



How to Cheat at Everything: A Con Man Reveals the Secrets of the Esoteric Trade of Cheating, Scams, and Hustles

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Gambling is more popular than ever, with multi-million dollar poker tournaments on television, gambling themed movies like *Rounders* gaining in popularity, and casinos opening in just about every state of the U.S. *How to Cheat at Everything* is a roller-coaster ride through bar bets, street hustles, carnivals, Internet fraud, big and small cons, card and dice games and more. You'll even find the exact frauds that the NYPD regard as the most common and dangerous today, and learn top tips on how to avoid each one. This inside information comes from Lovell's lifetime of experience in the field, along with additional information from both sides of the law. Not just a "here's how the con works" book; this guides you through the set up, the talk, the sell, everything about the con, and how you can be suckered into one. If you think that you can't be conned; then you are already halfway to being so! There is no preaching here, just a fun ripping ride through a world so few know about. You'll meet wild, eccentric and larcenous characters and you'll learn how they work their money-making deeds, all without having to risk a penny of your own money.

How to Cheat at Everything: A Con Man Reveals the Secrets of the Esoteric Trade of Cheating, Scams, and Hustles Details

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From Reader Review How to Cheat at Everything: A Con Man Reveals the Secrets of the Esoteric Trade of Cheating, Scams, and Hustles for online ebook

Rsoeffker says

What a fun read! As a magician, historian, and barroom grifter, I found this book to be a enjoyable walk through the dank carnival known as "The World of Con-Men". The author covers many genres and corners of "The Trade". There were a great many parts of the book where I was laughing like a mad-man at the stories.

The Downsides:

1. the historical documentation of the book was really bad. He would say stuff like "This has been around since the middle ages" but would back it up with nothing.
2. The book IS the con. He clearly is using con tricks to get your money. Even if he is "revealing" his trade, he is clearly using con tricks to get your money... just in a much more fair way.
3. He "Sells you the doughnut and gives you the hole". This is a old phrase taught to me by a mafia card-shark who taught me much of what I know. Lovell purposefully is hiding some seriously key parts of the cons to protect the really valuable secrets. If you try these cons knowing nothing more than what's in this book, you will fall flat on your face. Sure, some of the small time stuff is complete, but there's much more to mucking cards than just knowing how to trim a card down or apply ink. Beware: Don't think you are a pro just because you read this book.

Dele Omotosho says

This book needs to be renamed to something like "How to Cheat at Cards, Dice & Magic" in a future, much needed revision.

The author or publisher claiming this is about "everything" is ambitious, and it delivers short on that front. I'm impressed about the content on it's card, dice and magic tricks though.

Those said, if you're into bar tricks, or magic, or casino hustles, it's a great read, unfortunately I'm not into those and the title surely misdirected me.

(More side gripe: the book just mentioned online scams in passing, which, I will imagine should have a serious consideration, if it's truly about "everything")

Johnny says

I was delighted to discover a reference to my favorite musical, *Guys & Dolls*, as I was devouring *How to Cheat at Everything*. In the play, Sky Masterson says that his dad warned him that a man would come up to him with a new, sealed deck of cards and bet that he could make the joker pop up and spit on him. The father

said, “Do not take that bet!” and goes on to express that as surely as the sun rises, the joker will do just that. Before reading this book, I wondered how one could rig a “sealed deck.” I mean, I was semi-alert enough to realize that a deck could be “re-sealed,” but how did one introduce it into a game? Lovell’s composite con-man (he calls him Freddy and he seems to be a mix of all the world’s great scams) for the book will do so in multiple ways. In a friendly game, he may say that he has a new deck (“never been used”) in his car. That seems too obvious. However, since the con man usually plays with a shill (Lovell calls Freddy’s usual compatriot in crime, Sam), it is a simple matter to offer some money for Sam to go purchase a fresh deck and, guess what, Sam comes back with the stacked deck. Okay, it’s obvious. A lot of things in this book are obvious, but I was incredibly fascinated by the lengths people will go to in order to deceive other people.

When I was a child, I remember going to the county fair and bugging my Dad for money to play all of the games that looked like so much fun. I wanted to throw the hoops over the prizes, the ball at the cats, the ball at the metal “milk” bottles, and more. My father, wisely enough would say, “No. All of those games are crooked.” When I would ask, “How are they crooked?” He wasn’t sure. He just said that they all have their edge. I thought Dad was paranoid and, with childlike irrationality, refused to completely believe him. He put enough fear of the “carny” in me to keep me away from those games, except with the occasional dabble, but I was never completely satisfied. I even remember protesting about the milk bottles—but THEY can do it (meaning the carnies) and the baskets where you just have to get the ball to stay in to win the prize.

Lovell’s book points out that the carnies don’t have to cheat (p. 108). The games themselves have an edge in that the prizes don’t cost much and the games are already deceptively difficult. Few people have the accuracy to hit the “milk bottles” squarely at the bottom in the first place. The “cats” are mostly thread (representing a wild mane all the way around the cat), anyway—a smaller target than you think. The basketball hoops are smaller and tighter than a normal basketball hoop. The balloons are underinflated and the darts you get (as opposed to the carny’s demonstration darts) are dull. But the carnies up the odds with a few “gaffes” anyway.

When the carny throws at the milk bottles (or has a little kid do it for free to show how easy it is), he places the heavy bottle on the top. Almost any throw will cause the collapse then. When he places it for you, he not only places the heavy bottle as one of those on the bottom, but he places them asymmetrically so that you can’t even hit the two bottom bottles simultaneously—either missing one completely or having the front one deflect the ball away from the other one. When you throw at the cats, the widest point is at the bottom in order to avoid going through the “mane.” Yet, there is a bright piece of flashing at the bottom of the shelf that keeps you from getting a clean shot at the bottom. It not only looks pretty, but it deflects the ball. Sometimes, the carny even pulls a rope to bring the back of the tent in tighter so that the cats won’t fall—that’s really low. When the carny sinks a basket, he uses an underinflated ball to sink the basket. When you throw, he uses an overinflated ball to increase the chance you’ll pop out of the tighter basket. Obvious, yeah! Did I really know how it was done? No! A childhood mystery solved.

I’ve only placed two proposition bets in my life—one in junior high and one in high school. On neither occasion did I have money to bet, so I put something precious to me up (in both cases a book against a nickel in junior high and a quarter in high school). The junior high bet was straight up on the World Series. Yes, that was before I started rooting for the Cubs so I had a team in the series. I was a Dodger fan at the time and they were playing the Yankees in the World Series. Not only were the Dodgers my favorite team at the time, but they were my second favorite team as well (the team playing the Yankees). The Dodgers won 4-0, sweeping the Yankees and eliciting a pledge that I would never bet on sports again. If only that had been, I’ll never bet again. A schoolmate of mine told me that he had a bet for me. He would give me a quarter if he won and I’d give him a very funny book I owned by Richard Armour if I lost. I took the bet because he said I couldn’t stand still while he circled around me three times. He went around me twice and went home, saying

he'd see me tomorrow and give me my quarter if I was still standing there. I felt stupid and humiliated, as well I should have. Most proposition bets are just like that one—an NAP (Not A Prayer) bet.

If a fellow takes a wide-mouthed bar glass and sets it on a few matchbooks to increase the height and bets you the circumference of the glass is longer than the height of the matchbooks plus the glass, follow old Mr. Masterson's (really Damon Runyon's) advice and do not take that bet. The circumference is almost higher. If someone says he can light a cigarette, take four drags off it, knock the ash off it, and leave the cigarette as long as it was before, do not take that bet. He didn't say he would light it on either end, the middle would count, too. If there are around 30 people in the venue and he bets that at least two people in the room will share a birthday (not a specific date, but some birthday), do not take that bet. The odds are going to be almost 4:1 in his favor.

Lovell points out how his composite con-man, Freddy, will deliberately misquote the odds for a game. For example, Freddy has three coins or buttons so that they can land heads/tails with the former or dark/white with the latter. He says that there are four ways that they can come down uneven and two ways that they can come in even (all heads/tails or all dark/white), so he'll pay you \$2 every time they come up even and you pay him \$1 every time they come up uneven. Fair odds? Not quite! There are two ways to come up even, but there are SIX ways to come up uneven: H-T-T, H-H-T, H-T-H, T-H-H, T-T-H, and T-H-T. So, even though "Freddy" is paying you 2:1, the true odds are 6:2 or 3:1 against you. This isn't the biggest edge cited in the book, but it's easy to illustrate.

Now, it probably seems odd to anyone reading this review that I am so cheap that I look at any form of gambling in the same way my wife looks at the stock market—throwing money down the toilet. If it weren't for the fact that the government gives us a tax break for our 401Ks, I don't think we'd ever invest. But, there was a time when I knew a person who regularly ran horses at Churchill Downs. Even though I didn't bet on the horses, I liked to go and watch his horses run. But being a curious fellow, I loved watching the people around me. I particularly remember the guy who had been tearing up tickets all day long (obviously losing) and hearing his friend ask how he was doing. "Breaking even," said the losing gambler.

One of the mysteries solved for me in the book (although I had sort of suspected it) had to do with all of the touts at the racetrack with their little pick sheets claiming "Six winners yesterday!" or "24 winners, this week!" They would even have their marked cards from yesterday or earlier in the week showing how they'd done. Now, I had once worked with a professional handicapper (he worked at a regular job when his luck turned bad) and I knew I had out-picked him on numerous occasions (I picked just for fun out of the *Los Angeles Times*, but he was betting for real. It used to really annoy him when he'd lose and see my picks at the afternoon lunch break. "I shoulda' bet on that _*&^%+! How'd you pick that plug?"). So, I wondered how these guys consistently had winning picks. Duh! Lovell says that they just mark up cards several different ways with random horses. They keep one of each card. Then, they post the best one the next day. It's pretty easy to have a good day if you've picked all of the horses one way or another. You don't even have any money on it—just multiple cards (p. 86).

As for racetrack scams, I loved the one he shared on pp. 89-91 where Freddy and his female friend, the Minx, pretend to be husband and wife. She's drinking in the clubhouse and very upset. When she finds someone who will listen, she explains that her husband paid \$50 for a tip and that he's putting too much of their money on it. After the race, he comes back and flashes a wad of cabbage (a fake roll surrounded by real bills) and claims to be up \$750 even after paying the tip. He goes to the phone, talks for a while, shakes his head, and comes back and tells his "wife" that the next tip is \$100, but he's going to take it. He goes off and comes back flashing a bigger roll and excitedly tells her that they are up \$1,500. The next time he goes to the phone, he argues quite loudly, and comes back to the table dejected. The guy wants \$1,000 for the tip.

Freddy says he just can't risk all their money. He might have gone to \$200 for the tip, because the guy was so good, but he couldn't go \$1,000. The by-standers suggest a syndicate where everyone puts in \$200 so they can buy the tip. Freddy collects the money, goes off to buy the tip and comes back with a long-shot he picks at random. They stay through the race. If the horse wins, everyone is happy. If the horse loses, who can say anything? Freddy and the Minx lost their money and look downcast, too. But when they go home, Freddy and the Minx are \$800 richer.

I don't mean to give away the whole book here. Those examples are some of my favorites. I benefitted from seeing the illustrations of card marking (pp. 202-203) and commercial marked decks (pp. 206-207). I never realized how subtle such work could be. But I also never realized about putting subtle bends or crimps into a card while shuffling—not usually noticed by other players but enough to let you know where the important cards are as you're handling the deck (p. 268)—or how many techniques such as “nailing” (using one's fingernails to nick an important card), “sanding” (hiding a tiny piece of sandpaper to smooth the edge of a key card), or “daubing” (rubbing a fine paste onto a key card or two) could be used to mark a deck at the table (pp. 210-213).

The truth is that even though I'm not a gambler, I enjoyed reading about roofing scams (p. 377), badger games (pp. 379-380), bare breasts (drugged) in Brazil (p. 180), charity punchboards (pp. 154-155), the bicycle spoke scam (p. 235), and unscrupulous ways to cheat at *Scrabble* (basically, palming more than one tile on one's turn and keeping the extra tiles hidden--p. 397).

In spite of how interesting it is to know how cheats cheat, I have to agree with the late Nick the Greek's poem, quoted on p. 385 of Lovell's book:

*There's no road back to childhood, but
What fool would care to go?
There is no joy in playing games
Whose final score we know.*

All too true, and perfectly applicable with regard to life, too! I highly recommend this book. It is of sociological and psychological fascination—even for the non-gambler. Although, as Pascal once indicated, we are all gamblers in an ultimate sense. We are betting on the existence of and possibility of a relationship with God. Even if you're more interested in mundane bets and crooked bets than Pascal's wager, this book is for you.

Melody says

Interesting book about the number of ways a poor sap like me can get cheated. Heavy on the card/dice cheats, but with a few way cool chapters on how the carnivals are rigged and how people rip off restaurants and the like.

I am happy to say I only found con that I've fallen victim to- the well-dressed older guy who's just been mugged & needs to get to his sister in the hospital.

The card/dice chapters are full of odds and mathematical tables I think would be interesting only to real stats geeks and card sharps.

There were several failures of editing which grated upon my inner ear, but overall it's worth a look.

Jeff says

Saw this at Borders while shopping for other stuff and decided to check it out if available at lieberry. I read almost half of it in a couple days while in Connecticut on business.

big COMPLAINTS

#1: Horribly edited. Could be so much better with more clear descriptions of events and rules and such.

#2: The photos are laughably unhelpful though they could be a *huge* benefit to the reader.

Nevertheless, it's quite interesting reading as well as educational--almost consciousness-raising. Still, my final rating is tepid because the writing and editing were so godawful. I probably didn't read about 100pp because i couldn't bear anymore of the same old shite over and over anymore PLUS the subject matter wasn't very intriguing for me (mostly dice).

Kym Mccoll says

I don't play poker or spend time in bars playing dice games, which encompasses the majority of ths book. But I was still facinated by all of the methods described to cheat and, best of all, the little side bets of, "I'll bet you that you can't...." explained. Very good advice given over and over about how to keep your money in YOUR pocket rather than a cheat's. Many many kinda of scams explained (some just briefly, but you get the idea) and some real life examples given. I only give it 4 of 5 stars because the slight-of-hand techniques are hard to visualize from reading print and more pictures would have been useful, but otherwise, I enjoyed this book quite a bit for a "fun" read.

catechism says

Hmmmm. Bad editing and lolariously terrible photos (and some stuff about the internet I skipped because of age), and also I guess I thought it would be more about cons and less about cheating at bar/street games. But because it's basically about bar scams, the best way to actually get anything out of this book is to sit there with a friend and try to figure it out (the rules, the math, the sleight of hand). Simply reading through it turns it into a difficult-to-follow blur that can basically be summed up by "don't bet on stupid shit with strangers in bars, no matter how drunk they appear to be." I knew that one already.

Chloe Tempest says

I got this book as a Christmas present from my father as a joke (given that I may or may not have cheated while playing board games back in the day) and after just finishing a slew of horror stories, decided I would take a different route and give this book a try. Before actually reading it I ignorantly believed that it was going to be a rather sarcastic book, not actually about "cheating at everything", but I could not be further from the truth. Simon Lovell literally writes 456 pages worth of scams and cheating, primarily in the casino

area, and more importantly about how to get away with it. Considering that I am a 15 year old high school student, this topic does not really apply to me, but I still found it very interesting as to how far he was able to go. This was not your usual story with any major conflicts, but if you ever wonder about how a con man is able to make money off of what would typically be seen as doing the impossible, it is an interesting read.

Jennifer Lewis says

How to Cheat At Everything delivers exactly what it promises. It's encyclopedic, going over a wide range of cons, cheats and sleight-of-hand options. The sheer number of options for separating eager people from their money are astounding and enough to make me leery of any proposition with the word "bet" in it. It covers everything from idle bar gambling to pass the time to mailing scams to the professionally rigged games in travelling faires.

In the end, this book is more useful as a way to educate yourself about the potential dangers out there than as an instruction manual to become a master con artist. Most of the tricks presented take nerves of steel and years of practice to pull off. The best advice Lowell offers is to simply walk away from a suspected cheat. Confrontations often end badly.

I found this to be helpful as research material for background information. My dexterity wasn't up to following the instructions on how to do the individual tricks but it certainly opened my eyes to the possibilities.

Scott Johnson says

This was just meh. There were some great sections, particularly the coverage of carnival games, but most of this was just so dated and campy in 2018.

1) I can't imagine 99% of this working today when basically no one carries cash anymore, everyone has a cellphone to look shit up or take a photo of someone who cons them, etc. That's not the author's fault, but this did not age well.

I cannot imagine anyone sitting in a bar actually making a bet like the "tie a cigarette in a knot" one then actually paying up to a stranger when they pull something cute like wrapping it in the cellophane from the box. I feel like any reasonable person would go, "Ha ha, cute trick, fuck you," and not hand over \$50.

The same goes for the many, many times he talks about just entering into a relatively high stakes game with strangers in bars, in hotels, or even on airplanes. Do people really wager hundreds of dollars on backgammon on flights? Does anyone actually gamble on rolling dice with strangers outside of rigidly controlled casino table games? Maybe I'm just sheltered and I'm wrong, but I can't imagine this actually happening.

2) The writing was just....really weird. It wanted to be definitive and informative, but it also tried to be colloquial and humorous. It wasn't a poor blend so much as a haphazard veering from one extreme to the other. It's incredibly obvious that "Freddy" does not exist, so the afterword saying so was pointless.

3) The actual description of the techniques was vague and mostly useless. The title needs to be more like

"How Other People Might Try To Cheat You", since it doesn't teach you how to actually do most cheats (or does so in a cursory, vague way that is not instructional). I get if that's the intention, but the title is deliberately misleading if that's the case.

4) It was just unfocused because of all of these things. It feels like a collection of anecdotes and makes it hard to read.

Sarah TheAromaofBooks says

This book was overall interesting and engaging, especially the chapters are bar bets, fairs/carnivals, and random schemes. Where it dragged were the lengthy chapters devoted to cards and dices - sooo many long descriptions of the precise actions used to stack decks, switch loaded dice, etc. Some of it was interesting but sometimes it got bogged down in the details.

Still an overall worthwhile read just for the interest - it would be fun to see an updated version with more information on internet scams, as this book was published just as those were starting to be a thing.

YoSafBridg says

Simon Lovell is a magician, former con man, and professional card cheat. Currently he stars in the one-man Off Broadway show *Strange and Unusual Hobbies*. He is the author of seventeen books, has produced fourteen videos and five DVDs on the subject of cheating, and has lectured to both police and casino operatives on the subject according the back of *How to Cheat at Everything: A Con Man Reveals the Secrets of the Esoteric Trade of Cheating, Scams, and Hustles*, a book which showed up on the new cart the other day and looked rather interesting so i thought i'd give it a read (actually it was in my collection area, and seeing as how we are a small library with a limited budget i kind of wondered what the hell i was thinking when i purchased the thing and if it was worth it.)

It was an okay book. The subtitle was definitely more accurate than the title (but then again how could you cover everything?) It did seem a little dated, like i was reading about something from the 50s or something and many of the scams i had already heard about. Only cursory coverage is given to internet schemes, and if you haven't heard of pigeon drops with little old ladies and such, or stopping by to give estimates on work for your house maybe this is the book for you. And for the random consumer? Where was the advise for cheating on taxes (which i have never knowingly done myself, but tis said 50% of the population does and the title does say EVERYTHING does it not?) It does offer advice for mailing letter free (fill in the mailing address in the return address space and your address in the mailing address space and the post office will return it postage due) but that's about the only non-con-game scam advice there~not that i was looking to cheat the system or anything...

It did bring back a few random memories for me though~like when we were at a party back in college and an ex was trying to teach us how to play threeman (a dice/drinking game) and my best friend was convinced he was making up rules as he was going along but i was actually beginning to catch on and realized that there were Actual Rules to the game~and my best friend and i were trying to determine the sexual orientation of this guy i had gone to high school with (who had somehow become much more attractive in the intervening years) and, after making said determination, decide which one of us (he or i) should most appropriately continue our flirtation (ever the more enraging my ex as a bonus), when all of a sudden a man comes flying headfirst down the stairs and goes crashing into the front door with his head. My friend and i look at each

other, both thinking~wow that seems just like something GuySeenAt EveryTheatreParty would do, when the man stumbled to his feet and, lo and behold, it was GuySeenAt EveryTheatreParty even though this wasn't a theatre party, and the world grew ever so much smaller. But i don't think anyone was cheating at that dice game...(my friend wasn't so sure) And i gave the guy i went to high school with a ride home though nothing happened even though i'm pretty sure he was straight~so much for my charms...

Then there was the time i lived in a big house (and no CaptStrange NOT THAT House) with many roommates and we decided to have our first house party. A number of guys showed up looking for a guy named "Bud" which none of our roommates were named, but we weren't quite sure if anyone by that name was coming or if that wasn't a rather obvious codename for something else they we were looking for which we definitely weren't looking to market. But it being the beginning of the evening, and the beginning of our house party (even though we were located next to The Party House on the block~which we kindly pointed out to them~they still wanted to come into our house) and us wanting to be hospitable and all, we invited them in.

They came in, sat themselves down at our dining room table, and proceeded to play poker, with their own set of cards, which they had brought, and for money, amongst themselves. We kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, for them to draw someone into their game, and to cheat them out of money, to drink all our alcohol, to rob us, for something to happen, but it never did. They brought their own beer, played against each other all night, were quite friendly to us, and left at the end of the evening. Well actually i'm lying a little, with a bit of inebriation and boredom with other party-goers one roommate and i got rather friendly with one of the poker players and he ended up spending the night in my room...

tales

Shawn McDowell says

How to cheat

This is a book that everyone needs to read and reread again so that they will be better prepared in case of someone is trying to con them out of their money.

Sarah says

Don't listen to the title. This isn't a manual for the aspiring cheat, but rather a collection of classic cons. (Not that I was planning to rip folks off, but you never know when such things might prove useful.)

And while the cons themselves are interesting enough -- I particularly liked the explanations of precisely how the booths at the carnival midway are rigged -- the writing frequently gets in the way of the material. Lovell's jokes often fall flat, and his typos (and occasional blatant errors) were numerous.

Still, this is worth skimming if only to pick up a few bar tricks to amuse your friends.

DeAnna Knippling says

I'm not sure if the cheats listed herein are accurate or complete, but it does give an insight into a professional cheat's mind. At least, I hope it does...No way for me to know for sure, though.

I'd say--if you intend to turn professional cheat, don't use this book, but for the rest of us, a fun read.

Doesn't cover internet scams or accounting type stuff.
