

A deadly secret.
Stolen diamonds.
The trick of the century.

THE Great FOX Heist

JUSTYN EDWARDS

Praise for THE GREAT FOX ILLUSION

“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.”

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“*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
Heist**

JUSTYN EDWARDS



**WALKER
BOOKS**



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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 I'll have made a fortune in diamonds disappear from a vault, buried deep underground, surrounded by security guards and dozens of cameras, in one of the most secure banks in the world. A lot of very 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?

Be assured that, like all tricks, there's a perfectly logical explanation. If you work out the method correctly, you're just the sort of person we're looking for. But if you decide to join our team, you'd better be prepared because things are getting very dangerous now. Events are spinning out of control, and no one knows where or how this will end.



A decorative border surrounds the page, featuring various playing cards (aces, kings, queens, jacks, and suits like spades, hearts, and diamonds) and diamond-shaped gemstones. The cards are scattered across the page, with some showing specific suits and values. The diamonds are also scattered, some appearing as simple outlines and others with more detail. The overall theme is magic and mystery.

PART ONE

Questions

In which the magician invites
you to take part in a trick.
But you're getting wise to this.
This time you will not be fooled.
You know that nothing
the magician says will be true.



1

The Vanishing Man

Magicians make you doubt. It's what they do for a living. While they're busy explaining how solid the box is, how it's nothing out of the ordinary, one of their hands is round the back opening a hidden compartment, doing the very thing they repeatedly tell you cannot be done. Deceit is in their nature; it is the very essence of who they are. This makes them somewhat difficult to trust.

Flick had come to the little Swiss town of Linth to find her father. That was what she wanted more than anything. It was what the Great Fox had promised. But when they arrived it turned out her father was nowhere to be seen, and the Fox had another reason for them being here. In other words, he had opened the hidden compartment.

In the TV trailer, Flick sat in front of the mirror while a make-up artist fussed over her, applying finishing touches to make her look presentable in front of the cameras. It was as if they were trying to cover over her disappointment, trying to hide her true feelings under layers of foundation.

The make-up girl stepped back to admire her work. "OK, that's you done."

Flick thanked her, stood up and then walked carefully out of the trailer, down the ramp and towards the backstage area. Here she was met by a very thin girl with pink hair, a nose ring and a headset. Her badge said *Gemma is happy to help*. Her scowl said otherwise.

Gemma urgently signalled to Flick. "Flick Lions is entering the stage area now," she barked into her headset. "Yes, I know she's late!"

"I've been in make-up," explained Flick as they were waved through a gate in the security fence by two burly guards.

"There isn't time," Gemma muttered into her headset. "She won't be because... You know. She's only got one..."

Tucking her hair behind her ears, Gemma looked at Flick, revealing a downturned mouth. No laughter lines. Always a bad sign.

"Actually," she said, "we're really pressed for time, so we're just going to film your bio here. Kevin will do you now."

Kevin turned out to be a forty-something pale-skinned man with a big tummy that was barely contained in his

tight-fitting black overalls. He had a camera balanced on his shoulder and came down the steps from the back of the stage very slowly, as if worried his buttons might pop open.

Gemma turned to Flick. “Just hit Kevin with your name, age and something interesting about you, as if you were introducing yourself to the world.”

At the bottom of the steps, Kevin spun round with a flourish and shoved the lens in Flick’s face.

“Erm,” Flick began.

Gemma rolled her eyes. “Name, age, something interesting. Let’s go.”

“My name is Flick Lions and I’m thirteen years old,” Flick said as confidently as she could.

“Something *interesting*.” Gemma snapped her fingers. “We’ll try and stick it on afterwards. Like, do you love horse riding? Surfing?”

“I’ve never been horse riding,” Flick said.

Kevin lowered his lens.

Gemma raised her eyebrows at him. “Did you get that?” To Flick she said, “That’ll really get the viewers engaged. Flick Lions – never been horse riding. Compelling stuff.”

She touched her headset and listened for a moment. “OK.”

Kevin turned and gingerly made his way back up the stairs and Gemma gestured for Flick to follow.

Flick looked at the steps.

“Are we going to need—” Gemma started.

“I’ll be just fine,” said Flick, waving her away. She paused, took a firm grip on the rail with her right hand and started to move up the steps carefully, placing both feet on each one before attempting the next.

When she reached the top, she was met by a man with a headset who ushered her to stand in the wings, next to Charlie. Flick immediately felt herself relax a little when she saw him. He had on his familiar blue denim dungarees and a stripy top. Flick had never seen him wear anything else, although she was always pleased whenever she noticed the stripy top was a different colour, suggesting washing had occurred.

Charlie turned and beamed at her. “Hello,” he whispered.

She smiled back. “Here we go again. How did we end up back here?”

“That’s a good question,” replied Charlie. “The Fox once said to me that a magic trick should be ninety per cent preparation and ten per cent performance. He’s a great believer in planning any trick with multiple outs and having options ready if things go wrong, and sometimes even having whole backup tricks. I think the whole point of *The Great Fox Hunt* was to prepare for this competition. He knew this was coming. In fact, I would go so far as to say—”

“Shh,” said the man in the headset.

“I think you’re right,” Flick whispered. “We should have seen this coming. If I had enough legs, I’d kick myself.”

Charlie giggled. Then he lowered his glasses down his nose and looked at her over the top of them, pretending to disapprove.

Spotlights illuminated the stage and an elegant blonde stepped forward, wearing a dark business suit. Her perfect-for-TV glossy hair sparkled and a boom mic swung above her as she talked to the camera.

“Hello, my name is Christina Morgan, and it’s my honour to welcome you to *The Battle of the Magicians*. Every ten years the Global Order of Magic holds an election to choose a new chancellor. But this time it’s going to be different. Usually, the workings of the order are conducted in total secrecy, but this year they’ve agreed to let the cameras in, so you at home will get to see how the future of this ancient institution is decided. And believe me, this competition is all about the future. Each candidate will be represented by one or two young apprentices with great potential.”

Christina spun round and gave her most dramatic look down the lens of a second camera: raised eyebrows, pursed lips, head slightly tilted. “So, let the battle begin!”

She gazed up into the lens of another camera above her. Bright graphics of fireworks shot across the giant screens at the back of the stage.

“Cut!” shouted someone from the wings.

Immediately three make-up artists rushed forward to tend to Christina’s face as if it needed shoring up against erosion.

“And reset,” came the same voice. “Go.”

As quickly as they had arrived, the make-up artists scampered back into the wings and the graphics on the screens changed to a swirling blue mist.

Christina took a deep breath and furrowed her brow as if about to deliver incredibly tragic news. “There are four magicians standing for election,” she said solemnly. “Their chosen apprentices will perform tricks and illusions, competing against one another over two rounds with two teams eliminated after the first round. To keep things scrupulously fair, the event will be televised so everyone at home will be able to witness the whole process.”

She clapped her hands dramatically. “Right! We’re now going to interview our first candidate standing for election. He’s probably the most famous magician in the world right now, having recently come back from the dead – it’s the Great Fox!”

The Fox walked on from the opposite side of the stage. He was wearing a black suit and white shirt and had on his trademark fox mask. He strode confidently towards Christina and stopped on his mark in front of her.

“So,” said Christina. “Not content with faking your death and burning your own house down, you’re now running for chancellor?”

“Yes,” laughed the Fox. “It’s been quite a busy year.”

“It certainly has,” she agreed. Turning to the camera, she added, “If you haven’t seen *The Great Fox Hunt* yet, it’s soon

going to be available on catch-up.” She beamed persuasively down the lens and then turned to face the Fox again. “Why do you want to be chancellor of the Global Order of Magic?”

“Because I think we’re at an important turning point in history and the decisions we make now have never been more crucial.”

“And you’re mentoring the two apprentices you hired following *The Great Fox Hunt*?” asked Christina, clearly already knowing the answer.

Flick watched them from the wings. The Fox was never going to tell the truth. That it wasn’t the future of the Global Order that mattered to him. He didn’t care about its future or how it might become more relevant to a younger audience. What was important to the Fox was that whoever won the election also won the right to know the workings of any trick in the world. And that would include the method behind the Bell System – the greatest and most powerful trick ever created. A trick with such potential that some people would do anything to get their hands on it. The Fox had to win the election to keep it secret, and that meant Flick and Charlie had to win this competition for him, or at least that was what he had told them. But then again, he’d also said her dad would be in the Bahamas when Flick and her mum had flown there, and he wasn’t. Apparently, he’d urgently needed to move on to hide the Bell System. And it was his wish that Flick help the Fox win this competition. Was any of it true? Eventually, Flick’s mum had returned to the

UK because of her job, and she'd tried to persuade Flick to come with her. Flick had insisted on following the trail, doing all she could for her dad, but now there was a knot in her stomach because she was sure she was being played. She was on the verge of listening to her mum – just giving up and going home.

“Well, let’s get them out here,” exclaimed Christina. “Our old friends from *The Great Fox Hunt* – Flick and Charlie!”

Flick took a deep breath.

The screens lit up with red swirls as she and Charlie walked onto the stage and stood either side of the Great Fox. A camera spun round them, and the screens flashed with sparkles. The Fox struck a pose, standing side-on to the camera, while Flick and Charlie just tried not to look too awkward. When the director was satisfied, someone yelled “CUT!” and the screens went black.

The three make-up artists immediately returned to fuss around Christina’s face, clearly worried what gravity might have done in the intervening three minutes. She held out her right hand and one of them placed her phone into it; she held out her left and a designer coffee was hastily given to her. She looked Flick up and down, grimaced, and then wordlessly walked off the stage. The make-up artists buzzed after her like flies.

Flick, Charlie and the Fox were directed off the stage, the Fox and Charlie both kindly pausing while Flick negotiated her way back down the steps. Their suitcases had been left here when they arrived, so Flick and Charlie collected them

and walked through security, then out of the backstage enclosure, breathing a sigh of relief. The first ordeal was over. Now they could find their rooms.

They stepped into the bustle of Linth's harbour front. It was a beautiful summer afternoon, and the tourists were out in force, admiring the fishing boats and old bridges. The smells of cooking drifting from the street vendors made Flick's stomach rumble, but she didn't stop. From the harbour, she and Charlie followed the Fox into one of the side streets that turned steeply uphill, away from the waterfront. These cobbled streets were packed with people taking photos of the medieval clock towers and ancient shopfronts. Flick and Charlie pulled their suitcases along behind them and they rattled over the stones.

The Fox had been very quiet up to this point. Now he looked nervously over his shoulder and, when he was convinced no one was following them, said, "Don't trust Christina an inch. She doesn't want me winning this and I'm pretty sure she'll do everything she can to stop me. That means she'll come after you too."

"Don't worry. I'm not exactly one of her fans," muttered Flick.

"She's up to something – she keeps asking me questions about the Bell System. She shouldn't even be allowed to present a TV show after what happened last time, and yet here she is again. She definitely has some very powerful friends; maybe she's even still working with Drake. Everyone will do whatever it takes to get their hands on the Bell System. But

we have one thing in our favour: this town is the backyard of my old friend Lukas De Haas – he owns the castle, and the local bank. We go way back, and he’s a magician too. He’ll look after you. You must keep an eye out for anything he might be able to throw your way during the competition and make sure you take advantage of it.”

“And what about you?” asked Charlie. “You’ll be helping us too?”

“The rules say I have to leave Linth after the opening ceremony when the competition officially begins tomorrow, and I’m only allowed back for the final trick. I can send you instructions every day, so I can still advise you, but other than that there is to be no contact between us. Have you got any questions?”

“Where’s my dad?” asked Flick.

The Fox stopped walking. “I’m sorry. I was expecting him to be here to meet us.”

“So where is he then?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know.”

“You promised me he would be here. Just like you promised me six months ago that I’d see him in the Bahamas.”

“He promised me he would be here too. I don’t know what’s happened to him but I’m sure he’s fine.” He waved a hand dismissively. “I imagine he’s just been held up somewhere, but I’ll look for him.”

The Fox resumed walking and Flick and Charlie fell in alongside him.

“Right now, we need to get to the hotel where all the apprentices will be staying. Lukas will meet us there. Don’t worry about your dad.”

Flick scowled but said nothing.

The street wound its way up the hill and near the top was the De Haas Hotel. Like most buildings in Linth, it was covered in ancient beams, murals and oriel windows – bay windows with fancy ornate woodwork. Flick looked up to take it all in. Atop the steep peaks of the old, red-tiled roof were a couple of Swiss flags fluttering in the gentle breeze. In case you’d forgotten where you were, she thought.

They weaved their way through the many tables and chairs in the square in front of the hotel. Here people were enjoying coffee, pastries and lunch while sitting under the collection of parasols that shielded them from the bright sun. Flick could hear people chatting in several languages, and nearby was a large stone fountain that gurgled away, providing the relaxing background sounds of running water.

The Fox led them to the old stone entrance. The doorway was so low that the Fox had to duck down to fit his masked head through. Flick and Charlie filed through behind him, blinking furiously as they stepped out of the bright light and into the cool, dark space of the foyer. They lined their suitcases up along a wall out of the way.

The Fox said, "I need you both to concentrate on the competition. Remember what's at stake here. Leave your father to me, Flick. I'll make sure he's absolutely fine."

And there it was. The man who lied for a living had made a promise. What could possibly go wrong?

While they waited for Lukas De Haas to appear, the Fox paced up and down and Flick glanced around the foyer. In one corner, tucked behind a curved wooden desk, was a girl with short brown hair. Very pale and frail-looking, she sat completely still. Maybe she needed to conserve energy, mused Flick. Even a man in a giant fox's mask doing laps of the foyer hadn't caused her to look up. Or perhaps this was normal in this particular part of Switzerland.

To the girl's right was a glass cabinet selling Linth key rings, postcards, calendars, pens, rubbers, mugs, fridge magnets, Post-it notes and china models of clock towers. The postcards looked faded and there was a layer of dust on the fridge magnets. Next to each item was an orange sticker with a large number on it. Possibly the price, or maybe how many years since the item was last purchased.

Gemma walked into the foyer and the Fox abandoned his pacing.

"Ah, here she is," he said. "Each team gets an assistant, and ours is the lovely Gemma."

Flick looked at Gemma. She had a laptop under her arm and a sense of irritation on her face. *Lovely* seemed a bit of

a stretch. She was no longer wearing her *Happy to help* badge, which Flick took to be a bad sign.

Gemma met the Fox by the reception desk and opened her laptop.

“You need to see this,” she said to the Fox.

Flick and Charlie crossed the foyer so they could see the screen, which was filled with a video showing a green door at the base of a tower.

“I was sorting out your flight paperwork when this popped into my inbox. Apparently, I need to show it to Flick and Charlie too.” Gemma looked round to check they were watching. “Were you expecting Samuel Lions to join you?”

“Yes,” said the Fox. “He was supposed to be meeting us here.”

“Well, it seems he was ... um. Better just watch.”

The quality of the video wasn't good and there was no sound. It had been filmed in front of a stone wall with battlements along the top, in the middle of which was a large round tower. In the centre of this stood a green door. Flick guessed it had to be the De Haas castle that sat above the town. And in front of the door ... stood a man in a large coat and a baseball cap. Next to him was a wooden cabinet about the size of a wardrobe and to the right, a little way along the castle wall, was a large red lorry with the Channel Seven logo on the cab door.

“That's your father,” said the Fox, pointing to the man in the baseball cap.

Flick peered at the hazy figure. It might be her dad.

With the clothes he was wearing and the quality of the video, it was hard to tell. She watched with bated breath as her father opened the door of the wardrobe and got in. From behind the camera half a dozen people, clearly film crew as they were all wearing black overalls, advanced towards the wardrobe. Flick couldn't work out what they were carrying at first, and then she realized they each held a power tool.

The crew went to work. They removed the door and the sides until there was nothing left of the wardrobe. Her dad had vanished. The crew placed the parts in a pile in front of the lorry. One poured liquid all over the pile before dropping a match. The flames shot up so brightly the camera struggled, and the colours distorted.

Another crew member climbed up into the cab of the lorry. There was a pause, and then the lorry inched slowly forward, driving right over the burning pile. Next it reversed back over it. Then it moved forward and, once again, drove over the flattened, charred remains.

At that point, the film ended.

"Apparently your father told the crew this trick was supposed to be part of the TV show," Gemma said. "But it wasn't. It was never scheduled to be filmed. No one knows why he did it and no one knows where he is now."

"What do you mean?" cried Flick.

"Well, as far as the crew's concerned, he climbed into that wardrobe and vanished into thin air."