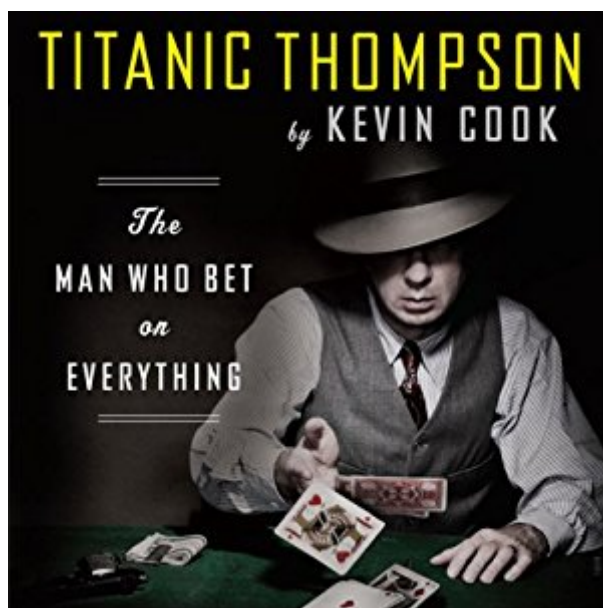


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Titanic Thompson: The Man Who Bet On Everything



Synopsis

Capturing the spirit of a freewheeling era, this rollicking biography brings to life the gambler-hero who inspired *Guys and Dolls*. Born in a log cabin in the Ozarks, Alvin "Titanic" Thompson (1892-1974) traveled with his golf clubs, a .45 revolver, and a suitcase full of cash. He won and lost millions playing cards, dice, golf, pool, and dangerous games of his own invention. He killed five men and married five women, each one a teenager on her wedding day. He ruled New York's underground craps games in the 1920s and was Damon Runyon's model for slick-talking Sky Masterson. Dominating the links in the pre-PGA Tour years, Thompson may have been the greatest golfer of his time, teeing up with Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Lee Trevino, and Ray Floyd. He also traded card tricks with Houdini, conned Al Capone, lost a million to Minnesota Fats, and then teamed up with Fats and won it all back. A terrific listen for anyone who has ever laid a bet, *Titanic* Thompson recaptures the colorful times of a singular figure: America's original road gambler.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours 15 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: May 3, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B004YZ4Z9O

Best Sellers Rank: #148 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Games

#536 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Puzzles & Games > Gambling #3261 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors

Customer Reviews

A nice book to read about the skulduggery of Titanic's cons and the halcyon time of American gambling when America was mostly an agrarian society. It was nice to hear some of Alvin's "Titantic" cons but some of them you must have been a moron to fall for even during that naive American agrarian time, like when Titanic marks balls with an X and putting them in a stream the day before conning a sucker that his dog can grab a ball marked with an "X" that he throws into the stream and his dog comes back with the same exact ball marked with the "X". Well, I guess there is

a sucker really born every minute. Or maybe this is more American myth than fact, the author Kevin Cook never really throws his opinion into the matter (though he does write a disclaimer in the back that somehow a tale verified by disparate sources becomes factual incident) but is more of a raconteur retelling these types of anecdotes. Unfortunately, it is a tendentious viewpoint of only recounting accounts from Titanic's family and friends. There were no accounts from Titanic's enemies albeit a few like Herman Keiser said they regretted working cons with him. I also wish the author was a little more opinionated as it was unnerving to hear Titanic fleece some undeserving victims like former heavyweight champion Joe Louis out of a lot of money and who died dead broke and who probably didn't deserve to get conned. Or to maybe what the author thought about Titanic marrying so many under age girls. Especially the last marriage when Titanic told the girl at eleven he was planning on marrying her when she turned eighteen. That was a little more than disturbing. Today, we call that person a PEDOPHILE! In summary, a decent book and a nice entertaining read about how con men operated in long gone time and how America was back then.

This is an excellent book. I could not put it down, and I learned a great deal about gambling in the process. I thought I knew a thing or two about gambling, however, this book humbled me. Titanic Thompson, as he came to be known was a man who left his family's backwoods cabin as a teen, and hit the road not knowing what he'd find. He knew a bit about card playing and gambling, and he could shoot a rifle well. He was an athletic lad who stayed fit all his life of more than eighty years. Titanic honed his skills as a gambler. He played cards, and came to be known as a shark. He played pool and came to be known as a pretty good cue. He threw horseshoes, and came to be an excellent ringer. And many, many people believe he could have easily become a pro golfer. He used these skills, and others he learned and mastered, to literally travel the country and win people's money. It is known and documented that he killed five men, always claiming self-defense, and always getting off. He also married five women. He befriended an amazing cache of people such as Arnold Rothstein, Al Capone, Nick the Greek, Minnesota Fats, and many other colorful characters. Some Titanic liked, some he disdained. The book explains why. What amazed me throughout the book was what a conman this guy, Titanic, was. He cheated at poker by marking cards, dealing off the bottom, using a mirror shard to see other's cards, etc. He rigged a horse race by paying off the jockeys, and threatening to kill one jockey who wouldn't take his money. He one time rigged the holes of the golf course greens with magnets, and used golf balls with a metal center. His bets were so often, sure things. Because he'd plan and execute them so perfectly, using whatever means he needed to. Even though the guy was a conman, he was also brilliant. He was

illiterate, but had a knack for numbers. He understood odds. Whether they be employed at the poker table, or on the pool table. And he had to be quite a man to get so many people to bet with him, and most often in the end, taking a great deal of their money. It's not something anyone could do. Certainly I couldn't. And not because my morals would prevent me, but because I don't have that kind of talent. This author is a good writer, and although I didn't like everything I read about Titanic the man, I did very much enjoy reading his life story. So much has changed since Titanic began his days of hustling, and the book addresses this. Being in my early thirties this book also taught me some things about our country's past. From the way people conducted business, to the highway systems, automobiles, the way gambling has changed, how the sport of golf has changed, and so much more. After reading the book I feel a little love for Titanic, a little sorry for him, and a little angry at him. It's good to know that there are still non-fiction books being written that can make a person feel such things. I highly recommend this book.

Having played golf in the 1960s on courses in Arkansas, Louisiana and East Texas, I had often heard of the escapades of a betting man named Titantic Thompson. Some of the stories were just unbelievable, but they were repeated and repeated by folks who 'had seen' Ti perform these 'bets'. He always stacked the deck by practicing and practicing, getting the 'bet' down before he ever offered someone a chance to 'win'. He could throw a key into a door lock from across the room. He could throw playing cards under a door, from across the room. He bet he could drive a golf ball 500 yards and HE DID...on a frozen lake. He could throw a playing card over a building, by catching the updraft. Of course, not everything he ever did or was credited with doing is in this book, but the writer did a good job and it is a good read. An interesting side, which is left out of the book, is that Ti was banned from playing golf on many, many courses because of this hustle. He could play great golf right or left handed and he always played in the championship flight at the golf tournaments. But, he always wanted to play in foursomes with a young golfer or a married golfer, that way his men could get bets going in the galleries that followed the players. For example, a young up and coming golfer's mom, dad or girl friend would be in the gallery following the group that included the young player and Titantic. Ti's men would recognize this mon, dad or girl friend and bet that the Old Man (Ti) would kick that young man's butt...which always resulted in a bet. They would signal to Ti that the bet was on and Ti would then go out and Kick the young man's butt and everyother player's butt who bet with Ti's men. After the round, they would split the pot. However, once the golf courses finally figured this routine out, they banned Ti and his group from playing in the tournaments. Titantic Thompson was one of a kind. When he died, Playboy magazine ran an article the the 'greatest

gambler ever known had died. The book is a good read.

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