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Researchers

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Do-Over

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of Made in
America

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POORN

War of the Wands

Behold! Howard Thurston! Harry Houdini's forgotten nemesis!

IT'S THE EARLY 20TH century. You want to take in a magic show. You've got your spats on, your mustache is all waxed and ready. Now you've got to choose between the two preeminent magicians of the age: Harry Houdini and Howard Thurston. "Those guys lived and breathed publicity," says Jim Steinmeyer, author of the new book *The Last Greatest Magician in the World*. "They were scrambling over each other to get the public's attention." So who to pick? Steinmeyer goes with Thurston. Though barely remembered now, his *Wonder Show of the Universe*, a two-and-a-half-hour extravaganza, captivated a generation. Houdini, however, "was just not an impressive magician," Steinmeyer says. Here's how they measured up.



Houdini (left, with Thurston) wasn't actually a very good magician

	THURSTON	HOUDINI	ADVANTAGE
Rank in the Society of American Magicians	Vice president	President	Houdini
Reputation	The former con artist revised his autobiography to pass himself off as a high-society gentleman with pious roots	The rabbi's son forged a new identity as a rough-and-tumble miscreant who associated with the criminal classes.	Thurston
Cards	His big break came when he dazzled famous New York theater agent Walter Plimmer with his sleight of hand.	A complete failure at card tricks, despite early attempts to bill himself as a King of Cards. He later gave them up.	Thurston
Greatest Trick	The Levitation of Princess Karnac, which featured a woman floating in midair.	The Water Torture Cell, in which Houdini escaped from an aquarium full of water.	Houdini
Magic Pedigree	Thurston was a protégé of world-famous magician Harry Keller, who picked him to carry on his legacy.	Houdini was also one of Keller's acolytes, but the escape artist lacked the showmanship to succeed his mentor.	Thurston
Use of Elephants	Thurston developed an appearing-elephant trick for a traveling stage show, but the baby pachyderm got sick and died before he could perform it.	In 1918, Houdini "vanished" an elephant in front of an audience of thousands at New York's Hippodrome Theater, making headlines around the world.	Houdini
Spectacle	The <i>Wonder Show of the Universe</i> lived up to its title, incorporating dancers, vanishing automobiles, vanishing girls, duck tricks, rabbit tricks, water tricks, and floating orbs.	Houdini advertised "an entire evening's worth of entertainment" that included a magic act, escapes, and a lecture on spiritualism. The escapes may have been stunning, but the magic was weak.	Thurston

WINNER: Thurston

DBB

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