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A TRUE STORY OF OBSESSION, CORRUPTION, AND THE SECRETIVE
SUBCULTURE OF ILLEGAL REPTILE SMUGGLING

STOLEN WORLD

A Tale of Reptiles, Smugglers, and Skulduggery

JENNIE ERIN SMITH

“Very disturbing and very entertaining chronicle of reptile smugglers . . . Smith’s affection for these unsavory people gives the book an intriguing moral ambiguity (which might make some environmentalists cringe), but the subculture’s brazen shenanigans make for a convoluted, fascinating tale.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Science reporter Smith debuts with an exciting tale of reptile smuggling . . . A richly detailed narrative of global malfeasance.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

A hundred reptiles—and one suitcase—emerge from the New Jersey soil. Tortoises disappear from Madagascar and resurface at the Bronx Zoo. A dead iguana awaits its unveiling in a Florida court. A viper causes mayhem from Ethiopia to Virginia.

From the chaotic open-air animal markets of Southeast Asia to the jungles of New Guinea to the reptile houses of American zoos, **STOLEN WORLD: *A Tale of Reptiles, Smugglers, and Skulduggery*** (Crown; January 4, 2011; hardcover), by award-winning reporter **Jennie Erin Smith**, takes readers on a captivating journey into the illicit reptile trade, telling the fantastic, strange, and sometimes painful story of the intertwined lives of two wildly ambitious smugglers.

In 1974 Hank Molt, a cheese salesman turned reptile dealer, took a trip around the world to collect rare and wonderful specimens for zoos. A year later he faced criminal charges under the newly passed Endangered Species Act. Molt re-emerged from prison hardened and invigorated, a smuggler in full. He created fake research institutes in New Guinea, conspired to steal giant snakes from national parks in Australia, and impersonated professors in Fiji. He continued to sell to many of the same celebrated institutions he had before, albeit now in a much more clandestine capacity.

Molt’s many successes, however, were soon dwarfed by those of a Florida carpet salesman and gator wrestler named Tommy Crutchfield, who was by the 1980s selling countless more snakes and lizards than Molt ever had, and to the best zoos in the country. By the 1990s, Molt and Crutchfield were both pursuing rare reptiles with a criminal passion that inevitably threw them into an epic rivalry. After the two became enmeshed over a shipment of highly illegal iguanas, the fallout from their feud catapulted Crutchfield to the center of a sprawling investigation with a reach extending through Germany, Madagascar, and Malaysia, that made him a fugitive and left the nation’s most reputable zoo scandalized.

STOLEN WORLD follows Molt and Crutchfield's respective journeys from sought-after specialist dealers to wanted criminals, but also explores the complex nature of what really drove them. As young men they had modeled themselves, with great care and deliberation, after the famed Victorian naturalist-explorers who went out into the world and collected extraordinary fauna for zoos and museums. And even after prison and personal ruin, Molt and Crutchfield never stopped scheming, never stopped trying to live the dreams of their youth, and never stopped longing for the next snake or lizard that would earn them the grudging respect of a scientific establishment that had come to shun them.

Running parallel to Smith's compulsively readable tales of jungle quests, violence, backstabbing, and thievery is an illuminating account of how zoos and museums evolved from bastions of eccentricity and romance to the professional, responsible, conservation-oriented institutions they are today. As Smith reveals in **STOLEN WORLD**, the corruption of Molt and Crutchfield, while formidable, was nearly matched by that of their zoo-world counterparts, who served as both customers and adversaries—sometimes at the same time—buying the smugglers' snakes while testifying against them in court.

Never before has the story of the animal underworld been told with such intimacy and depth. The result of a decade's reporting, with an unusual level of cooperation from normally circumspect criminals, **STOLEN WORLD** cuts to the heart of the illegal reptile trading world—and the surprising sensibilities of those who live in it. Full of wild adventures, a wide range of colorful, hilarious, and decidedly unstable characters, mind-boggling fights, and splendid animals, **STOLEN WORLD** is utterly irresistible.

About the Author

JENNIE ERIN SMITH is a freelance science reporter and a frequent reviewer on animals and natural history for the *Times Literary Supplement*. She is a recipient of the Rona Jaffe Award for women writers, a fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts, two first-place awards from the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors, and the Waldo Proffitt Award for Environmental Journalism. She lives in Germany.

STOLEN WORLD

A Tale of Reptiles, Smugglers, and Skulduggery

By Jennie Erin Smith

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For more information about **STOLEN WORLD** or to schedule an interview with **Jennie Erin Smith**, please contact Ellen Folan at 212-782-8944 or efolan@randomhouse.com.

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