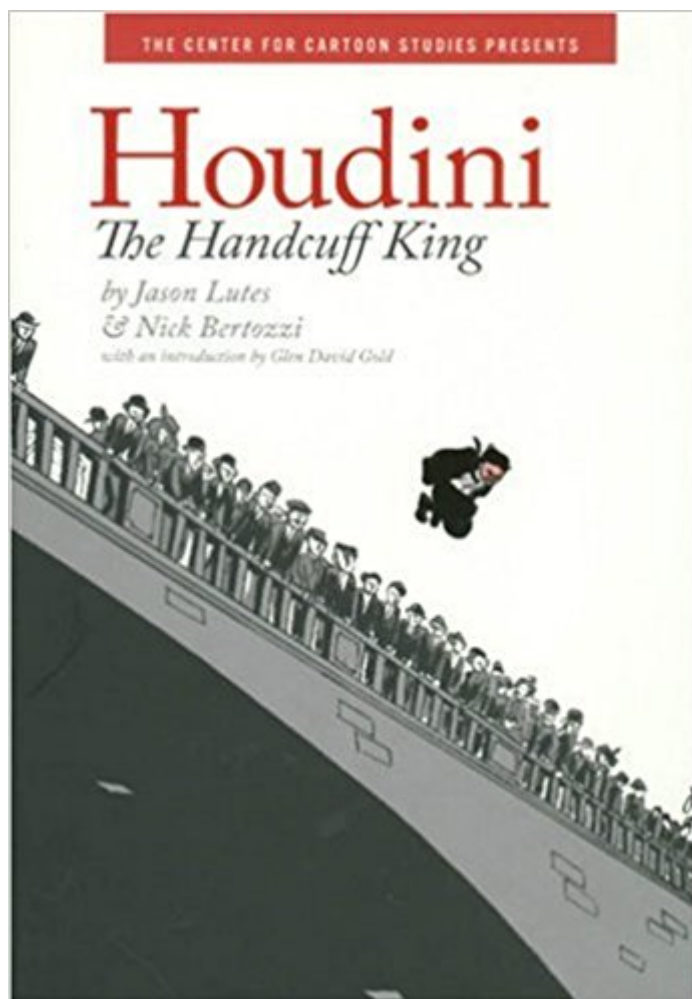



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# Houdini: The Handcuff King



## Synopsis

Harry Houdini mesmerized a generation of Americans when he was alive, and continues to do so 80 years after his death. This is a "snapshot" of Houdini's life, centering on one of his most famous jumps. As Houdini prepares for a death-defying leap into the icy Charles River in Boston, biographer Jason Lutes and artist Nick Bertozzi reveal Houdini's life and influence: from the anti-Semitism Houdini fought all his life, to the adulation of the American public; from his hounding by the press, to his loving relationship with his wife Bess; from his egoism to his insecurity; from his public persona -- to the secret behind his most amazing trick! And it's all in graphic form, so it's fresh, original, and unlike anything previously published about this most fascinating of American showmen. 

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Following Houdini on the morning of his leap (while handcuffed) into the frigid Boston River, readers gain a remarkably complete picture of his world. They will meet his wife, Bess; his strong-arm man, Beatty; reporters desperate to get a quote; and crowds hungry for a glimpse of him. Most of all, they get to know Houdini himself, who, as an extensive introduction notes, was probably the most famous man in the world at the time. Proud and obsessed--with his skill, his fame, and his wife--Houdini was a showman of the highest order who knew he represented hope to his adoring American public. He also knew that he had an unprecedented talent for self-hype. Avoiding overt, showy tricks themselves, Lutes and Bertozzi use clean, simple storytelling and crisp, clear black-and-white art to create not only a portrait of the man but also that

sense of suspense and anticipation Houdini generated in his performances. Endnotes linked to specific pictures offer background on everything from anti-Semitism (Houdini was Jewish) to handcuffs. A bibliography of mostly older adult titles is appended. Jesse Karp  
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Jason Lutes is a cartoonist living in Seattle. He has been an admirer of Houdini for most of his adult life, and his celebrated graphic novel for adults, *Jar of Fools*, also pays homage to the Handcuff King.

My daughter loves Houdini so we added this to her collection of books about him. She liked it.

This amazing little book will give you great insight into the life (and wife) of Houdini, and actually has a page-turning plot. I have a 10-year-old grandson who loves magic, seemed familiar with Houdini ... and what I appreciate most is the fact that we can sit down and enjoy the book together because it contains no offensive language as "adult" theme comic books so often do. BTW, you can judge this book by its wonderful cover.

The service getting the book was very good. My problem is that I didn't understand that it was a comic book. This wasn't what I expected. I could have been described a little better.

I just can't help but wonder," the magician Harry Houdini wonders at the end of "*Houdini: The Handcuff King*," a graphic novel by Jason Lutes and Nick Pertozzi, "will anyone even remember me a hundred years from now?" Who can tell, awash as we are in the flood of current events, movies, books, comic books and other forms of entertainment? He certainly deserves to be, if only as a historical figure, a stage magician who built his reputation by being the best magician and escape artist there ever was, and by making sure everyone knew it. "*Houdini*" tells this story by focusing on the events of a single day -- May 1, 1908 -- and a single publicity stunt, in which Houdini leapt into the near-frozen Charles River in Cambridge, Mass., wearing only a bathing suit and shackled at the wrists and ankles. Writer Jason Lutes follows the magician as he works at his craft, is interviewed by the press (and, like modern athletes, showing that he's capable of making them laugh, but also bringing out the claws to defend his reputation) and working with the police while rehearsing his stunt. And even though we know what to expect, he still pulls several surprises, working the reader as well as the audience. Historical figures do not operate in a vacuum, and neither did Houdini.

While watching him work, we're also made aware of the support network he built around him, starting with his loving wife, Bess, who he relied on for emotional support off-stage and as an assistant on-stage. Houdini also needed someone to promote his shows, and to protect him from unscrupulous rivals. It's a measure of the respect he engendered that he took to the grave the secrets of his most spectacular stunts. "Houdini" also manages to give us a peek into life as it was lived a hundred years ago, before the Internet, before cable television, before VHF and UHF and even before radio and the movies. It was a time when everyone who could turned out to see a great man, even if it was only to see him walk down the street. When, if you wanted to be remembered, you had to be prepared to risk everything, because in person, you couldn't fake it. Houdini didn't fake it, and that's why we still remember him. Although I believe this book is marketed for teens and younger, I found it an engaging read, but I have an interest in magic and Houdini's life in particular.

Full of boasting and bragging, this book shows the planning, moodiness, showmanship, and stardom of Houdini. It shows his wife's role in helping him with his illusions, too. Set in Boston, where Houdini leapt from the Charles Bridge into the Harvard River - mostly naked - in winter - handcuffed and leg-ironed - and escaped! Lots of smooching, some brooding depression. This will not do as a biography, but it might pique your child's interest. Notes at the beginning and end for kids who want to learn more. Very well done. Kissing is integral to the plot.

This is the first book in a proposed series of graphic-novel biographies for young readers published by the Center for Cartoon Studies in conjunction with Hyperion Press. It is meant to give just a snapshot of one moment in the life of Harry Houdini, and it delivers on its promise. By selecting one specific incident in the life of the famous magician/showman, the authors give readers a tantalizing glimpse of Houdini's life and accomplishments. In an original graphic novel style, Houdini is shown preparing for and then executing one of his most famous stunts, a death-defying jump off of the Harvard Bridge while handcuffed. His wife, Bess, is accurately depicted as an able accomplice, and readers get a glimpse into the secrets behind Houdini's success. Houdini loved a crowd, and the authors show how he worked his fans into a frenzy of fearful excitement. Large panels, which sometimes cross to the opposite page, along with bold illustrations showing close attention to facial expressions, add plenty of drama to the page. Houdini's Jewish identity is mentioned only briefly when a Boston policeman wonders aloud if it is true that the showman has horns. As he is being inspected before the stunt, Houdini rebukes the policeman by saying, "mind the horns." A series of panel discussions round out the volume, and one of these explains Houdini's Jewish background

and the anti-Semitism that was prevalent at the time. Fans of the graphic novel format will delight in this creative and suspenseful book, and since there have been a glut of recent books about Houdini, for both children and adults, curious readers who want a more in-depth biography will have an ample selection from which to choose. For ages 10 and up. Reviewed by Wendy Wasman.

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