



## City of Saints

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Winner of the 2011 Hillerman Prize—an engaging historical mystery set in 1930s Salt Lake City starring a newly-minted Mormon lawman

To the outside observer, Salt Lake City seems to be the squeaky-clean “City of Saints”—its nickname since Mormon pioneers first arrived. Its wide roads, huge Mormon temple topped by a horn-blowing angel, and orderly neighborhoods give it the appearance of the ideal American city. But looks can be deceiving.

When beautiful socialite Helen Kent Pfalzgraf turns up dead, Salt Lake County Deputy Art Oveson—a twenty-something husband, dad, and devout Mormon just getting his start—finds himself thrust into the role of detective. With his partner, a foul-mouthed, vice-ridden former strikebreaker, he begins to pursue Pfalzgraf’s murderer—or murderers. Their search takes them into the dark underbelly of Salt Lake City, a place rife with blackmail, corruption and murder.

Throw in a cowardly sheriff seeking reelection, a prominent local physician with a host of skeletons in his closet, and swirling rumors of an affair between the murder victim and an elusive Hollywood star, and you’ve got *City of Saints*, a mystery based on a true yet largely forgotten murder that once captivated the nation but still remains unsolved eighty years later.

## City of Saints Details

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Author : Andrew Hunt

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## From Reader Review City of Saints for online ebook

### Stewart says

First off, I want to say that City of Saints was NOT what I expected it to be. I went into this book expecting a dark book filled with mystery and Mormon intrigue. Now don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed the book, it just didn't fit my prior expectations.

City of Saints is a fictionalized version of a true unsolved murder that occurred in Salt Lake City in the 1930s. Andrew Hunt took a lot of liberty in telling the story so very little is true to fact other than time periods and a few renamed characters. In my opinion this was actually a pretty smart move on his part because he turned this story into a fabulously exciting tale that kept me wanting more. The writing was smart and fun and gave just enough depth to have a degree of realism to the plot. The ending was somewhat disappointing but I think it was probably quite a challenge to find a resolution to the story that both satisfied us as readers and held true to the actual murder that took place.

My only real complaint about City of Saints is that the time period didn't feel authentic. Honestly, the way it was told, the story could have occurred in the 2000s and I wouldn't have known better. There was very little effort made to place the reader in the 30's. I would have loved to feel more authenticity of that time period but really the only thing that makes you realize it's even occurring during that time is the occasional mention of a Model A and a reference to the date.

Overall, the book was better than I expected despite being nothing like I thought it would be. Enjoyable to the very last page!

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### Chris Norbury says

An interesting concept and premise (a 1930 murder mystery set in Salt Lake City, based on a real case) combined with a unique character (a squeaky clean young Mormon deputy sheriff) and high praise and awards attracted me to this book, but the book did not live up to the promise or the praise.

The premise was okay but I didn't get an in-depth feel for the era like I have in the historical novels of Ken Follett or other comparable authors. Art Oveson seemed like a fish out of water dealing with the criminal element in SLC as well as dealing with the foul mouth and crude behavior of his partner, Lund. The clash of cultures (Mormon clean living compared with "normal" lifestyles) was always jarring, especially since the dialogue and much of the narrative was overly proper, polite, and petty (Too much, "How are you?" "Fine, you?" "Not bad. Nice weather, huh?" Etc., Etc., Etc.) Those weren't direct quotes--just illustrating the chitchat nature of much of the dialogue).

The story was also plagued by far too much excruciating but unnecessary detail. 1930s telephones, party lines, and dealing with operators were discussed 3 or 4 too many times. Once was enough.

The plot proceeded at a languid pace, mainly due to the excessive details and drawn out conversations. No character stood out as being memorable--with the stock appearances by the crooked sheriff, loving wife, cute children, evil attorney, wealthy socialites. Mainly because the reader wasn't given enough *interesting* detail about the characters.

Altogether, a curiously uncomfortable book to read because of the prim and proper MC and stiff, polite narrative laced with occasional outbursts of violence and foul language. It was a mix that didn't work for me.

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### **Nikki says**

I loved so many things about this book!!

I loved the setting, the detective's character, the historical details. The first half of the book, 5 all the way. Though the ending was forced, I loved the tone so I'm sticking to my 4 and an overall recommendation to read away.

Note: the back-cover made me feel like I'd be reading a Mormon-expose, which this was not. It's general fiction with one character who is authentically devout living among people--some of whom share his faith, some of whom don't. Within each camp, moral and immoral decisions are made. That's one of the things I liked best about it. Religion is portrayed as a belief-system and/or a cultural heritage, not a personality trait. :)

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### **Joyce says**

This is the first book I've read by this author. It interested me for a couple reasons: it won the Tony Hillerman prize ( and I love Tony Hillerman!), and I love reading stories based in the southwest. This is a murder mystery and it's actually a fictionalized version of an actual murder that took place in that city in 1930. The story was a little slow moving at first, but became more interesting and fast-paced by the halfway point. In fact, from then on, I didn't want to put it down. The author is a history professor and incorporates some Salt Lake City history into his storytelling. I think there is a good possibility that we'll see "Art Oveson" , the main character, in another book or maybe even a series, in the future.

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### **Anna says**

Mehhh. Creative crime storyline, but written as flat as a pancake. Skip.

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### **Doug Calvert says**

Interested read. Keeps you guessing until it all get wrapped up tight, complete with confessions. But the ending left me feeling a bit disappointed somehow. Still, very fascinating historical context. Well thought-out and overall well executed.

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### **judy says**

Sorry but this book was just horrible. I forced myself to read to page 100 just to give it a chance. The green, sweet little Mormon sheriff seriously annoyed me. The author's attempt to add background for SLC and weave in some Mormon practices was spectacularly boring and ham-handed as well. The book was set in the

30s. That worked. At one point, for me, the dialog and the characters turned into a black and white movie from that era complete with jerky movements and squeaky voices. The author is a history prof. who has written non-fiction. I urge him to return to that. Hopefully, non-fic is his forte. BTW, at least a decade ago I read a Mormon murder series. It was good, proving that it can be done.

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### **Susan says**

When beautiful socialite Helen Kent Pfalzgraf turns up dead, Salt Lake County Deputy Art Oveson—a twenty-something husband, dad, and devout Mormon just getting his start—finds himself thrust into the role of detective. With his partner, a foul-mouthed, vice-ridden former strikebreaker, he begins to pursue Pfalzgraf's murderer—or murderers. Their search takes them into the dark underbelly of Salt Lake City, a place rife with blackmail, corruption and murder.

Throw in a cowardly sheriff seeking reelection, a prominent local physician with a host of skeletons in his closet, and swirling rumors of an affair between the murder victim and an elusive Hollywood star, and you've got *City of Saints*, a mystery based on a true yet largely forgotten murder that once captivated the nation but still remains unsolved eighty years later.

While the story was interesting and the main character a man of principle, I was disappointed in how foul-mouthed his partner was. Did people really drop the f-bomb like this in the 1930s, and were all the big socialites in Salt Lake so rotten and promiscuous? When the reader pronounced Manti as "Man-tee" the book also lost points. I have to wonder about the agenda of the writer.

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### **Noel says**

I really really wanted to like this, but the inaccuracies were just too overwhelming. You just can't go to Lagoon in February.

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### **Neil says**

This is the story of the murder of an adulterous socialite in 1930 Salt Lake City, based on a true case. Art Oveson of the Sheriff's Department investigates, but he's also caught up in departmental politics, Mormon vs. Nonmormon sectarianism, and family rivalries, all making his investigation more challenging.

Since I was born in Utah, lived in Salt Lake City for almost 10 years, have family history there, and am interested in history in general, I was quite looking forward to this novel. On the historical level, it does not disappoint, and I really enjoyed the thorough integration of the streets and sites of 1930 Salt Lake City into the story. The setting here isn't just window dressing, it's quite well used. It's rare to see locations other than the world's biggest cities profiled well in historical novels, so this was refreshing. I think the social history is slightly less believable. The Utah I remember was more provincial in some ways in the 1980s and 1990s than the book's Utah is in 1930. The attitude of the characters towards some of the things they encountered (adultery, abortion), particularly that of the protagonist who was a practicing Mormon, seemed a little more progressive than I could entirely believe.

As a mystery, the book is OK. The plot is fine, but stylistically it's a bit flat. If the author writes more about this character or in this setting, I will definitely read it, but perhaps can't recommend it quite as strongly to someone without an interest in the place or period.

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### **Alger says**

An undemanding read that has the bones of a good mystery novel, has the edge of being a kind of true crime novel, but Hunt completely lacks the chops of a good fiction writer when it comes to characterizations and dialogue. His primary characters are vague and defined mostly by quirks that they exhibit relentlessly, while the peripheral characters are empty suits that are easy to confuse and never really come to life.

The biggest smile of the novel came at the end where Hunt cited a pictorial local history book as a source of period detail. This explains why the fabric of Salt Lake City is described in so much detail while the people are not.

Hunt is equally bad at presenting the investigation as a mystery. It develops as a police story entangled with politics, which is fine. The problem comes when he needs to explain why the investigation continues after the official process closes the case. The tone and tenor of the characters and the case does not change one iota even as the bodies begin to pile up (view spoiler).

This is my first Hillerman Prize winner, and I am happy to see that they have decided there needs to be a prize for writers of Hillerman's quality.

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### **Kim says**

Minor spoilers. Being a non-mormon born and bred Utahn, as well as 2nd generation law enforcement, I was really interested in this book. I'm sorry it didn't hold up to it's promise. It didn't help going into the story knowing this is still an unsolved cold case. I found the lead character, Deputy Oveson a weak spined coward. He's so scared of losing his job, he can't even find the guts to stand up to the Sheriff even after being awarded the reward money that will help see him thru. Even if you stop to think he could probably find another job in law enforcement with his background, something the author never mentioned. He's more worried about his wife being the main bread winner, he would rather cower. He would let a possibly innocent man get framed and a guilty man go free rather than stand up for what he felt was right.

I also felt the synopsis was misleading. I felt it implied a stronger personality conflict between Oveson and his partner, which was not true.

I just can't get by with such weak characters, and again quit reading at about the half way point.

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### **Brian Durfee says**

Bland is the best way to describe this from the writing style to the story. The book is set in 1930s Salt Lake. I live in 2013 Salt Lake. Hunt didn't transport me back in time whatsoever! Shame that. Cuz had he done just that I woulda given this 5 stars--and the writing/story would not have seemed so ho hum.

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## **Stephanie says**

If you're not Mormon and are hoping to read a "Mormon mystery" or get some info about the church, this is not the place to find it. The main character is LDS, as are several of the characters, but that just provides some background for the story.

If you are Mormon and are looking for a "Mormon mystery", this is also not the place to find it. This is not a feel-good story with characters that share your standards- even several of the ostensibly Mormon characters are corrupt or even evil. This is a noir mystery with all the trappings of that genre- sex, violence, bad language, etc. Covenant did not publish this book.

Now that's out of the way, I liked it. I think what I liked the most was the insight into my home town as it was back in the 30s. I love looking at old photographs of the city, and it's fun to pick out landmarks that are still here, so I enjoyed reading about places that I know (I live close to Hawthorne Elementary, which is mentioned in the book, and Liberty Park- and I can testify that there is still no parking for the Pioneer Day fireworks because people park on my street, two blocks from the park).

I thought the story was paced well, with some suspense, but the writing itself bugged me a little. It felt like the author was so concerned with establishing an accurate picture of the time that he included too many details, interfering with the flow of the story a little. But I didn't notice it as much by the end of the book, so either I got used to it or he stopped doing it.

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## **Elizabeth McIlhaney says**

Although I really enjoyed the story, especially since it was based on a cold case from almost a century ago, I was disappointed that the Mormon theme was not given more complexity among the various characters. Why even mention that certain characters were Mormon unless it was a clue to fascinating aspects of their character and lives that would be developed throughout the novel? That wasn't the case in this book. I guess I was expecting something more exciting, similar to "Big Love," the popular TV series about Mormon bigamists living in contemporary times. This was a well-done crime mystery that just happened to take place in a city with a lot of Mormons in it, but that could have happened in any city, given the way the story was told. The Salt Lake City, Utah and Mormon history the writer included were educational in an academic sort of way, but every religion has its underbelly, and the writer didn't even let on that the Mormons have one, much less expose any of it. What a missed opportunity. Although not a Mormon, my mother was raised around many, her brother became one later in life and got his wife and adult children to convert, and one of my brothers taught some during his public school teaching career. All of this happened in other SW states, not Utah. So my perspective on the Mormon aspect of the story is three-generational, going back to the beginning of the 20th century.

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