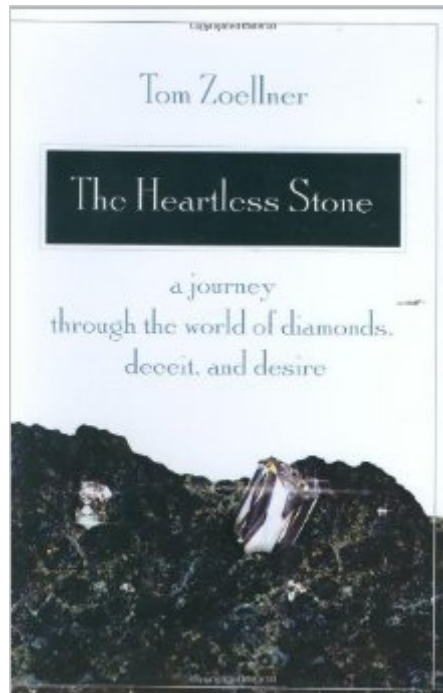


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# The Heartless Stone: A Journey Through The World Of Diamonds, Deceit, And Desire



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*The Heartless Stone: A Journey through the world of diamonds, deceit and desire* -- By Tom Zoellner I've been discovering, or rediscovering, some of the best non-fiction around this year. By any standard, Tom Zoellner's "The Heartless Stone" is one of the best. A good writer, and Zoellner is one, can take a single topic....salt (Salt: A World History" by Kurlansky or the spice trade ("Spice: The History of a Temptation" by Jack Turner) and weave a vivid, entertaining story around it. Zoellner takes us to the impoverished nation (if one can call a collection of ragged children and corrupt officials a "nation") of The Central African Republic and travels to the diamond mines,

watching his back for highwaymen and paying off corrupt officials as he goes. These are the "blood diamonds", extracted from the backs of slave labor and used to finance coups d'états and revolutions. He takes us north to the Arctic Circle, where the discovery of diamond-bearing "Kimberlite" (the soil produced by volcanic eruptions) has fostered a huge investment by multi-national corporations to extract diamonds from the permafrost. His writing is intelligent and graceful...and at times philosophical. He extracts nuggets of knowledge from those involved in the diamond trade, just as they extract diamonds from the earth. No substance known to man is more concentrated than the diamond. It is portable, easily concealed and sold on the black market. The Diamond's only value is what humans ascribe to it. It is a "Tabula Rasa" on which dreams are etched. "A Diamond is a philosopher's stone of the existential variety," he writes. For it is like the world itself, spoken into existence only through whatever meaning we choose to assign to it.

Diamonds are an illusion. Tom Zoellner proves this in his engaging account about the diamond trade. The book's chapters are divided by geographical location. This format helps make each chapter stand on its own, like a series of essays. But, Zoellner ties the narrative together by talking about his engagement and break up with Anne, his former fiancée. It is through describing the joy that Zoellner and his erstwhile fiancée experienced when the diamond was first given that he frames the insanity and obsession that diamonds can elicit. In the chapters exploring the seedier side of the business, the stories shift to the when relationship begins experiencing turbulence and its ultimate breakup. Zoellner finally conducts his own post mortem on it in the chapters talking about the rise of synthetic diamonds, a perceived challenger to the DeBeers hegemony. These personal anecdotes give the already interesting narrative a glue that really ties everything together. The main character of this book is the DeBeers cartel. Like the Smoke Monster in *Lost*, DeBeers permeates every facet of the business, exerting a grip that is total and astonishing in its casual brutality. DeBeers dispatches agents wherever diamonds are found. The beginning of the book shows how certain countries have buckled, the middle shows how other countries are cautiously trying to branch out from DeBeers' control, and the last few chapters profile the mavericks who are attempting to spectacularly break free and bring some transparency to the industry. That DeBeers has been able to operate a worldwide monopoly and pumped up the value of a gem that is not all that rare through the creation of artificial scarcity and bully tactics is breathtaking to behold.

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