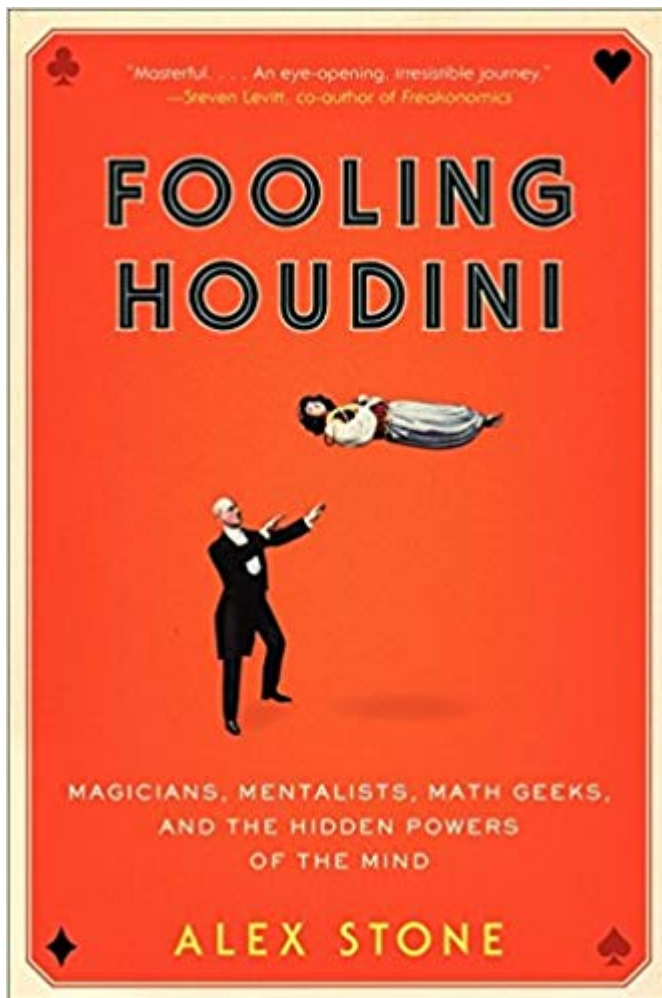


#123 – Fooling Houdini, Alex Stone BOOK REVIEW

Krauser PUA | 19 December, 2018 | by krauserpua



It's quite common for people to seek a unified theory of everything. Physicists are always at it, whether it's String Theory, the Standard Model, or pissing about with fractals. Hippies are equally into it though, because they lack the mathematics, their theory usually involves taking mushrooms, playing The Grateful Dead, and then explaining "it's all... like... connected man."

As an INTJ, I'm especially prone to seeking cross-discipline connections. **Daygame Infinite** is full of it them. So it was with some eager anticipation that I picked up Alex Stone's *Fooling Houdini* which the publisher blurb on that back states is his memoir: "in New York City, he plunged headlong into a vibrant [1] underground magic scene populated by a fascinating cast of characters... As he navigates this quirky and occasionally hilarious subculture, Stone pulls back the curtain on a secretive community organised around a single need: to prove one's worth by deceiving others."

It's Neil Strauss's *The Game* isn't it. Well, let's just see shall we?

The story arc is the usual **Heroes Journey**, which in this case has Stone start out as a full-of-himself living embodiment of the Dunning-Kruger effect. Chapter one sees him in Stockholm for a Magic Olympics [2] where the judges have him escorted from the stage mid-act he's so bad. That's in 2006 and after a crisis of confidence he rebuilds, decides to turn pro (in the *War Of Art* sense) and then goes on a journey of self-discovery. After a period of technical and character development he returns to major competition in 2010 as a superior magician with a personal style all of his own.

So, yeah, it's *The Game*. You could say his Heroes Journey is a lot like mine, only with far less shagging.



Jack The Ripper had never figured out how to put them back together

What struck me most about *Fooling Houdini* are the many parallels to the seduction community. Alex Stone was simultaneously studying in Columbia University for a PhD in physics and was a maths geek. But it wasn't Stone's frequent rumination on magic's links to psychology, maths, and science that got me thinking of unified theories of everything. Rather, it's the obvious parallels in structure, tone, and progression of and within the magic community itself. Now I think about it, perhaps Mystery's alter ego as a magician is a big part of why the modern PUA community is as it is. Perhaps he ported over many of the principles of magic – not the performance aspect, but the organisational side and the community tone.

Early in the book Stone actually goes to Vegas to take a weekend magic boot camp at the **Magic and Mystery School** run out of Jeff McBride's **House of Mystery**. McBride even dresses a lot like the famous PUA.

As Stone immerses himself deeper he finds a community that hangs around lots of informal nodes such as Tannen's magic shop, or Rustico II pizza parlour. In the shop, trainee magicians of various levels mill around showing off their tricks, discussing books, and referring each other to DVD courses. It's not unlike the forums and meet-ups noob PUAs get into. The pizza parlour is home to magicians advanced in skills and age, most notably a crusty old dude called Wes who becomes Stone's mentor. These wise old grouches are world-weary but retain a fascination for the magician's way of life and are fountains of wisdom. McBride explains to Stone the life cycle of a magician, of four cardinal stages of magic: Trickster, Sorcerer, Oracle, and Sage.

“The four archetypes represent the four stages in the age cycle of the magician,” he said. “They are like the four ages of man: infancy, adolescence, maturity, and old age.”

The **Trickster** is the imp in the family, quick-witted, resourceful, a fast-talking troublemaker who uses magic to contend with the world, overcome shyness, and build self-esteem... The next stage, the **Sorcerer**, is dutiful and hardworking, a serious student of the art who views magic not as a tool but as an end in itself. “Where the Trickster feeds on mischief and chaos,” McBride explained, “the Sorcerer focuses on transforming chaos into order. Sorcerers are skilful, disciplined, and put considerable time and energy into their work, acquiring the various

technical skills that it takes to become a magician.”

If you’re mapping this to your development in daygame, you’re a very smart boy. You could liken these stages to the forum dabbler / weekend experimenter who then moves on to become a serious student of the game, an actual “daygamer”. Stone continues:

In the third phase, that of the **Oracle**, the focus shifts from the body to the mind. The Oracle explores the hidden realms of perception and strives to master the psychology of magic. Finally, the enlightened **Sage**, master and elder of the art, passes on a lifetime of distilled wisdom to the next generation, completing the cycle. If magic were basketball, the Trickster would play for the Harlem Globetrotters... while the Sage would coach his team through game seven of the NBA Championships. The Sage is **Magic Infinite [3]**

Stone’s book stays faithful to this typology throughout the book, using it to thematically organise his own progression towards Oracle.

Perhaps the biggest surprise for me in reading *Fooling Houdini* is how technical magic is. Now obviously I’d heard of things like double lifts, bottom deals, false shuffles and so on but not until Stone’s patient explanations did I realise how technically precise these things are and how they continually evolve. There’s a whole lineage to magic with individual sleights of hand named after the talented magician who invented them – the Vernon Lift, Hofzinsler Cull, Bobo Switch, Elmsley Count **[4]**. Stone describes working for weeks to perfect the Ambitious Card, wherein a chosen card is inserted mid-deck and then magically rises to the top. I had no idea there were so many permutations and such technically-precise movements and means to master them. Stone goes into the pizza parlour to show off his trick to grumpy old Wes:

“No, no, no,” he rumbled, grabbing my hands. “That’s not right.” He moulded my fingers into a more forward grip, freeing them up to cover the bottom half of the deck, protecting it from exposure. This way, the lower two fingers of my right hand screened the move, making it undetectable. “I spent a whole day trying to teach Johnny Thompson this,” Wes said, sipping his diet soda. “But he was so used to doing it the other way that he just couldn’t get it.”

I gave it another shot. “No, straight back,” Wes said. “Keep these fingers relaxed.” He gestured at the lower three fingers of my right hand. “Always point your index finger directly to the left of the left-most line of vision.” This, I later learned, was a general principle for neutralising angle issues.

That’s like me coaching a residential: grumpy old guy admonishing a young lad for small technical mis-steps and then him looking wide-eyed as he didn’t realise there was so much he didn’t know. Close-up magic – or **David Blaine**’s version of Street magic – isn’t at all far from Street game. So many of the concepts carry over, so much so it’s possible to forget that magic is trying to deceive and game is not. It’s the performance aspect that’s most shared. The magician’s audience wants to be deceived, the girl you’re trying to fuck does not.

After the sluggish and badly-written first chapter I’d been ready to dismiss Stone as a nerdy gamma trying to write himself into coolness. As he finds his feet he becomes more likeable – though always a bit gamma – and the writing keeps improving. There’s a wonderfully warm chapter about a blind card mechanic who is rated best in the world due to his heightened sense of touch. There are some gamma backslides though. Gammas are always a force of instability in an organisation, as they don’t accept their lowly position. Thus they’ll happily throw others under a bus in order to advance themselves, tear down the organisation, and cloak it all in self-righteousness. In Stone’s case, he blatantly betrays his signed oath

to the Society of American Magicians by exposing their secrets in a *Vanity Fair* article.

Classic gamma betrayal for personal advancement. Utter selfishness and disregard for the good of the commons [5]. The SAM board write him a letter asking for his resignation from the Society. His response?

As the days passed and I recovered my presence of mind, the sting of rejection gradually subsided, and in its place indignation welled up like a volcano. I'd been a loyal, dues-paying member for over three years. I regularly attended meetings and ceremonies and was an active participant at lectures and workshops. I dutifully carried my laminated SAM membership card in my wallet next to my driver's licence and student IDs. Many fellow SAM members were friends of mine, people I hung out with on a regular basis. Imagine my horror, then, at finding out that these very same individuals now wanted me excommunicated. How dare they!

Yeah mate. Because you broke bread with them and within three years you'd betrayed the 100+ yr old Society. Because you're a gamma cunt.

So Stone hired a lawyer, sifted through the Society's bylaws and looked for a loophole to lawyer his way to remaining in the Society.... as if nobody would know that's what he was up to. "Oh yeah, mate. We've changed our minds. You're clearly not a cunt after all. I mean, bylaw 4.5 section 2 has a loophole in it. Our mistake!" Now, to Stone's credit, this is all information he willingly provides in the book. He's not trying to paint himself in a favourable light. Just because he was a gamma cunt then, doesn't mean he didn't get past it and, frankly, by the end he sounds like a much better person.

The book gets increasing more unified-theory-of-everything in a pleasing way and the PUA parallels continue. For example, here's a nice passage about the respect paid to the real innovators in magic from the accomplished pros a little further down the tree:

We spent the rest of the afternoon talking about an Italian coin expert named Giacomo Bertini, who was in town for the elite FFFF convention and was giving a lecture and teaching a workshop at the SAM later that week. "I'll tell you one thing," Wes wheezed. "He's got the best classic palm I've ever seen. It doesn't look like anything. It really doesn't." As with everything, Wes knew the score. He had a copy of an underground DVD containing some of Bertini's top-secret material, which had been put out by a close-up worker in Chicago. Bertini had now become somewhat of a star on the international coin circuit.

Tell me that doesn't sound like the PUA community when a good new infield, lecture, or technical blog post comes out. I can remember now sitting in bars or restaurants enthusiastically discussing latest developments in the daygame scene. "Have you heard? Torero has a new variation on the Toe. He's got it elevated at a new jaunty angle. Its, like, the best ever!" [6]

As Stone begins his passage into the Oracle stage he begins to take the techniques as read, and moves into the psychological dimension. An adage I especially liked was, "Magic happens not in the hands of the magician, but in the mind of the spectator." I've long said the purpose of game is to create the desired thought patterns in the girls. Game happens not in the moves of the player, but in the mind of the target. That type of daygame is infinite.

*Look, I've twice tried to subtly incept you with the idea of buying **Daygame Infinite**. Why don't you do us all a favour and just buy the bloody thing. [Have a look here for more details and a video display of the book](#). Also available [on Amazon](#).*



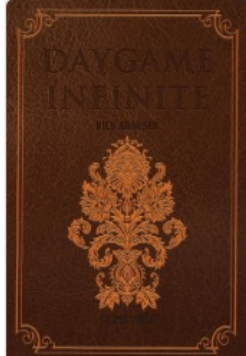
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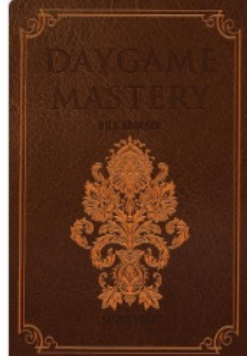
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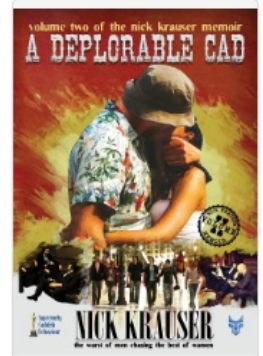
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[1] Fortunately in the literal sense of the word. Getting too vibrant in diverse NYC is likely a fast route to getting shot and your Nikes stolen.

[2] Don't laugh. It's no more dorky than the World PUA Summit.

[3] I may have added in that last sentence myself.

[4] Much like daygame's Torero Toe.

[5] The equivalent of daygamers who burn a town to the ground by spamming sets, then rationalise it all after selfishly destroying the commons shared by all daygamers.

[6] Daygame and magic both have "mentalists", but the connotation of the word is entirely different in the two spheres.

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