the investigator must care-

fully observe only one small portion of the design at a time through one or more entire rifflings. The process is then repeated until all small portions of the backs have been observed. Although this technique is not always effective, it is most revealing once a system of marking is detected and demonstrates how the design seems to move about before one’s eyes.

Once a marking system is discovered and developed by full comparison of all cards, people often think how obvious the gaff is. Yet to one in the heat of a card game, this apparently obvious marking will not appear as such. On the other hand, people often think that the marking is so minute that a cheat could hardly recognize it across a table. However, given reasonably good eyesight, a thorough understanding of the marking system, and a minimum of practice, the cheat can very effectively identify all markings even across a large table.

The amount of skill involved in different kinds of card games varies greatly—from “show down poker” and “in between,” requiring relatively little skill, to bridge and cribbage, requiring much more skill. Still, assuming a relatively equal amount of skill of the players and over a relatively lengthy game session, one good indication of cheating may be that certain players consistently win, especially the large pots or critical hands, and especially when certain players (victims) are only barely beaten, so that they are enticed to play and wager heavily. Of course, for the victims’ benefit, this observation or realization may come a bit too late.

As noted above, catching cheats at cards may be extremely difficult, and the outlined suggestions may be helpful. Nevertheless, if suspected cards are checked and no gaffing noted, a more thorough and complete laboratory examination is recommended using special equipment and techniques by experienced examiners.

Widening the border to form a hump is a marking that can be used on any brand of playing cards. (See arrow.)

