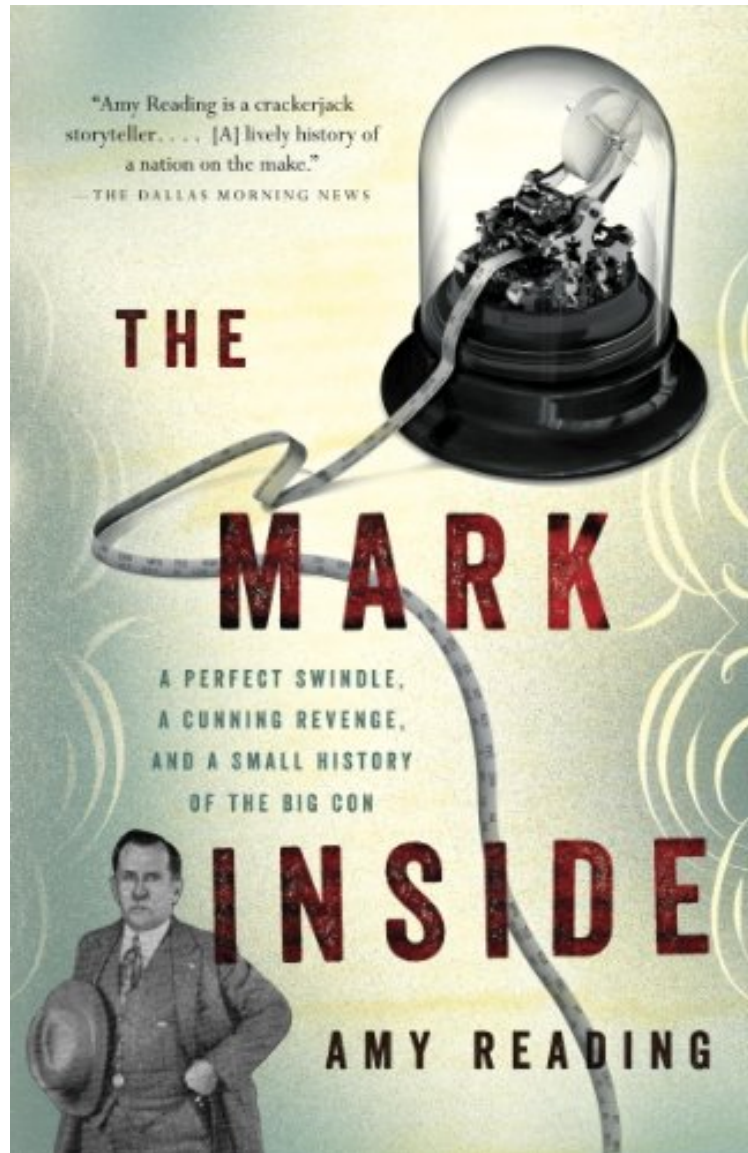


[E-BOOK] The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, a Cunning Revenge, and a Small History of the Big Con

The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, a Cunning Revenge, and a Small History of the Big Con

Amy Reading

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Amy Reading : The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, a Cunning Revenge, and a Small History of the Big Con before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mark Inside: A Perfect Swindle, a Cunning Revenge, and a Small History of the Big Con:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A FUN, INTERESTING GOOD READBy John Anthony DeksnisI loved this book. Of course, I guess I should admit to being a... sucker... for obscure bits of Americana and tales of

great con jobs. According to her author bio, Ms. Reading has a Ph.D in American Studies and it shows. But, in a good way. This work was thoroughly researched -- and I mean thoroughly. And, as a result, fascinating historical tidbits abound. Nothing dry and academic about Ms. Reading's writing, either. The book just flies along. I'm very anxious to see, too, what she does next. In the meantime, though, kudos to her for this effort. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Product rating By michelle kimmel This was a interesting book to read. We read it for our book club of which I know some people couldn't finish. I hate to not finish a book so a few months later I finally finished it. I loved the idea of the story. For me personally the book had the tendency to get really interesting for a few pages then would go into boring filler stuff. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A mostly enjoyable read By Bruce Gilpin The book covered an area of history I didn't know about. Some of the most interesting sections were side bars to the main narrative. I think the book would have been better if they were expanded on.

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.

Not only does she artfully relate Norfleet's revenge, but [Reading] also places it in the context of scammers dead and living. This is not a history of Ponzi schemes, and it does not reach the heights (or should I say depths) of Bernie Madoff's operation. It is, however, an engaging book for anybody who wants to better understand misconduct in the realm of finance -- and the consequences of such misconduct for everybody involved. Steve Weinberg, USA Today In these pages are brilliant portraits of Florida before retirement groves, of wild-west Denver before the tech boom, and of Texas before the Bush family decamped there from Greenwich, Connecticut. The country was younger then, though not more innocent. . . . A ripping good read. David M. Shribman, The Boston Globe In the era of Bernie Madoff, Nigerian spam scams, and other sordid rackets, it's heartening to remember that swindling once took a touch more finesse. . . . The Mark Inside is an astounding tale, brought to vivid life by an historian who has had to become an expert at distinguishing fact from romantic fiction. Jim Kelly, Businessweek Reading doesn't swindle her readers. . . . She delivers the goods, with enough scholarly information on America's con men to keep intellectually minded readers from feeling guilty about reading such a whopping good tale. Doug Childers, Richmond Times-Dispatch Amy Reading brings to life one actual con in a book as riveting as a movie. . . . An amazing piece of historical research that will ensnare the reader. Arthur T. Vanderbilt, Newark Star-Ledger Engrossing. . . . [Reading] gets to the center of both Norfleet's story and the mass appeal of the con artist as a figure in American culture. Ian Crouch, The Paris Daily Vibrant characterizations. . . . This narrative of vigilante justice flows like fiction, as con artistry is illuminated throughout, with resonance in today's world of high-tech con artistry. Publishers Weekly Fascinating . . . Norfleet's quest seems both quixotic and inspiring. Kirkus Most scholarship reads like a trip to the dentist. The Mark Inside reads like a trip to the track. David Mamet, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Glengarry Glen Ross and House of Games With pitch-perfect storytelling and stylish prose, Amy Reading weaves a gripping tale of a grand swindle and even grander act of revenge, a solo manhunt throughout North America that's as hilarious as it is compelling. Rarely has history been this fun, fast-paced, and fulfilling. The Mark Inside is a book you won't put down and a story you'll never forget. Karen Abbott, New York Times best-selling author of American Rose and Sin in the Second City Part page-turning crime drama, part juicy tale of vengeance and obsession, part informative social history, and part intriguing epistemological rumination about literary truth, Amy Reading's The Mark Inside is always great fun. From the first page Ms. Reading hooks the reader as shrewdly as any of the bunco men she writes about -- only she makes good on this

hotel bills. Norfleet accepted, charmed by the man's youthful friendliness. Spencer's boss, Garrett Thompson, soon telegraphed to say he was passing through Dallas and would love the opportunity to meet Norfleet. Would Norfleet agree to meet him at the Adolphus Hotel the next day? Courted by three successful businessmen, wined and dined at the city's best hotels, his down payment on the Slaughter land growing plumper by the hour, Norfleet must have felt as if something great were just beginning. In fact, something great was already well under way. Just twenty-four hours had elapsed and already he was deep into the big con. When Norfleet stepped into the St. George Hotel, 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. Even the mark has his lines, and just because he doesn't know them does not mean he won't say them at exactly the right moment. He will, because the dialogue is designed so that his responses are the most predictable things he would say in such a situation. The play hinges on three psychological moments, when the mark must make a decision that will propel him further inside. Any objections he might muster have already been taken into account and rejoinders to them devised. Norfleet's role called for him to play himself, a part at which he excelled, but in a context designed so that his own earnest words would betray him. Confidence men took inordinate pride in the structured nature of their profession. Instead of the violence and mayhem of other kinds of theft, they relied solely on a perfectly constructed piece of theater. Con artistry may seem, at times, like the art of controlling a mark's mind, but Norfleet made the decisions he did only because his swindlers so completely engineered his interpretation of events. He perceived his initial encounters with the two men as organic happenstances. In fact the swindlers had framed his experiences so that even the backdrop of urban life—the hotel lobbies, the streets, the office buildings—became props in their drama, the strangers around them became unwitting extras. The big con works because it makes use of a time-honored technique from stage magic, the one-ahead, in which the trick begins before the performer formally introduces it to the audience; it is the most elaborate form of misdirection because it leads the mark to misperceive the nature of the entire situation. In the face of the one-ahead, Norfleet's defenselessness was absolute—who, in his boots, would possibly guess that such an elaborate performance has been devised just for him? The first of the nine acts began before Norfleet even walked into the St. George, when Reno Hamlin had put the mark up for fleecing. Hamlin had trawled the lines at the train station and the hotels, eavesdropping on conversations and peering over counters at registers and receipts, until he had identified someone promising. Norfleet was no redneck blusterer, no wide-eyed naïf, no freewheeling gambler, no shyster on the make. What about him interested Hamlin? Hamlin had sifted the crowd with a particular set of criteria. His next mark would have to be, first and foremost, an out-of-towner so that he wouldn't be able to turn to his local banker for advice during the swindle or encounter the con men after his money vanished. He would be from a second- or third-tier American city, traveling alone in a large city for business purposes. It goes without saying that his mark would be male, for women rarely had the fortune, autonomy, and wherewithal to make investment decisions with the decisiveness that the con required. He would be a prosperous, substantial citizen in his community. More than that, he would be a self-made man, accustomed to both hard work and seizing the main chance. He must be able to raise \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000, even \$50,000 in a day or two, but he must not have so much money that he would refer a deal to his bankers and accountants. He wouldn't be overly familiar with the financial industry. Norfleet fit that role in almost every particular. The second act was to play the con for him: gain his confidence and bait him with thoughts of lucrative business deals. Hamlin and Spencer, the steerers, calibrated their offers to seem eminently plausible, not wanting to arouse Norfleet's suspicion. By the second day, they had succeeded in imaginatively increasing his wealth. At first glance, their two-step approach—first Hamlin's mules and then Spencer's land—might seem unnecessarily elaborate. Why not hook Norfleet simply by providing him with what he sought in Da...