



ARNO (RIGHT) FANNING A SCORE
Best defense is a pace in the face.

TRAVEL

Pickpocket Season

"They are beautifully dressed, usually in dark mohair business suits. Fine, lightweight raincoats are a trademark. Their passports always show them as professionals, and they look it. They stay at grade A hotels, always together. They always shop in Oxford Street and visit Westminster Abbey and Buckingham Palace. But they're more interested in sporting events. They keep to the same circuit every year—the Grand Prix of Monaco, Epsom for the Derby, Le Mans, Ascot. . . ."

They sound like a team of Temple Fielding's travel scouts, but Detective Inspector John Candlish of Scotland Yard is actually describing an elite corps of international pickpockets. "They come from Spain, Italy, the U.S.," notes Candlish, "but recently a lot more are from Latin America." As a discernible clique, they began arriving in Britain three years ago during the World Cup soccer matches. They have been returning regularly—and in increasing numbers—ever since.

Winter in Miami. Candlish has been studying their migratory habits, and now has charted a seasonal pattern. They arrive in London in mid- to late spring, stay only long enough to make five or six good hits, and then follow the early tourists to Paris, Germany, Switzerland. They relax briefly in late summer, leaving the field to second-rate hopefuls, before continuing their grand tour at the New York and New England fall racing meetings. They linger for holiday pickings from East Coast Christmas shoppers and then head, say, for San Francisco. Winding up the winter in Miami is a must.

One of the world's foremost experts

on the techniques of first-rank "wires" (or "cannons" or "pit workers") is Bob Arno, a 29-year-old Swede whose demonstrations onstage and in nightclubs earn him more than \$100,000 a year. Together, Candlish and Arno have drawn up a profile of the topflight pickpocket. The really good wires, says Arno, shun any tools other than their own hands and work only inside coat pockets, the likeliest place for money. "The best of them," he claims, "make over \$1,000 a day." They must have "good grift sense" and a nose for money. "They look for a 'score' who can be put off his guard, who won't react too suspiciously or violently if brushed against." Americans ("Easygoing, think that sort of thing doesn't happen in Britain") and Japanese ("Fear of losing face") are the easiest marks. Then it's the timid Scandinavians and the British ("Behind that front of assurance, the English are easily conned").

Giveaway Raincoats. The best of the international dips generally work in "firms" (teams), but not necessarily among crowds. A wire and his "stall" (runner) may, for instance, quarrel over a taxi with a likely pigeon. The wire "fans" the target—either by brushing up against him or simply by noting any bulge or sag in a pocket—to determine the "leather's" whereabouts. While he argues with the victim, he slips the wallet to the stall, who just fades away. "If you go for the pickpocket," says Candlish, "you usually find nothing."

At major sporting events, both pickpurses and Yardmen are well represented. "The greatest danger for the thieves," says the inspector, "is that they are complete creatures of habit. The raincoats are a giveaway. They use them to cover a mark's pocket while they work inside." Arno keeps up with industry trends around the world. Some random observations:

▶ "Arab pickpockets specialize in port cities. They use razors to slit back pockets of tourists in bars. They bump up against people brusquely, with no finesse."

▶ "Japanese use acid sprays to disintegrate trouser pockets. They're experts at removing tourists' cameras: just lift gently and slash the strap."

▶ "Filipinos, working on G.I.s and tourists, hold up huge bouquets or pieces of fruit while working on wallets in the visitors' hip pockets."

▶ "Korean children extend cheap dolls to travelers on departing trains; as they bargain, the kids break the watch straps on the outstretched arms."

The traveler is well advised to button his wallet pocket, fold his arms in crowds, and beware of the interested bystander as he cashes his traveler's checks. But the best defense may be psychological: Above all, says Arno, the tourist must have "pace in the face. If he looks alert and aggressive, most pickpockets will leave a man well enough alone."

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