

For the Thrill of It

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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.

For the Thrill of It Details


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From Reader Review For the Thrill of It for online ebook

Eric_W says

I suppose that anyone who has read about the career of Clarence Darrow is familiar with his famous defense of Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold. In short, a little Jewish boy (Richard's cousin!) from a wealthy Chicago family, Bobby Franks, was kidnapped after school and murdered by two intelligent and wealthy college students, both also Jewish. Suspicion initially fell on teachers at the school Bobby attended, the Harvard School, and despite lots of exculpatory evidence several of them were held by the police and beaten severely to try to get them to confess. They didn't and finally their lawyers convinced a judge to release them

Then there was an eyewitness who saw a gray Winton car right by the school at the time Bobby was kidnapped. Soon every person in Chicago with a gray Winton was being reported to the police. One owner parked his car in the garage and walked to work rather than having to face the police almost every day as people reported seeing him in his gray Winton. (The car they actually used was a dark green Willys-Knight.)

Pedophiles, homosexuals, anyone the police considered a "sexual deviant" were rounded up for questioning, although even the district attorney noted that it would be a rare event indeed for a pedophile to ask for a ransom and set up such an elaborate mechanism to collect it.

The story is horrifying in its depiction of the two psychopaths. Convinced they were smarter than everyone else (Richard was the youngest graduate of the University of Michigan,) they had successfully embarked on a series of petty vandalism before deciding to commit the "perfect murder." They almost succeeded, except for Nathan's glasses.

There was no question as to their guilt. They had confessed and revealed all the details to the police. They were perhaps lucky that they committed their crimes at a time when research in genetics and animal instinct was being popularized. Darrow, who had engaged in a "lifelong campaign on behalf of the defenseless" had read Altgeld's book, *Our Penal Machinery*, which argued that "criminal behavior... was less a consequence of free will and deliberation and more a matter of education, upbringing, and environment. The majority of criminals—the overwhelming majority, Altgeld stressed—had grown up in circumstances of dire poverty, in families where one or both parents were absent, and without the benefits of education, schooling, or discipline."

Darrow was also determined to rid society of capital punishment. He had defended numerous people who faced the death penalty. The Loeb/Leopold case was perfect "not because the defendants were deserving... the trial of Leopold and Loeb would capture the attention of the nation. ... "The importance of instinct in the animal world, Darrow stated, provided a clue to its significance in higher forms of life. Human beings believe that they act rationally, but might they not also be subject to instinctual drives? ..."human beings were no more capable of free agency than the mason bee or the red ant."

The trial provided a forum for the relatively new field of psychiatry (even then occasionally called "alienists") that wanted to impress upon the rapt audience their "belief that criminal behavior was a medical phenomenon best interpreted by scientific experts." That is, if they could avoid an adversarial battle between experts (each getting \$1,000 a day - a huge amount of money in those days,) which would require the cooperation of the state's attorney. The facts might not be at issue but the interpretations could very well be, and that would be embarrassing to the new profession. Darrow countered with the argument that no one wanted to see the boys freed by claiming insanity; they were trying to avoid the death penalty. Interestingly,

efforts to broadcast the trial --a first -- were nixed after opposition from religious and social groups worried about their children being exposed to the filth (homosexuality) that would come out during testimony.

To explain Darrow's brilliant strategy would be to reveal too much. Excellent read for anyone interested in Darrow, criminal motivations, and the justice system not to mention early nineteenth century culture.

Michelle Wegner says

This was a super interesting read on many levels. Two boys in their teens committed the "perfect crime" or so they thought. They spent the better part of a year planning to murder someone, anyone...as long as they could get away with it, just "For the Thrill of It."

On a personal level, I found this book to be fascinating, because the crime happens just blocks away from where my Grandparents and Great Grandparents were living at the time in the 1920's. All of the streets and places discussed in the book were familiar to me. I tried to read it from the point of view of my family--such a horrific crime had not been seen in Chicago in their recent history. The body of the child who was murdered was found in the same place that my Dad had taken me and my brothers fishing when I was young. Because of all these ties to the story, it made the whole thing seem more real and horrific to me than to the typical reader, I would guess.

The callousness of the boys who committed the crime is another reason I had to keep reading when the story got a little mundane in the middle. I had to find out why, why and how could they have done this.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is studying law or psychology, or anyone who simply loves to read about history or the nature of criminals.

Jill Meyer says

Proclaimed "The Crime of the Century" - until sadly superseded by more heinous murders as the 20th century progressed - the "Thrill Killing of Bobby Franks" shocked Chicago and the country in May, 1924. The 14 year old son of wealthy parents was kidnapped and murdered near his home and school on Chicago's South Side. When his murderers were caught, they turned out to be 19 year old boys, from the same social milieu as the victim. When asked why they committed the murder, Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold answered, "For the thrill of it".

There have been a few books and movies based on the Leopold and Loeb "thrill murder", but Simon Baatz's "For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder That Shocked Chicago" is one of the better ones. I've read them all, beginning with Meyer Levin's, "Compulsion", a fictional accounting of the relationship between the two killers and the murder and subsequent trial. Levin writes his novel in the first person, as a fellow student at the University of Chicago and an acquaintance of the Nathan Leopold character. Baatz's book, is a straight non-fiction account and he goes into great detail about the boys' families, the twisted relationship between the boys, the crime, the psychiatric findings, and the trial. Baatz also highlights the lawyers, law officers, and doctors involved. His writing is non-sensational and the book includes plenty of pictures of the people involved in the case and maps of the area.

One of the previous reviews I read states that Simon Baatz was wrong about the number of children in the Franks' family. Baatz writes there were four, including Bobby, and the reviewer says there were only three. I was intrigued by that error - if it was indeed an error - and started checking in on-line genealogical sites and I can't find anything that says there were four children. So I think you might read this book with a bit of caution.

David says

One Sentence Summary - The true story of two sociopathic lovers, their murder plot, and how their ensuing trial showcases the legal perception of mental illness during the 1920's.

Full Review:

In the world of notorious, romantic criminal duos, most of us are likely to recall figures like “Bonnie and Clyde,” but we would be remiss to forget about those infamous clandestine lovers and Jazz Age murders: Nathaniel Leopold and Richard Loeb. Simon Baatz’s novel, *For the Thrill of It*, provides us with an exciting examination of the murder case with a heavy emphasis on the legal rigmarole involved therein.

The murder plot, trial, and aftermath of this novel are all riveting, but the moments in between leave something to be desired. Baatz has a comprehensive knowledgeable of legal history and the evolution of psychiatry as it relates to the case. He shares much of that knowledge to provide helpful historical context so that we better understand the proceedings, but being bombarded with so much ancillary information does, occasionally, become tiresome for the reader.

For example, if there is some sort of legal precedent for a specific element of the case, the Baatz goes into (often agonizing) detail about that case. While this is mostly informative, it does have the unfortunate consequence of ruining the pacing of the novel. Likewise, whole chapters are dedicated to the legal professional history of secondary “characters” Clarence Darrow and Robert Crowe (attorneys for the defense and prosecution respectively). We learn almost as much about them as we do Nathaniel and Leopold.

This book will probably not be a page turner for most people, but if you’re interested in either the killers or the legal history behind their case, this is likely the most thrilling/engaging novel that you’ll find on the subject.

BONUS FUN FACT: If the name Clarence Darrow (the attorney for the defense) looks familiar, it’s probably because you know him for another famous American trial, the infamous “Scopes Trial” (aka The Monkey Trial), in which a Tennessee biology teacher was indicted for teaching the theory of evolution in school.

Kathryn says

I lived three blocks from the Franks' family mausoleum and never knew it.... wish I could leash up Buddy and walk over there now.

I suppose in the 20's killing for the sake of killing was a horrifically novel idea then. Perhaps in our time we

are numb to the concept.

Arnie Harris says

Simon Baatz's "For the the Thrill of It" must be considered the most authoritative account of the sensational crime of 1924, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb's murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks.

Almost by default, since, as the puzzled author points out in his afterword, his book is only the second to be written about the case in 30 years.

As such, a reading of "For the Thrill of It" results in not a little bit of ambivalence.

Baatz's research and detail,are impressive---but may perhaps be considered as alittle bit too much of a good thing.

One feels that the author tells us more about the then state of endocrinology than one nees to know.

He also spends an inordinate time delving in detail into the lives and cases of the prosecutor, Robert Crowe and defense attorney Clarence Darrow. In the latter's case,however, perhaps this serves as a valuable primer for younger readers unfamiiar with the legendary attorney.

Baatz also goes into great detail presenting the testimony of the numerous psychiatrists who testify to the mental illness they found in the two defendants.

As it turns out, all of this was anti-climactic as we learn that the judge in the case had already chosen to ignore that testimony and was resolved to make his decision of a life sentences or the death penalty minus all that clinical testimony.

On feels that Baatz may have spent more time on the defendants themselves. We learn precious little about how they spent their time in jail, both during the trial and in their years in prison.

To one's amazement, Baatz just gives cursory mention of the theories of the philosopher Nietzsche and their reportedly profound effect on the two boys and its role in their personality development and in leading them to the 'perfect murder committed by super-intellelts.'

(Almost comically , these 'super geniuses" perfect crime was botched from beginning to end to the point that they were already being held as serious suspects within three days of the murder).

Also Baatz tends not to tie up some important loose ends.

His book alludes to some other serious crimes committed by the pair prior to the Franks murder--crimes which Loeb feared Leopold would hold over his head in his bid for a lighter sentence--but the matter is never pursued or resolved.

Nonetheless, this book is well worth reading for anyone wanting to learn about one of the first of many "Trials of the Century."

Marti says

Prior to reading this, I knew Leopold and Loeb as one of the most sensational crimes of the 1920s. However I did not know much beyond the fact that they killed a young boy and were caught because one of them accidentally dropped a pair of unusual prescription eye-glasses next to the body. Therefore, it was a little surprising that a couple of supposed geniuses could be so stupid. Of course the crime itself may not have been indicative of terribly good judgment; but considering that it had been planned for months, one would think the murderers would have had enough sense not to stab the victim repeatedly in the rental car. Nor would they be seen furiously scrubbing out the back seat in the driveway of Leopold's family estate where

they could easily be spotted by their chauffeur.

Where I got a little bogged down was in the middle where the author takes great pains to explain the field of endocrinology as it related to a 1920s understanding of psychology which viewed homosexuality as a mental illness. An overview would have been sufficient to understand Clarence Darrow's defense which hinged on avoiding the death penalty in favor of life in prison. To accomplish this, he had to prove that both boys were insane. Although they had zero remorse, they seemed rational, intelligent and articulate; hence it's pretty clear that they were sociopaths (a term that did not seem to be in use at the time although narcissistic personality disorder was cited).

Much more interesting to me were things like the mob storming the courthouse for Clarence Darrow's summation and the broadcast of the verdict over the radio, during which all the business of the city of Chicago came to a complete stop. In addition to having no remorse, it seems that both Leopold and Loeb enjoyed their celebrity as they were constantly making dumb statements to the press and, while waiting for the verdict at the county jail, were visited by local celebrities like the Chicago Cubs baseball team. This carried over to Joliet Prison where they were incarcerated after they were sentenced to life in prison. While they were not able to hold court there like Pashas, they were able to buy special treatment from the guards because of their wealth.

Katherine Addison says

(Most over-used words in the genre of true crime: "shocked" and "shocking.")

For the Thrill of It suffers from a number of problems, the first and probably worst of which is that Leopold and Loeb just aren't that *interesting*. Or, perhaps, the ways in which they are interesting are things that this book failed to illuminate.

Baatz is an academic historian deliberately trying to write a "popular" book, which is not an auspicious combination. He says in his author's note that he wanted to write about the competing scientific paradigms/understandings of mental illness and crime duking it out in the Leopold and Loeb trial (i.e., in a nutshell, free will vs. determinism), but it's not clear from the actual text of the actual book that this was his goal. In fact, what the book is most signally lacking is a thesis of any kind. He's not making an argument about anything, just collecting and sorting the mountain of primary source material. (Apparently, there are great wodge of transcript which have been neither stolen nor written about already; see above re: L&L not being interesting.) And he's not even particularly good at organizing--he never seems to be sure where he thinks the story starts.

And there are two problems with source material. The first is that, while Baatz clearly dislikes Nathan Leopold and distrusts his autobiography as a source (for neither of which, let me be clear, I blame him), he (a.) uses Leopold's autobiography as a source anyway and (b.) never offers explicit evidence that Leopold is lying. The second is that, although he's careful to assure readers that all dialogue is taken from transcripts, he has an awful, *awful* habit of describing the thoughts and feelings of murder victims--for which he can have no reliable source.

I got the feeling, as I read, that Baatz wasn't very interested in L&L either. He doesn't follow up even very

obvious contradictions, e.g. the contradiction between Loeb not being interested in sex (as he himself said in interviews with psychiatrists) and the claims that he extorted sex out of other inmates at Stateville. (I'm not saying that Baatz should have an *answer*, because there may not be one; I just want him to point out the problem.) And there are plenty of others. Baatz doesn't provide any kind of analysis, even of the psychological/psychiatric questions he says he's interested in, and he makes no effort even to articulate the parameters of the question that underlies the whole trial (and what continuing interest in the case there is): Why did they do it? Or, the other way around, why did they fail *not* to do it?

Sarah says

Thoroughly researched and a very cool look at Chicago in the 1920's. I was surprised that the book was so focused on the competing scientific evidence used to explain the crime at that time.

Kavita says

This is one of the most boring true crime books I have read. When I read a book of this sort, I want to know about the crime, the criminals, the victims, and even the way a particular crime resulted in changing the law or society. What I DO NOT want is a biography of the lawyers involved in the trial. What I am not looking for in a book of this sort is a list of cases and personal beliefs of the lawyers. Moreover, what I certainly don't want is judging these lawyers for doing their job.

This book is a complete fail and could not keep me interested at all. I just skimmed through the entire book, except during the interrogations of Loeb and Leopold. Frankly, I still don't understand this murder and the author has put forward no theory regarding the various reasons this murder could have taken place. No psychological analysis, no checking the background of either victim or perpetrator, nothing. In fact, the poor victim and his family were completely forgotten in the author's enthusiasm to write a biography on the lawyers. Really, who wants to read that? I am sure there are biographies of both Clarence Darrow (he participated in the Scopes trial) and Robert Crowe (he was very active in trying to bring famous gamblers and gangsters to justice) for those who really want to know more about them.

And WHY are there descriptions of OTHER criminal cases that have nothing to do Leopold, Loeb or Franks? Very often, the 'story' veers away from its focus and starts discussing aspects of other murder cases in detail. It makes really no sense and in the end, all you get is a hotchpotch of different cases, the details of which are difficult to keep apart because of the writing style. This was not the only diversion from the relevant topics. There were actually a couple of pages on the functions of the thyroid and pituitary glands. I kid you not! There were also lengthy discussions on mental health organisations and their functions. Richard Loeb's blood pressure was systolic, 100; diastolic, 65; blood pressure, 35; pulse rate, 88 to 92. Very illuminating. I am sure it is of great interest – TO A DOCTOR! And OMG, there was excessive non-protein nitrogen in his blood. This is exactly what I was looking forward to read. NOT. I shall simply buy a biology textbook next time. Do we really need these unnecessary details which do not add anything to the story in hand?

In the small first part where this book actually dealt with the crime, it was highly fictionalised. There was no indication of where the author got his information from. The characters were given thoughts and emotions but again, there is no indication why the author has done so. Were these emotions described by a witness or

is there some kind of source he is using? Or did he just write in whatever he thought would be the right emotions for someone?

How does the author know that Darrow first met Leopold looking dishevelled with yellow stains on his shirt and his tie askew? Equally, would the author please explain how he knows that Nathan speculated whether they (the yellow stains on the lawyer's shirt) were egg stains left over from Darrow's breakfast? Did Nathan tell the author that this was what he thought? Did Nathan write it down in his diary? Did Nathan ask the lawyer about it and then the lawyer wrote it down somewhere? The book is full of similar thoughts and descriptions which are not just irrelevant, but also probably false.

The research of the trial is detailed and cannot be faulted. It is however presented as court transcripts interspersed with embellishments from the author's own mind. For example, he claims that "Ruby Darrow had also bought Clarence a new powder-blue shirt". How does he know? Did Ruby tell him SHE bought this shirt? Did Clarence tell him? Did Clarence mention it in a press conference? It could have been bought by Clarence himself, or a present from his mother or even a Christmas present from a close friend or relative. Or Ruby could have bought it for him for some OTHER occasion. There is just no evidence that Ruby bought that powder blue shirt for this occasion. Or did the author go around visiting the shops and checking their records and found out that Ruby Darrow had purchased a shirt for the trial of Leopold and Loeb? Because of course, this is the kind of thing that is entered in shop records. Is this even relevant? This kind of stupid embellishment made this book boring and false. The court transcripts are presented as they are (other than the false embellishments) and one wonders why bother to write a book at all. I can look up the transcripts on the net myself and don't need to read a book for it.

I would recommend people to give this book a miss unless you are really interested in the intricacies of the legal case or the medical evidence. For those who are looking for a general discussion of crime during the times or of the psychological or human aspects of the crime, this book is a fail

Lord Beardsley says

Okay this is when I press up my MwyTotal mNyuERD glasses up with my middle finger and let loose a giant rant I am quite disappointed with this book. I have been fascinated with the Leopold and Loeb case for many years now, and have read a considerable amount on the subject matter to be pretty well-versed in it. That being said, I found some major flaws of the factual kind running throughout this book, which makes me highly doubt the validity of it.

This book is marketed in a very sensationalistic manner. The cover implies Jazz! Sex! Murder! Mayhem. However, the majority of it is basically hammered out in dry, vague details of the murder without really going into much about Richard Loeb or Nathan Leopold. In fact, this book is actually a strange Anti-Clarence Darrow Agenda from the get go.

The author goes into great details about the lawyers for the Defence and the State as well as every crime that could be compared at all to Leopold and Loeb. More is spent discussing previous court cases than is actually spent on the subjects. Fail.

A Couple Examples of the Questionable/False Statements Passed Off As Facts:

-Sam was the OLDER brother of Nathan Leopold, not the younger. Nathan Leopold's nickname was "Babe" because he was the BABY of the family

-There is absolutely NO documented evidence that Richard Loeb propositioned Day with sexual blackmail (which Baatz used as a motive for the murder of Loeb). Besides this, the victim-blaming of Richard Loeb's murder is heavily implied.

-Richard Loeb stated when he was 18 that he was highly indifferent to sex of any kind, that also makes it difficult to believe this fabrication of Loeb as "asking for it" in regards to Days' violent act.

If you really want to read a fantastic and (imho) definitive, thoughtful, and incredibly moving account of the Leopold and Loeb case, read "Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century" by Hal Higdon. Don't waste your time with this.

I started wondering (see The Curious Case of the autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas by Douglas Murray) at one point, "Is the guy who wrote this some kind of Neo-Con?". If I start wondering things like that about a book, then chances are, the book is (to quote The God Warrior from TV's 'Trading Spouses') "Dark-sided."

Nerd Alert, signing off.

Matt says

Like most of you, I've spent a fair amount of time plotting the perfect murder. Maybe you've just gotten an earful from some nemesis, and you spend the next hour of your life plotting their demise, a demise that would be untraceable to you. Perhaps you pondered the utility of stabbing someone with an icicle (which would then melt away), or smothering someone with a pillow, and then putting a cheeseburger in both their hands (so that it'd look like cardiac arrest). Maybe you've thought about putting your cellphone on your dog and having him run wild while you commit your deed, thereby having your phone ping off various cell towers while you are...

Wait, you've never spent a moment of your life in such reveries?

Well, me neither! I was talking about a friend.

Anyway, for most of us you who have dared to contemplate this, the most foulest of deeds, there is comfort in the notion that thoughts alone do not constitute first-degree premeditated murder.

Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold have gone down in infamy because they took the next step.

Leopold & Loeb.

No doubt you've heard of this illustrious and alliterative tandem. Even if you've never taken the time to read anything about their case, you probably – like me – assume you know everything there is about it.

On May 21, 1924, fourteen year-old Bobby Franks was abducted on his way home from school. His family received a demand for \$10,000 in ransom. Shortly thereafter, Franks' corpse was discovered in a drainage culvert. A distinctive pair of spectacles left at the scene led detectives to nineteen year-old Nathan Leopold. Like his victim, Leopold came from a prominent and wealthy family. He was extremely intelligent and had never lacked for anything.

Nevertheless, in soon came about that he and Richard Loeb – who were lovers – had plotted and executed

the crime with a precision that belied how quickly the plan unraveled. Their motives were opaque. They didn't really need the money, after all. Was the murder an act of sexual deviancy? Did it have something to do with the killers' uncertain grasp of Nietzsche? Were the killers mentally ill? Or did it come down – as it was suggested by Loeb – to a thrill killing? Were, the killers, in fact, simply attempting an exercise at the perfect crime?

Simon Baatz's *For the Thrill of It: Leopold, Loeb, and the Murder that Shocked Jazz Age Chicago* does not have answer. Nor does it really try for one. What it does is provide you the full, sordid tale of wealth and privilege, sexuality and bloodlust. It places center stage arguments of the role of science in the law; of capital punishment in civilized societies; and the debate between determinism and individual responsibility when it comes to apportioning culpability.

For the Thrill of It starts rather poorly, in a disorganized and disjointed fashion. This is a function of Baatz's decision to start his narrative with the kidnapping, proceed with the discovery of the body, and only then circle back to introduce the killers, sketch out their relationship, and describe their homicidal exertions. I don't want to sound like an old man on his porch, throwing rocks at kids passing by on the sidewalk, but enough with the fractured narratives! They're not always necessary. Sometimes you should just stick to chronology, because chronology works. It is an efficient way of telling a coherent story. Life is messy and filled with enough zigs and zags; there is no need in nonfiction to compound this reality by structuring everything like an episode of *LOST*.

Anyway, I had a hard time getting into this because of the way Baatz revealed information in dribs and drabs. Once he locks onto the timeline, however, things get much better. Indeed, the narrative, for awhile at least, is almost propulsive. As Baatz himself points out in an afterword, he has a lot of research material to work with. There are newspaper articles, court transcripts, and lengthy confessions to mine. The result is that Baatz is able to write with incredible journalistic access. Despite this crime occurring nearly 100 years ago, there is more than enough information for Baatz to write in a novelistic yet comprehensive style.

Baatz covers the Leopold and Loeb case from all angles: from the victim's family; the killers; the killers' family; and the attorneys. The attorneys, especially, are a focal point here. Loeb's family hired famed defense attorney Clarence Darrow, whose up-and-down career is given a decent retelling in a chapter devoted solely to him. (Baatz is rather skeptical of Darrow's reputation, and makes sure you know that). Another chapter is given to Robert Crowe, the State's Attorney. (In comparison to Darrow, Crowe comes off as the better litigator; however, as part of Chicago machine politics, he certainly wasn't an angel descended from God's own courtroom).

The biggest drawback to *For the Thrill of It* has nothing to do with Baatz's abilities as a writer or researcher (he is good at both) or his needlessly convoluted early chapters. Rather, the historical reality of the Leopold and Loeb case does not offer much legal drama.

This is not a whodunit. We know exactly who did it. Both Leopold and Loeb gave detailed confessions that were actually taken down by a stenographer. As far as the evidence shows, neither man had those confessions beaten out of him, which is more than a lot of Cook County defendants could ever say.

This is also not a courtroom fight. Leopold and Loeb, you see, pled *guilty* right off the bat. Thus, the central performance in any great true crime story is missing.

Instead, the story of Leopold and Loeb is the story of early 20th century psychiatry. Darrow's ploy was to have his client plead guilty (Leopold did the same, following the advice of his attorney), avoid a jury, and

then argue to the judge (who seemed sympathetic to the ploy) that Loeb should not be hanged.

Thus, the big middle section of *For the Thrill of It* is not a set-piece legal showdown, but a tedious battle of experts. Darrow brought in a bunch of psychiatrists who gave various, sometimes contradictory theories about why Leopold and Loeb did what they did. The State did the same, countering with their own experts. The loser was psychiatry, which came off looking like something conjured from thin air. There was no winner.

Baatz does a credible job in explaining all these different theories, and their likely impact on the judge. Nothing he does as an author, however, can necessarily make this interesting. It just kind of drags. Then, when it comes time for Darrow's famous closing argument, Baatz sort of just dismisses it as disorganized and ineffectual.

Baatz might be right. The judge gave Leopold and Loeb life plus 99 years (he screwed up the sentencing pronouncement, meaning they'd eventually be eligible for parole), sparing their young lives. The basis of his decision had nothing to do with Darrow's experts or his summation. It came down to the age of the defendants. He thought they were too young to be hanged. In this judgment, he has been borne out by science.

Maybe the most interesting parts of *For the Thrill of It* come in the trial's aftermath, as Baatz follows the two killers to prison. The reason I liked this part is because it's where my ignorance was most pronounced. While I'd known the contours of the "thrill killing" story, I never knew what happened to Leopold and Loeb once Darrow saved them. (Now, of course, I realize that Darrow probably didn't save them).

Baatz claims that his is one of the few full-length nonfiction books to explore this topic, a topic that has had a powerful afterlife on stage, in novels, and in movie theaters. I have no reason to doubt his claim. Moreover, he certainly accomplished his goals in suitably entertaining fashion. *For the Thrill of It* does its utmost with the material at hand. When I finished this, I thought to myself: Wow, I really had a lot of misconceptions.

The other thing I thought is that I really didn't need a book to cure them. This is one of those cases where you don't learn much about humanity, other than when you have very large numbers of people on earth, some terrible things are bound to happen. While I liked *For the Thrill of It*, I can't say that it is quite good enough to overcome its morbid and disheartening subject matter to become something that must be read in spite of that.

Kc Chapa says

Definitely a detailed look into one of the most infamous cases in Chicago history. This book combined my favorite things...Chicago history, the 20s and a murder mystery. SCORE.

Stabitha says

This book was pretty disappointing because it provides no real historical context. The jacket and all of the positive reviews refer to the book's backdrop of hedonistic 1920s Chicago, but this is hardly explored. Instead the author (Baatz) chooses to focus on the tiniest details of the case and never gives the reader the

bigger picture. While the book disappoints as a history, it also lacks the intrigue endemic to the more sensationalist true crime genre. It's as if Baatz intentionally sucked all the juice from the details in order to avoid being labeled as a true crime author. So it fails on both counts: it's neither an interesting history OR an exciting crime thriller. It's pretty dull, which is crazy considering the subject matter and the setting.

Derek Davis says

This one deserves at least 6 stars for effort and completeness, about 2 or 3 for the telling. Could anyone make the Leopold-Loeb case boring? Baatz, a history prof, manages it for much of the book.

There's no doubt that this is and will probably remain the definitive study of the case, and it brings out in horrific detail the socially abandoned minds of the killers. In today's terms, they would certainly be called psychopaths, but even within that category they seem unique. Garrulous, confident, unconcerned with human feeling, Leopold and Loeb described, almost with glee and in minute detail, the six-month-plus preparation and execution of their kidnapping and murder of Bobby Franks – a random victim chosen simply to prove that they could carry out a perfect, vicious crime (which they bungled at every step).

Where Baatz, possibly because of his academic background, falls flat is in his inability to separate significant from trivial detail. To set a scene, he describes every piece of clothing worn by every character. To support the place of scientific testimony in the trial, he provides the complete academic history of each witness. To document the reaction of the press and public, he reproduces page after verbatim page of redundant comment. He prefigures testimony that will be given later, repeats this summing up when the testimony is given – then quotes the actual words which echo almost precisely what he has just said. Whole chapters are read-down-the-middle-of-the-page-and-hope-there's-something-in-here-somewhere.

However, if, like me, you've always been fascinated by this case and what to know all, all is definitely what you get.
