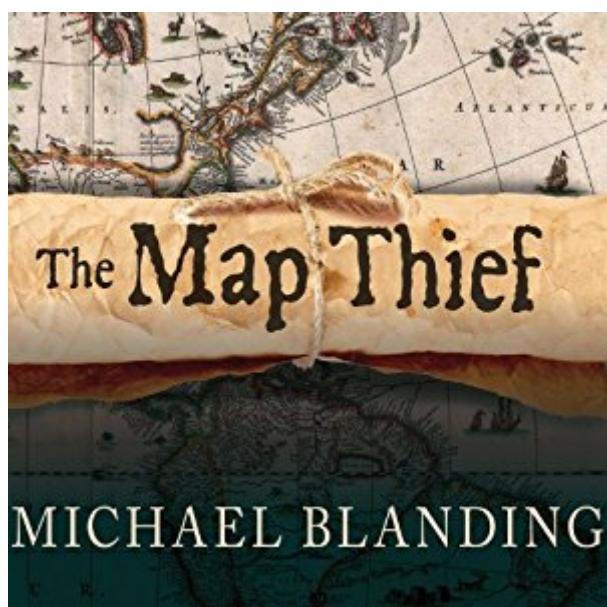


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The Map Thief: The Gripping Story Of An Esteemed Rare-Map Dealer Who Made Millions Stealing Priceless Maps



Synopsis

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

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 35 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: May 29, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00KAFMPS0

Best Sellers Rank: #78 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > White Collar Crime
#220 in Books > Reference > Atlases & Maps > Atlases & Gazetteers #348 in Books > Audible

Customer Reviews

"The Map Thief" by Michael Blanding (2014). The earlier reviews have pretty well covered the plot of this book: a seller of old maps, who has fallen heavily into debt to pay for his lavish lifestyle, stole old maps from old books in old universities for re-sale to those who collect very, very expensive historical maps. Besides discussing how the thief was caught, the author adds much to this book by detailing some of the political shenanigans of early 16th Century cartographers: drawing fictitious boundaries on New World maps to support their nation's political goals of claiming larger swaths of land than what their explorers had actually discovered. Besides detailing the swashbuckling, good-time party-man, back-slapping personality of the map thief, this book could almost stand alone as a book discussing the historical development of maps regarding the New World. This isn't a book about how to lay out strands of chain-links in how to map as a budding land surveyor, but it is an informative look at the development of cartography of New World maps. Why, two books for the price of one! An insight to the lack of security at many big-name libraries. The author was able to arrange only one meeting with the thief, before he clamed up for good -- the author speculates that perhaps the thief didn't want to become liable for more prison time if he were to reveal that perhaps he hadn't been fully forthcoming in his admissions as to what more he might have purloined. Although the thief admitted to stealing some 110+ maps, several librarians thought that he might have stolen more -- as many other maps disappeared from their libraries shortly after the thief had visited them. A good enjoyable, interesting and informative read by a determined author who doggedly wrote a fine book.

WOW! Never knew the "map stealing" was such a big industry! Intriguing book about a flawed character who gets trapped in his misguided pursuit of stealing maps and selling them. Good lessons for those who might be tempted by greed. Our book club discussed this book and brought out many aspects of the map industry. Had us wondering how many ancient and valuable books have been desecrated by people stealing maps from them. Give this one a try for a subject you probably have never thought much about. The pictures of old, old maps are most intriguing also.

Excellent story and insight into how/why E. Forbes Smiley III not only betrayed himself but how he screwed those that had put their trust in him and made his career successful. Hat's off to rare maps collector Graham Arader for calling a spade a spade and recognizing early on that Smiley was

nothing but a sweet talking, criminal con artist at heart. Unfortunately, nobody listened to Arader until it was too late. Author Michael Blanding's many interviews and research into the crimes, plus doing his historical homework on the rare stolen maps themselves, made this an intensely intriguing and emotional book to read. As a map illustrator and map lover myself, I really liked how Blanding paralleled the map histories with Smiley's crimes to give them context and importance in history. It angers me that Smiley got off so easily at sentencing, too, while the dealers suffered the worst financial hits. Smiley's Martha's Vineyard house should have been seized by the government and sold to pay off the restitution to those he hurt financially. The punishment doesn't do justice to the crimes Smiley committed and in my opinion not much of a deterrent for others, including Smiley himself, to re-engage in these thefts.

WOW What an amazing book. There is some excitement, and there is some very sad times when items are identified as lost or stolen, and the legal ramifications are phenomenal. Smiley is quite the guy. Very charming and quick witted, he is able to do amazing things. Then when it comes back to bite him, he pays dearly for the mistakes he made. Like another reader said, the details are a lot overwhelming. Had troubles keeping up with all the good guys and bad guys and who had what and so forth. Very fascinating. I really enjoyed the photos included of the massive maps that crossed their hands. If you like high detailed books, this is the one for you!!!

Having a master's in geography, I found this a great read. If you have an interest in antiques and love a good crime story, this book is for you. It covers the history of cartography in an easy to read manner. I didn't realize how valuable some old maps could be. Best of all, he conveys the fascination for maps that I have had my entire life.

Forbes Smiley is a dealer in expensive, antique maps. He is an expert, a connoisseur, and a family man; a generous friend and a civic-minded citizen. Oh, and he's a thief. Welcome to the true story of a map dealer who got lost and violated the trust of the very industry and institutions that once made him a success. Journalist Michael Blanding tells the story as equal parts narrative and history of map-making, so by the end of the book the reader not only knows the very surprising story of Smiley's rise and fall but has also received an education in cartography. The book is an excellent read, a strange tale deftly told. Highly recommended.

The Map Thief had me enthralled from the start. This guy: so educated, knowledgeable, passionate

about his field, respected, successful, well-raised--- to succumb to the immoral depths of stealing and selling the best of his trade was so sad, hard to fathom. The trail of who he betrayed was so lengthy, from the institutions that were primary to his core of experience, to his family and closest friends, was a heart-breaking read. Hard to accept the defensive posture and self-justification. Very illuminative about the field, and great at explaining why this type of art/history crime continues to exist as we see why coming forward exposes vulnerabilities in the libraries and museums that house our heritage and history.

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