



The Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire

Tom Zoellner

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In 2000, Tom Zoellner purchased a diamond engagement ring and proposed. His girlfriend said, "yes" and then, suddenly, walked out of his life making Tom the owner of a used engagement ring. Instead of hitting the self-help shelves of his local bookstore, he hit the road travelling to diamond mines in Africa, Canada, India, Brazil and Russia to discover the true worth of this shining gem. He travelled to Japan to understand how diamonds were linked with engagements and delved into the history of our own American romance with the diamond ring. He gained entry to DeBeers, the London diamond merchants. He visited shopping mall jewellers with starry-eyed couples. Through all of his travels, he searched for an answer to the question "How has one stone created empires, ruined lives, inspired lust and emptied wallets throughout history?" A diamond version of Susan Orleans's *The Orchid Thief*, Tom Zoellner's *The Heartless Stone* is a journey to the cold heart of the world's most unyielding gem.

The Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire Details

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From Reader Review The Heartless Stone: A Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire for online ebook

Naisargishukla says

This book brings all aspects of the diamond industry to light from clean Canadian diamonds, mining in South America to the polishing in India. A bit dry but the subject itself is eye-opening. The diamond cartels have undertaken a brilliant marketing campaign to dupe consumers into linking diamonds and love. A must read!

Chloe says

Cecil Rhodes. One miserable, bigot. deBeers. Diamonds and apartheid and price fixing. The Oppenheims. Bad or worse. de Beers Bros. Not even in the picture. A piece of pretty stone; a pebble, in many places worldwide - the Borgias of gems.

This book is so well written and told you will not want it to end nor will you want to put it down. You will also look at that chip or rock on your hands or adorning your ears and cry for the ugliness that made it sparkle. You will never see a diamond or an ad for them in the same way.

And yet it brings so much more to the reader. And it shines in ways that amazed me. If you are a curious person and maybe even a lover of diamonds. Do not miss this book.

Ms.pegasus says

Zoellner's journey is historical as well as geographical. He guides us through the career of the ruthless imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, who planted the seeds of apartheid in South Africa, the rise of the DeBeers cartel, the Portuguese rape and abandonment of Angola, the game changing discovery of the Argyle mine at Barramundi Gap in northwestern Australia, the shift of the diamond polishing industry from Amsterdam and Antwerp to Surat in northern India, and the technology developed in Russia to produce synthetic diamonds, virtually undetectable from the naturally found mineral.

He attempts to impose a cohesive framework on his extensive research through the story of his own aborted engagement, and the symbolism of hope and disappointment that keeps him attached to the returned diamond engagement ring he had bought. The device is not altogether successful. The book feels more like a compendium of short stories, some more compelling than others.

My favorite was his story of the 20th century marketing campaign that permanently linked the diamond to the marriage vow. In the 1930's prices had collapsed, and DeBeers looked to the American market as its only option for expansion. It hired N.W. Ayer to create its new image. Materialism was linked to the symbolism of legacy, with allusions to familial bonds, timelessness, "fruits of the earth." Zoellner spells it out bluntly: *"If the reader got lost in the Yoda-speak, the [accompanying] Dali painting made it clear: wealth outlasts life. And De Beers was there to help."* The copywriter was an unmarried woman, Frances Gerety, and she

could well have served as the model for Don Draper's appropriation of human longing and reconstructed nostalgia in the service of his Kodak carousel pitch. Zoellner captures that same sense of emotional momentum that leads up to the "A Diamond is Forever" tagline in 1948. The approach was repackaged and exported to post-war Japan with dramatic results in the 1960's by J.Walter Thompson.

The true unifying theme is one that is bound to leave the reader conflicted. Zoellner opens his story in the war-torn Central African Republic. As he moves to the Amazon Basin of Brazil, the Cuango River in Angola, and then the mines of South Africa, the same story with variations is repeated. Impoverished populations, exploited laborers, lawlessness, thievery, butchery, extortion, smuggling, institutional corruption, and money laundering are the persistent themes. We associate the term "blood diamonds" with specific conflict zones, like Sierra Leone. In truth, the value, portability and untraceability of gem-quality diamonds create their own aura of conflict. Some go so far as to call them a curse.

Zoellner is a persistent and skillful interviewer. He coaxes contradictory statements from General Lukumba in Angola, candid admissions from DeBeers officials, sad stories of hopelessness from miners and stone polishers. I was drawn to this book after reading *A SAFEWAY IN ARIZONA*. This book does not approach that level of insight but nevertheless tells a thought-provoking and illuminating story.

Penny says

Note: this book was published before the movie "Blood Diamond" made its appearance) Wow. This is an excellent exploration of the world of diamonds. History, lore, mining, advertising, cartels, new discoveries that threaten De Beers... from South Africa to Brazil, India, Japan, Siberia and the Great White North of Canada, the author covers the globe in an compelling and interesting fashion.

Bookmarks Magazine says

The dirty secret of diamonds has been out for some time, and with good reason. It's got all the requisite ingredients of intriguing journalism: greed, sex, gaping economic disparities, and glamour. It's too bad it took a failed engagement to prompt this book, but Zoellner has risen from the romantic ashes with *Heartless Stone*. As *The Wall Street Journal* points out, he's no geologist, but he *is* a careful reporter. He doesn't miss a stop on the diamond road, hopping from Africa to South America to the British Isles in pursuit of the gem whose exclusivity is based only on the tight control of a few greedy individuals. That little blue Tiffany box might never look the same.

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Ellen says

Anyone who to read and also loves diamonds and gems **MUST** read this. It will make you feel horribly guilty but you should at least know what you are buying into...

Lisa James says

While the story of blood diamonds is sordid in parts, parts of the book were dry as diamond dust, which lost me. I found myself skimming through the detailed parts towards the end just so I could say I finished it...

Lisa says

This book was completely mesmerizing. It goes from country to country and examines the corruption of the diamond trade. There's a chapter for each country. The author tells stories, so the book feels like a series of short stories more than a non-fiction book. The author, a Utah native, also includes some of his personal history with diamonds and a failed engagement. At the time I began reading this, I was doing research for a screenplay. The screenplay changed directions, but the book remained in my memory. When I got engaged, I got a ring with an alexandrite at the center--not a diamond. That is a testimony to the power of this book.

Barb says

I lounged in a stuffed armchair, transfixed by Daphne Du Maurier's novel, *Jamaica Inn*, when I was startled to attention by a sparkly stone hurtled from the staircase. It skimmed over my head, landed on the living room hearth, and skittered into the cold brick, fireplace.

My parents never divorced but they had some epic battles. Dad swore like the sailor he once was and Mom threw things. Today's battle was memorable because my mother had recently switched from breakable objects, like my sister's "made with love in art class" ceramic ashtray, to Mom's more symbolic, engagement ring containing the hardest stone on the planet. This particular fight was fierce and at its zenith she reached for her ring to deliver the coup de grâce. Alas, Mom had just reached such a level of plumpness that the ring remained trapped at the base of her red, sweaty finger, increasing her fury to an added degree. Angrily she stomped up the stairs to soap her hand.

Diamonds and conflict apparently go together, as I learned from *The Heartless Stone, a Journey Through the World of Diamonds, Deceit, and Desire*, by Tom Zoellner. His book is a methodical study of diamonds, the diamond industry, and the diamond market, all within the framework of Zoellner's personal experience with one particular diamond, a diamond on a ring returned to him from Ann, his almost wife. Diamond obsessed and wistfully saddened, the intrepid Zoellner travels the world investigating the diamond trade: Africa, Canada, Japan, Australia, India, Russia and the U.S. Although, the trade is one of the least transparent industries on the globe, Zoellner digs for truth and shines a light on its practices. What is exposed is not sparkle and dreams.

Companies from De Beers to Zales, who want to keep their extraordinary 50% or more markup, control the narrative of the stone and are able to manipulate popular culture to associate diamonds in our minds with qualities of: trust, loyalty, commitment, love, passion, frugality, status and financial success. But the truth is, the diamond trade is also associated with starvation wages, smuggling, unhealthy work conditions, deception, price fixing, finance of civil wars, theft, and even murder (of suspected thieves). Getting a diamond to market might also involve child labor. You may have heard this before and think that child labor is no longer tolerated, but in places such as India these abuses are easy to hide and continue to this day. I was most surprised to learn that diamonds are not even scarce, as we are led to believe; companies release just the

right amount of them to keep that myth alive.

It is a rare person who has never faced, at some time in their life, overwhelming pressure to purchase one or more of these very expensive, glittery rocks, whether as a marriage promise, mall jewelry, or a piece of hip-hop bling. Responsible consumers might want to educate themselves about its ugly origin, protect themselves from being taken to the cleaners and avoid abusing our fellow humans. The Heartless Stone is a good place to begin that education.

After many minutes in the upstairs bathroom, hand held under cold soapy water, my furious mother triumphantly stomped back down the stairs and threw her ring. Dad was no longer in the vicinity and the unintended result was a daughter who, from then on, would not find diamonds all that desirable. The Heartless Stone did nothing to disabuse me of this notion.

I would recommend this book to anyone with a curious mind, and an appreciation of polished investigative adventure writing whether or not you harbor a diamond obsession.

Erica says

A good solid 4.5 star book. I really like Zoellner's writing and style. This book aims more at the heart of people involved in the diamond trade - the smugglers, the third-world diggers, the warlords, the cutters/polishers, the distributors, and the engaged couples... A really interesting look at how propaganda has enticed entire populations to turn to diamonds as a matter of due course. And even though I never wanted a diamond, and never bought into the propaganda about them...this book did have me thinking for a minute that maybe, just maybe I missed something magical...but nah, I really don't want to wear on my finger something that may have been shoved up someones tail-end..(1/6 to 1/20 diamonds are thought to have been smuggled). Interesting note: there are 1 billion carats "in the world" - cut and circulated today... The Argyle Mine, the only diamond mine of Australia has an estimated reserve of 1 trillion carats!

Ginger says

Very fascinating and thought-provoking look at our love affair with diamonds. I promise that you will never look at a diamond in the same way again! Each chapter is centered on a different country and issue involved in the diamond trade; each chapter stands alone. The first chapter along with chapters about Japan (marketing, cultural practices of engagement, WWII), South Africa (DeBeers, Cecil Rhodes), India (polishing and setting, child labor), and Russia ("cultured" diamonds) are absolutely fascinating! Did you know there are diamonds in Arkansas? I confess that I did not read all the chapters (Canada was a bore unless you are into geology and I didn't think I could handle the gore of blood diamonds in Angola) but the beauty of the book is that you can pick and choose chapters! My book club gave it unanimous thumbs up.

Andy says

I work in the diamond and jewelry industry and didn't know many things in this book. Especially the diamond histories of various countries from Russia and Canada to Angola and the Central African Republic. Things are not as good as the Kimberly Process makes it seem.

Jun Wen says

Reading one of Tom Zoellner's books often feels like travelling - travelling around the world, and also back and forth in time.

The Heartless Stone is no exception. In this engaging book, prepare to discover how much you didn't know about diamonds and just how amazingly much of what we think we know is actually myth or simply assumptions that were created for us.

The countless interviews with people span the globe, and take in every perspective that you can glean without actually hopping on a plane and getting them yourself. Zoellner's ground up approach, covering people from the lowest to the highest levels in the diamond industry, gives a complete image that would compel you to keep reading.

Definitely worth a read.

Anthony says

The author's journey to understand the precious stone that stirs so much emotion within humanity takes him from a broken relationship in the United States to dusty allies in Central African Republic, Botswana, and South Africa, frigid conditions in Canada/Russia, humid streets of India, to the desolate Outback of Australia, ultra modern streets of Japan, to the diamond districts of Antwerp, Israel, and NYC.

I learned so much about the history of the diamond industry, how DeBeers became a cartel, and then in the late 90s how gems in Russia, Canada, and Australia cut into their market share. Of interest was how the Orthodox Jews maintained secret deals with simple handshakes and had a network across NYC, Antwerp, and Israel, but then the Indians were able to acquire business cutting low cost brown diamonds. DeBeers then had to reinvent themselves as a luxury brand, which I saw up close at the Tysons Corner Mall. It was fascinating to walk into their store in the mall and already know that I was a knowledgeable consumer and knew a decent amount about their history and the industries history.

The chapters are broken down into geographic regions so they are short stories into themselves tied together with the author's failed relationship and the overall diamond theme. I truly feel more informed about diamonds after reading this novel and in an effort to make an ethical purchase by understanding the previous blood diamond conflicts, can say this book helped tremendously and I would recommend it to anyone who even thinks about diamonds and want to be a responsible consumer and try to understand this industry.

I enjoyed the quote, "The question is not where the diamond come from (this has always been a tertiary concern in the diamond business) but who will control its narrative once it is out of the forge. A diamond is lost without its mythology; it becomes nothing but a chunk of clear carbon polished to a high sheen, no better than a piece of common quartz picked from a stream bed during a summer picnic. We thirst for diamonds because we believe them to be rare and because they are perceived by others to have a certain power - power from wealth, power from love, power from crackling sexuality, power from kinship with all of the above. The belief in a diamond's power IS its power."

also

"The true preoccupation of the mind, rather, is the urge to derive some kind of PURPOSE from the confusing mass of stimuli constantly thrown at us by the world." - Viktor Frankle

Jianghengqiang says

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