



The Magician

Sol Stein

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The Magician is a tale of two magicians, of high school extortion and violence, and of a criminal trial in which the guilty go free. Selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club, The Magician has sold over one million copies.

"A shark-like bite that won't be easily forgotten. Fast moving, incisive, angry, fine, and dramatic!" (Library Journal)

"I cannot recall a novel of this type with greater pleasure. Beautiful and gripping." (The New York Times Book Review)

Author Bio: Sol Stein is a prize-winning playwright produced on Broadway, an anthologized poet, the author of nine novels, and an award-winning teacher of writers. Stein has edited some of the most successful writers of the century, and is the author of Stein on Writing and the creator of the computer programs WritePro, FictionMaster, and FirstAid for Writers.

The Magician Details

Date : Published May 20th 2000 by Backinprint.com (first published 1971)

ISBN : 9780595093168

Author : Sol Stein

Format : Paperback 280 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Dark

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From Reader Review The Magician for online ebook

Gray Sizemore says

I hated this book. It made me angry, and that's reasonably difficult. However, it made me angry through truths, and while that's even more difficult, it's valuable.

Roberta says

This hasn't aged well. The political and social commentary create a plot that kept me reading through to the end, but it was full of distracting stereotypes. I think it would be much better as a play.

smoreads says

this book was basically a giant wtf, but in a fascinating, time-capsuley way? the 1970s don't hold back The Weird.

Jacque says

I actually had to order his book off eBay instead of reading it on a Kindle because some writers are so good, you need to hold the product in your hand and turn the pages as they were meant to be turned.

The writing is crisply precise and the story is edited well, but some parts of the plot seem underdeveloped (his relationship with his parents, why he was so interested in magic, and the cameo from the psychiatrist).

The dramatic irony in the final chapter was cleverly crafted, but disappointing without a satisfying denouement. I am still a fan girl. Love you, Sol!

Louise Silk says

I decided to read this novel because I have found Stein's books on writing so useful. I really enjoyed this book. The only reason I didn't give it 5 stars is the ending which was disappointing and a bit trite.

Stein knows how to follow his own advice. It is so well written! The story is intriguing and moves along at a great pace. Considering that it was published in 1971, the characters and their actions are dated but certainly appropriate to the day.

Bandit says

Meant to read something for banned books week or month and here it is some time later. This was according to the extensive (and somewhat pompous though fortunately that tone in no way transported to the book itself) briefly banned in one of those small minded small towns that also banned *The Great Gatsby*. Anyway, this was actually a pleasant surprise. Billed as a YA book, it doesn't come across as one, because at the heart of it isn't so much the confrontation between two sixteen year olds as it is a perversion of justice. Justice is, of course, the matter for adults and the lawyers who go on to battle this seemingly straight forward case of assault in court turn the case into something where justice isn't just blind, it's made irrelevant. So this is very much a frightening sort of social commentary on the fact that justice (yes, I'm overusing the word, but only to make up for the fact that it's scarcely found in the story) is all about who has the best lawyer as in who has the best fact manipulator and doesn't even pretend to care about morality, empirical right/wrong, etc. The fact that the kids are involved and especially the tragic ending make it all the more poignant and resonant. Originally published in 1971, it is dated and yet not dated at the same time strangely enough. The salient factors...class differences, racism, violence, legalities, mentalities...remain fairly similar, definitely recognizable in today's society. It may be a cynical view, but individuals don't seem to change as much as the technology around them, there is a basic nature that is just ugly and I think the author did a good job of reflecting that by really developing the characters so that the ugliness can be not just shown but understood. Emotionally difficult story, but a good and important one. The audiobook version was very well read. Recommended.

Gary Lawrence says

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I give up. I don't often fail to finish a book but more than half way through I have decided that this is not worth another three hours when there are so many books yet to read.

It's not all Sol's fault either. I decided to read *The Magician* after getting so much out of reading Stein on Writing, in which he talks about the process of writing and editing this book, with plenty of quotes. I checked the reviews and found them mixed, some of them mentioning that some books age well and this one doesn't and I agree with that point of view.

There are parts of the story that I like – the relationship between the young man and his father and also his girlfriend have a ring of reality and I can see why young people of two generations ago were attracted to this just as a previous generation were to *A Catcher in the Rye*. The book is well written, especially the dialogue. However the measure of any novel are the characters and their story and I just cannot get into this story and I have not found one character that I want to know more about. Most importantly, the writer has not convinced me - I do not believe!

My problem is my personal background. I have been a high school teach (of biology like the protagonist's father) for 46 years and a psychologist/counselor to boot. I know Australia is different to New York but I cannot believe that the school football team pays off gangs of younger thugs to stay safe, even within the blackboard jungle. Football teams stick together and treat a low life who threatens their friends much more effectively than teachers or police are allowed to. Maybe I can accept that the American legal system is as dysfunctional as is painted here but I find the Old psychiatrist and his "investigation" of his simplistic theory

of three personality types just unbelievable.

I think that in the 30 years since this book was written writers, along with schools and the legal systems may have changed a little but I think one aspect of writing has been revolutionised. Those writing novels set in specialised settings, for example the court systems and forensic detective stories now do a lot of research before they put a word on paper. Highly successful novelists employ researchers while beginners just talk to experts wherever they can trap them. I am not sure if Sol was writing from personal experience of his own schooling or he spoke to some teachers and students back in 1980. If he did and this is an accurate representation of a New York education then well done for surviving!

Stein On Writing: A Master Editor of Some of the Most Successful Writers of Our Century Shares His Craft Techniques and Strategies

Doug says

It was a good book. Literate. Well written. I enjoyed it, sorta. The main issue was plausibility.

SPOILER ALERT!

We have a gang of high school thugs able to extort protection money with impunity from all but one student even though that one is not particularly strong nor athletic. We have a clear case of assault which results in hospitalization of the victim, but incompetent prosecutors are unable to obtain a conviction even though one and all agree on who the guilty party is.

END OF SPOILERS!

We have ... etc. Implausible. One result was that I didn't find any of the characters interesting enough that I wanted to get to know them any better. It seems that the story was written primarily to serve a political/philosophical agenda rather than to immerse me in wonderful characters and/or an intriguing plot. Ho hum.

Tammy Downing says

Wow! This book is fabulous. Ed, a teenage magician, performs at his high school prom. After the prom, as Ed, his girlfriend and his father are taking his equipment to the car, Ed is attacked by the school bully. The police are called and the bully is arrested. Ed discovers in the first court hearing that the defense attorney makes a mockery of the law. He declines to testify at the final hearing so the bully goes free. The ending surprised the heck out of me.

Briannah says

Awesome book. It is about a sixteen year old boy named Edward Japhet (Ed) He is a magician. There is this school gang-Urek's gang-terrorizing everyone..and what Ed does about it leads to a criminal trial,an attempted murder and a death. I recommend it to everyone!

Lesley says

This is classified as a "young adult" novel, and I think I first read it in my teens. I returned to it recently and it still has resonance, even today.

Set in 1960/1970's America, it is the story of Ed Japhet, a young high school pupil who has a nice life. His dad teaches at his high school, he has a nice girlfriend, and he is rather good at magic tricks. He lives in comfortable middle class white America, but he goes to school with Urek. Urek is a thug, and is jealous of Ed. One fateful evening, after Ed performs his magic show at the school, he is brutally beaten by Urek and hospitalised.

What follows is a riveting insight into the American justice system, and the law when taken into the hands of one Thomassy, a genius at defending the poor, the lower class, because he, too has a chip on his shoulder. Earlier rejections by "Wasp" Law firms have left him burning with a desire to smash their nice, middle class comfortable lives.

As Ed and father watch helplessly, Thomassy performs his own "magic" - leaving the reader to decide, who, indeed, is "The Magician" of the title.

It is a compelling book that shows the reader just how divided America is/ was on the cusp of immense change and upheaval. To me, a classic. Thomassy will live long in the memory.....

A Voracious Reader (a.k.a. Carol) says

4.5

*Book source ~ Many thanks to Untreed Reads for providing a review copy in exchange for an honest review.

Sixteen-year-old Ed Japhet performs a magic show at his Prom and that's what brings things to a head between him and the local gang leader, Urek. After Prom Urek and three of his stooges attack Ed, Ed's girlfriend Lila and Ed's dad, causing grievous harm to Ed and smashing up Mr. Japhet's car. Urek is arrested and brought to trial. But will he be deemed guilty or not?

While this book was first written in 1971 the basic meaning of it hasn't changed 40 years later. A person is supposed to be innocent until proven guilty, but that doesn't mean a guilty person is always convicted. Unfortunately, what Ed says in the book is true, back then as well as today. The justice system is a game and the best person to play it wins. Or like Ed with his magic. Slight of hand. Look what I'm doing over here and ignore what's going on over there. Thomassy knows his client is guilty but he achieves a physical high on playing the game and winning. He doesn't care that he's putting a dangerous person back on the street as long as he comes out the winner. Granted, there are many stereotypes in this book, but it doesn't change the underlying message. Our justice system, on the whole, sucks. Depressing, but true. How can it be fixed? I have no idea. The ending starts the beginning all over again. All-in-all this is an excellently written story about what can (and usually does) happen in a courtroom.

Rich Hoffman says

This is my favorite courtroom drama novel. It is an honest, revealing classic that is shockingly well-written. The character depth is excellent, the twists and turns are unforeseen, and the picture it paints of humanity is all-too real. Every 8th grade student should be required to read this book.

Andy says

When I finished this book it kind of seemed like the whole thing was a long set-up to a clever ending. I liked the writing and the atypical storyline keeps you guessing as it evolves in an enjoyably frustrating way.

Bruce says

This effectively plotted novel dramatizes the question: Does the adversarial system for trying serious crimes promote justice? The magician of the title at first refers to the victim of a felonious assault, a high school student who performs magic tricks. By the end of the novel, however, it refers to a skillful lawyer who can so skew the facts of a case as to suggest a conclusion opposite to the their obvious import. And of course the obvious import of a series of facts can be false as well as true (recall the plot of the play or film, *Twelve Angry Men*).

This work is a perfect springboard for discussion of this and related issues. I decided to keep it on my poor overloaded shelves to have at hand its several well-crafted meditations, perhaps even more relevant now.
