

Hard News



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On May 11, 2003, The New York Times devoted four pages of its Sunday paper to the deceptions of Jayson Blair, a mediocre former Times reporter who had made up stories, faked datelines, and plagiarized on a massive scale. The fallout from the Blair scandal rocked the Times to its core and revealed fault lines in a fractious newsroom that was already close to open revolt.

Staffers were furious—about the perception that management had given Blair more leeway because he was black, about the special treatment of favored correspondents, and most of all about the shoddy reporting that was infecting the most revered newspaper in the world. Within a month, Howell Raines, the imperious executive editor who had taken office less than a week before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—and helped lead the paper to a record six Pulitzer Prizes for its coverage of the attacks—had been forced out of his job.

Having gained unprecedented access to the reporters who conducted the Times' internal investigation, top newsroom executives, and dozens of Times editors, former Newsweek senior writer Seth Mnookin lets us read all about it—the story behind the biggest journalistic scam of our era and the profound implications of the scandal for the rapidly changing world of American journalism.

It's a true tale that reads like Greek drama, with the most revered of American institutions attempting to overcome the crippling effects of a leader's blinding narcissism and a low-level reporter's sociopathic deceptions. Hard News will shape how we understand and judge the media for years to come.

From the Hardcover edition.

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