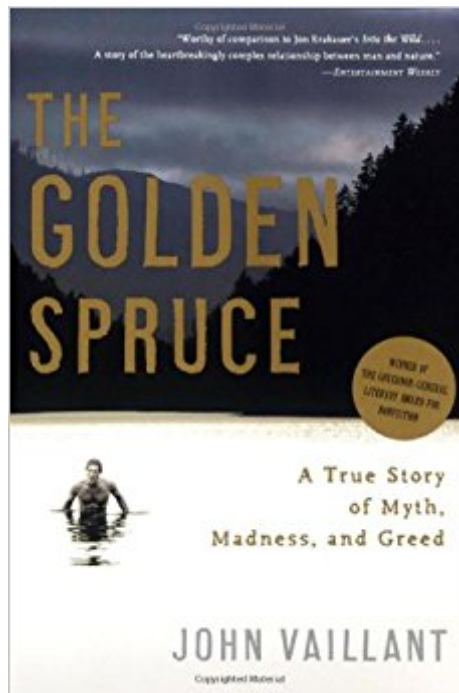




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The Golden Spruce: A True Story Of Myth, Madness, And Greed



Synopsis

A tale of obsession so fierce that a man kills the thing he loves most: the only giant golden spruce on earth. When a shattered kayak and camping gear are found on an uninhabited island in the Pacific Northwest, they reignite a mystery surrounding a shocking act of protest. Five months earlier, logger-turned-activist Grant Hadwin had plunged naked into a river in British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands, towing a chainsaw. When his night's work was done, a unique Sitka spruce, 165 feet tall and covered with luminous golden needles, teetered on its stump. Two days later it fell. As vividly as John Krakauer puts readers on Everest, John Vaillant takes us into the heart of North America's last great forest.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The felling of a celebrated giant golden spruce tree in British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands takes on a potent symbolism in this probing study of an unprecedented act of eco-vandalism. First-time author Vaillant, who originally wrote about the death of the spruce for the New Yorker, profiles the culprit, an ex-logger turned messianic environmentalist who toppled the famous tree—the only one of its kind—to protest the destruction of British Columbia's old-growth forest, then soon vanished mysteriously. Vaillant also explores the culture and history of the Haida Indians who revered the tree, and of the logging industry that often expresses an elegiac awe for the ancient trees it is busily clear-cutting. Writing in a vigorous, evocative style, Vaillant portrays the Pacific Northwest as a region of conflict and violence, from the battles between Europeans and Indians over the 18th-century sea otter trade to the hard-bitten, macho milieu of the

logging camps, where grisly death is an occupational hazard. It is also, in his telling, a land of virtually infinite natural resources overmatched by an even greater human rapaciousness. Through this archetypal story of "people fail[ing] to see the forest for the tree," Vaillant paints a haunting portrait of man's vexed relationship with nature. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review This powerful and vexing man-versus-nature tale is set in an extraordinary place, Canada's Queen Charlotte Islands, and features two legendary individuals: a uniquely golden 300-year-old Sitka spruce and Grant Hadwin, a logger turned champion of old-growth forests who ultimately destroys what he loves. With a firm grasp of every confounding aspect of this suspenseful and disturbing story and a flair for creating arresting allegories and metaphors, Vaillant conveys a wealth of complex biological, cultural, historical, and economic information within an incisive interpretation of the essential role trees have played in human civilization. Breathtaking evocations of this oceanic realm of giant trees and epic rains give way to a homage to its ghosts, for this is the sight of a holocaust, where the creative and dauntless Haida were nearly decimated by Europeans who also clear-cut the mighty forests. It is this legacy of greed and loss that rendered the immense golden spruce, a miraculous survivor, sacred, and that drove Hadwin to cut it down. This tragic tale goes right to the heart of the conflicts among loggers, native rights activists, and environmentalists, and induces us to more deeply consider the consequences of our habits of destruction. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is an excellent book in all respects, but it spoke to me particularly as someone who worked my way through college by spending my summers in the woods (the Cascades) logging old growth timber for Weyerhaeuser in the 1960s, an experience I've written about for Open Spaces Magazine. Vaillant manages to capture perfectly the juxtaposition of what a logger (from that era) felt between the excitement and manliness (and money) of his trade, on the one hand, and on the other, the unforgettably troubling sights a logger witnessed first hand as the solemn and silent old growth forest was reduced with such loud and destructive violence to massive swaths of clear cuts and slash. Vaillant duly records all the rationalizations of those in the industry (some of which, inconveniently, make reasonably good sense), from the choker setter at the site to the executives in the corporate office. He even gets all the arcane logging terms from that era right. All of this is

merely context, though, for a tale that is even-handed, basically non-judgmental, highly disturbing, and likely to linger hauntingly for most who read it.

This is a tale that should be read, savored and discussed by the largest possible audience and not just those of us who care about environmental issues. I for one had very little knowledge of the Golden Spruce and the myth surrounding it prior to purchasing this book and came away impressed and wanting to read even more about the whole sordid affair of it being cut down. As to the clear-cutting itself in BC and elsewhere, which apparently motivated Grant Hadwin's actions...it is in the same league with mountain top removal and other ecological disasters: just not necessary, to say the least, in these or any times, notwithstanding the needs of modern civilization. As to the book itself it is an impressive first book by an author I have read before and whose later prose improved in my humble view, but I think it could have been better written and it certainly required more editorial attention...the timeline can be a bit hard to follow, there are too many factoids and the story jumps around so much that it can be distracting at times and as a whole. Still I do recommend it and the map included is very helpful.

A gripping book, and much more than simply the tale of the destruction of an icon on Haida Gwaii. The subtitle is apt, although it is an open question whether the term 'madness' refers to the single disturbing act of Grant Hadwin's felling this tree or to the wanton destruction, vastly accelerated following the industrial revolution, of entire ecosystems for no other reason than short sighted self interest or downright greed. The author convincingly introduces readers to the world of Hadwin, the experienced and efficient logger, into the abominable logging practices sanctioned by both government and industry not so long ago, then the protagonist's gradual conversion into becoming what one would now describe as an eco-terrorist. He also writes engagingly about the islands, the Haida themselves, their history and culture, but refrains from romanticizing. We also learn what an important place this iconic tree took in the beliefs of the Haida and about the deep scars its destruction caused. The Golden Spruce is a fascinating and well written tale, but more than just a story about this tree and Haida Gwaii, In some way it is also one about a microcosm representative of man's uneasy relationship with the world he inhabits since earliest times..

From the first page, the lush language enraptured me. Lush language that perfectly described the immense beauty of my home, the Pacific Northwest. Not since Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Diane Ackerman's *The Natural History of the Senses* have I been so intrigued by a

non-fiction book about nature. History, geography, and insights into the devastations man has wrought - this book has it all . Read it to experience a great story-teller. Read it as a wake-up call to pay attention to nature and the (unintended?) consequences of our actions.

Great story. Once again, John Valliant play to his strengths and exquisite research to tell a timeless tale of place and people that draws on myth and reality. You could not do a better job at capturing all that is beautiful and all that is profane in the interactions between humans (particularly white Europeans) and the rain forests of the Pacific Northwest. Beautiful book and memorable real life characters.

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