



Empire of Deception: The Incredible Story of a Master Swindler Who Seduced a City and Captivated the Nation

By Dean Jobb

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“A brilliantly researched tale of greed, ambition, and our desperate need to believe in magic, it’s history that captures America as it really was--and always will be. A great read.” —Douglas Perry, author of *Eliot Ness*

It was a time of unregulated madness. And nowhere was it madder than in Chicago at the dawn of the Roaring Twenties. As Model Ts rumbled down Michigan Avenue, gang war shootings announced Al Capone’s rise to underworld domination. Bedecked partygoers thronged to the Drake Hotel’s opulent banquet rooms, corrupt politicians held court in thriving speakeasies, and the frenzy of stock market gambling was rampant.

Enter a slick, smooth-talking, charismatic lawyer named Leo Koretz, who enticed hundreds of people (who should have known better) to invest as much as \$30 million--upwards of \$400 million today--in phantom timberland and nonexistent oil wells in Panama. It was an ingenious deceit, one that out-ponzied Charles Ponzi himself, who only a few years earlier had been arrested for a pyramid scheme. Leo had a good run--his was perhaps the longest fraud in history--and when his enterprise finally collapsed in 1923, he vanished. The Cook County state’s attorney, a man whose lust for power equaled Leo’s own lust for money, began an international manhunt that lasted almost a year. When finally apprehended, Leo was living a life of luxury in Nova Scotia under the assumed identity of a book dealer and literary critic. A salacious court hearing followed, and his mysterious death in a Chicago prison rivaled the rest of his almost-too-bizarre-to-believe life.

A rip-roaring tale of greed, financial corruption, dirty politics, over-the-top and under-the-radar deceit, illicit sex, and a brilliant and wildly charming con man on the town and then on the lam, *Empire of Deception* has it all. It’s not only a rich and detailed account of a man and an era; it’s a fascinating look at the methods of swindlers throughout history. Leo Koretz was the Bernie Madoff of his day, and Dean Jobb shows us that the American dream of easy wealth is timeless.

“The granddaddy of all con men, Leo Koretz gives Jobb the opportunity to exhibit his impressive research and storytelling skills . . . [Jobb] keeps readers on edge . . . as they wait to see if Koretz might just get away with it. A highly readable, entertaining story.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“A captivating tale of high-flying financial chicanery in 1920s Chicago. Dean Jobb tells the story of Leo Koretz, a legendary con artist of Madoffian audacity, with terrific energy and narrative brio.” —Gary Krist, author of *Empire of Sin*

“A dramatic read and a useful lesson!” —Michael Korda, author of *Charmed Lives*

“Begin with a Bernie Madoff–wolf-in-sheep’s-clothing con man pursued by a power-hungry public prosecutor; add the great hog-trough feeding frenzy of 1920s Chicago; stir with great writing and enterprising research; and there you have it: a wonderfully entertaining read!” —Michael Lesy, author of *Murder City*

“Dean Jobb’s story of con man Leo and his pathetically gullible and mostly rich victims perfectly captures the flavor of Chicago in the Roaring Twenties. What a great caper movie this would make!” —Marq de Villiers, author of *Our Way Out*

“Reads like a Gatsby-Ponzi mashup. A guilty-pleasure reminder that the most audacious bad guys have always been the most entertaining. Kudos to Jobb for unearthing this overlooked story and bringing to life a charming, witty, naughty, iconic American crook.” —Neal Thompson, author of *A Curious Man*

“Dean Jobb has found a fascinating yet little-known jazz-age tale and told it with style and smarts.” —Jonathan Eig, author of *Get Capone*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of May 2015: Part popular history, part true crime, Dean Jobb's *Empire of Deception* is the fascinating tale of Leo Koretz, a trained lawyer who used his sweet-talking ways not to defend the law but to break it. Set mostly in Chicago during the Roaring Twenties, the same era that brought us Ponzi and his famous scheme, Jobb's book is divided into three acts. Act One introduces readers to Koretz, who managed to bilk millions from mostly rich "investors" who thought they were getting entrée into oil and timber interests in Panama. Act Two shows his years of hard criminal work paying off (he lived in a mansion and owned two Rolls Royces) and also catching up to him. Act Three shows him fleeing to Nova Scotia, where he dated a slew of women and threw lavish parties until he was eventually caught. What makes this book so interesting is the excellent pacing and fine detail laced throughout (although toward the end of the book that detail threatens, momentarily, to stall the momentum that Jobb so skillfully builds), the joy of reading about a man who could have taught Bernie Madoff a thing or two, and the sheer chutzpah (and, yes, skill) of Leo Koretz, who for a time lived like Gatsby and who managed to separate millions of dollars from people who probably should have known better. --Chris Schlupe

Review

"Intoxicating and impressively researched, Jobb's immorality tale provides a sobering post-Madoff reminder that those who think everything is theirs for the taking are destined to be taken." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Comprehensively researched and enthralling . . . High-stakes hijinks give the story a rollicking feel, but Jobb manages great poignancy, too. . . This lively and sweeping account seems to have already given a master con artist his due, putting him in the 'pantheon of pyramid-building swindlers.'" —*The Washington Post*

"This cautionary tale of 1920s greed and excess reads like it could happen today." —*The Associated Press*

"Jobb vividly, albeit briefly, brings the Chicago of the 1880s and '90s to life . . . [and] is a masterpiece of narrative set-up and vivid language." —*Chicago Tribune*

"Dean Jobb skillfully dusts off this century-old tale with a fast-paced narrative, a keen eye for detail and a cast of characters in which the free-for-all city of Chicago plays a prominent role . . . [A] masterfully told story." —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

"Jobb expertly mixes newspaper research with witness interviews to weave a rollicking narrative. . . The result is a memorable, fast-moving work of history." —*Atlanta Jewish Times*

"[A]n intriguing story. . . In our own wealth-besotted times, this well-researched story of Leo Koretz is a cautionary tale." —*Washington Independent Review of Books*

"Peppered with contemporaneous photos depicting the key players and the swanky places, phony stock certificates, newspaper headlines, and even a 'wanted' posted, *Empire of Deception* is a jaw-dropping, rollicking good read." —*Booklist*

“This lively, entertaining, and depressingly relevant history of a man and his con reads like a novel and will be enjoyed by fans of popular history as well as true crime.” —*Library Journal*, **starred review**

“[A] rollicking story of greed, financial corruption, dirty politics, and illicit sex.” —*Publishers Weekly*

From the Back Cover

“A rollicking tale that is one part *The Sting*, one part *The Great Gatsby*, and one part *The Devil in the White City*.” —Karen Abbott, author of *Liar*, *Temptress*, *Soldier*, *Spy*

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“Captivating . . . A story that seems to be as American as it can get, and it’s told well.” —*The Christian Science Monitor*

“A masterpiece of narrative set-up and vivid language . . . Jobb vividly . . . brings the Chicago of the 1880s and ‘90s to life.” —*Chicago Tribune*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Peggy Hardman:

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Richard Williams:

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James Atkinson:

Is it you who having spare time in that case spend it whole day by watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something new? This Empire of Deception: The Incredible Story of a Master Swindler Who Seduced a City and Captivated the Nation can be the answer, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your spare time by reading in this new era is common not a geek activity. So what these guides have than the others?

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