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Melinda's Magic Sure to Impress Those Who Like Their Illusions Big

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NEW YORK - Admittedly, I may be the least qualified person in America to evaluate the merits of **"Melinda: First Lady of Magic"** (CBS 2,3 and 22 at 8, TV-PG). To me, magic is... well, magic. Take the simplest card trick; show me how it's done in super slow-motion, all the while explaining each step in words the average 3-year-old would understand. And when you're finished, I'll still be staring at the deck with open-mouthed, bug-eyed incomprehension.

That said, I have to point out that, to my untrained eye, the magic of "Melinda" seems pretty impressive. However, a running "subplot," in which Shelley Long plays a woman telling her daughter (Kelsey Mulrooney) a bedtime story about Melinda, is as intrusive as it is irritating.

But that magic really is something. In one illusion, Melinda makes a winged horse disappear. I'm not sure what the deal was with those wings. I mean, it's not as though I'd have been less impressed if she'd made just a regular old horse disappear. A horse is a horse (of course, of course).

In other illusions, Melinda makes a jacked-up race car vanish as Al Unser revs it to 180 mph, and appears to balance a reclining assistant on the point of a single sword.

One particularly unusual segment features a Revolutionary War theme, for which Melinda is garbed in a leotard and British red coat. (Thankfully, this was not the actual English uniform, or we'd still be colonies today: The Americans, rendered helpless with laughter, would simply have been rounded up by their adversaries.) It concludes with Melinda apparently being fired from a cannon into a barrel some distance away, a feat she makes look as easy as... well, shooting Melindas into a barrel.

In the show-stopper, Melinda is seemingly impaled on a giant industrial drill. She introduces the illusion as a metaphor for pursuing dreams and aspirations. I didn't quite follow this - my dreams and aspirations never having included my torso being corkscrewed onto a bit the size of a redwood trunk - but never mind. It's pretty darned amazing, in any case.