



Heaven's Gate: America's UFO Religion

Benjamin E. Zeller

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2015 Best Book Award from the Communal Studies Association

In March 1997, thirty-nine people in Rancho Santa Fe, California, ritually terminated their lives. To outsiders, it was a mass suicide. To insiders, it was a graduation. This act was the culmination of over two decades of spiritual and social development for the members of Heaven's Gate, a religious group focused on transcending humanity and the Earth, and seeking salvation in the literal heavens on board a UFO.

In this fascinating overview, Benjamin Zeller not only explores the question of why the members of Heaven's Gate committed ritual suicides, but interrogates the origin and evolution of the religion, its appeal, and its practices. By tracking the development of the history, social structure, and worldview of Heaven's Gate, Zeller draws out the ways in which the movement was both a reflection and a microcosm of larger American culture. The group emerged out of engagement with Evangelical Christianity, the New Age movement, science fiction and UFOs, and conspiracy theories, and it evolved in response to the religious quests of baby boomers, new religions of the counterculture, and the narcissistic pessimism of the 1990s. Thus, *Heaven's Gate* not only reflects the context of its environment, but also reveals how those forces interacted in the form of a single religious body.

In the only book-length study of Heaven's Gate, Zeller traces the roots of the movement, examines its beliefs and practices, and tells the captivating story of the people of Heaven's Gate.

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