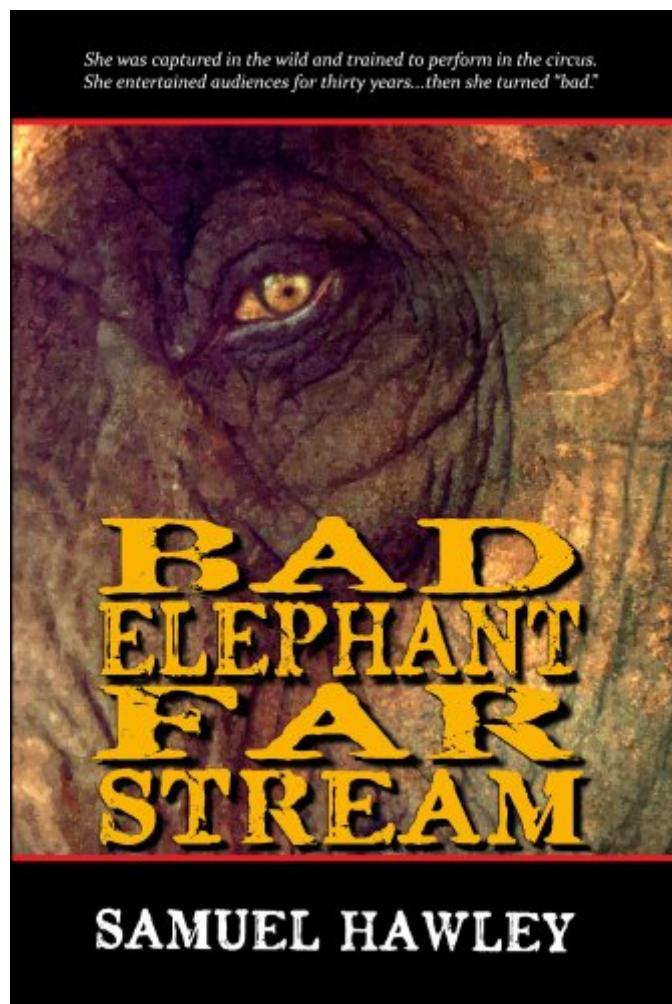


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Bad Elephant Far Stream



Synopsis

The story of an elephant's journey through life, told through her own eyesBad Elephant Far Stream is an animal story for adults, a novel about the odyssey of a circus elephant, told from her own perspective, through her own eyes. Inspired by the true story of the elephant Topsy, it begins in the forests of Ceylon in the late 1860s with the capture of a baby elephant known to her own kind as Far Stream. She is taken to America chained in a ship, a journey of several months, and sent to the Adam Forepaugh Circus in Philadelphia. There, Far Stream embarks on a new life under the big top, appearing first as "Baby Annie," then, when she grows bigger, as "Topsy," part of Forepaugh's famed elephant dancing quadrille. She crisscrosses North America for thirty years with the circus, experiencing hardships, kidnapping, escapes and adventure. But when she comes to outweigh her keepers by a factor of forty, it's hard not to hurt somebody. It's hard not to be bad. A poignant and powerful novel for animal lovers and fans of unusual historical fiction, Bad Elephant Far Stream explores the questions: What is it like to be an elephant captured and trained to perform in the circus? What does such an animal think? What does it feel? What does it yearn for? Bad Elephant Far Stream takes the reader on a voyage of discovery to find out.

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Customer Reviews

This is the odyssey of Far Stream, an Asian elephant caught between two different worlds: her elephant family's jungle home in Ceylon and the urban "jungle" of 19th century America as part of a traveling circus. Author Samuel Hawley has several books under his belt but this is his first novel and it's a good one. The story follows Far Stream's life, as seen through her eyes, from early babyhood and her capture by native elephant hunters, her harrowing sea voyage into the unknown world of man and her days with a turn of the century animal show/circus. Hawley explores the hidden "culture" of elephants, their love of family and how they communicate with one another on a level unknown to man. Is it true that an elephant never forgets? In the story Far Stream is sometimes troubled by dreams and memories of her past, at times she can almost hear Grandmother calling to her "Follow me!". Current research on elephant behavior seems to support the ideas that elephants do remember the events and other individual elephants in their lives. They also seem to communicate with one another through low-frequency "infrasound" but just how detailed that sound is or if it constitutes a language is open to debate. In Bad Elephant Far Stream the elephant characters do "talk" to one another, have a sense of humor, even a religion of sorts and, most importantly, they are "self aware". Far Stream progresses from a innocent baby to a troubled adult with a growing sense that something's wrong in her life. She and her sister often journey, in their minds, to a forest paradise, untouched by man, where her family seems to always be just out of sight. The humans in Far Stream's life are as varied as the elephants are, some good, some bad.

At some time in the 1860s, in the forests of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), a baby elephant known by her family as Far Stream is playing with her siblings. Her grandmother senses danger, but the herd is trapped, by men using fire. Far Stream and her sister Red Moon, together with another family of elephants, are chained and sent on a long voyage. Some months later, they land in America, Far Stream is separated from her sister, and led away to join the Adam Forepaugh Circus in Pennsylvania. Initially called Baby Annie and subjected to intense training, Far Stream becomes part of a troupe of performing elephants travelling around North America. As she grows, her name is changed, but her journey becomes more tolerable when she is reunited with her sister Red Moon. Together, in their consciousness, they are able to escape the rigours of circus life for safer, warmer places where the food is plentiful and they can frolic in the water. She had been Rosalind at Council Bluffs, Ophelia at St Paul, Hamlet at Fargo. It didn't matter. But as Far Stream grows

and confinement becomes unbearable, she is less tractable and becomes feared. How long will she be able to tolerate her mistreatment? What happens to Far Stream that causes her to become Topsy, the subject of Thomas Edison's 1903 film: "The Electrocution of an Elephant? (Yes, a video is available on Youtube for those who wish to see it.) We know, from the prologue, how this story will end. What we glean, from reading the story, is one perspective of why. This is Samuel Hawley's imaginative and sensitive telling of the story of Topsy. As Topsy, or Annie, or Rosalind, or Hamlet, the elephant is a badly treated and ultimately doomed creature.

This is a well-researched and written piece of historic fiction that eloquently depicts the minds of elephants as similar to and yet different from those of humans. The book opens with a scene of a so-called bad elephant about to be executed. The humans state they are doing so humanely and nothing can be done because the elephant has gone rogue and killed too many humans. The book then flashes back to see the elephant's life from the elephant's perspective, leaving it up to the reader to determine if the elephant is actually bad. The humans call her Topsy, but her elephant name is actually Far Stream. What follows in the flashback is a delicately handled and clearly exquisitely researched tale of the life of a circus elephant in the late 1800s in the US. From the beginning, the author makes it clear that elephants are intelligent, with lives, families, and emotions of their own. Quite a bit of this is backed up by science, such as elephants crying and also mourning dead members of the herd. There are also those who think that elephants might communicate via sign language and/or telepathically, and the book fully embraces both ideas. What results in telling this tale from the elephant's perspective is a scene of one intelligent species enslaved by another that is heartbreakingly sad. What really makes the story work, though, is that the author strikes the perfect balance between showing the horror of being a circus elephant and also not fully demonizing humans.

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