

Masters of Illusion

Roland Sarlot and Susan Eyed

by [Linda Ray](#)

SECRET IDENTITY: Roland Sarlot and Susan Eyed

SECRET POWER: Masters of the mystic arts

SECRET ORIGIN: On a dark and stormy night in Transylvania, Roland pondered his future. He withdrew from his pocket a charm he'd fashioned into a lens. The enchanted glass revealed the shape of a dancing woman who was working magic with the mysterious Gnawa in distant Morocco. The wizardry of modern transportation hurried him to her side—and Susan was smitten at first sight. The Gnawa blessed the couple with the gift of a magic carpet; Sarlot and Eyed vowed to use it to rescue prisoners of low expectations the world over.



THE REAL STORY: Susan Eyed grew up in Middle America with one thing on her mind: escape. She daydreamed of being elsewhere—the more exotic, the better. Her obsession inspired an international-relations major in college; afterward, she leveraged her familial Syrian facial features into the ultimate exotic experience—a sojourn in Morocco, where she got to know the Gnawa, an ancient band of musicians and healers. She learned to teach belly-dancing, which would become a career in the United States—but because the Gnawa also were proficient at tricks and illusions, she brought some of those home, too.

Roland Sarlot had a rocky start at math, but eventually became its master. He liked its possibilities as a college major, and ultimately parlayed it into a career in optics at the UA. His focus, if you will, was on seeing stars. At the Center for Astronomical Adaptive Optics at the Steward Observatory, he worked on projects, one of which you can read about in a document called "Optical Design of ARIES: The New Near Infrared Science Instrument for the Adaptive F/15 Multiple Mirror Telescope." Meanwhile, he pursued an interest in magic and illusions. As retirement approached, he began performing regularly in University Medical Center hospital rooms, and took patients' counsel about how to improve his prowess.

If Eyed were ever to settle down, she knew it would have to be in the sun. She chose Tucson, because her sister owned an art gallery on Fourth Avenue. It was there she met Sarlot, just as he was embarking on a different sort of optics project—the optics of illusions. So it was that the belly-dancer and the magician set forth to rescue people from their humdrum and/or harrowing lives. They performed at the bedside of a dying veteran, in the stress-fraught hospital rooms of children surrounded by their families, and at the group homes of lonely aging and disabled people. But they also performed at resorts, spas, private parties and theaters around the world—and, eventually, in their own magic-carpet-strewn "Victorian parlour" at the Doubletree Inn. Their mission, they say, is to liberate audiences from a preoccupation with reality, and break them out of whatever concerns are stifling their sense of wonder.

SUPER BESTS: The **Gem and Mineral Show** is a particular favorite escape of Eyed's, and both are enthusiastic about **2nd Saturdays Downtown** and **Tucson Meet Yourself**. Eyed says that **Café Poca Cosa** has "the best salsa and margaritas on the planet," and she prefers **Beyond Bread**'s chocolate fruit tart over any birthday cake. The duo's super-best places to eat are **Mariscos Chihuahua** on Grande Avenue ("I love the murals," Eyed says, "They're so over the top!"), and the new **I Love Pho** on Campbell Avenue. "I would start bringing mint in," Eyed says, "and all of a sudden, they started growing it, because they knew I liked it." "We like **Gates Pass**," Sarlot says. "We love the desert. We like the expanse, and of course, the sunset is incredible. It's right in town! There's all this stuff in town that we really love. We like walking **downtown**, too. When it's hot and miserable, it's nice to go out at 10 o'clock at night and just walk when it's cooler. "We also love the **bats under the Campbell Avenue bridge**," Eyed says. "There are gazillions of them, and here you are, in the middle of town!"

Perhaps it's a phantom memory of Transylvania ...