

## The prestige

# The Prestige



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Opening Lines: "Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called "The Pledge." The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But of course... it probably isn't. The second act is called "The Turn." The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you're looking for the secret... but you won't find it, because of course you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn't clap yet. Because making something disappear isn't enough; you have to bring it back. That's why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call "The Prestige."

While growing up in Bloomington, I had the pleasure of knowing a professional stage magician. He made a small living performing at various conventions and meetings around the United States. As a small boy of 10, I found him fascinating. He took me under his wing for a while and gave me what he called a beginning magic kit. It wasn't the type you found in magic stores. This was something special.

It had the linking rings, multiplying bottles, the Chinese rice bowls and a large number of other small stage illusions. There was even a time in my life when I could take a new deck of cards, shuffle them several times, let you cut them, and then cut them myself and deal myself a Royal Flush. (No I couldn't do this today.) The result of this training was that I have a background in how even some of the most complex magic tricks are performed, and I can never find someone willing to play poker with me. I love a good magic show, I like trying to spot the moves of the magician on stage. I like it even more when the magician succeeds in misdirecting my attention even when I know how the trick is performed. And I like films about magicians. *The Prestige* is perhaps my favorite.

*The Prestige* stars Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman as rival magicians--each in a never ending battle to outdo and outperform the other on stage. The rivalry is at times violent; disguises are worn to disrupt each other's tricks and otherwise hinder their performances. Finally one of them comes up with the ultimate illusion "The Transported Man," a trick where the magician disappears from one point and reappears in another. The drive to perform this trick quickly and with the most flair moves the film from drama to science fiction when one of them enlists the aid of Nikola Tesla. There are many twists and turns in this film. You will have to watch closely to keep track of all of them. I was never disappointed. If I were to find any fault with the film, it would be that I found Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman looked enough alike at this time in their lives that there were moments when I had difficulty telling them apart.

I imagine that magicians as a society have a love/hate relationship with this movie. In order for

the basic plot to work the secret to several stage illusions are revealed, and this is something that magicians have always sought to prevent. I think you will be surprised at how simple many of them are. I would, however, like to mention one trick in particular, the vanishing bird cage. The movie perpetuates a rumor that the bird in the cage dies or is badly injured each time the trick is performed. According to all the histories of this trick I have read this was never the case. It was a rumor started to discredit a magician named Harry Keller in the late 1800's. He was actually investigated and he proved that he had been using the same bird for a number of years. However the rumor has continued to build over the years to the extent that to avoid controversy many magicians today use a clearly fake bird rather a live one. It is true that some magic tricks can be dangerous, but only if the magician or their assistants are extremely careless. Watching the film almost made me want to dust off my stage wand, and see if I could again fool an audience. What stopped me? I have long since given away the magic kit I had been given as a child and when I priced the cost of illusions of similar quality I found I had given away a set worth more than four thousand dollars at today's prices. Alas, this was too much money to invest simply to return to a hobby that I was unsure I would continue.

Posted by Keith C. on February 3, 2015

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**Reviews Titles:**

[The prestige](#)

## Night Circus Readalikes



Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* tells the story of two competing magicians trying to outdo each other in the creation of an enchanted circus. Whether you've read it and want more of the gothic atmosphere, period charm, and dazzling detail, are on the holds list for it, or just enjoy a bit of whimsy and dark Victorianism, these books should be of interest.

Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell, a tale of the resurgence of English magic in the early 19th century, is just as dense and immersive as the equally thick *Night Circus*, and like that novel features a period writing style and a fully realized magical world-within-a-world.

Her Fearful Symmetry shares the formal, slightly sinister tone and otherworldly atmosphere of *The Night Circus*. Twin sisters inherit a house abutting London's Highgate cemetery, and the mysterious aunt who left it to them continues to wield an influence from beyond the grave.

Mechanique takes place in a futuristic/steampunk postapocalypse, where a circus made up of mechanical people travels the harsh landscape. Its author's care for detailed and striking visual description and the overall gothic atmosphere are very akin to *The Night Circus*, and despite the time period there is an old-fashioned flavor to it.

The dueling magicians in Robert Priest's The Prestige become not lovers (as in *The Night Circus*) but ever fiercer competitors, and their unbelievable secrets and magical/scientific tricks ratchet

up the stakes in this elegant, tense novel. The Victorian writing style is taken even further here, and the gothic atmosphere and magic-related drama are very reminiscent of *The Night Circus*.

The dramatic black and white world of the lushly illustrated The Invention of Hugo Cabret could easily stand side by side with Morgenstern's circus. At the turn of the century Hugo is living in a Paris train station and is obsessed with mechanics and automata--one of which might carry a secret message. The dark whimsicality and period charm are similar to *The Night Circus*.

Likewise, Amphigorey, a collection of odd, gothic works by Edward Gorey, offers a more overt visual component. Gorey's careful, old-fashioned, twisted style could have perfectly captured Morgenstern's circus world, and the overall dark, Victorian cast of the stories is parallel (if a bit more humorously done).

Posted by mkinney on January 22, 2012

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Her fearful symmetry : a novel

Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell

Mechanique : a tale of the Circus Tresaulti

The invention of Hugo Cabret : a novel in words and pictures

The night circus : a novel

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