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Young Harry Houdini spends his days chaining himself to train tracks and teetering on wires high above the city with his two best friends, Arthur and Billie. But when Harry's friend and magical mentor, Herbie, disappears, the three friends band together, determined to rescue the beloved magician.

With nothing more than a mysterious puff of purple smoke, an ominous threat, and a menacing Bulgarian for evidence, Harry, Arthur, and Billie embark on a dangerously thrilling investigation that pushes their skill, and friendship, to the limits. But can Harry find Herbie before it's too late?

The Magician's Fire Details

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From Reader Review The Magician's Fire for online ebook

Pop Bop says

Way, Way More Than You Might Ever Expect

If you were to look at the blurbs for this book you could quite understandably suspect that all you would get is a kid adventure where one of the kids is supposed to be young Harry Houdini. Maybe some biographical facts slipped in; maybe an O.K. mystery; maybe some local color from 1886 Manhattan. Little more. Well, shame on you, (actually me, since that was my attitude), since it turns out that this book spins a colorful yarn that features ripping action and three terrifically engaging lead characters.

Our heroes are young Harry, who will ultimately become "The" Harry Houdini. He is a shoeshine boy with ambition, and that ambition is to become a great illusionist. Heroine Billie is an orphan escaped from New Orleans - street wise and devil-may-care. Our last player is Artie, the lonely and ignored son of a wealthy man, whose smarts, resourcefulness and reliability round out this solid, loyal and dependable gang of three. They are a remarkably appealing team and each plays a major role in all of the action and adventure.

The plot is deceptively straightforward. They all adore their old friend Herbie, the accomplished house magician at a creaky old theater. When Herbie disappears after a performance, (kidnapped?, murdered?), the three pals spring into action to solve the mystery of his disappearance.

Solving the mystery involves tracking down leads in old New York, as well as a few illusions pulled off by the team, and results in some colorful adventures. The action never falters and the tale leads up to a socko finish that ties everything up very neatly.

While this book seems aimed at a middle grade crowd, and properly so, it is written to a higher standard. The prose is direct and efficient, but dialogue is realistic, descriptions are engaging and evocative, plotting is careful, and characters grow and develop much much more than is usual for the middle grade action/mysteries that I've read. There are some touching moments shared among the friends, who each have their own burdens to bear, but the author never reaches for the angsty or maudlin. This is mostly upbeat and gungho stuff.

VERY MILD SPOILER. The ending is odd, (don't misunderstand - the mystery is fully solved), because the book ends with a suggestion that the kids will be invited by an unknown group to form some sort of 19th century youth Impossible Mission Team. That sort of comes out of left field, but if that represents the launch of a series, I'm all for it.

So, a truly happy surprise and a very satisfying read, with great characters and a restrained but authoritative touch on the author's part. A nice find.

Please note that I received a free advance ecopy of this book in exchange for a candid review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.

Sally Balboa says

I received a free copy of this novel from a Goodreads giveaway. This was an okay novel for me, considering it's for people way below my age group. Now that I've read it however I know I can give it to my little cousins and they'll like it. Had I been younger when I read then I probably would have liked it more.

The Magicians Fire (Young Houdini) starts off with a disappearance by a famous magician. Herbie Lemster disappears in a puff of purple smoke, and can not be found. It takes the city by storm. But more importantly it takes young Harry and his friends by storm. They set out to investigate their main suspect in the case, using the only means they have. Magicians acts and friendship.

This novel is indeed based on the pre-life of the famous magician Harry Houdini. It's a nice kids novel too, nothing too gruesome and definitely kid friendly. The biggest thing to contend with a near death experience and selective breaking of the law. But it is all in the name of friendship, and justice.

The book was a very quick read for me, easily read in a day.

I liked the magic acts in the book. it was interesting to see the mechanics of tricks, especially the last trick they perform in the book seeing as how it is based on their own experience and they had to quick think their way out of it. But the other ones were interesting too, like dangling from chains in front of trains.

For a child the writing will be okay but for someone older the writing can be a bit dull in places, but once again this is not for my age group.

Michelle Widjaja says

Harry and his 2 friends Billie and Arthur wander around New York, doing part time jobs to earn a living. Till one day after seeing their famous friend Herbie Lemster perform his magic show they decide to go meet him in the back of the theatre. But when they get there, they hear someone threatening Herbie and then POOF! Herbie disappears. Knowing that Herbie didn't disappear mysteriously they decide to go investigate and save him.

This book teaches you about friendship and being there for your friends. Harry, Billie and Arthur have been through a lot together to save Herbie Lemster from the man behind it all. They nearly killed themselves a few times but that didn't stop them from saving Herbie. And that just shows great friendships.

I think my favourite part of the book is when Harry meets the man behind it all and he traps Harry in a water torture cell and Harry was the only one who could save himself. At the end he does come out of the cell.

I would totally recommend this book to ages 11 to 14.
Amazing Book!

Ian Wood says

This is the complete review as it appears at my blog dedicated to reading, writing (no 'rithmetic!), movies, & TV. Blog reviews often contain links which are not reproduced here, nor will updates or modifications to the blog review be replicated here. Graphic and children's reviews on the blog typically feature two or three

images from the book's interior, which are not reproduced here.

Note that I don't really do stars. To me a book is either worth reading or it isn't. I can't rate it three-fifths worth reading! The only reason I've relented and started putting stars up there is to credit the good ones, which were being unfairly uncredited. So, all you'll ever see from me is a five-star or a one-star (since no stars isn't a rating, unfortunately).

I rated this book WARTY!

WARNING! MAY CONTAIN UNHIDDEN SPOILERS! PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK!

This middle-grade novel sounded really appealing until I began reading it, and then the excitement drained away disturbingly quickly. It's clearly modeled heavily on Harry Potter (the name 'Harry' almost literally starts every other chapter), and he has two assistants: Artie, who stands in for Ron Weasley, and Billie, who stands in for Hermione Granger. The problem is that there's no magic here.

This story is very highly fictionalized and bears no relationship whatsoever to the real Harry Houdini. The original was named Erik Weisz, and didn't routinely call himself Harry until he was significantly older than the boy in this story. The closest he came to it was his nickname, 'Ehrie'. He was the son of a Hungarian rabbi, and he migrated from Europe with his family, eventually winding up in New York City. He began his career as a magician, migrating to escape tricks somewhat later.

The depiction at the beginning of this story of him escaping chains in the face of an oncoming train is not only inaccurate, it's an appalling idea to set before young, impressionable children. I sincerely hope no kid reads this book and decides to emulate this dangerous stunt.

The main story features the disappearance of a magician who is also a friend and mentor to "Harry". This is tame and limp stuff, which may or may not thrill the young children for whom this is written, but it was boring to me, so I never finished the novel. It is, however, short, so it has that going for it. I can't recommend this, however.

Jessa Franco says

I don't typically enjoy middle grade novels. There isn't usually enough going on to immerse myself. But this one actually pulled me in. I just wish it wasn't such an obvious serious opener.

Ms. Yingling says

Young Harry Houdini, an immigrant to New York City from Hungary who makes his meager living shining shoes, tries his hand at a variety of magic and escape acts with the help of his friends, the wealthy but unsupervised Artie and the musician from New Orleans Billie. When an older magician, Herbie, looks to be ill and then disappears from his room in the theater where he works, Harry and his friends investigate. Suspicious first falls on the Bulgarian magician Zell, but when it turns out that Zell is one of Herbie's friends, the trio of friends must use all of the tricks at their disposal to identify and then thwart the real kidnappers. When they are eventually triumphant, they are approached by the Order of the White Crow, and

their adventure is just beginning.

Strengths: Lots of good descriptions of magic acts and lots of daring escapes from a variety of harrowing situations, combined with a decent mystery set in late 1800s New York City. Houdini is an enduring historical figure who will appeal to a wide range of readers.

Weaknesses: The mystery was a bit weak-- very simple and linear, and I saw it coming a mile away. This might not bother the target demographic, but I expected something as complicated and mysterious as Houdini himself. I also found it hard to believe that a struggling street child would have befriended a wealthy boy, but stranger things have happened.

Sharon Tyler says

The Magician's Fire is the first book in the Young Houdini series by Simon Nicholson. Manhattan was a tough place for kids in 1886, especially when you are alone or feel that you are. Young Houdini spends his days practicing magic tricks with his two best friends, Arthur and Billie. At least when he is not making enough money to pay for his room and to eat. But when Harry's magical mentor, Herbie, disappears after a performance at the theater, the three friends band together, determined to rescue the beloved magician. With nothing more than a mysterious puff of purple smoke, an ominous threat, and a menacing Bulgarian for evidence, Harry, Arthur, and Billie embark on a dangerously thrilling investigation that pushes their skill, and friendship, to the limits. Can Harry find Herbie and learn what it means to be a true friend before it's too late?

The Magician's Fire is an action packed mystery for the middle grade set. Harry is a shoeshine boy with a keen eye for magic and fine details. Billie works in a glue factory, and is very street smart and practical. Arthur has a father that pretty much ignores him, and has emerged himself in books, making him very smart and a great researcher. Together they make a fabulous team for creating and pulling off new magic stunts and for solving mysteries. However, astray search for Herbie and face the dangers of that mystery, they also face issues of trust and friendship. The combination makes for a great read, full of action and puzzling out who the culprit is and how the friends will come together to save the day.

I would highly recommend The Magician's Fire to all middle grade readers because there is a little something for everyone. It is historical fiction, mystery, action adventure, coming of age and magical read.

Sierra says

While not quite historically accurate, and a tad dramatic, this was a fun story about the youth of Harry Houdini. It was fast-paced and interesting.

Amanda Northrup says

Premise: Harry Houdini and his two best friends are starting to command a crowd for their escape acts. All's well until Harry's elderly mentor, Herbie, disappears in a cloud of purple smoke. Certain that Herbie is in danger, Harry is determined to find and rescue him even if it means risking his own life.

I wasn't expecting much out of this book. While the cover is exciting, there's something about it that seems kind of predictable. But I was still looking forward to reading it because year after year, my 5th graders love Harry Houdini.

Shortly into *The Magician's Fire* I was proven wrong. This book is fun, fast-paced, and well-written. Populated with magic tricks, illusions, sneaky villains, and death defying escapes, it was a really fun read.

The level of character development (quite a bit for 3 primary and 2 secondary characters) and plot complexity (one straightforward tale with some twists) makes it a great selection for the middle grades. The use of the iconic figure of Harry Houdini will also make it a grabber for less-confident readers.

Historical Fiction can be challenging for middle graders, but historic New York City was painted in clear details that made for a great backdrop.

My only complaint is that I kept wondering how much of young Harry's story was based on fact. An author's note to this effect would have been a great addition.

Kelly Clingman says

What a fun and fast paced book. The book follows a young Harry who is a novice magician. Harry, his female orphan friend, Billie, and his wealthy friend, Arthur, learn what it takes to be a team by solving a mystery of their mentor, magician Herbie Lemster. It seems perfectly suited that a young Harry Houdini solve mysteries. After all, magicians are very observant as they look for the how they did it...seems natural they would also look for The Who done it. Well-written, this first book of the series is a fun mystery. Reminds me of Nancy Drew books, as Nancy solves mysteries with her two good friends...just as Harry solves mysteries with his two good friends.

Dawn Teresa says

Originally posted on my blog, *ReadLove* .

Faster than they can say Abracadabra, Simon Nicholson has readers riveted and holding their breath during his opening sequence where young Harry Houdini chains himself to the train tracks in preparation for his next grand escape. At Harry's side are his friends Arthur, the neglected son of a banker, and Billie, an orphaned, street-wise girl. In addition to immediately grabbing your attention, Nicholson wastes no time in demonstrating the special bond shared by this rag-tag group of young friends. Just after Harry and his assistants collect the coins showered on him for his dangerous stunt, we find Harry and Billie pooling their resources for a special birthday cake surprise for Arthur. It's a warm, touching scene that endears you to these kids as they sacrifice to lavishly celebrate their friend.

The moment quietly but clearly sets a tone that will be important as the book progresses. Because, you see, once Harry's magician friend and mentor goes missing, Harry's wildly determined to find him. So much so that in his blind desperation, he strikes out alone, leaving his friends feeling jilted. Luckily, along the way, Billie and Arthur prove their mettle and Harry comes to the realization that nothing is more magical than good friends.

Verdict: 4 of 5 Hearts. Magical Mystery in Which Young Houdini Finds True Friendship is No Illusion.

Strong characterization and plotting make this adventurous mystery not only thrilling, but funny and full of heart. Nicholson has crafted a mesmerizing speculative boyhood history for the daring escape artist, Houdini. Readers who enjoy imaginative, fantasy-twined fiction surrounding the exploits of close-knit friends will find plenty in *The Magician's Fire* that enchants.

*Disclosure of Material Connection: I would like to thank Sourcebooks Jabberwocky and NetGalley for providing me a copy of this title. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255: "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Adriana says

The Magician's Fire was a very fast paced read. I enjoyed imagining Houdini as a kid with a group of friends who loved magic too. There was a very obvious lesson that Harry learned by the end of the book that was being repeated very often throughout the book. I liked what his friends contributed to the group and the story. This could have been a tad less obvious but I still enjoyed this for what it was. It makes me want to know more about Houdini.

Michelle says

My Review:

I've had this book on my shelf for some time and I am a big fan of magicians and Houdini. I was looking forward to read this book to not only introduce to my kids but to find a fun series for myself to read. This was a cute book but I found it to be a bit slow and some of the story seemed rather choppy to me. I found it easy to follow along but Harry got on my nerves a lot more than I would have wanted. He was a bit spontaneous and would dart off without telling his friends where he was going. Even when they had a great plan that would work perfectly he would find some way to ruin it but something about this story just seemed not put together. Maybe I was expecting a lot more magic or escapes. The beginning was very exciting but as I got to the middle of the book it kind of just fell off and it was a lot of running around. I did enjoy the idea of the story and the twists were cool but like I said something seemed missing.

I have every intention of reading the next book in this series, the end was a To Be Continued so I can't wait to see what happens to Harry and his friends, they look like they are about to go on a wild ride. This book would be great for kids and adults might enjoy it. I did like this book I think it just felt like it was missing something that I am hoping will be in book #2 :)

[divider]

Thank you so much for stopping by to check out my review

Hope you have a great day and Happy Reading!

This review was originally posted on Because reading is better than real life

Janice says

What was Harry Houdini like before he became a famous magician and escape artist? Harry has been practicing magic tricks, escape tricks in his spare time when he's not shining shoes. Billie is a girl, an orphan, can tell a wonderful tale, play the ukulele and works at low wage jobs to survive. Arthur is wealthy but his father barely acknowledges that he exists. And together Harry, Billie and Arthur are friends, co-conspirators, and a team.

So when their friend and Harry's magical mentor, Herbie disappears it's up to them to save him. Except that Harry keeps running off and doing his own thing. He refuses to listen and just figures out that the others will follow his lead. But they have good ideas as well. Will Harry ever learn that he needs the other two? Will Herbie be saved? What is really happening at Wesley Jones Theater?

Learning about teamwork is one of the hardest things to do. The Magician's Fire shows what can happen with and without teamwork. From researching at the library, to finding props, catching bad guys, and death defying tricks this book has it all. It is delightfully encased in a fun mystery starring the young Harry Houdini and friends.

Tess says

I got this book through Goodreads first reads.

Harry, Billie and Arthur run magic tricks. We first meet Harry as he's trying to escape from being chained up before the train arrives. When Herbie, their magician friend, disappears after a show the three friends decide to save him and figure out what exactly happened and who took him.

Harry is a bit obnoxious; in fact I hated him about midway through the book. He really doesn't listen to Billie and Arthur. If anything although I like Harry by the end, I'm not convinced that he's really changed or learned to listen to his friends, he often does things and then has to explain himself afterward, but although he feels bad that he acted without listening or stopping to explain he does the same thing again. The friendship was cute, sorry that sounds like I'm making that sound like a bad thing, it's not but you know how it is friendships are always kind of cute with that class gap.

I liked the book it was a pleasant enough read, even if I don't remember why I wanted to read it. The ending surprised me; I did not expect the mystery to be explained or resolved in that way. I had also completely forgotten about Arthur's problem. It was a good book, and so action packed, some times I felt like I should have been running to keep up with those kids.

I have one issue, and that is that it centres around a young Houdini, I can't help but think that the book would have been just as good if it had been about some random child instead of being so far from the truth about Houdini that it is best to just forget who he is. I understand the point but I can't help but think that a fictional account of the childhood a young Houdini should have a stronger link to his actual childhood.
