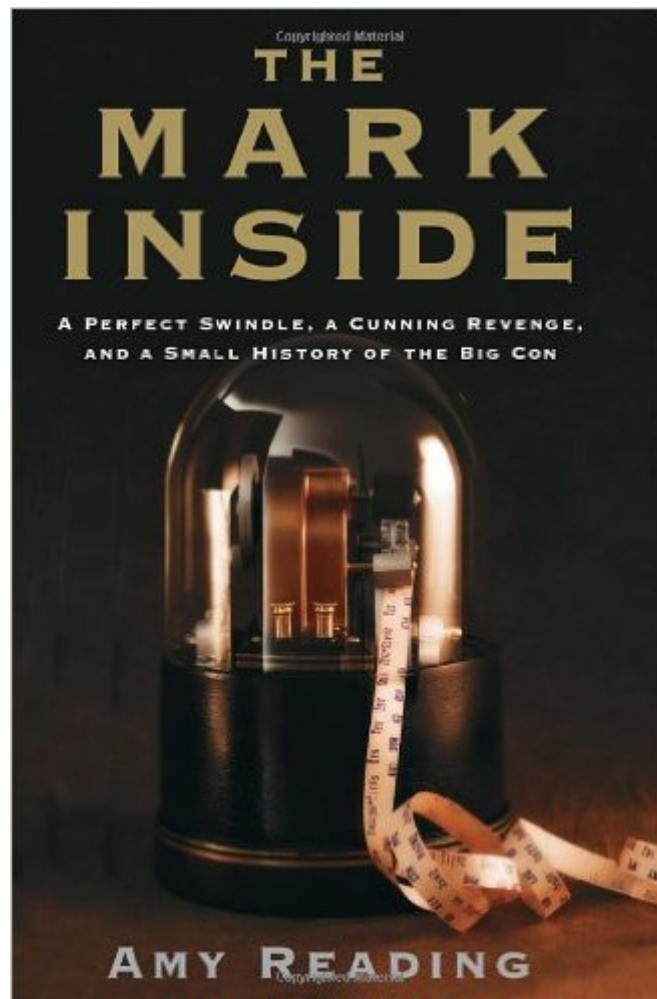


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The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, A Cunning Revenge, And A Small History Of The Big Con



Synopsis

In 1919, Texas rancher J. Frank Norfleet lost everything he had in a stock market swindle. He did what many other marks did—he went home, borrowed more money from his family, and returned for another round of swindling. Only after he lost that second fortune did he reclaim control of his story. Instead of crawling back home in shame, he vowed to hunt down the five men who had conned him. Armed with a revolver and a suitcase full of disguises, Norfleet crisscrossed the country from Texas to Florida to California to Colorado, posing as a country hick and allowing himself to be ensnared by confidence men again and again to gather evidence on his enemies. Within four years, Frank Norfleet had become nationally famous for his quest to out-con the con men. Through Norfleet's ingenious reverse-swindle, Amy Reading reveals the mechanics behind the scenes of the big con—a piece of performance art targeted to the most vulnerable points of human nature. Reading shows how the big con has been woven throughout U.S. history. From the colonies to the railroads and the Chicago Board of Trade, America has always been a speculative enterprise, and bunco men and bankers alike have always understood that the common man was perfectly willing to engage in minor fraud to get a piece of the expanding stock market—a trait that made him infinitely gullible. Amy Reading's fascinating account of con artistry in America and Frank Norfleet's wild caper invites you into the crooked history of a nation on the hustle, constantly feeding the hunger and the hope of the mark inside.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you remember the movie The Sting from 1973 you will recall that there was a series of various

confidence tricks, including a pigeon drop, a rigged card game, and an elaborately staged fake betting parlor set up just to con a despicable gambler. As entertaining as Robert Redford and Paul Newman made the movie, I remember thinking that the fake betting was just too complicated and preposterous for anyone to have confidence in. It could only happen in the movies. I have found myself proved wrong as I was reading *The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, A Cunning Revenge, and a Small History of the Big Con* (Knopf) by Amy Reading. Reading holds a doctorate in American Studies, and the book started as an academic venture, and comes with plenty of footnotes, but forget all that. This, Reading's first book, is a terrific story of duplicity and revenge, and an examination of confidence schemes as a manifestation of a particularly American drive. The hero of the story is J. Frank Norfleet, and when we meet him in 1919, he was merely an upstanding, teetotaling, diminutive, third-generation Texas rancher, in his prosperous 54th year. He came to Dallas for the purpose of buying and selling land. This is the proverbial honest man who could not be cheated, and yet his honesty and goodwill were played against him by three clever gentlemen who were prosperous and friendly. They were just his sort of people, even though they were strangers. He entered the St. George Hotel, and as Reading says, "... he entered a tightly scripted drama with nine acts, each with its own distinct function in conveying the mark toward the climax when his money will be whisked away." Reading describes each of the nine acts, which have names like "roping the mark" or "the convincer."

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