

A magic trick.
A competition.
The chance of a lifetime.

THE GREAT FOX ILLUSION



JUSTYN EDWARDS



“A delightfully tricky tale of **magic** and **misdirection**.
A **page-turner** that’s also great fun to read.”

M. G. LEONARD

“*The Great Fox Illusion* is a **glittering tale** of magic and mystery, trust and tricks, friendship and family. Let Justyn Edwards take you behind the scenes of a world of magic and illusion, on a **mind-bending adventure** to find the truth. Reading this brilliant book is like opening a **magician’s box of tricks** and discovering their secrets for yourself.”

THOMAS TAYLOR

“*The Great Fox Illusion* is **magic**! A page-turning mystery about family, friendship and magic tricks, told with real **panache** and **pizzazz**.”

CHRISTOPHER EDGE

“This book did a **vanishing trick** on me – I didn’t reappear until I’d read the very last page! A **spectacular, page-turning mystery** that will have you guessing until the very end. I can’t wait to see what other stories Justyn Edwards has up his (magician’s) sleeve!”

CLARE POVEY





**THE
Great
FOX
Illusion**

JUSTYN EDWARDS



**WALKER
BOOKS**

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For Rachel and Josh





This book is a trick. Please don't trust it or sit back and enjoy it. In fact, don't take your eyes off it for a second, because by the end of the story I'll have vanished from a room hidden deep underground, surrounded by security guards and dozens of cameras, beneath a burning house, with a very valuable secret. A lot of extremely clever people will have tried to stop me and they will all have failed.

The question is, will you be able to work out how I did it?

There will be plenty of clues throughout this book to help you. Be assured that, like all tricks, there's a perfectly logical explanation. If you get it right and you're good at solving these kinds of problems, we'll probably ask you to join us. We will need your help for what's coming next.



A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring various playing cards (aces, kings, queens, jacks, tens, nines, eights, sevens, sixes, fives, fours, threes, twos, aces) and stars of different sizes and orientations. The cards are scattered around the perimeter, with some showing their faces and others showing their backs. The stars are also scattered, some large and some small, creating a whimsical, magical atmosphere.

PART ONE

Pursuit of the Impossible

In which a magician invites you
to come up onstage and take part in a trick.
We surrender ourselves to the magician's control,
for we will all play our part in the illusion
that follows. Pay close attention.
Everyone is about to be fooled.



1

The Robbery

Few robberies are advertised. Thieves don't broadcast their crimes on TV or put up huge signs telling everyone what they're about to do. Some might occasionally wave banners at music festivals, but as a rule, criminals don't normally like to attract attention.

And yet.

Flick was looking at a sign. Advertising a robbery. That would happen on live TV.

Admittedly, it didn't use the word *robbery*. You had to read between the lines, but it was obvious where this was going.

The banner draped over the gates said:

WELCOME TO THE GREAT FOX HUNT

ENTER THE FOX'S DEN AND UNCOVER ITS SECRETS

The Great Fox Hunt was a new TV show about solving the hidden tricks in a dead magician's house. It was hosted by another magician who clearly just wanted to get his hands on his rival's illusions. It was a robbery.

Flick stood with her mum in a long queue of people hoping to be part of the show. Now and then, they would edge forward with Flick wheeling her suitcase behind her. When she eventually arrived at the front, there was a makeshift table and behind it sat a man with a beard, a lot of tattoos and a heavy dose of boredom.

He shoved a form at Flick. "Fill this out."

Was that a Daffy Duck tattoo on his arm? Unless Daffy was a big part of his life, that might be one to regret.

He chucked a pen at Flick and stifled a yawn.

She carefully put her details in the right boxes. All the important facts: Felicity Lions, female, thirteen years old, address, not a huge Daffy Duck fan. Not even his early watercolour work.

And now was the moment where this could all go wrong. To be honest, this was one of many moments that could end in disaster, but these next few seconds would be crucial. Would they recognize her name? Flick could feel her heart beating in her chest and her hands shook as she passed the sheet of paper back.

The man looked at it.

Flick waited, half expecting him to reach under the table and set off some sort of alarm. Maybe a warning light would flash or a distant klaxon would sound.

But nothing happened.

Instead he examined the form as if he'd never seen words before. Which was possible. Then he stamped it, tossed Flick a numbered badge and used the same empty smile he'd tried on everyone else.

Glancing down, he added, "Will you be requiring special—"

Flick shook her head. "Nah. I'll be fine."

He put the sheet in the out tray, collected and labelled her suitcase and waved her through.

Welcome to *The Great Fox Hunt*.

Her mum gave her a big hug. "A final goodbye," she said.

Flick smiled. "Haven't we had at least six of these?"

“Just remember,” her mum said, disengaging from the hug. “Be careful.”

“I will.”

“Andar com um amigo no escuro é melhor que caminhar sozinho na luz. ‘Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.’ That’s what my mother always said to me.”

Flick laughed. “Because all the best wisdom comes in Portuguese.”

“I’m being serious.” She fussed over Flick’s badge. “Ask for help if you need it. You don’t have to do everything alone.”

“I will.”

“This is better.” Her mum reattached the pin and stepped back. “And promise you’ll have fun.”

“Now that my badge is straight, how can I fail?”

“I want you to make the promise.”

Flick nodded. “I promise.”

“Good.”

Flick hugged her mum one last time. “Love you,” she said.

“You too.”

Flick let go. “Now, I’ve got a competition to win.” She blew her mum a kiss and turned, heading towards

the entrance. She passed through the impressive gates and followed the path that wound its way towards a large tent. On either side of her were gardens filled with dozens of flower beds and several lawns framed by tall trees. It was a damp day and the trees had a mist hanging over them. Here and there a few remaining leaves clung to the branches. Soon they would all have to let go as autumn became winter.

Arriving at the tent, Flick found it full with a couple of hundred hopefuls, all chatting away. At the front, there was a large screen and a stage with a podium. Flick chose a seat towards the back and sat down, relieved to take the weight off her leg.

She tuned into the conversations going on around her. Everyone was excited. Some were worried about how difficult the competition would be; others were hoping to become TV stars. Flick was probably the only person in the tent who knew what was really going on. Like all good tricks, the people behind this one had created a brilliant distraction.

They were it.



2

The Last Trick

The lights in the tent dimmed and a film of the Great Fox onstage started playing on the screen. A voice-over said: “Famous man of mystery the Great Fox performed his final trick six weeks ago at his Las Vegas show. After revealing to the rapt audience that he was terminally ill with only a few weeks left, he stepped into a wooden cabinet and vanished into thin air. Was this just another publicity stunt from the master of the headline-grabbing illusion? Or was he being straight with his audience for once? The only thing we know for certain is that after the performance, his show, which has run for six years, was immediately cancelled and no one has seen him since.”

The footage cut to shots of the Fox's website.

"The Great Fox has always had a knack for publicity and it seems that being dead hasn't slowed him down. Last weekend, a mysterious video appeared announcing a competition. He died leaving no heirs, but it seems he was keen to pass on his secrets."

Flick leant forward as they started showing pictures of the house.

"For the past five years the Great Fox lived as a recluse in this three hundred acre estate located outside the seaside town of Weymouth in Dorset. He always had an affinity with the town, having performed his very first magic show here, as a teenager, as part of an end of pier act. Early in his career, he vowed that if he ever made it big he would return to Weymouth and buy the derelict old mansion near by. Decades later, he realized his dream. He is rumoured to have spent millions on the property, employing teams of builders to restore its features and carry out vast highly secret alterations. What exactly went on in the house has since been the subject of much speculation, especially after the Great Fox surrounded it with a twenty-foot military fence and made anyone involved sign a gag order."

There were more shots of the Fox at awards

ceremonies. The voice-over continued: “Such secrecy was typical of the Fox. No one ever saw his face. Some claimed he was heavily disfigured in an accident when he was a child, others that he had a large facial scar. There are no known photos of him because his real name remains a mystery even today. Those who met him said his piercing blue eyes could be seen through the mask he always wore.”

Shots of the Fox ducking into a car were shown, seemingly taken through a blurry zoom lens.

“He hadn’t been interviewed in years and, apart from his appearances onstage, the only time he’d been seen in public recently was in court. In June of this year the magician Dominic Drake filed a suit against the Great Fox over the rights to a new trick. Drake claimed that the Fox had stolen the concept of the illusion from him and was suing him for intellectual property theft. The Great Fox strongly denied such claims.

“The court case was conducted behind closed doors because of the sensitive nature of the hearing, with both magicians concerned about their secrets becoming public. As a result, very little is known about the trick at the heart of the dispute, except that it was described by Drake as the ‘ultimate illusion’, and by the Great

Fox as ‘probably the greatest magic that has ever been performed’. The only piece of information that has been leaked to the media is that it is known as the Bell System.”

And there it was. Flick’s reason for being there. She could vividly remember the moment her father told her he’d invented the Bell System. He’d said it was an illusion that would change the history of magic. And then, because life can be cruel, it had ended up in the hands of the Great Fox. But Flick would put that right. She would get it back. Somehow.



The Last Message

The film ended and a blonde woman in a dark business suit stepped onto the stage. As she addressed the audience, she looked down on them, in every way.

“We’ve run out of space so you’re the lucky ones.” She beamed into the microphone and laughed like this was the funniest thing in the world. “My name is Christina Morgan. You probably recognize me from my summer glove slash mitten modelling campaign, and extensive radio adverts.”

At the front, there were some cheers. Flick decided to keep her joy in check.

Christina held up her hands as if afraid a riot might break out, and the audience quietened. She put on her

best serious face. It was an incredible thing to watch – slight scowl, pursed lips, head slightly forward. Ideal for local radio.

“So, here we are in the grounds of the Fox’s Den, where four lucky contestants will compete in pairs over the next few days.” She pointed dramatically at the audience, towards the expectant faces. “Just think, two teams will race each other to solve a series of fiendishly difficult puzzles and uncover the amazing secrets of this mysterious house.”

Yes, shock news. Someone entering the competition would win it.

Christina’s expression transitioned from serious to earnest – raised eyebrows, head tilted to one side, lips turned slightly down. “Finishing first will give you an opportunity to change your life for ever.”

Well, that was probably true. What was about to happen would certainly make a huge difference to Flick’s life.

“So let’s get started. What I’m about to play you are the last known words of the Great Fox. Pay close attention. From now on, everything should be treated as a clue to unlocking the Fox’s Den and all the extraordinary secrets it contains.”

The Great Fox appeared on the screen wearing his trademark fox mask and standing in what looked like a library with rows and rows of books behind him. He spoke directly into the lens.

“If you’re watching this, it means I’ve performed my last vanishing trick. I won’t be reappearing. Don’t be sad; don’t mourn me. I’ve had an amazing life and been very fortunate to perform illusions all over the world. I leave behind me six series of *The Great Fox Presents* and two series of *Fox Night* – and let’s not forget my *Fantastic Fox* show in Vegas that ran for six years. It’s been a blast.”

He paused as if remembering some special moments. “Nothing lasts for ever. But let’s get down to business. The big problem I have is that I’ve no one to inherit my legacy. I have no children, and most of my more distant family don’t like me. And yet I have a lot of very valuable secrets. I want these to go to someone worthy. Hence *The Great Fox Hunt*.

“For the last five years, I’ve had teams of builders in my house following my designs. What I’ve constructed is a series of tests to find someone who deserves my legacy. Think of it as a giant treasure hunt! The most important rule of the hunt is this: no one over fourteen can take part. This is the age I was when I first got

into magic. It's a very special age. I want the person who wins my treasures to still have the imagination to introduce my magic to a new generation. I want someone young enough to dream big and not be constrained by commercial concerns or limited by an adult perspective."

He hesitated, choosing his next words carefully. "Magic is about dreaming the impossible and making it possible. It's the innocent young mind in all of us that loves it. We want to be filled with wonder; we want to believe. I want the winners of this competition and the recipients of my legacy to dare to dream big. So, let *The Great Fox Hunt* begin. I wish everyone who takes part the very best."

The film ended and the screen faded to black.

Christina faced the audience. "We're very pleased at Channel Seven to have won the rights to make *The Great Fox Hunt* into a TV show. We hope that the winners will go on to become stars of the future. With all the Fox's tricks, they'll certainly have everything they need. The Great Fox listed his career highlights in that video, but maybe his best show will be the one he'll never get to see. And you could be the star!"

There was some more cheering from the first few rows. Flick rolled her eyes. Where had they found these people?

“Let’s start the selection process. It’s a very simple concept, but very hard to crack. This will test you, so I hope you’re all ready!” Christina flashed her blindingly white teeth like she’d once seen a photograph of someone smiling and now thought she’d have a go. “But you’d better get used to being tested because this competition will only get harder.”

She paused again to laugh.

Just get on with it, Flick thought.

“You’re about to see a magic trick. After you’ve watched it, we’ll interview each of you and ask how you think it was done. From those who get it right, four of you will be chosen to enter the Fox’s Den.”

This statement was not met by manic cheering, just a lot of muttering. Someone near by threw up his arms and shouted, “What? No way! Too hard.”

Flick, on the other hand, didn’t think it sounded very hard at all. Her dad was a highly skilled magician and he’d taught her all his secrets. He was a better performer than the Great Fox had ever been, and she was certain she could easily work out how any trick was done. Not that she cared about winning the stupid competition. She wasn’t interested in the Fox’s legacy. The Great Fox had destroyed her family, and a man who’d done such a thing

didn't deserve a successor. She was going to search that house and find the Bell System, the trick her father had invented, something that was rightfully hers, something that the Fox had stolen from her family, denying her a legacy and taking away a piece of her father. She was going to get it back. Because the Bell System was her only hope of saving him.

The Great Fox and Flick's father had been rivals, performing similar magic acts on the same tour circuits. Years ago, her dad had had a big show on Blackpool Pier and the Fox had been performing in London. Channel Seven visited both shows but chose the Fox to front their new TV project. Her dad's contract at Blackpool expired at the end of the season and he was replaced by a punk magic act. The Great Fox went on to receive rave reviews for his TV show.

Flick knew her dad had been just as good a magician as the Great Fox, but the chief executive at Channel Seven had disagreed. Later she found out that the chief executive's sister had been dating the Fox at the time, which surely wasn't a coincidence. After that everyone wanted to book the Fox and her dad's career took a nosedive. As the years went by, her father struggled to find work, and recently it seemed as if no one had wanted

to book him at all. Finally after one very poorly supported small-scale show three months ago, he had disappeared. He'd packed his bag and walked out of their lives.

The Great Fox had destroyed her family as surely as if he had pulled a trigger.

A couple of months before he walked out, her dad had told her he'd invented the Bell System. He was so excited to have created something that he believed was a game changer. He'd said it was his last chance. But he had no show, nowhere to perform his vision and no means of making it a reality. So he'd sent it to the Great Fox and begged for his help in promoting it. And it had to still be here, inside the Fox's house. It would end up being bundled up with all the other tricks and given to whoever won the competition. Flick had to stop that happening. She was determined to find the Bell System, for her father. If he knew she had it, he might come home.

Her mission wouldn't be easy. There weren't many female magicians, and there were even fewer one-legged female magicians. In order to win this she didn't just need to be better than her male, two-legged colleagues. She needed to be a hundred times better. But the Bell System was her chance to save her family and no one was going to stop her.

The lights in the tent dimmed and hundreds of intense faces became transfixed by the big screen.

Flick sat forward. She didn't want to miss a single detail of what was about to unfold.



JUSTYN EDWARDS graduated from the University of Southampton with a degree in archaeology. Since then he has worked as a caravan park attendant, a paperboy and a software engineer, but never as an archaeologist. He has always wanted to be a writer, and his inspiration for *The Great Fox Illusion* came from watching magic shows. He realized that what elevates the tricks magicians perform are the stories they tell their audience. And in turn, stories themselves are a kind of magic trick, with authors choosing when to reveal their secrets to the reader. And so his debut novel was born. Justyn lives in Cornwall with his wife and two cats. Visit his website at www.justynedwards.com



We hope you enjoyed



We'd love to hear from you!

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