



Titanic Thompson: The Man Who Bet on Everything

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This "raucous retelling of the life of a consummate gambler, grifter and quintessential American character" (*Kirkus Reviews*) introduces Alvin "Titanic" Thompson (1892-1974), who traveled with golf clubs, a .45 revolver, and a suitcase full of cash. A terrific read for anyone who has ever laid a bet, *Titanic Thompson* recaptures the colorful times of a singular figure.

Titanic Thompson: The Man Who Bet on Everything Details

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From Reader Review Titanic Thompson: The Man Who Bet on Everything for online ebook

Dignan107 says

Small room literature. Enjoyable list of tales of the annoying bloke from the pub who would ask you to bet on 'anything'. Strange to believe how gullible people must have been in yesteryear. Golfing tales were enjoyable and more realistic than throwing items over high-rise buildings. Credit to the author who hasn't portrayed Mr Thompson/Thomas in anything but a good light. He remained a selfish, arrogant individual who didn't care who he fleeced and displayed no care or much attention to his family. Has this been made into a film? I too had never heard of Mr Thompson so cannot confirm/deny any of the authors stories/direction. An enjoyable read at times.

Charise Olson Olson says

Cook's style makes this a great and interesting read. He provides context to immerse the reader in the period and considerations of the time that might not otherwise resonate in 2017. His subject is interesting and sympathetic while being a significantly flawed individual. Enjoyed the story of Thompson's life. The end is bittersweet, but it is clear Titanic Thompson lived his life to the fullest and we each should do the same. I liked the epilogue notes quite a bit which helped provide perspective to the story arc.

Neil Schiller says

I've been reading this book frantically, desperate to get onto the next exploit of the great Titanic Thompson. I love books (and films) about con-men, just because their ploys are usually so crafty and intelligently put together - I find them fascinating despite the obviously dubious morality. And this is a great example of that, covering the wayward, rambling life of an unknown American legend and his quest for riches at the expense of gamblers and marks up and down the America of the '20s and '30s.

I can't tell you how accurate this is as a biography of Thompson - I'd never even heard of the man until I opened the cover of this book. But as a riveting read, it's up there with the best. The picture it paints of America between the wars - the carpet baggers, the hoodlums, prohibition, the gambling dens - is brilliantly evocative. And the simplicity of the ways Thompson cons his targets (moving a signpost before betting the number of miles on it is incorrect, placing the stakes of a horseshoe game a foot further apart than they should be etc.) is brilliantly portrayed. Kevin Cook carefully points out in places the legends about Thompson that he knows to be untrue, but whether what remains is completely factual or not is hard to say. But that's always going to be a problem with a book of this nature - the subject of it is essentially an urban legend, someone who shied away from publicity because he thought it would harm his career, leaving hearsay and myths in his wake. There are first hand accounts of his life used here and there, direct quotes from Thompson himself, but these are almost inevitably going to be tinged with elements of exaggeration and self promotion. So in my opinion, Cook has done a good job of setting down the most accurate account he could have.

I've seen some other reviews which suggest the style of writing is a little bit unemotive, and I guess I can see where those comments come from. There is a lot covered in the book, and at the end of the day it is a

biography rather than a work of fiction. But I didn't find the writer's style off-putting. I loved it.

David says

Interesting account of a fascinating con man- reminds me of myself (that is, if I were smarter, better coordinated, and more dedicated to separating rich people from their money).

Gillian G Golborne says

Although I enjoyed most of this book I found it was a bit boring halfway through. A bit repetitive as he did the same things throughout his life. Sad to see how he ended up. He had it all at one point.

Richard Lucas says

Interesting reading

I gave this book 4 stars instead of 5 due to personal bias. The author did an excellent job of making the book a fast-paced read that is difficult to put down, as well as regret over how soon it is finished.

I recommend this book to all who enjoy a good story about little known people that lived larger than life. Few readers will not enjoy the time spread on this book.

RUSTY LINGENFELTER says

Having heard occasional stories about TT, his golfing skills caught my interest. I thought this was a well done book for those with a casual interest in the life of TT. It was an entertaining read about a colorful, rather amazing character. From the limited fact checking I did, the vignettes seemed to be accurate. I rate the book four stars not for any particular shortcoming of the book or with the intent of discouraging potential readers. It is a good, but not a great book. As it is a biography and not fiction, I thought the author presented the facts in as entertaining a manner as could be expected.

Dennis D. says

This was a fun, weird bio of a guy I had never heard of, but who was somehow a larger than life con-Man. Maybe more like 3.75 stars, but giving an extra quarter-star for verve.

Dustin says

This was a story I was excited to begin, but finished disappointed. It's one of those biographies that made me like the subject less and less as it went on. This was a man considered to be legendary in gambling circles, as

well as on the golf course. As you read on, though, you realize that he was a man that could have only ever existed in the time that he did. God knows what he'd have done in today's world. The things that made him a folksy legend then make him a total asshole now. He was less a gambler and more a full blown con artist and hustler. I know the old axiom is "If you ain't cheatin', you ain't tryin'." And I'm sure he wasn't unique in that regard, given the circles he ran in, and the way he made money. I'm not saying he wasn't interesting to read about, because he is. But ultimately, he wasn't a decent human being. He killed people (in self defense). He married multiple girls in their teens, even as he got disturbingly older. He also abandoned several of them after they had his child.

So yeah...

I'm sure he was quite the character, but the person I am now doesn't admire a person like that. His wild tales don't erase the fact that he was a degenerate gambler, and most likely a pedophile. In today's world, this guy is either dead young, in prison, or on a registry.

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

"Are you a gambling man?" he'd ask. "Because I am." Prologue.

A non-fiction biography that reads like fiction, this is the life story of Titanic Thompson. According to author Kevin Cook, Titanic's life was the model for the gambler Sky Masterson in the musical "Guys and Dolls." This poker and golf-playing phenomenon bet and propositioned his way across the country. In addition to all of the fun anecdotes about bets he made, Titanic was a star witness in the trial for the murder of the man accused of "fixing" the World Series.

Seriously folks, history doesn't get much more interesting than this.

As Alvin collected his winnings, someone asked Snow Clark the stranger's name. "I don't rightly know but it ought to be 'Titanic,'" Clark said. "He sinks everybody." pg 3

Alvin Clarence Thomas was born in 1893 in rural Missouri near the small town of Monett. The last name, Thompson, that he would adopt for most of his adult life, came from a later newspaper misprint that he embraced as his own.

Later in life, Thompson said he couldn't read, but numbers and odds always made sense to him. He spent hours sitting alone in his room, teaching himself to adeptly shuffle cards, practicing dealing from the bottom of the deck more quickly than the eye could follow. Thompson developed a method of marking cards that some still use today, like putting dots on the back or notching the edges to be able to tell a face cards from the lower ones.

He was quite popular with the ladies and married 5 times to women significantly younger than him. Scandalous!

"He was fun," said a woman who knew him. "He took his hat off when he spoke to you. Alvin was slim like a willow, and he didn't walk, he sauntered." pg 21

When he was drafted into the army, he was made a sergeant and taught the men under him how to gamble.

"Sergeant Thomas spent hours dealing demonstration stud hands, providing a running commentary on each hand, training his men to calculate the odds of an opponent's having an ace or king or deuce in the hole, telling them when to bet harder and when to fold their tents, so they could beat all the poor dumb soldiers who trusted to luck." pg 53

There are so many interesting stories in this book. My favorite was when he swindled Al Capone. Yes, THE Al Capone.

Highly recommended for fans of history or historical fiction. As I said, this guy's life reads like a story.

Robert Morrow says

The book is well-written and has some interesting passages and vignettes of the era. The problem with the book is that the story is repetitive: one hustle after another, ad infinitum. The lead character is neither admirable nor particularly charming: he's what Sherwood Anderson would call a "grotesque," obsessed with one thing.

Adam says

A cracking read. The true story of American hustler Titanic Thompson, who gambled his way around the states from 1910 until the 70's, winning and losing millions in the process. He was a card sharp, sharp shooter, athlete, golfer who would bet on almost anything and invariably come out on top. He rubbed shoulders with and conned everybody from Al Capone to Harry Houdini. It's a real insight into a bygone age. Having read it, you can't believe how much the world has changed in 100 years. Did you know there were only 10 miles of paved road in America in 1910? Thought that was quite amazing. You'll breeze through this book in one sitting - give it a whirl.

Kim Zinkowski says

B+. A very interesting character.

Marc says

Fantastic book about a very interesting self-made man. Works his way up through the ranks of gamblers and con-men to become one of the best at what he does. Easy to read in a couple sittings

Carin says

I was at the wonderful Library Center in Springfield, Missouri, perusing their gift shop before settling in to the coffee shop to read for a bit, when I ran across this book. I had taken note of it when it first came out because "Titanic" Thompson was the inspiration for Sky Masterson, a role my brother once played in the musical Guys and Dolls. What I did not know was that he was from the Missouri Ozarks, which makes sense why they would have bought a lot of this book in their library system when it was first published. And since my boyfriend occasionally gambles (in fact, had lost a lot but won it all back and then some just two nights earlier in St. Louis), I thought it would be a perfect book for him. And I thought I'd just take a quick look at it. And I didn't put it down for two hours. My own book never made it out of my purse that day.

Just reading the flap copy is eye-poppingly unbelievable. As an example: "He killed five men and married five women, each one a teenager on her wedding day." That's enough to base most books on right there, but no, there's more: "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." Thompson never drank, only killed in order to not be killed himself, and with one exception never placed bets he didn't know he could win. It's bizarre to fathom how this can be true of a professional gambler but he did mark cards, and he was creative at figuring out how to win something things, and a maniacal practicer at others. The one exception was horses. He once bribed and threatened all the jockeys of the other horses in a race, and yet his horse managed to break a leg mid-race. All the other jockeys reined in their horses and refused to cross the finish line, fearing for their lives and their bribes. The horse that finally did win, was rider-less. He really couldn't win at horses.

Inveterate gambler, trickster, charmer, and raconteur, Thompson crossed paths with everyone of note in his era, in his trade. Utterly fascinating, this story wouldn't be remotely believable as fiction if you took out half of what he did. A one-of-a-kind and wildly interesting guy, while I'm glad I never crossed paths with Thompson (for even I, a never-better, likely would have been tempted by a few of his seems-like-you-can't-lose bets that were truly can't-wins), I could read about him all day long. And I did.
