



For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder That Shocked Jazz Age Chicago

By Simon Baatz

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It was a crime that shocked the nation: the brutal murder in Chicago in 1924 of a child by two wealthy college students who killed solely for the thrill of the experience. Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb were intellectuals—too smart, they believed, for the police to catch them. When they were apprehended, state's attorney Robert Crowe was certain that no defense could save the ruthless killers from the gallows. But the families of the confessed murderers hired Clarence Darrow, entrusting the lives of their sons to the most famous lawyer in America in what would be one of the most sensational criminal trials in the history of American justice.

Set against the backdrop of the 1920s—a time of prosperity, self-indulgence, and hedonistic excess in a lawless city on the brink of anarchy—*For the Thrill of It* draws the reader into a world of speakeasies and flappers, of gangsters and gin parties, with a spellbinding narrative of Jazz Age murder and mystery.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1924, Nathan Leopold, 19, and Richard Loeb, 18, both intellectually precocious scions of wealthy Jewish Chicago families, kidnapped and brutally murdered 14-year-old Bobby Franks in an attempt to commit the perfect crime. Historian Baatz, of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, replays the crime (on which Meyer Levin's 1956 novel *Compulsion* was based) from the killers' point of view, detailing their intense, often sexual, relationship that culminated in the murder. But they left a crucial piece of evidence and eventually confessed to the murder. Clarence Darrow cleverly had the boys plead guilty to avoid a trial, and the legendary defense attorney went head to head with State's Attorney Robert Crowe in a sentencing hearing before Judge John Caverly. Both sides trotted out psychiatrists to testify whether Leopold and Loeb were mentally ill. Darrow's gamble paid off in life sentences. Loeb was murdered in prison in 1936; Leopold was eventually paroled in 1958. Baatz gives an acute portrait of the two murderers bound together in a web of fantasy, but his heavy reliance on novelistic techniques (there!—he had done it) and meandering pacing prevent this from being as convincing as his exhaustive research deserves. B&w photos. (Aug.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb have been the objects of derision and curiosity ever since the sensational murder they committed on Chicago's South Side in 1924. These two privileged teenagers, who killed little Bobby Franks, a neighbor, also from a privileged family, just for the thrill of achieving the perfect crime ("a murder that would never be solved"), have become almost legendary "bad boys." Baatz's comprehensive account of the case succeeds in identifying their peculiar personality traits as well as what it was in the nature of their relationship that made them believe in their infallibility in performing the ultimate crime. All of Leopold and Loeb's intense planning quickly unraveled, however, when the victim's body was discovered soon after the murder; the murderers had counted on the body never being located. The second strong point of this exhaustively researched and rivetingly presented account is the thoroughness with which the author reconstructs the police investigation and the trial itself; a vivid portrait of the famous lawyer Clarence Darrow, who defended Leopold and Loeb, is a fascinating by-product. One of the best true-crime books of this or any other season. --Brad Hooper

Review

"Altogether absorbing. . . . Mr. Baatz, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan, has done meticulous research, and he writes extremely well. . . . His book on the Leopold and Loeb case is the best we'll have for a long, long time." (New York Times)

"The story of the Jazz Age thrill-killers Leopold and Loeb has never been told in so gripping a style. A significant work of historical scholarship that reads like a page-turning thriller, Simon Baatz's masterly book now stands as the definitive account of this legendary case." (Harold Schechter, author of *The Devil's Gentleman*)

"Baatz lucidly lays out the complicated courtroom maneuvers and also provides a fascinating, skillful analysis of two different legal philosophies.... A solid true-crime thriller that's also a masterly analysis of postwar shifts in society's ideas about crime and personality." (Kirkus Reviews)

Exhaustively researched and rivetingly presented. . . . One of the best true-crime books of this or any other

season. (Booklist (starred review))

“[Baatz] breaks his fascinating narrative into two distinct Law and Order–type sections. . . . While it might be easy to dismiss the murderers—Nathan “Babe” Leopold Jr. and Richard “Dickie” Loeb—as bored rich kids, Baatz shows that there was much more to this story.” (Library Journal)

“The pages read like the very best crime fiction. . . . Reading Baatz’s compelling, definitive book brings it all back to life.” (Open Letters Monthly)

“Simon Baatz’s *For the Thrill of It* is likely to be the definitive work on this infamous crime and the dramatic trial of its perpetrators. It is impressive in its research, even-handed in its tone and immensely readable. . . . [An] excellent book.” (Wall Street Journal)

“This story never fails to astonish.” (Chicago Tribune)

Meticulous and thorough, and it puts the case in historical perspective as a clash between two conflicting views of criminals and crime, one espoused by...Clarence Darrow...the most famous American lawyer of his day, perhaps indeed of any day. (Washington Post Book World)

“A riveting non-fiction thriller that will turn you into an activity-hostile recluse who shouts, “Go away and let me read!”... What makes *Thrill of It* so exceptional is the way Baatz balances all the elements: the killers, the crime, the police, the media and the trial’s impact.” (USA Today)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bryan Smith:

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George Hughes:

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Lillie Stein:

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