



Stolen World: A Tale of Reptiles, Smugglers, and Skulduggery

Jennie Erin Smith

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Tortoises disappear from a Madagascar reserve and reappear in the Bronx Zoo. A dead iguana floats in a jar, awaiting its unveiling in a Florida court. A viper causes mayhem from Ethiopia to Virginia. In *Stolen World*, Jennie Erin Smith takes the reader on an unforgettable journey, a dark adventure over five decades and six continents.

In 1965, Hank Molt, a young cheese salesman from Philadelphia, reinvented himself as a “specialist dealer in rare fauna,” traveling the world to collect exquisite reptiles for zoos and museums. By the end of the decade that followed, new endangered species laws had turned Molt into a convicted smuggler, and an unrepentant one, who went on to provide many of the same rare reptiles to many of the same institutions, covertly.

But Molt soon found a rival in Tommy Crutchfield, a Florida carpet salesman with every intention of usurping Molt as the most accomplished reptile smuggler in the country. Like Molt, Crutchfield had modeled himself after an earlier generation of natural-history collectors celebrated for their service to science, an ideal that, for Molt and Crutchfield, eclipsed the realities of the new wildlife-protection laws. Zoo curators, caught between a desire for rare animals and the conservation-minded focus of their institutions, became the smugglers’ antagonists in court but also their best customers, sometimes simultaneously.

Crutchfield forged ties with a criminally inclined Malaysian wildlife trader and emerged a millionaire, beloved by some of the finest zoos in the world. Molt, following a string of inventive but disastrous smuggling schemes in New Guinea, was reduced to hanging around Crutchfield’s Florida compound, plotting Crutchfield’s demise. The fallout from their feud would result in a major federal investigation with tentacles in Germany, Madagascar, Holland, and Malaysia. And yet even after prison, personal ruin, and the depredations of age, Molt and Crutchfield never stopped scheming, never stopped longing for the snake or lizard that would earn each his rightful place in a world that had forgotten them—or rather, had never recognized them to begin with.

Stolen World: A Tale of Reptiles, Smugglers, and Skulduggery Details

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From Reader Review Stolen World: A Tale of Reptiles, Smugglers, and Skulduggery for online ebook

Hank Stuever says

Started, but didn't finish. Was lured by the praise for the reporting and writing here, but it turns out I just wasn't interested -- at all -- in the subject. That's my fault, not the author's.

Desiree reilly says

i am donating this book to the school so t hat more people will be able to read the book about why it is so hard to get smugglers out of the system i in joyed the book a lot took only one day it ell you how the animals were brought in t he state and some of t he better know zoo were involved and they tell you how they made money and went to prison and came back out and re did it again this need to stop and then protect the animals

Kelly says

Really, where do I begin with this book?

It starts back in the day when reptile collectors were traveling the world to bring back the rarest and most intriguing reptiles for zoos and museum collections until, in 1973, with the introduction of the Endangered Species Act, these "reptile collectors" were made into smugglers overnight. Zoos, no longer wanting to be associated with smugglers (at least not publicly,) went into a panic and began breeding as many species as they could, to the point that they had a surplus and no choice but to sell some back to the smugglers they were trying to avoid in the first place. The rush to breed species eventually lead to the more current day commercialization of iguanas and pet store snakes. Then there's the more complex breeding industry of genetically mutated snakes and lizards, where an albino iguana or abnormal colored boa can be worth as much as a new car. And finally to the more disturbing, less commercialized, and ever growing venomous snakes trade, where vipers, cobras and black mambas can be bought in a plastic dish.

And behind all of this are the reptile hunters themselves, the ones who will pay any price and smuggle the reptile in the country anyway possible, even down the back of their shirt. They're obsessed with the rarest and the hunt to find them, and they're every bit as sneaky and corrupt as a person can be. The rarer the species and the more laws protecting it the better, even if it means jail time or backstabbing their best friend.

The hunters are so outlandish it's easy to forget they aren't characters out of a novel. As for the story, it was slow at times and hard to put down at others. I think it could have really been edited down (by the last fifty pages, I wanted it to be over). But overall, I enjoyed this glimpse into the crazy world of the reptile trade, and will never look at a snake the same way again.

sarah morgan says

Reptile collectors are a strange breed, most moderately to severely handicapped in social skills. Perhaps this is due to their odd obsession of keeping creatures in the basement that eat live chickens and mice for dinner.

See the rest of my review at The Internet Review of Books www.internetreviewbooks.blogspot.com

Sugarpuss says

Skulduggery

noun

skul·dug·ger·y (sk?l?d??(?)r?): underhanded or unscrupulous behavior; trickery.

This word sums up this book perfectly. The amount of fraudulence & chicanery that goes on in this world of reptiles is truly unbelievable! I mean one of these guys last name is Molt, for chrissake!!

This book is one of those guilty pleasures that you just can't put down. You wonder, how these characters weren't whacked, and you marvel at their brazenness that borders on stupidity. It's just good fun..... Unless you're one of the reptiles, or course.

Elizabeth says

I initially picked up this book because I have a friend with somewhere around eleven snakes, and I wondered how these species all came to be in the US market. This book painted a fascinating tale of a group of 'old school' reptile wranglers, always seeking out something new and rare in remote locations to ship back to the US through extremely illegal means. After countless legal battles, the men kept going, and persevere to this day in the reptile business.

It was rather shocking to learn how often zoos participated in (and may still participate in) the exchange of clearly illegal animals as well, and how blatantly people will flaunt their illegal catches.

Smith clearly did extensive research for this novel, and it shows, maintaining personal and scientific facts without sacrificing the swift legal drama that unfolds. I found the book difficult to put down, at the end, and I would gladly read any further exposé she prints about the pet industry.

David Bales says

Excellent book on the sordid dealings of old-time "reptile smugglers" masquerading as "exotic wildlife dealers" who tromp all over the world looking for the rarest creatures (mostly snakes but other reptiles too) to smuggle back to Europe, Japan and the U.S. for collectors. Smith chronicles chiefly the lives of two smugglers, (dealers?) one very successful and the other not so much, (both whom go to prison, however). They are repellent but you can't really put this one down. Reveals a lot about the wildlife trade in contemporary times.

Tara says

A thoroughly entertaining read. I had never been particularly interested in reptile smuggling, but this book was featured on the "new items" shelf at the library, so I decided to give it a try. All of the individuals featured in this book are reprehensible, but the fiascos that they get involved in are thoroughly entertaining.

Lance says

Loved it. I found it very interesting. I did not know that there was that much smuggling of reptiles going on. The book is well written and entertaining.

David R. says

A depressing look at the seamy, sordid world of the reptile "trade" (supported by smuggling and massive violations of endangered species law) with focus on several especially slimy characters. Smith does a fine job explaining the issues, making sense of the players (including the ethically challenged caretakers at zoos), and peering inside the twisted minds of the parties involved. I would have liked more discussion of whether enforcement has really improved since the 1960s and if endangered reptiles are even any better off, but this doesn't weaken the book as it stands.

Read It Forward says

A fabulous micro-history about a little-known subculture, a thriller, and an exposé all in one. Also: the characters are unforgettable. I love what Peter Nicholls said about it: "If DARWIN, DOSTOYEVSKY, and GEORGE LUCAS had collaborated on a novel, it might have resembled STOLEN WORLD." Awesome. Dive in to the read, you won't be able to put it down <http://su.pr/1hUi2U>.

Larry Perez says

Ten years of effort can yield a wide diversity of possible results. For writer Jennie Erin Smith, a decade of work has resulted in an incredibly compelling and deeply layered exposé that reveals the shadowy underbelly of the reptile trade. In her book *Stolen World*, Smith carefully unravels the adventures, aspirations, personal struggles, and public trials of a legendary few who famously—or infamously—smuggled many of the world's rarest, and most desirable species.

Stolen World earns high marks from me, as it seems tailor-made for a reptile/Everglades/invasive species egghead like yours truly. Smith does a masterful job of introducing in great detail many of the names and institutions that have long been well-recognized in Florida. But perhaps most importantly, the book provides a detailed glimpse into the psyche of both those with an insatiable lust for lizards, turtles, and snakes, and

those willing to gamble all to satisfy their desire.

In the course of just over three hundred pages, it becomes readily apparent that the trade in the cold-blooded often hinges upon the personal faults of the cold-hearted. This is a conclusion drawn not by Smith—but rather—reflects the self-assessment of those entwined hopelessly in the reptile business. The desire for dominion over the world's rarest creatures—as well as the authorities that protect them—is not purely lucrative. Rather, it sometimes finds its origins as compensation for social shortcomings, is often fueled by uncontrolled compulsions, and is frequently reinforced by tragic character flaws. And though it's usually dangerous to paint any group with so broad a brush, Smith's research fails to reveal many well-balanced exceptions.

That is both telling and troubling, considering she was on the case for ten long years.

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Taylor says

I picked this book up on a whim as it was in one of the discounted sections at my local store. I was not disappointed by this read as it is very informative and evokes many emotions in the reader. For instance, unlike the reviews on the back of the book, I do not find the characters loveable or... what's the word... endearing in any way. Rather, I think this book offers insight into the world of smuggling and animal cruelty for the sake of profit. The characters, though they are real people, are, in my opinion, the deplorable kind who claim to do things for "the love of the animal" but rather just think with their wallets rather than conscious. Thus, my suggestion is: if you like animal books but cannot tolerate animal cruelty, do not read this book. If you would prefer insight into global reptile trade, smuggling, and the association of zoos in all of the above, read this book and become educated on a bloody past.

Denae says

I was disappointed by this, although that's only partially the fault of the author. I just couldn't handle the amount of pointless reptile death. And the turtles... I think it might have been different if the writing had been really good, but it just didn't hold my interest to make the feeling of mild horror worthwhile.

Rob Rausch says

A surprisingly entertaining story about the world of lizard smuggling - informative, fast-paced, funny, and with an entertaining cast of characters.
