



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

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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