



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

By Michael Daly

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

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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**Editorial Review**

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Cruelty to animals was considered entertaining by many people in nineteenth-century America. At a time when cockfighting was widespread, and draymen beating horses on city streets was common, mobs greeted traveling circuses to gawk at exotic beasts. No animals suffered more than elephants, chained together on display, vulnerable to tormentors offering peppered apples and whiskey. Elephant keepers, many of whom were ill-paid alcoholics, could be just as abusive, using sharp hooks instead of kind words to control their charges. As circus owners P. T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh touted their increasingly larger herds of elephants, sensational newspapers reported on a series of accidental deaths of their keepers. The elephants were always blamed. Weaving together stories about circus rivalries and the contest between power companies to wire America, Daly recounts how a once-beloved baby elephant grew up to be condemned to a public execution using electricity, the technical innovation of the time. Not for sensitive readers. --Rick Roche

Review

“Michael Daly vividly revives a rollicking pachydermal tale that riveted New Yorkers a century ago and still survives in a gruesome YouTube video. Daly . . . provides perceptive insights into circus and sideshow elephants and their huckster handlers . . . [and] leads readers on mesmerizing detours that reveal everything from the origins of pink lemonade to a brazen pickpocket’s trick. . . . Even [the] dark episode does not dampen the book’s exuberance. . . . A summery escape.”—*New York Times*

“[A] poignant, grim account of dueling impresarios and the American appetite for curiosities centered on one elephant’s life and death. . . . *Topsy* is a fascinating but disturbing story, a skillfully told and admirably researched reminder of a time not as long ago as we’d like to think.”—*Wall Street Journal*

“A gripping popular history . . . Vivid . . . simultaneously fascinating and horrifying.”—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“[Daly] invoke[s] these creatures . . . with grace and compassion.”—*New York Times Book Review*

“Heartbreaking.”—*Plain Dealer* (Cleveland)

“A lively chronicle.”—*Dallas Morning News*

“A fascinating and moving piece of American history and a meditation on the cost of entertainment and human progress.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Bizarre and remarkable . . . Daly’s fascinating, nuanced portraits of the seedy sides of the circus’s heyday and the dawn of the electric age makes for incredibly entertaining reading.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“This book should be read by anyone who’s ever been to the circus. I read it and could not bring myself to put it down. Nor could I bring myself to look at the moment—preserved by Edison’s footage and now on YouTube—that this book illuminates so clearly. The story left me a little breathless, and I will never see an

elephant in captivity again and not think about Topsy and the cruelty of which we humans are capable. I've always respected Michael Daly as a great New York writer. But here, he reaches out to the world beyond New York and goes deep. The results are extraordinary. He humanizes and speaks for those animals who cannot speak. He touches the hearts of those of us who are not animal activists. I'm not so proud to be a member of the human race today, but I am proud to know someone who should be."—James McBride, author of *The Color of Water*

"Step right up, folks, and read all about it! The amazing tale of elephants, electricity, Edison and Barnum, stunts, fights and ghastly events. *Topsy* is a 19th-century reality show that boggles the mind as the pages fly by with events that have you laughing out loud one moment and gasping in disbelief the next."—Tom Brokaw

"*Topsy* offers a compelling history of late-nineteenth-century scientific genius, American hucksterism, and the chase for the almighty buck; it's a tale of giants; Edison, Barnum, and an elephant, in which the four legged creature comes across as more humane than her fellow players"—Richard Price

"[A] tale of American enterprising spirit gone amok. . . the author's quiet outrage . . . endows an off-the-radar circus story with the fatalistic gravitas of Aeschylus."—*Boston Globe*

"After seeing Thomas Edison's 1903 film 'Electrocuting an Elephant,' author Michael Daly had to know more. The result is *Topsy*, a sad and fascinating story of a circus elephant at the turn of the last century, when America was flexing the new power of electricity. . . . While the tragic conclusion is known from the outset, the journey in *Topsy* offers continuous surprise."—*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis)

"Daly's anecdotes will have readers laughing at the bad luck of the sometimes honest circus goers. . . . [and he] skillfully recreates several examples of animal brutality, the importance of the circus as one of the few affordable forms of entertainment, and the immoral actions of the leading characters."—*ForeWord*

"Daly deftly weaves the story of one pachyderm's untimely end."—Barnes and Noble Review.com

"However tragic, *Topsy* is also a tale of determination, invention, and hope. Readers will come away with an understanding of aspects of American history that include un-sugarcoated descriptions of animal abuse, glories of the circus, and the emergence of electricity."—*Baltimore City Paper*

"Daly expertly leads his readers through this peculiar series of events, as well as the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo—where McKinley was assassinated—and the development of Coney Island. Complete with letters, photographs and newspaper accounts from the period, Daly enlivens a captivating popular history of this exceptional time. A poignant read."—*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*

"Fascinating . . . a heartbreaking, complex story of brutality."—*Workforce*

#### About the Author

Michael Daly has been a newspaper journalist and columnist for many years, currently with the *New York Daily News*. He is the author of *The Book of Mychal: The Surprising Life and Heroic Death of Father Mychal Judge* about his friend, an NYFD chaplain who died on 9/11. In 2002, Daly was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. He lives in Brooklyn.

## **Users Review**

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#### **Gabriel Reed:**

Do you certainly one of people who can't read gratifying if the sentence chained inside the straightway, hold on guys this kind of aren't like that. This Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison book is readable simply by you who hate those straight word style. You will find the data here are arrange for enjoyable studying experience without leaving also decrease the knowledge that want to offer to you. The writer involving Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison content conveys objective easily to understand by many people. The printed and e-book are not different in the content material but it just different available as it. So , do you continue to thinking Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison is not loveable to be your top record reading book?

#### **Bryan Perry:**

The reserve with title Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison has a lot of information that you can study it. You can get a lot of benefit after read this book. This kind of book exist new information the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world right now. That is important to yo7u to learn how the improvement of the world. This specific book will bring you inside new era of the the positive effect. You can read the e-book with your smart phone, so you can read the idea anywhere you want.

#### **Mary Craine:**

This Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison is great guide for you because the content and that is full of information for you who always deal with world and get to make decision every minute. This book reveal it facts accurately using great arrange word or we can declare no rambling sentences within it. So if you are read this hurriedly you can have whole details in it. Doesn't mean it only provides you with straight forward sentences but tough core information with beautiful delivering sentences. Having Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison in your hand like obtaining the world in your arm, information in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no publication that offer you world throughout ten or fifteen small right but this guide already do that. So , this is good reading book. Hey there Mr. and Mrs. busy do you still doubt which?

#### **Mark Guerrero:**

The book untitled Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard, Thomas Edison contain a lot of information on the idea. The writer explains your girlfriend idea with easy means. The language is very straightforward all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read it. The book was compiled by famous author. The author will take you in the new age of

literary works. It is easy to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book in anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site as well as order it. Have a nice study.

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