



Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear

By Jim Steinmeyer

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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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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.

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From [Booklist](#)

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 Lillian 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 Tribby*

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Review

No author has . . . better conveyed the way love of conjuring consumes a magician's life with magic's joys, terrors and longings. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, by Teller

Users Review

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Scottie Kelly:

The book Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear make you feel enjoy for your spare time. You need to use to make your capable a lot more increase. Book can to be your best friend when you getting pressure or having big problem together with your subject. If you can

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Thomas Carroll:

Exactly why? Because this *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear* is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap it but latter it will surprise you with the secret it inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who write the book in such incredible way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning thoroughly. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book possess such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking way. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

Joshua Castillo:

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