

▣ ABOUT THE MOVIE ▣

TITLE	The Sting
DIRECTOR	George Roy Hill
YEAR AND COUNTRY	1973 USA
GENRE	Comedy
ACTORS	Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Robert Shaw

PLOT

Which saying do you prefer: ‘Revenge is sweet’ or ‘You can’t cheat an honest man’? The Sting explores both. John Hooker is a small-time confidence man whose partner is murdered. The man who ordered the murder – Doyle Lonnegan – is a big time criminal. Hooker doesn’t know enough about killing so he sets out to get his revenge by conning Lonnegan out of his money with the help of ‘big-con’ player Henry Gondorff (and more than one complex plot twist).

LANGUAGE

Every profession has its own jargon, and crime is no exception. The rise of American organized crime in the 1920s (the ‘mobs’ or ‘rackets’) – and the American fascination with gangsters that rose along with it – opened a linguistic doorway that has never been shut. The movies of Jimmy Cagney, the writings of Dashiell Hammet, even revivals of the Broadway musical ‘Guys and Dolls’ have kept criminal vocabulary in the public eye, and today most Americans can still tell you that FBI agents are ‘g-men’ (or ‘feds’), detectives are ‘dicks’, and police officers who take money from criminals are ‘crooked’ and ‘on the take’.

Even for American audiences, the language of the Sting is a puzzle to be solved. Hooker and Gondorff aren’t criminals, for example, and they don’t steal money: They’re grifters and they play the big con. The jargon of the con, and the street slang (why say everything’s ‘okay’ when you can say it’s ‘jake’?) are a continuous presence – and not always easy to understand – but the effect is to make the audience part of the scene.

VOCABULARY

To follow all of the dialog in The Sting you need a bilingual Con Man – English dictionary. Indeed, that is one of The Sting’s charms. Here are some words and phrases to help you enter the world of a con man.

bunko: squad of police officers who combat con men	switch: type of con game, where something of value is exchanged for something without value
con: as a verb, to obtain money by fraud	to fix: take care of (a problem); also used as a noun
grand: one thousand	to play: also used as a noun; the act of conning someone.
hook: an offer to a mark to get him to play the con	to rub out: to murder
mark: the person whose money will be taken by the con man.	win, place, show: come in first, second, and third (respectively). Bets placed on a horse race
odds: numerical probability of something happening (for example, 4 to 1 odds where \$1 bet wins \$4)	wire: telegraph wire