

Shim Lim's *Dream Act*, Full Reveal. *America's Got Talent*, 2018-05-29.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhJRq12bZJY>

Shim Lim is one of the most talented, dexterous, close-up card magicians of all time. He won the entire *AGT* competition in the 2019 season, snagging a \$1,000,000 prize and some gigs in Vegas at The Mirage. He also appeared twice on Penn & Teller's *Fool Us* magic show, in 2015 and 2017. And he's won other contests and made a number of other high-profile appearances on television media and around the world as well.

Lim performed this entire set of tricks, that he has named *The Dream Act*, in the 2019 *AGT* semi-finals and in his 2015 *Fool Us* appearance as well. He performed parts of it in a number of his other appearances. Lim supposedly sells the reveal kit for *The Dream Act* on his website for \$200, but buyers report the kit contains neither all of the information nor any of the physical gimmicks. Not surprising, given it was a million-dollar set of tricks that made Lim world-famous.

For this spoilers/trick reveals review, I will reference times and moves as seen in YouTube's posting of *The Dream Act* by *AGT* in 1080p at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhJRq12bZJY> .

Parts of *The Dream Act* have been revealed (or attempted to reveal) by others, pro and amateur. Analysis of other parts are notoriously absent. Here I will reveal all, start to finish.

This set of tricks, for the most part, is based on slight-of-hand, executed with an incredible degree of speed and dexterity. However Lim also uses gimmicks:

(1) **Copycat signature cards.** At 13:46, a close look at Tyra's original signed card bears a capital T with a small serif/'tail' at its bottom. And the 'cattail' that runs off the A ends directly above the A. However at 15:00 Lim pulls from his left vest pocket a copycat card that bears a T with NO serif/tail and a cattail that extends past the A and ends above the R. These copycat cards were likely not obtained from Tyra pre-show. If they had been, the time would have been taken to make the signatures match more closely. And Penn & Teller do not approve of "pre-work" in the acts they present. And there is not sufficient opportunity for Lim to create these copycat cards to this degree of accuracy during the performance. This leaves us with the only explanation: Lim has an assistant stashed under his table, watching a television monitor, creating the copycat cards on-the-fly. In both the *AGT* and *Fool Us* presentations, Lim basically ensures the camera captures a close-up of the signed cards, ostensibly for the benefit of his assistant underneath. In both presentations, the view under the table is entirely obscured.

(2) **Gimmick Vest and Trousers.** In some cases the cards are being moved around using snap-elastic gimmicks that are built into Lim's vest and trousers. This is also a well-known magic gimmick. Lim has custom-built these for this act.

If you want to see how incredibly fast & neat one of these snap-elastic gimmicks work, watch magician Danny Cole use one on *Fool Us* to make his tie disappear right off of the front of his shirt in plain view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6yVnxv-Nlo> at 1:04

Or, even faster & neater, watch magician Eric Chien use one to make his vest change colors, again in plain view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvzMqIQLiXE> first at 1:50 and again at 5:18.

(3) **Gimmick Cards.** Twice Lim uses a "full-deck" gimmick card that has four flaps/panels attached to its bottom that flip down so that, at a distance, it will look like an entire deck of cards. This is a standard gimmick available from any magic shop. He also, as seen, uses a couple of blank cards.

I—Much, but not all, of the "Heidi" portion of the act has already been revealed by others:

11:16. Lim picks up a card from the table and slips it into his back pocket. The card is blank.

11:29. Lim opens the box of cards and takes out about 35 cards, face-up to him. He can easily see which ones to grab, because the other cards are face-down to him.

11:31. Lim flips the box when he sets it down. Now the cards still in the box are face-up to him.

11:38. Lim *fully fans* the cards in a manner so that Heidi may pick any one of the cards (except the top card that is completely covered by Lim's left thumb). This is a force. The first half of the cards are all J♣, the second half of the cards are all 2♦. Except for the top card. That one is blank. So Lim is forcing either a J♣ or a 2♦ on Heidi. Lim will later use the same deck to force on Tyra whichever card Heidi does not pick. Lim is forcing so his assistant under the table only needs some J♣s and 2♦s to work with to make copycat cards, rather than wasting time fumbling about through entire decks and stacks of cards to find what he/she needs.

11:52. Lim, holding the deck at the back edge of the table, cuts all the 2♦s to the bottom of the deck (where he will need them when Tyra selects her card). Then he pulls the full-deck gimmick card from under the table (you can see him do it) and slides it into the division between the J♣s and the 2♦s. This is going to help him hold the J♣s back from Tyra later in the act. This is why Lim doesn't just let Heidi *keep* the card and start signing it; Lim needs to be 'free' for a brief moment to execute this move, undistracted by Heidi and with the audience watching her fiddle with the marker instead of watching him. The move was supposed to be timed so that Heidi's handling of the marker would distract, but Lim missed a beat. Even Heidi is looking right at the move, probably wondering about what Lim is looking for.

12:16. The 'vanishing marker' move. Lim brings his hands together. At that instant he swivels the marker behind his right hand with an instant snap. Then his right hand quickly to the left. It appears he is shoving the marker into his left hand, but actually he is positioning his right hand so he can pull his right hand rightward again, shoving the marker into the right-side of his vest. To finish putting it inside the vest, Lim forcefully snaps the marker in the rest of the way in using his middle finger ... which can briefly be seen moving inward to do so.

12:26. Lim pretends to toss the J♣ onto the table. Actually he picks up the J♣ with his ring finger and pinky and uses them to flip the J♣ up under to the bottom of the deck. Simultaneously he flips the blank card on top out on the mat using his index finger.

12:27. Lim's left hand moves in a snapping motion from the front to the back of the deck. Lim is folding the J♣ at the bottom of the deck in half.

12:29. Lim scoots the card on the mat slightly. This is a visual diversion. Lim is, quite smoothly, folding the J♣ again under the deck, so that it is now folded in quarters.

12:37. Under cover of the deck of cards and his arm, Lim snags, out of his vest with his thumb, the clear plastic tube that will deliver smoke to his mouth.

12:41. Under the excuse of 'rolling up' his already-rolled-up sleeves. Lim places the deck of cards in his mouth, and immediately uses his tongue to take the quarter-folded J♣ into his mouth from the bottom of the deck. Also he bites down on the tip of the smoke tube to hold it; you can actually hear him bite it. I have to wonder why he didn't start the act with unrolled sleeves; it would have made his excuse a bit more believable.

12:42. With his head tilted down, and the deck of cards dangling below, the audience cannot see the clear tube that is going to deliver the smoke to his mouth. And the audience is distracted, looking at the card on the mat.

12:49. The assistant under the table trips the smoke gag (which Lim calls SSS, Sleeveless Silent Smoke). It's piping smoke to a small hole in the mat on which the card is laying ... and also to the tube in Lim's mouth. The tube, again, is covered by the head-tilt and the cards. And the audience is further distracted, now focused entirely on the smoke emanating from the mat.

12:52. Lim now has the smoke in his mouth he needs. Lim takes the cards out of his mouth and releases the smoke tube. The clear tube, with elastic attached, snaps back into his vest. The audience is still transfixed on the smoking mat.

12:53. Lim reveals the blank card that he tossed to the mat at 12:26.

13:05. Lim unfolds from his mouth the J♣ that he placed there at 12:41.

13:11. Lim pushes his thumb forcefully twice inside his vest. He's not just retrieving a plastic bag. He could have had one on the table from the outset. He's also created this opportunity to be able to push the clear smoke tube further down into his vest, to make sure it doesn't show.

II.—A significant part of the earlier part of the "Tyra" portion of the act has already been revealed by others, while most of the latter portion, that after 14:56, has NOT been successfully revealed (until now):

13:29. Lim does NOT fully fan the cards in a manner so that Tyra may pick any one of the cards. This is also a force. Lim pulls back the full deck gimmick card ... and all the J♣s above it ... up under his right thumb so that, essentially, Tyra can't or won't pick one of them. Hence, Lim is forcing a 2♦ on Tyra. Again, Lim is forcing so his assistant under the table only needs some J♣s &

2♦s to work with to make copycat cards, rather than fumbling about through entire decks of cards to find what he/she needs. Again, notice that these cards are never shown face-up during the act.

13:35. Lim makes some sort of move here, bringing the 2♦ up to the deck of cards, and covering them all from view with his closed hands. It *may* be a failed attempt to use the 2♦ to assist in a one-hand cut to bring the full-deck gimmick card to the top of the deck. Lim did not make this move in the *Fool Us* presentation.

13:40. While Tyra is distracting, Lim cuts the cards, bringing the full-deck gimmick card to the top of the deck.

13:44. While the audience is visually distracted by looking at Tyra's signed card, Lim uses his left hand to slip the deck of cards into a pocket hidden inside his vest. He keeps only the full-deck gimmick card. The full-deck gimmick card on top is helping to hide Lim's move to ditch the rest of the cards in his vest.

13:46. Take note that, as said above, Tyra's original signed card bears a capital T with a small serif/'tail' at its bottom. And the 'cattail' that runs off the A ends directly above the A, no further.

13:48. Lim flips out the four panels on the full-deck gimmick card. He does so by briefly holding the card with his right hand while using the fingers of his left hand to give the panels a quick flick. Now it appears that Lim is (still) holding the deck of cards (that he ditched at 13:44) in his left hand, but actually he is only holding the single full-deck gimmick card in his left hand.

13:51. Not in this *AGT* presentation, but in his *Fool Us* presentation, Lim makes a second 'vanishing marker' move at this point in the act. Lim faces left with the marker between his hands that are clasped as though in prayer. He separates his hand and the marker appears to have vanished. Lim quickly flipped the marker, under cover of his left hand, so that he was grasping the marker between two of his fingers *behind* his right hand. A basic skill for close-up card magicians is to be able to make a card disappear in-a-snap using the same move. Lim then quickly lets his right hand drop to his side, allowing him to discard the marker on the floor.

13:57. Lim slides the 2♦ under the full-deck gimmick card, face-down. He is now only holding two cards in his left hand.

14:03. Under cover of his right hand, Lim lifts the full-deck gimmick card with his right hand. He is simultaneously using his right thumb to fold down the back flap and his left thumb to flip down the left flap. Then Lim immediately follows with a motion of the full-deck gimmick card to his right to fold down the right flap, then a forward motion to fold down the front flap. Now Lim has two flat cards in his left hand, the full-deck gimmick card on top and the 2♦ on the bottom, face-down.

14:06. Lim flips the two cards for the reveal. Now the 2♦ is on top, face-up.

14:08. Lim pinches two corners of the cards tightly, one corner with each hand. This to make it look as though he now only has one card, the 2♦. Without the pinching, the full-deck gimmick card might bulge from the thickness of its flaps/panels and be revealed.

14:18. Lim shakes the rest of the cards out of the box. They come out face-up, just as Lin set them up at 11:31.

14:23. Lim fans the cards to reveal their faces. The audience gasps as if he "moved" the deck of cards from his left hand into the box. But actually these are just the extra cards Lim never removed from the box in the first place. Notice that Lim is only fanning about 20 cards (out of a 54-card deck, counting the 2 Jokers). Also notice that this is the first time Lin ever reveals any card faces other than J♣ and 2♦.

14:26. Lim uses his left hand to bring the 2♦ and the full-deck gimmick card under the fanned cards in his right hand. He is slipping the 2♦ onto the bottom of the fanned cards, while keeping the full-deck gimmick card in his left hand.

14:40. Amazing slight-of-hand. Lim shakes the full-deck gimmick card back and forth to disguise that he is flipping down its flaps so that it looks as though it is an entire deck of cards. While simultaneously squeezing all the cards in his right hand together tightly, and flipping up their bottom. The 2♦ is revealed and it looks as though it is just a single card, while actually all the other fanned cards are right behind it.

14:46. Lim slides all the fanned cards, with the 2♦ on the bottom, face-down ... under the full-deck gimmick card.

14:47. Lim flips all the cards, revealing the 2♦, face-up, on top of the deck. The full-deck gimmick card is now on the bottom of the deck, face-up.

14:49. Lim cuts the cards once, placing the bottom part of the deck onto the top part of the deck. This brings the full-deck gimmick card to the middle of the deck, right above the 2♦. To the audience it appears to be being done to 'bury' the 2♦. Actually it's being done so the weight of the cards on top of the full-deck gimmick card will keep the flaps/panels from bulging too much when he sets the deck down on the mat. This is the last time the original signed 2♦ makes any appearance.

14:56. After waving his hands about a bit, so that the audience is sure the 2♦ is still in the deck on the mat, Lim pulls the 2♦ from a left pocket in his vest using his left hand. This is a copycat card. The assistant, behind and under the table, has loaded the copycat card into the elastic gimmick in Lin's trousers and snapped Lim the 2♦ copycat card (#1) up to his left vest pocket. Lim is also firmly touching near the center of his vest with two fingers of his right hand. He is making sure he was *also* correctly snapped the two additional 2♦ copycat cards (#2 & #3) he will need later in the act. Because, once he turns around, the assistant can't get to the elastic gimmick in his trousers to snap him. It won't be facing him/her next to the table. He's likely had the assistant apply a bit of magician's 'roughing fluid' to them, that dries to a texture of very fine sandpaper, to help cards stick together when desired.

15:00. The 2♦ that came out of the vest pocket can plainly be seen to be a copycat card (#1). As said above, it bears a T with NO serif/tail and a cattail that extends past the A and ends above the

R. Lim's assistant has already had over a minute to prepare the needed 2♦ copycat cards, so he/she should have done better than this.

15:08. Lim palms the 2♦ copycat card (#1) into his left hand.

15:09. Lim can be seen hard-pushing the 2♦ copycat card (#1) into his vest. He's attaching it to another elastic gimmick.

15:15. Lim, now with his back turned to the audience, is preparing to grab with his left hand the blank card that he put in his rear pocket at 11:16.

15:17. With his back turned, Lim is retrieving the two other 2♦ copycat cards (#2 & #3) from the location that he was touching & double-checking at 14:56. He's holding them together, both facing in the same direction, and starting to quarter-fold them. At first, his left arm is level while he is first retrieving the two other 2♦ copycat cards (#2 & #3). Then you see his left arm starting to move upward; that is Lim feeding the tube from under his vest into his mouth to prepare to take in some more smoke.

15:19. Lim is retrieving 2♦ copycat card (#1) that he snapped himself at 15:09. He is pulling it out of a slit in the black silk (that is being disguised the black backstrap), using his left thumb and placing it front of the blank card, face-up. This move to the backstrap is plainly seen in every performance of the act.

15:22. Lim flips the two cards for the reveal of the 2♦ copycat card (#1) face-up, with the blank card behind unseen. He has raised his left arm up high manipulating and his head is tilted down. He's done quarter-folding the two other 2♦ copycat cards (#2 & #3), now putting them into his mouth and has begun taking on some smoke.

15:27. Lim's right hand momentarily slips the two cards under his vest's black backstrap. He has used his left index finger to slightly separate the two cards. The 2♦ copycat card (#1) that is underneath is being slid into the slit in the black silk ... and being attached to another elastic gimmick. The blank card in front of it is helping to disguise the move. This move of the cards under the backstrap is plainly seen in every performance of the act. The elastic gimmick is snapped immediately and brings the card up the back of his vest, over his shoulder and to the top front of his vest where he can snag it with his left hand.

15:28. Lim picks up the 2♦ copycat card (#1) from the top front of his vest and, while his left hand is still hidden, he flips the card so that the card is being held *behind* his left hand between his fingers. He releases the smoke tube from his mouth and it snaps back under his vest.

15:29. Lim moves his left hand into view, with the hidden 2♦ copycat card (#1) being held behind it between his fingers. Then he flips it forward for the reveal of both it and the blank card at his waist.

15:33. Lim puts his hands together and appears to be swapping the 2♦ copycat card (#1) and the blank card from his upper right hand to his lower left hand. Actually he is cupping both cards in his right hand.

15:34. Lim visually distracts by looking at his left hand and raising it, as though the 2♦ copycat card (#1) are blank card are there. They are not. Actually he is bringing his right hand to the edge of the back of the table, where he ditches the 2♦ copycat card (#1) and the blank card behind the table. Now he has no cards in either hand. And he shows the audience the cards have disappeared, his hands empty. This is the last appearance of 2♦ copycat card (#1). Now there are only the other two 2♦ copycats (#2 & #3) on-deck, the ones that he is presently holding in his mouth.

15:38 – 15:52. Lim reveals the two other 2♦ copycat cards (#2 & #3) that he placed in his mouth at 15:22. Of course, he's representing them as a single card. But they are actually two cards together, facing the same way.

15:41. Lim runs his fingers through his hair. I *think* he is drying his fingers off toward the balance of the act. Or it may just be theatre.

15:53. The exposed 2♦ Lim holds out to the camera can also plainly be seen to be a copycat card. It also bears a T with NO serif/tail and a cattail that extends past the A and ends above the R.

15:59. Lim runs the 2♦ through his right hand with a strong snapping motion. Again, amazing sleight-of-hand. He is, in one swift motion, snapping away one of the copycat cards, folding it up back into quarters (again) and cupping it hidden in his right hand. All in an instant.

16:06. Lim holds up the plastic bag containing the J♣. He slips his middle and ring fingers into the bag. The same finger move can be seen in the *Fool Us* presentation. The copycat 2♦ is still cupped behind the fingers of his right hand. (The other 2♦ copycat card is still in his mouth.)

16:08. More amazing card dexterity. The most difficult move in the entire act. Lim flips the bag up in the air, unfolds the quarter-folded 2♦ copycat card he has been cupping using his pinky, and flings it into the bag (unfolded), using the tops of his middle and ring fingers as support to guide it into the bag. And he does it so that the 2♦ ends up back-to-back with the J♣. Now Lim has a bag with a J♣ facing out of one side and a 2♦ facing out of the other side. And he makes sure to flip the bag around so that the 2♦ is facing the audience. All so fast it looks as though the J♣ changed into a 2♦ in a New York second. Incredible.

16:10. Lim grasps the bag pretty firmly. He is probably making sure the two cards are edged up perfectly, so as not to reveal the trick. The roughing fluid is helping the two cards stick together, edged up.

16:14. Lim turns the bag face-down, so neither card can be seen.

16:15. Lim takes the copycat card out of his mouth, so it can be seen to be the 2♦. Again, the lack of a serif/tail proves it is a copycat. Then he brings up the bag, flipping it around (again) in the process, to show that "it is now" the J♣. In the *Fool Us* presentation, the camera is further back and the flipping of the bag from one side to the other can plainly be seen.

16:17. Lim lets Tyra see the 2♦ for about half a second, then he throws it face-down onto the mat. No need to let her get a really good look at what is supposed to be her own signature.

16:22. Lim shakes out the content of the plastic bag onto the mat. He makes sure it falls on the mat so that the J♣ is face-up. The copycat 2♦ behind it cannot be seen. The roughing fluid helped to make sure the 2♦ did not fall away from the J♣ as he shook it out on the mat.

16:23: Lim snags an empty folded-up plastic bag from under his vest using his right hand. He keeps the empty bag cupped from view in his right hand. Another amazing move. None of his fingers move at all, he's just guiding the bag into his palm as he pulls his hand away ... simply using the pressure of his hand.

16:26. Lim picks up the J♣ and the copycat 2♦ off the mat. He flips the copycat 2♦ around so you can see its front and back. He does NOT flip the J♣, as it would reveal the *other* copycat 2♦ that was behind it in the bag.

16:33: Lim moves the top left corner of the empty folded-up plastic bag to behind the bag containing the J♣. He aligns the top left corners of both bags so that he is grasping them together.

16:34. What he slips into the bag are the J♣ and both of the remaining 2♦ copycats.

16:42: Lim flips the J♣ bag into his right hand and cups it, while simultaneously releasing the rest of empty bag to reveal it.

16:43: Lim slaps his right hand on the back edge of the table. At the moment it strikes, he ditches the J♣ bag behind the table. Now the J♣ and all of the copycat 2♦s are off-deck, gone for the remainder of the act.

16:49: Lim places the box of cards with part of it extending below the back of the table then swipes his left hand across the mat twice as though he is dusting the mat. Under cover of his left hand, Lim and his assistant work together to ditch the box of cards and replace it with an empty box. Now the original signed 2♦ is also gone.

16:52. Lim sets the empty box, that has no bottom, right on top of the hole that was used at 12:49 to release smoke onto the mat.

16:58. Assistant, a little more smoke, please. The smoke appears to be emanating from the box itself. Because it is, shooting right up into the empty box.

17:01: Lim crushes the empty box with his right hand.

17:05: Lim swipes his flattened hand back across the mat to the edge of the table without lifting it, ditching the crushed box behind the table. Everything has now disappeared. Except for the empty plastic bag that was left over at 16:44.

QED.