

HOUDINI UNBOUND

Mystery, Music and Flying Machines

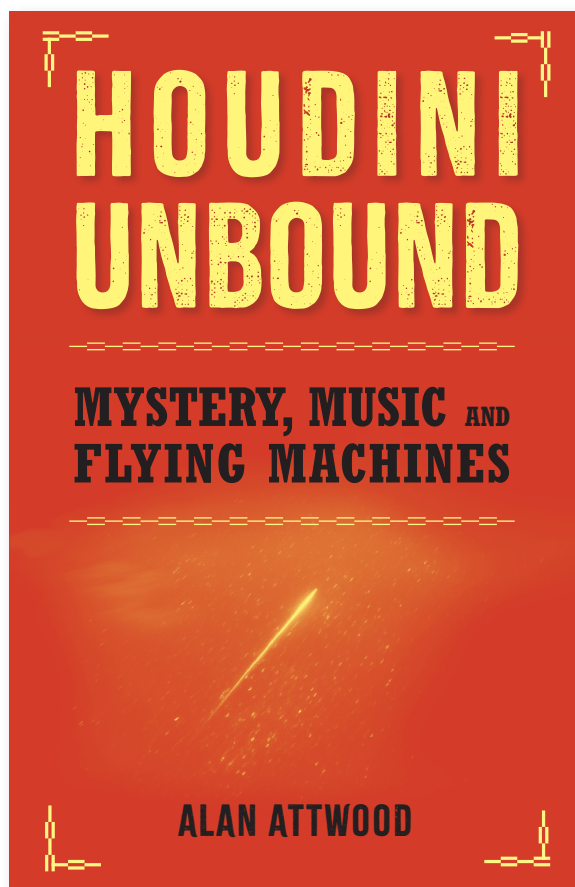
by ALAN ATTWOOD

It is 1910. Halley's Comet is coming. Harry Houdini is in Australia for the first time. The most celebrated escape artist in the world has sold-out seasons in both Melbourne and Sydney.

Houdini has a new obsession: aviation. He has brought with him from Europe his own Voisin biplane, being put together and prepared in a Diggers Rest paddock by his French mechanic, Brassac. Houdini is intent on claiming a record: first to fly in Australia. But he has competition from aspiring aviators in several states, and is left restless and distracted when his promotional leap-in-chains from a Melbourne bridge disturbs a corpse in the Yarra.

Meanwhile, his wife, Bess, left alone in their hotel, stumbles upon her own mystery: music with no apparent source. Then she realises that her preoccupied husband is far from being the most famous visitor to Australia. Also present, though in hiding, is an Italian composer who has performed his own vanishing act.

This intriguing story, set in the year of Halley's Comet, merges history and invention, reality and illusion. Like Houdini's own act, is it possible to believe what you see or hear?



The Author

Alan Attwood has worked as an abalone packer, dishwasher and mail sorter, but mainly as a journalist. He has written for publications ranging from *The Sunday Times*, *London*, to *Time* magazine and covered events as diverse as the first free elections in South Africa, soccer in Northern Greece, political intrigue in Morocco and four Olympic Games. Between 1995–98 he was the New York-based correspondent for *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* newspapers. From 2006–16 he was editor of *The Big Issue* magazine in Australia. His previous novels include *Sinking into Winter*, shortlisted for The Australian/Vogel Literary Award in 1990, *Breathing Underwater* (1997) and *Burke's Soldier*, shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2004.