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Sommario/riassunto	Imagine a stage full of black cats emitting electrical sparks, a man catching bullets with his teeth, or an evangelist jumping on a transformer to shoot bolts of lightning through his fingertips. These and other wild schemes were part of the repertoire of showmen who traveled from city to city, making presentations that blended science with myth and magic. In Wonder Shows, Fred Nadis offers a colorful history of these traveling magicians, inventors, popular science lecturers, and other presenters of "miracle science" who revealed science and technology to the public in awe-inspiring fashion. The book provides an innovative synthesis of the history of performance with a wider study of culture, science, and religion from the antebellum period to the present. It features a lively cast of characters, including electrical "wizards" Nikola Tesla and Thomas Alva Edison, vaudeville

performers such as Harry Houdini, mind readers, UFO cultists, and practitioners of New Age science. All of these performers developed strategies for invoking cultural authority to back their visions of science and progress. The pseudo-science in their wonder shows helped promote a romantic worldview that called into question the absolute authority of scientific materialism while reaffirming the importance of human spirituality. Nadis argues that the sensation that these entertainers provided became an antidote to the alienation and dehumanization that accompanied the rise of modern America. Although most recent defenders of science are prone to reject wonder, considering it an ally of ignorance and superstition, Wonder Shows demonstrates that the public's passion for magic and meaning is still very much alive. Today, sales continue to be made and allegiances won based on illusions that products are unique, singular, and at best, miraculous. Nadis establishes that contemporary showmen, corporate publicists, advertisers, and popular science lecturers are not that unlike the magicians and mesmerists of years ago.
