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Sleights of Mind, by Stephen Macknik and Susana Martinez-Conde, with Sandra Blak

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Posted by: Makarios on Saturday, March 26, 2011 - 04:00 PM



What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals About Our Brains

Reviewed by Peter Rogerson

A word of warning, if you love the wonder of magic shows and do not want on any account to know how magic tricks (even, one suspects, old and superseded ones) work, then do not read this book. If on the other hand you want to know what magic tricks can tell us about how we perceive the world, and what they illustrated about the human perceptual processes, then this book is for you.

The husband and wife team who wrote this book are neurologists at the Barrow Institute in Phoenix, Arizona who have been working with some of the USA and Spain's leading magicians and mentalists to work out how they, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes consciously, use the gaps and short cuts in human perception, and illusions of perception, cognition and memory, to work their magic, and have persuaded several to reveal at least some of their secrets.

Though the authors' brief encounters with "psychics" at Sedonia, reveal that most of these are very poor at practices like cold reading, many of the insights in this book are invaluable for anyone investigating paranormal claims and in evaluating how much of what is presented in the literature is likely to have happened exactly as described therein.

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