

The Animal Hunter through My Life  
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Everyone needs to start puzzle solving, or magic, somewhere, and so several of us started with "The Animal Hunter". When we started, we had no idea it might be called a mental magic forcing device, that would come later. Nor did we probably think to work beyond the basic prop that we received. It was just a trick to fool our friends and family, but it is pretty clever!

My first experience with the prop came when I was seven or eight. I received an S. S. Adams magic set complete with three colored Cups and Balls, Magic Coin Box, Balancing Wand, Rice Bowls, Ball and Vase, and more. Several of them I could do, such as Ball and Vase, Balancing Wand, etc., but several ended up in the bottom of the toy box, including The Animal Hunter.

The Animal Hunter was a simple cream colored plastic disc about four inches in diameter. It had raised surfaces detailing seven animals and their names around the edge of the disc. These were printed in red. Below the picture of each animal, a hole was stamped through the disc. By today's terms, it was a simple, durable, and somewhat attractive piece of magic. Unfortunately, with the direction booklet "gone with the wind", that's about all there was to it.

Time passed, as it always does, and the pieces of the magic set that could be found were retrieved from the abandoned toy box when a real interest in magic was renewed in ninth grade. With The Amateur Magician's Handbook by Henry Hay in hand, many of the little tricks could be put to use. The Cups and Balls had new life, as did the black egg shaped Vanisher and The Rice Bowls. The Magic Coin Box could be enhanced by putting it into a ball of yarn, and The Three Shells could be used for the routine that was outlined in either MUM or Linking Ring. For someone on a very limited budget, the set turned into a gold mine, but that disc with the animals was still a mystery.

Moving ahead about ten years and I am teaching sixth graders about science, and in a unit on scientific method, we investigate ESP. To give students practice in following directions while exploring the topic, the VHS tape "Max Maven's Mind Games" was put to good use. Students would follow Max's instructions and be amazed at the outcome. One of the tests he presented dealt with astrology and involved a circle of symbols with a tail of four symbols outside the circle. Students would pick a number and begin counting that number starting on the first symbol of the tail, and then entering the circle on the count of five, and then continue their count, symbol by symbol until their secret number was reached. They then counted the symbols backward to the same number but avoiding the tail. Max then revealed the symbol on which they had landed. Once again, amazement, and then Max was off onto the next experiment. Little did I know, the methodology of The Animal Hunter had an inkling of a relationship with Max's Astrology Experiment.

Last year at Magic Live 2017, I attended a session group about using magic as a tool to help children. Lo and behold, there it was... The Animal Hunter! Through the proceedings, we were shown the trick. Someone picked one of the animals and told no one. The performer

tapped the various animals with a pencil while the participant silently spelled the animal's name. When the participant finished spelling, she said, "Stop!". The performer's pencil rested on the animal that was chosen. I had finally seen it! Continuing on, another person selected an animal and the routine was repeated, except different animals were tapped. Still, the performer ended tapping on the selected animal. Intriguing, indeed, to those of us not familiar with the workings of the chestnut.

We were then given a paper copy of the animal disc, which, in performance, wouldn't occur. Just as in the Astrology Experiment, show it and move on. Upon careful examination, the working became evident, especially with Max's Astrology Experiment, and it's tail. This was no random grouping of animals! They were carefully chosen! Now, the effect of the little plastic disc was clear, and it was clever!

While most folks stop with the animal disc, I wondered if the effect could be used in other ways. For one, since I teach chemistry, I could show students a wheel with the following elements: potassium, tin, tungsten, xenon, phosphorus, gold, helium, and mercury and the same effect, with a chosen element, would work beautifully. The effect could be repeated a few times and then the students could work in groups to try to discover the secret. Now they have something which they could show their parents and friends. This may seem like a tenuous connection to chemistry, but I believe that chemistry is all about patterns and problem solving, and that is what this problem would be.

How could you use "The Animal Hunter" in your field?