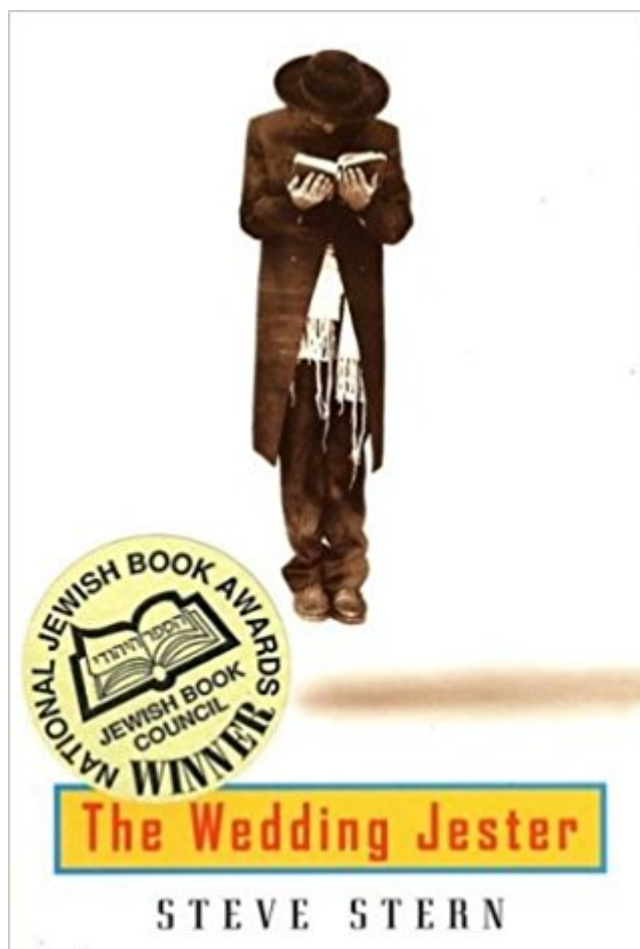


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# The Wedding Jester



## Synopsis

The New York Times has called Steve Stern "a prodigiously talented writer who arrives unheralded like one of the apparitions in his own stories." The Philadelphia Inquirer has said, "Steve Stern is an astonishing writer." Whatever the source, the critics agree that Stern offers immense delight, and outright laughs, throughout his award-winning books. *The Wedding Jester* offers a new chance to journey to Stern's magical Jewish otherworld-- where fantastical events are commonplace, and rabbis-- sometimes frequently-- take flight.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rich and wondrous, these nine tales confirm Stern's (*A Plague of Dreamers*) distinctive place in modern American Jewish fiction, as he continues to stake out his own unique territory where history and myth intersect, where Jewish legends, mysticism and ancient traditions implode into the everyday with dazzling and unforeseen consequences. "Magic realism" seems too facile a term to encompass these beguiling, multilayered stories in which a flying rabbi floats above houses and trolleys; a humble cobbler and his wife, transported to Paradise via extraordinarily "ecstatic intercourse," enlist the aid of Elijah, prophet-turned-honorary angel, to return them to earth; and a voracious, man-hungry succubus steps from a mirror to seduce a terrified yeshiva scholar. Fervent dreamers, crackpot messiahs, bedeviled housewives, rowdy beekeepers, vagrant angels and wise fools fiercely pursue their obscure destinies in ingenious fictions that prismatically filter Jewish history, tragedy, consciousness, hope and despair through a modern existential lens. In the

hilarious and outrageous title story, set in a Catskills singles resort, the bride-to-be moments before she can say "I do" is possessed by a dybbuk, in this case the spirit of a wisecracking dead male Borscht Belt comedian. The narrator, a blocked writer who could be Stern's alter-ego, uses a kabbalist kissing technique to exorcise the unruly spirit-which then possesses him. This irreverent, classic story plumbs Jewish humor as a source of strength, a survival tool, a vehicle to resist cant and conformity. Stern's tales utterly transport readers into a fully realized world, whether the setting is the neurotic, Seinfeld-like milieu of a Manhattan writer ("Bruno's Metamorphosis"), or czarist Russia's Jewish ghetto and New York's Lower East Side ("Romance"), or Stern's favorite haunt, a Memphis, Tenn., Jewish community in uneasy coexistence with its gentile neighbors ("Tale of a Kite"). With empathy and bracing wit, Stern's enjoyable stories seismically chart the collision of the Old World and the New, of undying religious traditions and modern secularism, of lust and love, faith and doubt. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In this collection of nine action-packed, richly folkloric stories, Stern (*A Plague of Dreamers*, LJ 11/1/93) takes his readers on a surrealistic ride steeped in tradition. Jewish mysticism, magic, and otherworldly concerns are featured throughout. In "The Sin of Elijah," Gitl and Feybush Fefer live on the Lower East Side of Manhattan during the early part of the century. Unbeknownst to them, their lovemaking is observed by Elijah the prophet, leading to a trip to heaven, a return to Earth in the present, and other riotous hijinks. In the title story, nondescript writer Saul Bozoff accompanies his mother to a wedding at the Concord Hotel in New York's Catskill Mountains. His shining moment comes when he is able to exorcise a dybbuk from the bride, who becomes possessed at the altar by a long-dead Jewish comic. Apparitions, the fantastical, and uproarious hilarity are featured throughout. Recommended for large fiction collections. Molly Abramowitz, Silver Spring, MD  
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I'm not a fan of "magical realism" generally; I guess I'm way too Right Brain. But I loved Steve Stern's book of short stories, "The Wedding Jester", when I found the book, years after it was originally published. Stern writes about people - mostly men and always Jewish - who are touched by magic and wonder. Fantastical "events" happen to everyday people in Stern's story. Lives relived, lives changed, and, in some cases, lives lived to the end in ceaseless boredom. But husbands and wives rediscover each other, or in one story, discover the love they had avoided since their wedding day in the old Russian village from where they emigrated. Steve Stern, who I had never heard of until I found his book, is a wonderful writer. He takes the reader from Memphis

to the Catskills, from the 19th century until the end of the last one. His writing is "quirky", not mainstream, but it sure is enjoyable. I'm going to seek out more of his writing.

I loved the book! The writing was both smart and humorous! I will read more of his books.

Delightful and zany. I learned some new things about Judaism and the power of the imagination. I cannot say I enjoyed the title story. Too much shtick.

AWESOME AS ORDERED!

too smaltzy,,,,, if there is such a thing. Kinda funnysome times, bathroom reading only with nothing to repeat to other.

..that Steve Stern had really been accorded his "distinctive place in modern American Jewish fiction." But he hasn't (yet). One does not have to be Jewish, or a Memphian, or a fan of magical realism to enjoy--nay, to wish to live inside of--his amazing stories and novels. His writing is funny and sad and deep and--I swear, I just opened Jester to a random page--"the stuff of forbidden texts, which made otherwise serious scholars into crackpots."Please, please, please, read his books, whoever you are. If you like Jester, your next stop should be A Plague of Dreamers, Lazar Malkin, and/or Harry Kaplan's Adventures Underground.

Steve Stern's prowess reminds me we're doomed and blessed at the same time. His sure hand (every sentence rings true) and steady plot progression (unbelievably well-imagined) put him in the highest echelons of modern writing, yet no one knows about him. Why? But the fact he's still out there is some cause for solace. I agree with another reviewer that Stern is redemptive when dark and moving when hilarious. He's dizzifyingly brilliant and worthy of reams of glowing criticism.

My only problem with Steve Stern is that he's not a superstar!! His writing is brilliant and what he does with Yiddish themes is transcendent. He uses classic motifs and symbols, such as dybbuks, golems and demons, yet he is accessible to those unfamiliar with Yiddish literature. When his writing is dark, it is redemptive. When it's hilarious, it's also moving. Once you read these stories, you're going to want to read everything he's ever written.

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