



[Home](#) > The Magician's Elephant

The Magician's Elephant

Books Reviewed:

[The Magician's Elephant](#) [1]

Issue:

[186](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Anne Faundez](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Peter Augustus Duchene lives in an attic with his penniless guardian, an old soldier friend of his dead father. His guardian, somewhat crazy and given to bouts of fever, assures Peter that he has no living family. Yet Peter is haunted by memories. When he happens upon a fortune-teller he gives her his only coin so that she may tell him the truth. The fortune-teller's words are mysterious: she confirms that he has a sister and, to find her, he must follow the elephant.

Days later, a magician performing in the opera house gets his trick wrong. Instead of making a bunch of flowers appear from nowhere, an elephant comes crashing through the roof, injuring an old noblewoman in the audience. Peter comes to hear of this sensational event and sets out to find the animal, encountering an extraordinary cast of characters along the way.

Set in the past in an imaginary and wintry medieval city, this story feels timeless with events unfolding as in a dream tinged with nightmare. Themes are large and sweeping with the most apparent being Peter's quest for identity and love, the power of dreams and the assertion that life must be continually questioned and transformed. Each character and there are many, including a wise policeman who becomes the elephant's gaoler, a poet beggar and a stunted stonecutter brings a different personality, and problem, to the story. Eloquently written, evocative yet emotionally restrained, the story skilfully weaves its disparate themes and unforgettable characters into a memorable and haunting fairytale in which Yoko Tanaka's unsettling, powerful artwork is the perfect complement.

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Links:

[1] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-magician's-elephant>

[2] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/186>

[3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/anne-faundez>