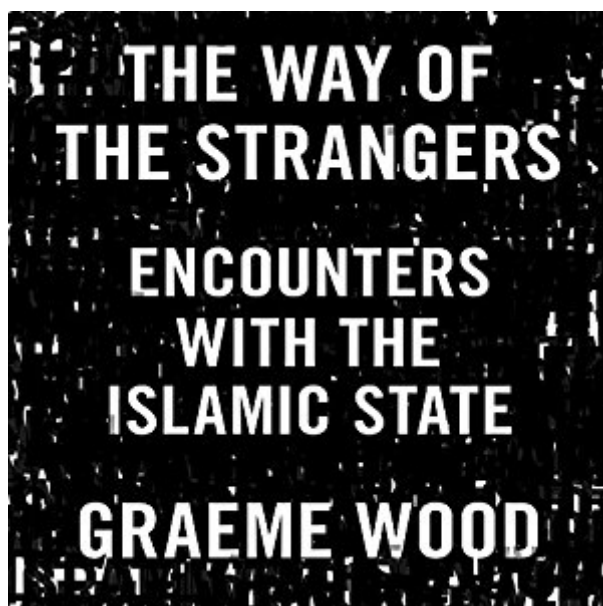


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The Way Of The Strangers: Encounters With The Islamic State



Synopsis

The author of the explosive Atlantic cover story "What ISIS Really Wants" has written the definitive, electrifying account of the strategy, psychology, and theology driving the Islamic State. Tens of thousands of men and women have left comfortable, privileged lives to join the Islamic State and kill for it. To them, its violence is beautiful and holy, and the caliphate a fulfillment of prophecy and the only place on earth where they can live and die as Muslims. *The Way of the Strangers* is an intimate journey into the minds of the Islamic State's true believers. From the streets of Cairo to the mosques of London, Wood interviews supporters, recruiters, and sympathizers of the group. We meet an Egyptian tailor who once made bespoke suits for Paul Newman and now wants to live, finally, under Shariah; a Japanese convert who believes that the eradication of borders - one of the Islamic State's proudest achievements - is a religious imperative; and a charming, garrulous Australian preacher who translates the group's sermons and threats into English and is accused of recruiting for the organization. We also learn about a prodigy of Islamic rhetoric, now stripped of the citizenship of the nation of his birth and determined to see it drenched in blood. Wood speaks with non-Islamic State Muslim scholars and jihadists, and explores the group's idiosyncratic, coherent approach to Islam. The Islamic State is bent on murder and apocalypse, but its followers find meaning and fellowship in its utopian dream. Its first caliph, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, has declared that he is the sole legitimate authority for Muslims worldwide. The theology, law, and emotional appeal of the Islamic State are key to understanding it - and predicting what its followers will do next. Through character study and analysis, Wood provides a clear-eyed look at a movement that has inspired so many people to abandon or uproot their families. Many seek death - and they will be the terror threat of the next decade, as they strike back against the countries fighting their caliphate. Just as Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower* informed our understanding of Al Qaida, Graeme Wood's *The Way of the Strangers* will shape how we see a new generation of terrorists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From the moment it downloaded to my Kindle early this morning, I have not been able to stop reading it. It exposes the religious foundation for ISIS and does not dance around the reality that indeed ISIS is very much a well considered implementation of historic Islamic teachings and practices. The author is a self-described atheist, so he can not be accused of being on some sort of Christian Crusade, against the Jihadists. No, this book is simply his eye and ear witness accounts with those persons who are part of the ISIS movement and champions of what its goals are. He allows them to explain the philosophies of the most "radical" form of Islam that is the foundation of ISIS, but the form of Islam most true to its origins. If you are ready to read something not filtered through the self-chosen ignorance of Western media, you will learn what ISIS is really about all about and why it does what it does. It's a very necessary splash of cold, hard reality. At our peril we neglect this reality. Whether the West cares or not, the fact is ISIS is determined to wipe all Western societies off the map and will stop at absolutely nothing to do so. "Compromise" and "diplomacy" are alien concepts. We are war with radical Islam, make no mistake about it. You won't after you read this book.

Wonderful and enjoyable read. I'm amazed at how many ISIS supporters Mr Wood was able to track down and interview. I also appreciate that he doesn't talk down to the reader or politicize what is a very political topic. Just straight reporting; he explains the history of the group, the factions, the current situation, etc - all the facts for you to make your own judgments. There are also some hilarious bits which surprised me for the topic. ISIS is, and will continue to be, a major factor for future policy around the globe... if you're looking to learn more about who they are and what they want, I highly recommend.

In poker, one of the biggest mistakes you can make is to underestimate your adversary. The Islamic State (IS) is one adversary that both Westerners and Muslims have underestimated *and* misunderstood. Cause let's face it who really gets IS anyway? Even to an educated audience, they seem like a jumble of names (ISIS? ISIL?

Da'esh? different from Al Qaeda?), leaders, factions and philosophies falling somewhere between incoherence and chaos. How did they come about? Are these guys even Muslim? What's up with the beheadings, amputations, and sex slavery? What compels so many seemingly nice young men to leave everything behind and join them in Syria? And why are they so damn mean?

"The Way of the Strangers" places IS in an historical, religious, geographic and ideological context so by the end of it we can all say, "Aahh, *now* I get it."

First of all, IS is definitely Muslim, even though most Muslim scholars and laymen hate to admit it. Wood shows how IS goes out of its way to justify its odious behavior with Muslim scripture. Its interpretations may be capricious and biased towards bloodthirsty nihilism, but they're not coming out of thin air. I particularly appreciated Wood's taxonomy of the various interrelated Islamist movements. He does a great job of tracing the IS ideology back to its sources, showing the fault lines that cause communion and clash amongst the extremist factions. The descriptions are precise; never again will you conflate Wahhabis, Salafis and Dhahiris at a cocktail party. Where the book really shines is in Wood's encounters with flesh-and-blood IS devotees, many of them converts. Musa (born Robert) Cerantonio the Australian; Hesham Elashry, the Egyptian tailor; Hassan Ko Nakata, the mild-mannered Japanese academic; "The Avenger" (really); and the family of the gnomish Yahya Abu Hassan, who grew up a mere 20min away from Wood's own childhood Dallas home. Through these characters — mentally nimble but ideologically pigheaded, hospitable in manner but advocating brutish violence — you come to appreciate the internal logic of IS, and how a token bookish, socially awkward young man could get drawn into its certainties. You also apprehend the incredible darkness of it all. Even as they try to invest IS with a patina of their own Utopian desires, Wood shows the underlying ambivalence and disappointment of the IS adherents he interviews.

Unfortunately, "the tragedy is that even those inverted visionaries who live to realize their error will never be able to undo the misery they have inflicted on so many others."

What's most remarkable about the book is that it exists at all. Wood is apparently fluent in Arabic and conversant in a fistful of other languages, as he goes to Cairo, Tokyo, Oslo, Mindanao (Philippines), Alexandria, London, Dallas and lord knows where else to meet these characters. He's knowledgeable enough about Islamic history and scripture as to debate, gain the grudging respect and even *befriend* many of these people of odious creed. They pay for his meals and invite him in their homes without even poisoning him once. Maybe they all gave him a pass in hopes of the big prize for converting an atheist.

Nevertheless, he probably ended up endangering his life several times to write this book. Don't know about you, but if some faction out there hated me and were hell-bent on annihilating me, my civilization and everything I value, I'd like to know more about them. Graeme Wood gives you an authoritative, level-headed peer into the abyss of IS to better understand the origins and intentions of this formidable enemy.

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