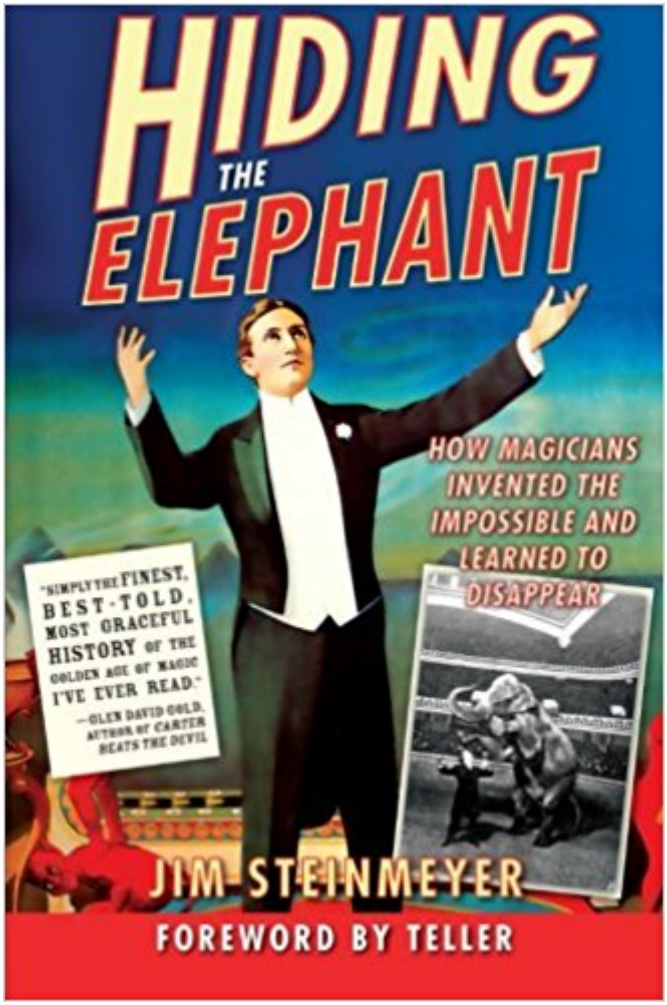
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Hiding The Elephant: How Magicians Invented The Impossible And Learned To Disappear



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Synopsis

Now in paperback comes Jim Steinmeyer's astonishing chronicle of half a century of illusionary innovation, backstage chicanery, and keen competition within the world of magicians. Lauded by today's finest magicians and critics, Hiding the Elephant is a cultural history of the efforts among legendary conjurers to make things materialize, levitate, and disappear. Steinmeyer unveils the secrets and life stories of the fascinating personalities behind optical marvels such as floating ghosts interacting with live actors, disembodied heads, and vanishing ladies. He demystifies Pepper's Ghost, Harry Kellar's Levitation of Princess Karnak, Charles Morritt's Disappearing Donkey, and Houdini's landmark vanishing of Jennie the elephant in 1918. The dramatic mix of science and history, with revealing diagrams, photographs and magicians' portraits by William Stout, provides a glimpse behind the curtain at the backstage story of magic.

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Customer Reviews

The success of a magician "lies in making a human connection to the magic." Create an illusion in the audience's mind, and they're hooked. But to understand magicians, we need to understand the art of that creation. Steinmeyer, who has designed illusions for Siegfried and Roy and David Copperfield, presents a cultural history of magic's golden age (from the 1890s to the 1930s), some legendary tricks (including the Levitation of Princess Karnak and Harry Houdini's Disappearing Elephant) and the fierce rivalries that dominated the craft. Steinmeyer reveals certain secrets, which rely on engineering, artistry and sheer chutzpah, but he hasn't betrayed anyone; most of his information has been published elsewhere. What he adds is context. Magicians advertise deceit,

then perform it. Unlike political chicanery, which Steinmeyer dubs dishonest trickery, magic is a kind of pure trickery. Audiences pay for a ruse, not a lecture on fraud. Do we believe movie special effects are real? Of course not, but it doesn't detract from our enjoyment. Similarly, while many 19th-century spiritualists were rightfully debunked as frauds and charlatans, audiences loved the antics. Some, such as the Davenport brothers, were a magnet of controversy and a wild hit, successfully mixing "religion, agnosticism, science, superstition, and fraud." Steinmeyer diagrams famous tricks, celebrating their science and ingenuity. Readers meet characters as colorful as their acts. Buyer beware: If you want to keep your illusions, go to Las Vegas. But for magic lovers who revel in learning the magician's art, this book part research study, part salute is a find. 8 pages of b&w photos and diagrams.Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Writing a history of stage magic, Steinmeyer reveals the secrets of such famous feats as hiding an elephant, one of Houdini's big tricks, as he details notable stage magicians' careers. He shows that this venerable entertainment genre is indubitably more illusion, performed by monumentally clever practitioners, than magic. Brother-and-sister mind-reading act Charles and Lilian Morritt perfected a silent code based on synchronized counting that defied cagey observers' abilities to detect, let alone understand. Charles went on to realize the sleight central to Houdini's disappearing elephant bit, and that is just one of the delicious connections Steinmeyer points out among performers who seem to constitute a fellowship. Complementing Steinmeyer's profiles are excellent portraits of his subjects by underground-comix stalwart William Stout. Delightful and informative. Mike TribbyCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I ALWAYS LIKE Jim Steinmeyer's books because of the amount of work and research he puts into each volume...and this one is no exception. In fact, I must say that with my almost-lifetime love of magic - in all of its various forms - this book certainly sheds "new light" on the subject, and gave me a very sobering look into the "back stories" of the art. And, it has a Foreword by Teller of the magic-duo "Penn & Teller"...that's a great read all by itself.The book's title, "Hiding The Elephant", is based on the infamous 1918 illusion that Harry Houdini did on the stage at the New York Hippodrome, when he caused "Jennie The Elephant" to vanish into thin air. Or, did he ? That's what this book is all about, and the well-known term "Smoke & Mirrors" comes into play throughout the books 362 Pages, proving that "the hand may be quicker than the eye", but it's deception, and,

misdirection that makes the trick - or, illusion - work.Steinmeyer takes a chronological look at the history of these, sometimes, seemingly impossible vanishing illusions, as well as the tricks used by those who caused disembodied heads to appear, ghosts to float, ladies to be sawed-in-half...and, donkeys, cars, and, elephants, and almost anything else you can name, to disappear.THE NAMES OF THOSE chronicled within the book are some of the most-famous of all-time: Kellar, Herrmann, Dante, Houdini, Bamberg, the Davenport Brothers, Robert-Houdin, Thurston, the Maskelynes', Goldin...well, you get the picture. But I was a little upset that Blackstone, as well as "Carter The Great" weren't profiled in here. Both had superb careers, and Blackstone was one of Houdini's greatest rivals, and in-reality a better magician & illusionist than Houdini, who excelled more as an escape artist than as a magician.Speaking of "rivalry", this is the part of the book that I hadn't fully known about. I didn't realize the backstabbing, the belittling, the thievery that went on behind-the-scenes of these legendary icons...with almost all of those mentioned, taking part in those activities. Page-after-page stories of tricks, illusions, designs of apparatus, and, sometimes actual items, being stolen by one illusionist/magician from the other ! I was shocked at this new light that was shed on a profession I have loved, followed, and, at one time, participated-in myself...it gave me new insight and soured me on those who took part in any of the above-mentioned callous deeds.As the well-known magician/actor/writer, Ricky Jay states, Steinmeyer's book is "An enthralling history of great illusionists that reveals not only how magicians act but how they think.""HIDING THE ELEPHANT", by Jim Steinmeyer, has 362 Pages that contain 16 Chapters, 65 Illustrations, 8 Pages of rare photos, and, a great section on Acknowledgements & Notes. In reading it, prepare yourself for a look back at Magic's History going from the 1800's-to-today, and learn, as I did, that in the World of Magic not everything is as it seems: On Stage, OR, Off.

When researching Victorian stage magicians, I came across Jim Steinmeyer's book. Not only does he give an incredible account of history, Steinmeyer does so with entertaining narrative. He connects how the profession grew, the competition behind finding the best spectacle to gain an audience, and how the history helped push the use of technology and stage presence. Steinmeyer brings you into the book by framing it with a historical trick he tried. Once I started reading the book, I couldn't stop until I had devoured the whole thing. It interested me so much that I've continued researching stage magicians!

An insightful review of theater, magic and society as it developed through the years, this fascinating story provides a look at how magicians think. Highly recommended for lovers of magic, theater and

history.

A fascinating walk through the history of magic and the showmanship that went with it from the late 1800's through the end of magic's golden era in the 1930's. Although the book explains the mechanics of many great illusions, it's much more than just a "how they did it" book. There are compelling character studies of magicians and the entire magic community as well as an in-depth look at European and American theater of the era. The magicians' stories intertwine as illusions evolved and theater goer wants changed, all done with the unfolding narrative of a good novel. Author and illusion designer to the stars (including David Copperfield, Siegfried & Roy, and Doug Henning) Jim Steinmeyer also injects the mystery of an elusive trick throughout the book, explaining how the illusionist works and thinks. This is a book about people, history, and creative thinking as much as it's a book about magic.

Jim Steinmeyer is a marvellous writer and he turns his full powers to a subject he loves and knows well - the history of the Golden Age of Magic. Whether or not you are interested in magic, theater or history, you'll still be knocked out by this book. It was the best book I read this past summer, not just because of all the "gee, whiz" cool stuff in it, but because of the human element involved in the stories here. In its depiction of the personalities, egos, and creative mad scientists involved, Hiding the Elephant really shines. I read the whole book in one day, then passed it to a friend who did the same thing. Neither of us could put it down. Highly recommended.

This is a fascinating history of the "golden age of magic" from about the last third of the 19th Century to about the first third of the 20th Century. If you're a professional magician or serious hobbyist you simply must read this book. If you're not a magician but enjoy well-written popular history you'll like it as well.Although the book does reveal some of the workings of some older illusions, there are no "Masked Magician" or William Poundstone style exposures for exposure's sake here. None of the revelations are gratuitous; they're necessary to appreciate the story.Steinmeyer is not only a master illusion designer and builder but a true scholar of his art and a very good writer. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and I bet you will too.

This is a great book. Fascinating history of magic. I earned a ton and thought I had read a lot before.

A very well written and well researched history of magic, covering many magicians from the 1800s

and 1900s. Of all the book concentrates on the history of specific performers and the development of magic tricks, it does reveal a few secrets ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • just enough to satisfy curious readers. It's made me more excited about going to my next magic show.I do want to mention, however, that the Kindle edition's selected typeface makes it difficult to read. Normally, I can read a book without glasses by simply enlarging the font. For this title, however, I needed to enlarge the typeface several times to ensure that it was large enough to read without glasses. This was clearly a problem with the typeface selected for this title.

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