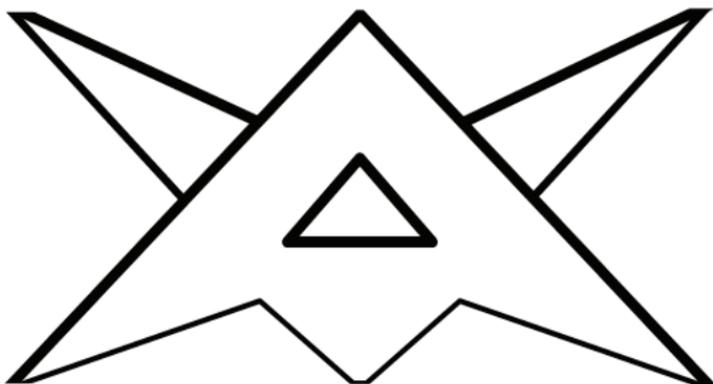


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# APPENDIX MAN II

Attack  
of the  
Phazzmatron



ANGUS MCNEIL



CROWBAR<sup>®</sup>  
media



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## CHAPTER ONE

# Opening Night

THE THEATRE WAS full and the show was ready to start. The lights were brilliant as guests made themselves comfortable in their cushy seats. They unbuttoned their blazers, switched off their music players and attended to wiping the boogers off their children's noses, desperately hoping to get the babies off to sleep before their screeching cries filled the hall. The babbling of conversation echoed around the theatre so that not a single word could be distinguished from the others. Handbags rustled, pockets tinkled and mobile phones beeped endlessly with new messages. Nobody knew exactly what was coming. Nobody knew if their one hundred and forty dollars had been well spent.

Finally, the lights dimmed.

The curtains were drawn.

And show began.

The crowd became instantly alert. Some stirred. Some whispered. The rest waited.

Waited for *him*.

## APPENDIX MAN II

After a second of solitary darkness, a single spotlight snapped on and shone before the audience. It illuminated the only object on the stage: a three-legged stool.

Some of the audience frowned, others turned to their partners; one person even clapped enthusiastically thinking he had already seen a marvellous trick, before a bubble of laughter told him otherwise.

But another minute passed before anything happened at all.

Finally, footsteps echoed softly around the theatre.

*Clop... clop... clop...*

*Where was it coming from?*

*The stage?*

*The roof?*

*The basement?*

Some tossed and turned, seeking the source.

*There!*

He strode casually down the aisle, his dark purple cape hanging loosely behind him. He had black, smooth hair wound back in a ponytail, reaching down to his shoulders, and wore a suit covered in a mess of black and red stripes. Some of those sitting close to him could even see the twinkle of tiny silver stars splattered onto the outfit, giving it the appearance of a midnight's sky.

He had an imposing presence. If he had walked onto a crowded subway platform, there was no doubt that everybody would notice that he was there. And yet, there was just something about him that

## OPENING NIGHT

suggested he could disappear from that same subway platform at a moment's notice.

He walked slowly and calmly, eyeing off members of the audience as he made his way casually to the stage.

He was the star of the show, and he knew it.

This was his domain.

They were all here for him.

Finally, he made it to the front of the aisle. He didn't jump up onto the stage immediately, but instead turned, looked back at the crowd again, and resumed his calm pace to the far right where a stepladder awaited. He glided up the steps and before anybody had thought to remember why they were here, the performer stood before them, his arms outstretched, absorbing the anticipation from the crowd.

Though he spoke calmly, his voice echoed around the theatre from an invisible microphone.

'Mathematics,' he said, 'is an incredible thing.'

Someone coughed up the back, but aside from that his words were met with ear-splitting silence.

'It creates, changes and drives the world that we live in. It gives life to the birds, bees and trees. It can raise rivers, and topple mountains. It can wake volcanoes, and calm the storms. It sets the tides, and splits the stars. It is everywhere around us, flowing through us like an element more common than the carbon, hydrogen and nitrogen that we breathe in... and out... and in... and out every

## APPENDIX MAN II

single day.’

The audience were on the edge of their seat...

They didn’t dare make a sound...

‘And yet,’ the performer continued, ‘despite it’s strength, and power, we can manipulate it to our own free will.’

He held up a sleeve.

‘In mathematics, we can add!’

The performer flicked his wrist violently, and a small canary appeared on his finger, chirping excitedly. The audience clapped politely.

‘We can multiply!’

He threw the canary into the air with both arms-  
-just as hundreds of canaries appeared from his sleeves! The sky filled with yellow screeches as the flocks circled over the audience. The viewers clapped and cheered harder now, very impressed.

‘We can use it,’ bellowed the performer over the deafening noise of flapping wings, ‘to divide!’

The canary mass dispersed as quickly as it arrived, until there was just a lonely bird flapping its way back to its owner’s hand.

‘And,’ said the performer, softer now, ‘we can subtract!’

He held the canary in his palm...

*SMACK!*

He clapped his palms together and then opened them.

The canary was gone.

The crowd gasped, and then clapped viciously again.

## OPENING NIGHT

The performer smiled.

‘Without mathematics, there is no life,’ he announced, ‘and without life, there is no magic.’

He sat down suddenly on the stool.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, tonight you will see a performance that nobody else can possibly reproduce. You will see things that only I can show you, because only I know the true meaning of magic. I will dazzle you, confuse you, scare you, and make you believe that everything you see in front of you, and everything you have ever known, will come crashing down to nothing more than a theory of numbers.’

He stood again – the stool he’d been sitting on vanished in the darkness behind the spotlight – and took a single step forward.

‘And when you think that I could not possibly surprise you anymore, I promise you...’ He looked directly at a young woman sitting in the front row, ‘...the show will have only just begun.’

And that’s what he did. For ninety minutes, the performer defied the expectations of every single audience member and stunned them beyond belief. His magic placed them under a spell from which they could not escape. Nobody dared even visit the bathroom under fear of missing yet another spectacular illusion, so they watched and watched and watched and watched while he blew their minds with his magical concoction of tricks.

When the last act had finally finished, the magician did not leave the stage via the curtain, nor did he even say farewell. He

## APPENDIX MAN II

simply disappeared in a puff of smoke, the return of house lights signalling the completion of the show. Already, as the audience was leaving, the buzz of excitement had begun its travels all the way to the outskirts of the city. Every man, woman and child who had seen this show could think of nothing but what an amazing magician this performer had been. They spent hours thinking about his tricks, trying to find a logical answer to explain them just as the magician had instructed them to. However, nobody could come anywhere close to discovering how this mystical being could do the things he did.

It was an incredible night.

Yet it wasn't until the early hours of the next morning that the first audience member started to realise something was wrong. Mr Hamish Baxter – an accountant from the city – fished through his coat hanging in his wardrobe to extract his wallet, but noticed it wasn't there. He cursed himself and told his wife. She was disappointed, but eventually laughed and reminded him of how clumsy he always was. He laughed along with her and started making arrangements with the banks to cancel his lost credit cards. He even returned to the theatre on his way to work the next morning just in case they'd picked it up, but they hadn't. He thanked the theatre concierge and made his way to work.

On his way out, Mr Baxter had seen another person enter the theatre – someone he thought he recognised from last night's performance – but continued on his way without stopping to chat.

## OPENING NIGHT

Perhaps he should have, for that very person – Dr Paula Tyler, a surgeon from the suburbs – would have told Hamish that she had returned to the theatre to see if the manager had picked up her wallet as well.

Nobody realised it, but the magician had performed his greatest trick right before the show had started: for of all the wallets that had entered the theatre last night in the pockets of the eager audience members...

...not a single one had left.