

Vanishing Leprechaun, Disappearing Dwarf and Swinging Sixties Pin-up Girls – puzzles in pictures

A pictorial history of a much-loved, much-imitated geometrical illusion

Blogpost: The Vanishing Leprechaun puzzle explained

Tue 1 Apr 2014 02.00 EDT

•

The Vanishing Leprechaun is a puzzle that became popular in the late 60s and early 70s. There are 15 leprechauns in the top image, but when the two cut-out pieces are swapped over, one of the leprechauns vanishes. The illustration was drawn in the late 60s by Pat Lyons and sold in magic and novelty shops. Illustration: Pat Lyons



•

The earliest version of the leprechaun-style vanishing puzzle that I have been able to find is The Magic Egg Puzzle, from 1880. The card is cut into four pieces, and they can be rearranged to make 8, 9 or 10 eggs. I printed out a copy of this and it really is very ingenious. Try it! On the back of the card is an advertisement for Wemple and Company, a US firm. It was common for promotional flyers to have puzzles like this on the back. Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



• In 1907 Theodore L DeLand Jr, an amateur magician from Philadelphia, copyrighted La Mystérieuse. This version was used as a business card by the American magician John Percival (1888-1974). Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Jim Holdaway, the British artist most famous for illustrating the Modesty Blaise comic strip, drew this fantastic vanishing puzzle of pin-up girls in the late 60s. He was commissioned by John Henley, the London magician and magic entrepreneur, who used to sell a similar puzzle from Austria. Illustration: John Henley



John Henley, who has since moved to Canada and become a movie actor, told me he sold thousands of Vanishing Lady puzzles in the 60s and 70s. Illustration: John Henley



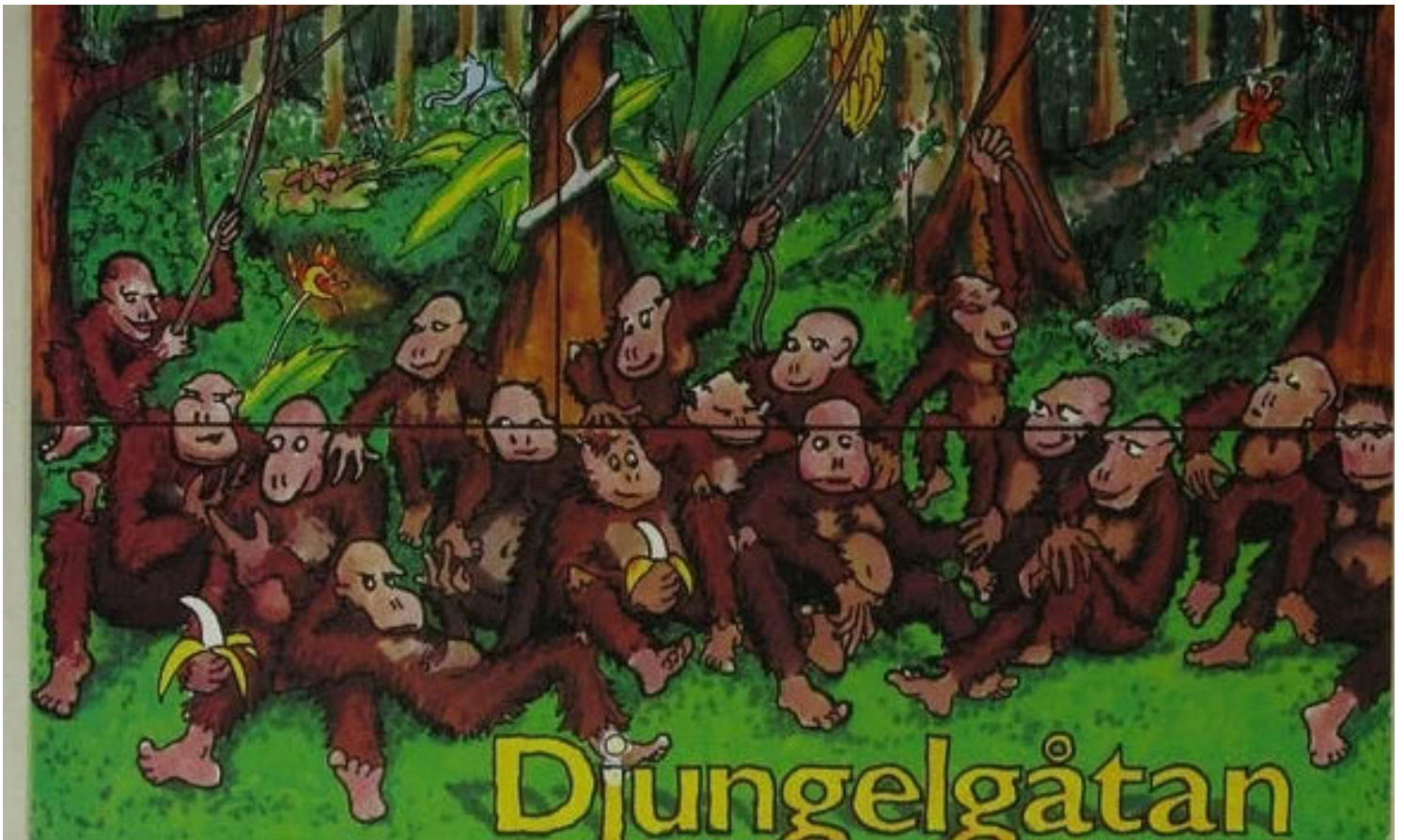
The puzzle goes stratospheric in 1978. Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



Swedish gnomes get in on the act. Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

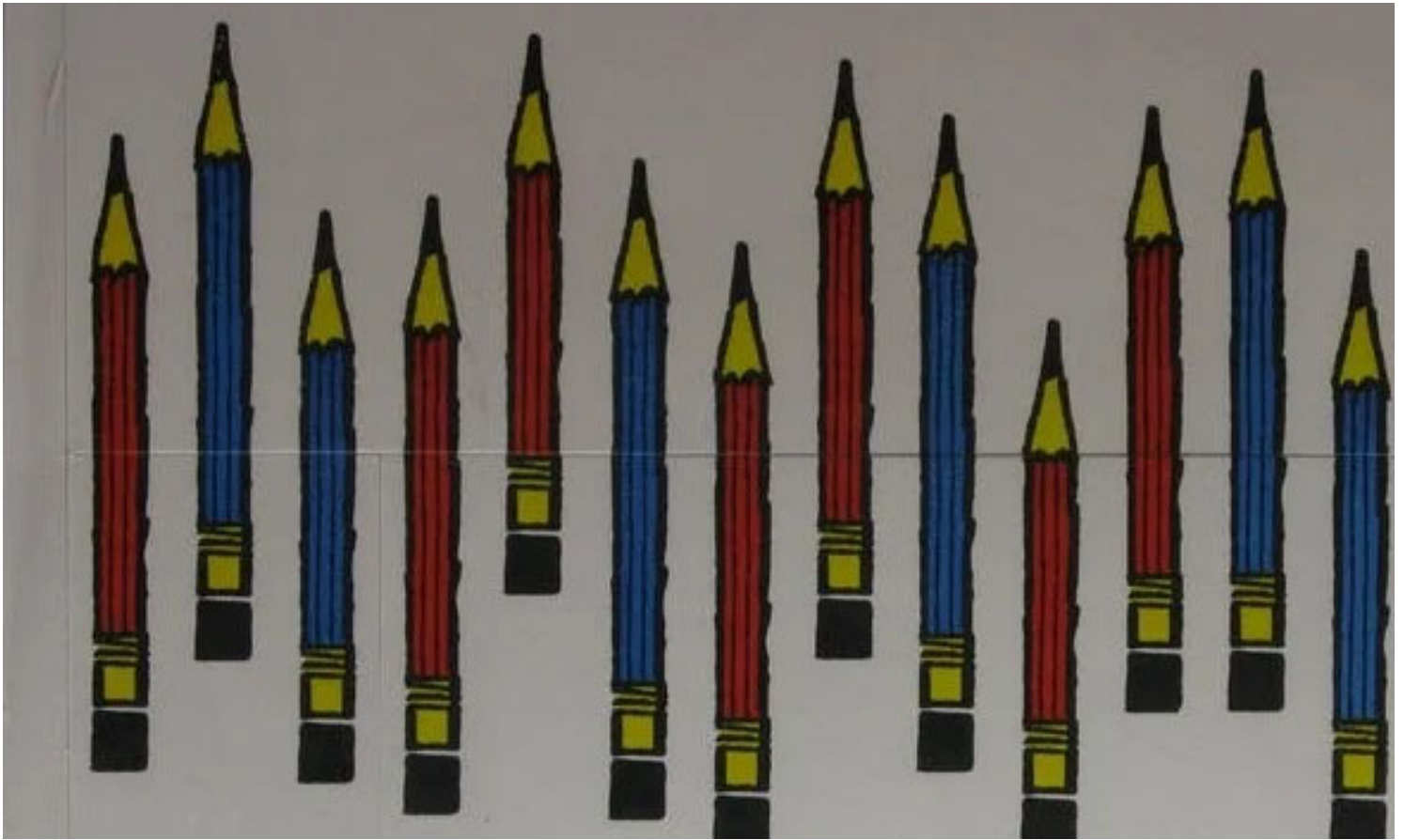


• Another Swedish variant, with apes, from the 90s. Who knew the Swedes were so into geometrical puzzles? Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



-
-

Canadian magician Mel Stover made this version in 1991. Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



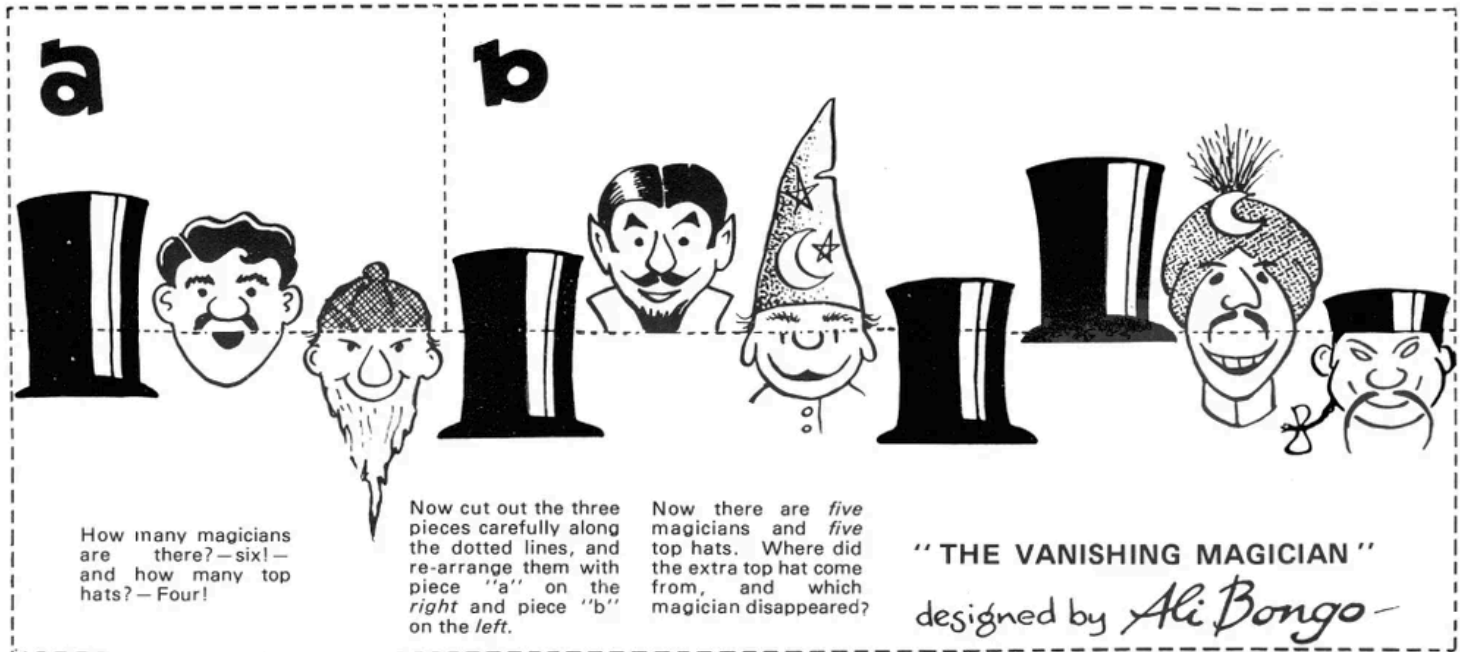
•

The Chinese vanish. Image courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana



•

Another one, by British comedy magician Ali Bongo. I would love to publish a gallery of new examples by Guardian readers ... so email me please alexanderbellos@gmail.com. For tips on how to draw them read my blogpost. Follow me on Twitter @alexbellos. Illustration: John Henley



Topics

- Art and design
- Alex Bellos's Adventures in Numberland
- Mathematics
- Puzzle games
- Psychology