



# The Book Thief: The True Crimes of Daniel Spiegelman

*Travis McDade*

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In the spring of 1994, Daniel Spiegelman shinnied up an abandoned book lift in Columbia University's Butler Library, dismantled a wall, stole books, reassembled the wall, and snuck back down the shaft. Over a three-month period he did this more than a dozen times. He eventually escaped to Europe with roughly \$1.8 million in rare books, letters and manuscripts. When he was caught in the Netherlands, he tried to avoid extradition to the U.S. by telling the Dutch authorities he was a financier of the Oklahoma City bombing?knowing they wouldn't extradite someone facing the death penalty. Eventually, the FBI got him back to New York, where he finally stood trial for his crimes. Including a retelling of the crimes, dialogue from the court transcripts, and explanations of the legal consequences and intricacies, McDade recounts all the sordid elements of this true crime caper in vivid detail.

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Four years, four attorneys, one determined librarian, numerous court appearances, and one guilty plea after the initial crime took place, a federal judge in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York meted out a sentence that ran counter to the plea agreement, nearly doubling the ordinary sentence for a crime of that magnitude. In so doing, he created a new justification for departure from Federal Sentencing Guidelines. Basing his decision on the potential harm inflicted on society as a whole by the theft of rare and unique elements of our cultural heritage, Judge Kaplan redefined the value of such rare items and justified his sentencing by determining the value to be beyond the monetary realm. McDade recounts all the sordid elements of this true-crime caper in vivid detail, presenting readers with a retelling of the crimes, dialogue from the court transcripts, and explanations of the legal consequences and intricacies. In addition to the significant, overall legal themes, *The Book Thief* describes two prison escape attempts, one suicide attempt, a jailed defense lawyer, and the aftermath of this unique and interesting case.

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