



Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison

Michael Daly

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In 1903, on Coney Island, an elephant named Topsy was electrocuted, and over the past century, this bizarre, ghoulish execution has reverberated through popular culture with the whiff of urban legend. But it really happened, and many historical forces conspired to bring Topsy, Thomas Edison, and those 6600 volts of alternating current together that day. Tracing them all in *Topsy The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison*, journalist Michael Daly weaves together a fascinating popular history, the first book on this astonishing tale.

At the turn of the century, the circus in America was at its apex with the circuses of P.T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh (or 4-Paw) competing in a War of the Elephants, with declarations of whose pachyderms were younger, bigger, or more “sacred”. This brought Topsy to America, fraudulently billed as the first native-born, and caught between the circus disputes and the War of the Currents, in which Edison and George Westinghouse (and Nikola Tesla) battled over alternating versus direct current.

Rich in period Americana, and full of circus tidbits and larger than life characters—both human and elephant—Topsy is a touching tale and an entertaining read.

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