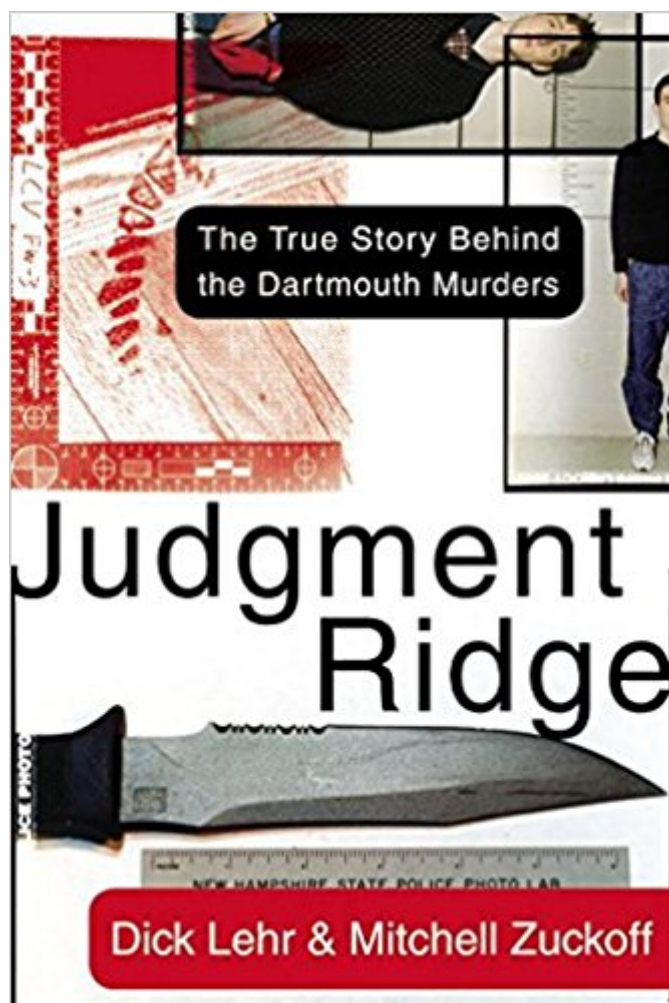


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# Judgment Ridge: The True Story Behind The Dartmouth Murders



## Synopsis

On a cold night in January 2001, the idyllic community of Dartmouth College was shattered by the discovery that two professors had been hacked to death in their own home. Investigators searched helplessly for clues linking the victims, Half and Susanne Zantop, to their murderer or murderers. The residents of Hanover, New Hampshire, speculated endlessly -- could the killer be a disgruntled student? a spurned lover? -- while the grisly nature of the crimes themselves destroyed, perhaps forever, the sanctity and invulnerability of their academic arcadia. By contrast, the hardscrabble community of nearby Chelsea, Vermont, was relatively unaffected. The big news in Chelsea came when the school's basketball star scored his 1,000th point on a Friday, three weeks after the murders. As parents and teenagers streamed into the night to celebrate after the game, a stunning scene stopped them in their tracks. Outside the house of high school senior Robert Tulloch were the flashing lights of a swarm of police cars. His neighbors couldn't imagine what the trouble could be -- a prank gone overboard, perhaps -- but they were confident it was all a misunderstanding that would be sorted out in due course. But they were wrong. The town discovered the incomprehensible reality that Tulloch and best friend Jim Parker, two of Chelsea's brightest and most popular sons, were now fugitives, wanted for the murders of Half and Susanne Zantop. Afterward, their classmates and teachers would admit to noticing subtle changes in Robert and Jim over the previous year. Robert, a former Student Council president, and Jim, a member of the school band and drama club, had been popular kids, benign mischief-makers -- their escapades included breaking into an empty home and raiding the refrigerator. But as their friends thought about college and futures beyond Chelsea, Robert and Jim began plotting a very different life. Split off from their peers, with too much free time and too little structure, normal teenage ambition took, in these two boys, an unthinkably dark and sinister turn. Authors Dick Lehr and Mitchell Zuckoff provide a vivid explanation of murders that captivated the nation, as well as dramatic revelations about the forces that turned two popular teenagers into killers: Could poor parenting, psychological abnormalities, or a community that fails to challenge and engage its young people be blamed? Or was it more complex? Judgment Ridge conveys a deep appreciation for the lives and the devastating loss of Half and Susanne Zantop, while also providing a clear portrait of the killers, their families, and their community -- and, perhaps, a warning to all parents about what evil may lurk in the hearts of boys.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this meandering yet irresistibly absorbing book, Lehr (co-author of the bestselling *Black Mass*, about a turncoat FBI agent) and Zuckoff (*Choosing Naia*, about a Down syndrome child) recount the harrowing story of the murders of Half and Susanne Zantop, two beloved Dartmouth College professors who were savagely butchered in their home on January 27, 2001. The messy crime scene soon led investigators to James Parker and Robert Tulloch, a couple of popular teenagers from nearby Chelsea, Vt. But after being interviewed by detectives, the two promptly fled, leading authorities on a three-day manhunt that ended abruptly at a truck stop in Illinois. While the stunned and bewildered residents of Chelsea muscled their way through choking crowds of reporters (the already sensational story was made all the more lurid by the suspects' youth and the sleepy, idyllic setting) and came to terms with the unimaginable (two of their own townspeople were murderers), Parker and Tulloch were remanded to New Hampshire and arraigned on murder charges that were supported by an arsenal of incriminating evidence. Although the authors (Lehr supplies the grit and Zuckoff the sympathetic touch) assiduously reconstruct the events surrounding the pointless double homicide (Parker and Tulloch made off with a whopping \$340), the authors appear to have been reluctant to omit any mundane detail or passing commentary, bogging down their energetic narrative in its own research. But the authors nicely expose the strange relationship between these two boys, their muddleheaded motivations for the crime, and Tulloch's arrogant and volatile personality, disregarded by his family and teachers as youthful exuberance when in fact it was the self-absorbed posturing of a burgeoning psychopath. 16 illus. not seen by PW. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In January, 2001, Half and Susanne Zantop, popular professors at Dartmouth College, were

murdered in their home in New Hampshire. Clever detective work linked knife sheaths found at the scene to a pair of teen-agers, Robert Tulloch and Jim Parker, who lived in an isolated Vermont town thirty miles away. Confronted by police, the boys fled; eventually, they were tracked down in Indiana. Parker, the sidekick, struck a plea bargain that may free him in sixteen years, but Tulloch pleaded guilty and received a sentence of life without parole. Zuckoff and Lehr, who covered the case for the Boston Globe, examine in fascinating detail the ordinariness of the boys' grudges—typical high-school controversies about the student council and the debate team—and how, in Tulloch's twisted mind, the idea of random killing became an obsession. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker

Some aspects of the book appealed to me that were perceived as negatives by other reviewers. That's just a matter of personal preference. There is a lot of detail about the area, the people and their history. I like that. I feel I'm learning from it. But some will find it to be annoying filler. There is also some repetition of parts of the crime. To me it worked for the story. And of course the story is about the senseless slaughter of a couple of Dartmouth college professors by a couple of spoiled, arrogant teenagers for no reason other than the thrill of it. What they did is incomprehensible to most of us. It a fascinating read.

I suppose reading *In Cold Blood* spoiled me. In this genre, it's hard for any author to live up to that one. Apart from any fault in the writing, I think the problem with this book stemmed from the subject matter -- idiotic motives of the two teenage killers, Tulloch & Parker. Randomness...banality...teen angst. These guys were such boring morons that it was probably hard for the author to create a lot "complexity" to this book. They were so absolutely guilty that even they realized that going through a contested trial was pointless. They were so stupid about how they went about it that they were bound for prison. No mystery here at all. Still, the author captures the horror of this crime. But the sheer pointless-ness of the crime only increases the irony I felt for accomplished people like the Zantops. They had led such meaningful lives. It's such a shame that they experienced such a meaning-less death at the hands of these two juvenile psychopaths. I'm so sorry for the Zantop family -- the victims seemed like wonderful people.

A lengthy accounting of the murders of two Dartmouth college professors, the two young killers, their incredulous friends, teachers, families and community, and their totally innocent victims. This was a much deeper exploration of the individuals involved than I generally find in the genre, and, as

such it seemed slightly tiresome at times. But it was well written and quite engrossing overall.

Very straightforward and detailed look into the minds and lives of the Dartmouth Killers, Robert Tulloch and James Parker. Reminiscent of Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood", but with not as much description and feeling. Truman Capote had spent much time with Perry Smith, building a relationship with him, that virtually destroyed Capote in the end. The authors of this book interviewed people related to the murders and not the actual murderers themselves. This makes the book much more clinical and detached in feeling than Capote's book. It's still good, but doesn't give quite as much insight into the mind and heart of the "good boy", James, as Capote's does into the mind of Perry Smith. Both books delve into the criminal psychology of how one pathological person can seize control of the mind of another person, who may have the same proclivities but may never have acted upon them without the "push" from the other. Interesting study. Not detailed enough into the early childhood of either boy. Left me feeling there was a lot unsaid, or many questions unasked other than to those who saw no wrong in the boys. Many "allusions" to those who saw problems, but the people who seemed to see problems, weren't interviewed. Perhaps the wounds were too deep, or the crimes too fresh for people to talk. As stated, interesting, but left unsatisfied if you were really looking for answers. Was Robert a sociopath? Were James' tears at his sentencing truly for the family of those he murdered, or only for himself? We'll never know.

This was a very interesting book because the author takes you behind the scenes and gives you glimpses into the mindsets of Parker and Tulloch. I was interested in this crime because I remembered the news broadcasts and seeing both in handcuffs and wondering Why? What would inspire two teenagers to kill this couple? And the two professors who loved life and their work and each other, their lives I wanted to know more about. The author took me on a journey behind the scenes and into these four lives and all the other lives this crime affected and even though I gained an understanding somewhat, all it did really was compound the original sadness of such promising loss, the couple killed and the murderers in prison. Well written, although at times I wanted to get to the end. The writer explains these lives in true detail.

Too much time spent on back story. Way, way, too much. The births of the Zantops, the charter and beginnings of the city of Chelsea hundreds of years ago, actually even listing the food prices at some of the cafes when there is a high school football game being played. I didn't feel that any of this was a necessary part of the story? I skipped a lot but do not feel like I missed anything. It is an

okay book.

I liked how thoroughly researched this book is. It's a long story but worth the time it takes to read it. I also liked the explanation of "psychotic" and "psychopathic" behavior. I had not understood the difference. It gave me insight into the characteristics of each and how to discern who might have those characteristics. I recommend this book to everyone who enjoys reading about true crime. However, it's a long book with lots of details, so if you like reading only short stories, this is not for you. But it's a learning experience so I gave it a try and enjoyed it. I gave a 5 star rating because it's so well written, documented and organized.

This account of the grisly murders of two Dartmouth professors, husband and wife, Hal and Susanne Zantop, examines the lives of the pair of teenage perpetrators and just what led them to the random killing of people who were strangers to them. In contrast to the bored youths is the author's picture of the potential victims, a couple who loved each other, their students, and education, professors who truly cared about the world they lived in. In this story we meet the worst of mankind and the best. The result is more a tribute to goodness than just the depressing tale of two boys sinking deeper into the vicious banality of evil.

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