



Summary

In *Tangled Vines*, bestselling true crime author John Glatt reconstructs the rise of the prestigious Murdaugh family and the shocking double murder that led to the downfall of its patriarch, Alex Murdaugh.

Among the lush, tree-lined waterways of South Carolina low country, the Murdaugh name means power. A century-old, multimillion-dollar law practice has catapulted the family into incredible wealth and local celebrity—but it was an unimaginable tragedy that would thrust them into the national spotlight. On June 7th, 2021, prominent attorney Alex Murdaugh discovered the bodies of his wife, Maggie, and son, Paul, on the grounds of their thousand-acre hunting lodge. The mystery deepened only months later when Alex himself was discovered shot in the head on a local roadside.

But as authorities scrambled for clues and the community reeled from the loss and media attention, dark secrets about this Southern legal dynasty came to light. The Murdaughs, it turned out, were feared as much as they were loved. And they wouldn't hesitate to wield their influence to protect one of their own; two years before he was killed, a highly intoxicated Paul Murdaugh was at the helm of a boat when it crashed and killed a teenage girl, and his light treatment by police led to speculation that privilege had come into play. As bombshells of financial fraud were revealed and more suspicious deaths were linked to the Murdaughs, a new portrait of Alex Murdaugh emerged: a desperate man on the brink of ruin who would do anything, even plan his own death, to save his family's reputation.

Courtesy of the publisher



About the Author

English-born JOHN GLATT is the author of more than thirty books including *The Lost Girls* and *My Sweet Angel*, and has over thirty years of experience as an investigative journalist in England and America. He has appeared on television and radio programs all over the world, including Dateline NBC, Fox News, ABC's 20/20, BBC World News, and A&E Biography.

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Discussion Questions

1. Were you familiar with the Murdaugh family and their crimes before reading this book? Have you read anything about the court case that took place after this book was published?
2. Talk about the “good old boy” system that ran throughout the Murdaugh family business and throughout the Southern culture in general. What role did these attitudes play in the events described in the book?
3. The Murdaughs demonstrated a great sense of entitlement throughout their lives. How did this effect them and the people they interacted with? Do you think this entitlement was inevitable, or could the chain somehow have been broken?
4. Discuss the issue of parental liability for their children’s crimes. How much, if any, responsibility do you think Maggie and Alex Murdaugh should have been required to take for Paul and Buster’s behavior?
5. What was the role of social media as evidence in the boating accident? How might this event and its consequences have been different if it had taken place before social media was so prevalent?
6. What do you think really happened to Gloria Satterfield, the Murdaugh family housekeeper? Were you surprised by the way the Murdaughs reacted after the incident?
7. There were so many criminal activities/deaths occurring within the Murdaugh family. Which were especially memorable or had the most impact for you? Why?
8. What do you think life will be like in the future for Buster, the surviving Murdaugh son?

Reviews

Bestseller Glatt (*The Doomsday Mother*) tells the stranger-than-fiction saga of South Carolina's Murdaugh family in this exemplary work of true crime. While many readers will be familiar with the allegations that attorney Alex Murdaugh killed his wife, Maggie, and 22-year-old son, Paul, in 2021—resulting in his 2023 conviction and double life sentence—Glatt deepens the story by placing those murders in the context of the family's history. The Murdaughs “dominated a huge swath of South Carolina's luscious Lowcountry, epitomizing power, justice, and big, big money” by serving as the equivalent of district attorneys at a time when state laws also permitted them to maintain a lucrative civil practice; they were well-known locally as both prosecutors and personal injury lawyers. Leading up to the murders, Maggie was beginning to consider filing for divorce, and Paul had been indicted for homicide after drunkenly crashing a boat and killing one of its passengers. All of this, Glatt explains, motivated Alex to act in desperate defense of the family legacy and their accumulated fortune, supporting this thesis by digging into the scope of both their influence and their wealth. Through his judicious use of police records, interviews with sources including local historians, and Alex's own jailhouse phone calls (including one where he laughs off his crimes, saying “it is what it is”), Glatt has produced the equivalent of a juicy John Grisham novel, featuring a lead more “dark and totally devoid of conscience” than anyone he's ever researched. This real-life Southern noir lingers. (Publishers Weekly)

The horrific double homicide may have thrown the South Carolina low country into an unflattering national spotlight, but the murders of Maggie and Paul Murdaugh are but two in a series of tragedies. At the center is Maggie's husband and Paul's father, Alex, a former lawyer descended from a long line of South Carolina prosecutors. Investigative journalist and veteran true-crime author Glatt (*The Doomsday Mother*, 2022) tells the story, from the first Murdaugh solicitors to hold office through Alex's 2023 trial, including the several deaths in Alex's orbit: Stephen Smith, his son Buster's classmate, who was found dead under suspicious circumstances in 2015; longtime housekeeper Gloria Satterfield, who died after allegedly tripping and falling on the Murdaugh's property in 2018; Mallory Beach, Paul's 19-year-old friend, who was killed in a 2019 boating accident while Paul was driving drunk. And of course, the 2021 shooting deaths of Maggie and Paul on the family hunting property. Adding to the horror, Alex all the while was stealing millions from his clients' settlements, including from the sons of his deceased housekeeper. With the flurry of recent coverage, including Netflix and Dateline documentaries, readers will be swept up in this account of the circumstances that enabled such tragedies. (Booklist)