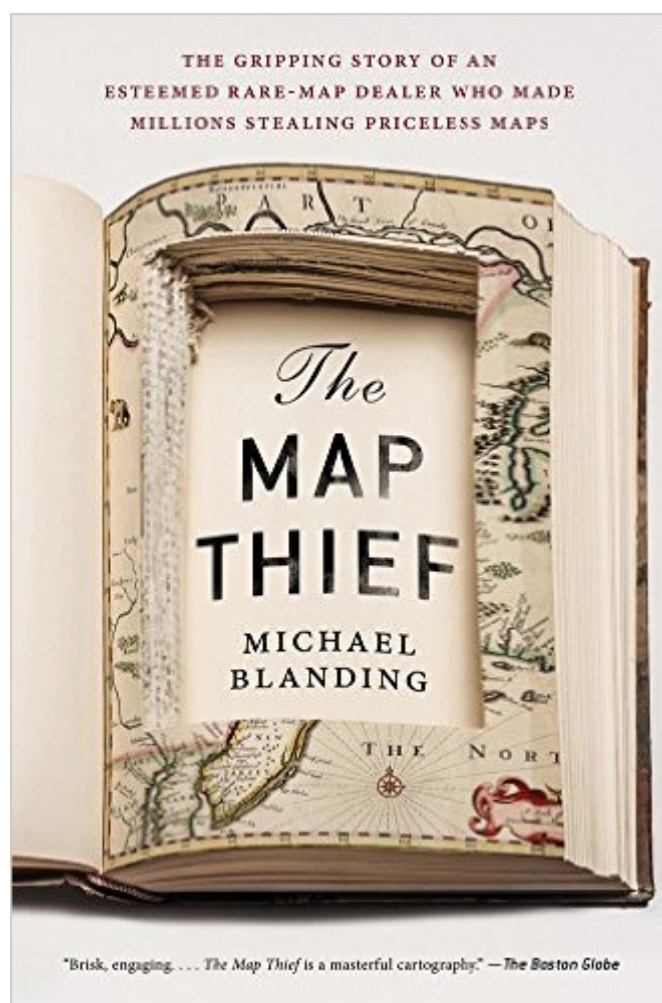


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The Map Thief: The Gripping Story Of An Esteemed Rare-Map Dealer Who Made Millions Stealing Priceless Maps



Synopsis

The story of an infamous crime, a revered map dealer with an unsavory secret, and the ruthless subculture that consumed him—Maps have long exerted a special fascination on viewers—both as beautiful works of art and as practical tools to navigate the world. But to those who collect them, the map trade can be a cutthroat business, inhabited by quirky and sometimes disreputable characters in search of a finite number of extremely rare objects. Once considered a respectable antiquarian map dealer, E. Forbes Smiley spent years doubling as a map thief—until he was finally arrested slipping maps out of books in the Yale University library. The Map Thief delves into the untold history of this fascinating high-stakes criminal and the inside story of the industry that consumed him. Acclaimed reporter Michael Blanding has interviewed all the key players in this stranger-than-fiction story, and shares the fascinating histories of maps that charted the New World, and how they went from being practical instruments to quirky heirlooms to highly coveted objects. Though pieces of the map theft story have been written before, Blanding is the first reporter to explore the story in full—and had the rare privilege of having access to Smiley himself after he'd gone silent in the wake of his crimes. Moreover, although Smiley swears he has admitted to all of the maps he stole, libraries claim he stole hundreds more—and offer intriguing clues to prove it. Now, through a series of exclusive interviews with Smiley and other key individuals, Blanding teases out an astonishing tale of destruction and redemption. The Map Thief interweaves Smiley's escapades with the stories of the explorers and mapmakers he knew better than anyone. Tracking a series of thefts as brazen as the art heists in Provenance and a subculture as obsessive as the oenophiles in The Billionaire's Vinegar, Blanding has pieced together an unforgettable story of high-stakes crime.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is an exemplary piece of narrative nonfiction and gave me precisely the reading experience I look for from that genre. I loved the detailed descriptions of people and places which brought the story to life. I loved them even more when the author's notes clearly showed he'd done the interviews and other research necessary to know these details. I liked that the beginning included a cast of characters, but liked even more that the author wrote so clearly, I never needed to use the cast list. I was immediately won over by the author's decision to start the book with his journey to learn about Smiley. I actually really like narrative nonfiction where the author inserts their research adventures into the book. They give part of the story a first-person perspective, which I find very immersive. In addition to the detailed depiction of Smiley's story, *The Map Thief* includes a lot of fascinating anecdotes and fun facts about the history of maps. Prior to reading this book, I might not have realized what a rich topic this was. Since the boundaries shown on maps reflect exploration, philosophical beliefs about unexplored regions, political realities, and political aspirations, the history of maps is intimately connected with the history of human expansion. The author did a fantastic job connecting the maps he discusses to larger world events. The story flowed impressively smoothly between history and Smiley's stories. The story also raised many ethical issues which I think will be of interest to most readers. As a reader, especially having just read about the history of maps, it was easy for me to appreciate how horrible Smiley's breach of trust was when he removed maps from the books where they belonged.

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