

read the chapters of interest there, and the rest of us should await a more exhaustive and comprehensive compendium on this subject in the years to come.

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The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime

By Miles Harvey. Random House, New York, 2000. 406 pp., illus., notes, index. ISBN 0-375-50551-7 Cloth \$24.95

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“. . . in my journalistic travels, as in my personal wanderings, I'm a sucker for detours, back roads, tourist traps, scenic views, and historic landmarks." (p. 136)

The Island of Lost Maps details, on one level, a true story of cartographic crime, the theft of 250 rare maps, worth over one-half million dollars by Gilbert Bland, one of the biggest such thefts known. A reader who is interested solely in this theft and wants an unadorned story of crime, capture, and punishment, may be somewhat frustrated, because Miles Harvey does not follow what he calls "interstate Bland." The reader who enjoys wanderings into history of cartography and exploration, the workings of libraries, and the worlds of map collectors and dealers will enjoy the trip. In this saga of map theft, Harvey cleverly introduces readers to a wide range of topics by intertwining them with the crime story.

In keeping with Harvey's road analogy, the story is actually a quest and is structured much like a quest novel. Harvey is in pursuit of the mind of the aptly named Mr. Bland. Why and how did a teenage car thief, small time unsuccessful crook, Army deserter, with apparently no previous knowledge of or interest in rare maps, become a map thief so convincing that he was able to walk into the rare book rooms of treasure house libraries

in the US and Canada, steal maps (using a "shopping list"), and sell them to major map dealers?

Each chapter begins with a narrative that sets the theme. For example, Chapter 2 "Imaginary Creatures," begins with a discussion of the mythical monsters on *mappae mundi*, and the human monstrosities on the 1493 world map in Harman Schedel's *Nuremberg Chronicle*. These, then, are tied to the many imaginary (false) identities that Bland used. The chapter wanders through fictional maps in the Hardy Boys mysteries, the map that Robert Lewis Stevenson used as a base for *Treasure Island*, and the plot of *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. This literary trick seems forced at times and mildly annoying, such as the unhappy ghost of Lloyd Brown, author of *The Story of Maps*, muttering curses as he hovers above the reading room of the Peabody Library where the crimes were discovered.

Because Harvey is a journalist and not an academic, he gains much of his material through discussions and interviews with experts in a variety of fields. These are effective; readers feel they are in the room with him. Thus, we learn about the world of map dealers through a day trip to a Sotheby auction with "the map mogul" Graham Arader; we watch as the bidding for a copy of Ptolemy's *Geographica* escalates from \$100,000 to over \$1.2 million. Several hours are spent at the home of "Mr. Atlas," a anonymous, knowledgeable, avid map collector, and at the office of Dr. Werner Muensterberger, psychologist and author of *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, to understand the obsession for collecting, which after all, fuels the market for antique maps.

The stage is set for Bland's map thefts through a discussion of the problems libraries have maintaining and protecting their collections—the costs of physical repairs to aging buildings, modern

security system—and the controversial solutions of “deaccessioning” or selling off a few rare books in order to save others and “breaking books” or gutting them to sell individual maps and illustrations.

Since the book is not aimed solely at the specialist, some knowledge of how maps have been and are made is useful. Harvey details how copper plate maps were made from the 16th through 19th centuries and visits a modern map making firm, the American Map Company, to learn how modern maps are made, and how the transition from manual to computer means is impacting the field.

Cartographic crime, ranging from plagiarism to map theft, is not new. Maps have strategic value in exploration and war, and theft of maps from competitors and enemies has a long history. In Chapter 7, “A Brief History of Cartographic Crime,” Harvey chronicles such thefts by Columbus, Magellan, and other early explorers intent on finding a fast route to treasure. Plagiarism of maps also has a long history, and as readers of *Cartographic Perspectives* know, modern mapping companies put copyright markers on their maps to protect themselves from copyright violation. Harvey also summarizes the activities of seven thieves of rare books and maps and the security problems of libraries in this chapter.

The unhappiest chapter, “The Invisible Crime Spree,” brings home the tragedy of map theft. Here Harvey details how the University of Washington Special Collections Division acquired Ogilby’s 1671 *America* and made it the “poster book” for preservation fund raising. The restorer explains what was involved in restoring and rebinding the book. After five years of effort on the part of librarian and restorer, *America* was made available to library patrons in June of 1995; on October 4, 1995, Bland, the first person to request the book,

removed four maps and damaged additional pages when he slashed out the maps. Only three of the maps have been found. Bland’s comment on this kind of damage was that the maps could be glued back in.

Harvey is not always complimentary to map dealers, collectors, and librarians and this will rankle some readers. Although he interviewed several dealers, and devotes an entire chapter to Graham Arader, he believes dealers and collectors too often are lax in their search for a map’s provenance. Harvey admires librarians, who are usually portrayed favorably, but they are criticized for an “it-can’t-happen-in-my-library” attitude. This denial is so great that after Bland’s capture, some librarians refused to even check if they were missing maps!

The Island of Lost Maps is the office of FBI Special Agent Gray Hill who was responsible for returning the maps to their rightful owners. At the time the book was written, approximately seventy maps remained on the island.

Ultimately, in his search for the inner Bland, Harvey admits failure. Bland refused to meet with him and in their one phone conversation, Bland threatened Harvey with prosecution for stalking if he ever attempted to contact him again. Bland remains a mystery and even in the one photo of Bland in the book, his face cannot be seen. However, in the search for Bland, Harvey learned a great deal about the world of cartographic collecting and dealing and imparts his knowledge to the reader in an entertaining manner. One complaint is that the epilogue is not needed. The story ends nicely with what should be the final chapter “Mr. Bland, I Presume,” and in his attempt to give himself closure, Harvey weakens the ending.

Miles Harvey is a frequent contributor to *Outside* magazine, not an academic, a cartographer,

or a collector, but he did his research well in his four-year search for Bland. The book is based on standard histories of cartography, as well as interviews with a wide range of specialists: dealers, collectors, librarians, cartographers, historians of cartography, police and the FBI agent responsible for returning the maps. The book is meticulously footnoted and indexed with 40 pages of notes and an 11-page index. Each chapter begins with an illustration that helps set the theme of the chapter. These black and white illustrations are with few exceptions details of maps mentioned in the chapters. Because the page format of the book is small, only 5.5" x 7.25", detail portions are more effective than reductions of entire maps. One of the few illustrations that is not map-related is the aforementioned photograph of Gilbert Bland.

One caveat for anyone trying to find *The Island of Lost Maps* is that you may have a search also. Bookstores seem unsure where to shelve the book. Although the cover indicates “current affairs/travel” it is hardly a travel book. Because of the subtitle: “A True Story of Cartographic Crime,” one bookstore displayed it in the true crime section. Because it deals with maps, another store shelved it with earth science. However, it is worth the quest and is, overall, a fascinating story.

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NACIS FALL BOARD MEETING
Doubletree Downtown Portland
Portland, OR
October 5, 2001

Attending: Jim Anderson, Lou Cross III, Will Fontanez, Adele Haft, Megan Kealy, Gordon