

Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith

By Jon Krakauer

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Jon Krakauer's literary reputation rests on insightful chronicles of lives conducted at the outer limits. In UNDER THE BANNER OF HEAVEN, he shifts his focus from extremes of physical adventure to extremes of religious belief within our own borders. At the core of his book is an appalling double murder committed by two Mormon Fundamentalist brothers, Ron and Dan Lafferty, who insist they received a revelation from God commanding them to kill their blameless victims. Beginning with a meticulously researched account of this "divinely inspired" crime, Krakauer constructs a multilayered, bone-chilling narrative of messianic delusion, savage violence, polygamy, and unyielding faith. Along the way, he uncovers a shadowy offshoot of America's fastest-growing religion, and raises provocative questions about the nature of religious belief.

Krakauer takes readers inside isolated communities in the American West, Canada, and Mexico, where some forty-thousand Mormon Fundamentalists believe the mainstream Mormon Church went unforgivably astray when it renounced polygamy. Defying both civil authorities and the Mormon establishment in Salt Lake City, the leaders of these outlaw sects are zealots who answer only to God. Marrying prodigiously and with virtual impunity (the leader of the largest fundamentalist church took seventy-five "plural wives," several of whom were wed to him when they were fourteen or fifteen and he was in his eighties), fundamentalist prophets exercise absolute control over the lives of their followers, and preach that any day now the world will be swept clean in a hurricane of fire, sparing only their most obedient adherents.

Weaving the story of the Lafferty brothers and their fanatical brethren with a clear-eyed look at Mormonism's violent past, Krakauer examines the underbelly of the most successful homegrown faith in the United States, and finds a distinctly American brand of religious extremism. The result is vintage Krakauer, an utterly compelling work of nonfiction that illuminates an otherwise confounding realm of human behavior.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
In 1984, Ron and Dan Lafferty murdered the wife and infant daughter of their younger brother Allen. The crimes were noteworthy not merely for their brutality but for the brothers' claim that they were acting on direct orders from God. In *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Jon Krakauer tells the story of the killers and their crime but also explores the shadowy world of Mormon fundamentalism from which the two emerged. The Mormon Church was founded, in part, on the idea that true believers could speak directly with God. But while the mainstream church attempted to be more palatable to the general public by rejecting the controversial tenet of polygamy, fundamentalist splinter groups saw this as apostasy and took to the hills to live what they believed to be a righteous life. When their beliefs are challenged or their patriarchal, cult-like order defied, these still-active groups, according to Krakauer, are capable of fighting back with tremendous violence. While Krakauer's research into the history of the church is admirably extensive, the real power of the book comes from present-day information, notably jailhouse interviews with Dan Lafferty. Far from being the brooding maniac one might expect, Lafferty is chillingly coherent, still insisting that his motive was merely to obey God's command. Krakauer's accounts of the actual murders are graphic and disturbing, but such detail makes the brothers' claim of divine instruction all the more horrifying. In an age where Westerners have trouble comprehending what drives Islamic fundamentalists to kill, Jon Krakauer advises us to look within America's own borders. --*John Moe*

From Publishers Weekly
Using as a focal point the chilling story of offshoot Mormon fundamentalist brothers Dan and Ron Lafferty, who in 1984 brutally butchered their sister-in-law and 15-month-old niece in the name of a divine revelation, Krakauer explores what he sees as the nature of radical Mormon sects with Svengali-like leaders. Using mostly secondary historical texts and some contemporary primary sources, Krakauer compellingly details the history of the Mormon church from its early 19th-century creation by Joseph Smith (whom Krakauer describes as a convicted con man) to its violent journey from upstate New York to the Midwest and finally Utah, where, after the 1890 renunciation of the church's holy doctrine sanctioning multiple marriages, it transformed itself into one of the world's fastest-growing religions. Through interviews with family members and an unremorseful Dan Lafferty (who is currently serving a life sentence), Krakauer chronologically tracks what led to the double murder, from the brothers' theological misgivings about the Mormon church to starting their own fundamentalist sect that relies on their direct communications with God to guide their actions. According to Dan's chilling step-by-step account, when their new religion led to Ron's divorce and both men's excommunication from the Mormon church, the brothers followed divine revelations and sought to kill, starting with their sister-in-law, those who stood in the way of their new beliefs. Relying on his strong journalistic and storytelling skills, Krakauer peppers the book with an array of disturbing firsthand accounts and news stories (such as the recent kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart) of physical and sexual brutality, which he sees as an outgrowth of some fundamentalists' belief in polygamy and the notion that every male speaks to God and can do God's bidding. While Krakauer demonstrates that most nonfundamentalist Mormons are community oriented, industrious and law-abiding, he poses some striking questions about the closed-minded, closed-door policies of the religion-and many religions in general.
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From Booklist
On July 24, 1984, Dan and Ron Lafferty cut the throats of their brother Allan's wife, Brenda, and baby daughter, Erica, fulfilling part of a revelation Ron received from God. Ron is now on death row. Brother

Dan, serving two life sentences for the murders, has never denied killing his sister-in-law and niece but has absolutely no remorse. "I was doing God's will," he says, "which is not a crime." Krakauer, best known for his adventure writing in *Outside* magazine and his books *Into the Wild* (1995) and *Into Thin Air* (1997), has shifted gears to tackle issues of faith in this true-crime/religious expose, which delves deep into the heart of Mormon fundamentalism, where revelations from God are commonplace and polygamy not only still exists but is "a matter of religious duty." Alternating between the bloodier aspects of the origins of the Mormon Church (Joseph Smith Jr.'s lynching in Nauvoo, Illinois, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre in Utah) and some of the more extreme aspects of today's Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints (fraud, incest, and murder), Krakauer's account is gripping yet deeply disturbing. Not only does he interview Dan, an admitted murderer, but also he talks with former child brides and victims of incest. Debbie Palmer, raised to be an obedient wife in FLDS, married at 14 and became a stepmother to 31 kids, including her own stepmother, which made her "a stepmother to her stepmother, and thus a step grandmother to herself." *Benjamin Segedin*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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The experience that you get from Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith is the more deep you looking the information that hide in the words the more you get interested in reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to recognise but Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith giving you buzz feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by anyone who read that because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. That book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith instantly.

Mary Olive:

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