



The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence Man

David Maurer

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"Of all the grifters, the confidence man is the aristocrat, " wrote David Maurer, a proposition he definitively proved in *The Big Con*, one of the most colorful, well-researched, and entertaining works of criminology, ever written. A professor of linguistics who specialized in underworld argot, Maurer won the trust of hundreds of swindlers who let him in on not simply their language, but their folkways and the astonishingly complex and elaborate schemes whereby unsuspecting marks, hooked by their own greed and dishonesty, were "taken off" -- i.e., cheated -- of thousands upon thousands of dollars. The products of amazing ingenuity, crack timing, and attention to every last detail, these "big cons" richly deserve Maurer's description as "the most effective swindling device which man has ever invented."

The Big Con is a treasure trove of American lingo (the write, the rag, the payoff, ropers, shills, the cold poke, the convincer, to put on the send) and indelible characters (Yellow Kid Weil, Barney the Patch, the Seldom Seen Kid, Limehouse Chappie, Larry the Lug). It served as a source for the Oscar-winning film *The Sting* and will delight fans of such writers as David Mamet, Jim Thompson, Elmore Leonard, and William Burroughs for its droll, utterly authoritative look at the timeless pursuit of relieving one's fellow man of his surplus cash.

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