

AFTER THE BLAST: A MILITANT ISLAMIC LINK

Newsweek

March 15, 1993 : \$2.95

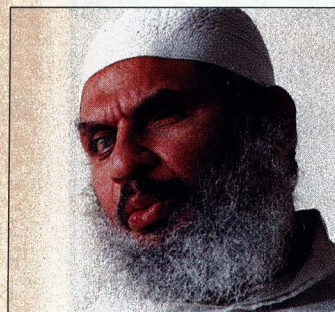
SECRETS OF THE Cult



After the raid, a federal agent comforts a fallen comrade

■ The Secrets of the Cult

In the wake of a botched raid that left four federal agents dead, self-described prophet David Koresh and about 100 followers remain under siege in their Texas compound. Koresh has predicted the apocalypse—and now it may be upon them, putting an end to a cult notable for its leader's voracious sexual appetite and demands for strict obedience. **Society: Page 52**



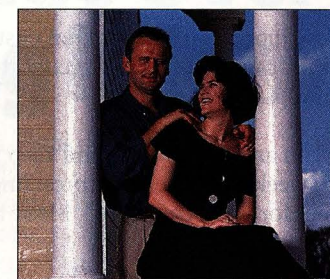
Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman

■ After the Blast: An Islamic Link

Investigators thought it could take months to begin solving the Twin Towers bombing. But a mangled truck chassis led to the Little Egypt section of Jersey City and a suspect: a guileless Islamic fundamentalist who clearly kept dangerous company. Though they haven't linked him to the blast, officials are also watching a blind sheik whose fiery rhetoric may have inspired violence in the past. **National Affairs: Page 28**

■ This Lawyer Always Wins

Three years ago, John Grisham was a lawyer in a Memphis suburb. One day he had an idea for a novel. Now he's got four best-selling legal thrillers to his name and Hollywood in his pocket. But while he awaits publication next week of his latest, "The Client," Grisham is starting to feel a bit handcuffed by the formula he has perfected. He's awfully rich—but he's restless. **The Arts: Page 78**



With his wife, Renée, at home

Letters to the Editor should be sent to NEWSWEEK, 444 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022, and subscription inquiries to NEWSWEEK, The NEWSWEEK Building, Livingston, N.J. 07039. NEWSWEEK (ISSN 0028-9604), March 15, 1993, Volume CXXI, No. 11. In Canada subscription inquiries should be sent to NEWSWEEK, Inc., P.O. Box 4012, Postal Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 2K1, or call 1-800-634-6850 for change of address and 1-800-631-1040 for all other inquiries. Canada Post International Publications Mail (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 546593. Canadian GST No. 123-321-309. Unless otherwise indicated by source or currency designation, all terms and prices are applicable in the U.S. only and may not apply in Canada. NEWSWEEK is published weekly, \$41.08 U.S. a year and \$61.88 Canadian a year, by NEWSWEEK, Inc., 444 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022. Richard M. Smith, Editor-in-Chief and President; Tina A. Ravitz, Secretary; Joanne O'Rourke Hindman, Controller. Second Class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to NEWSWEEK, The NEWSWEEK Building, Livingston, N.J. 07039. Printed in U.S.A.

Newsweek

National Affairs

After the blast: an Islamic link	28
A cleric's violent message	32
Sheik Omar: "I didn't break the law"	33
An army of eternal victims	34
Why won't Senator Packwood quit?	36
Health care: a covert operation	37
Robert J. Samuelson	38

International

The Bosnians' trail of "white death"	40
The making of a political muddle	43
Oops, maybe we shouldn't have	44
Italy's crusaders: throwing the bums out	49
Somalia: have troops overstayed their welcome?	51

Society

Thy kingdom come (the cover)	52
The messiah of Waco	56
Cultic America: a tower of Babel	60
From prophets to losses	62
Media: The incendiary aftershocks	65
Medicine: Is it sadness or madness?	66
A big break in Lou Gehrig's disease	66
Justice: When to hold 'em and when to fold 'em	68
Sports: Passion on ice	69
This Penny is worth millions	70
Cities: Rethinking Chicago's troubled projects	71

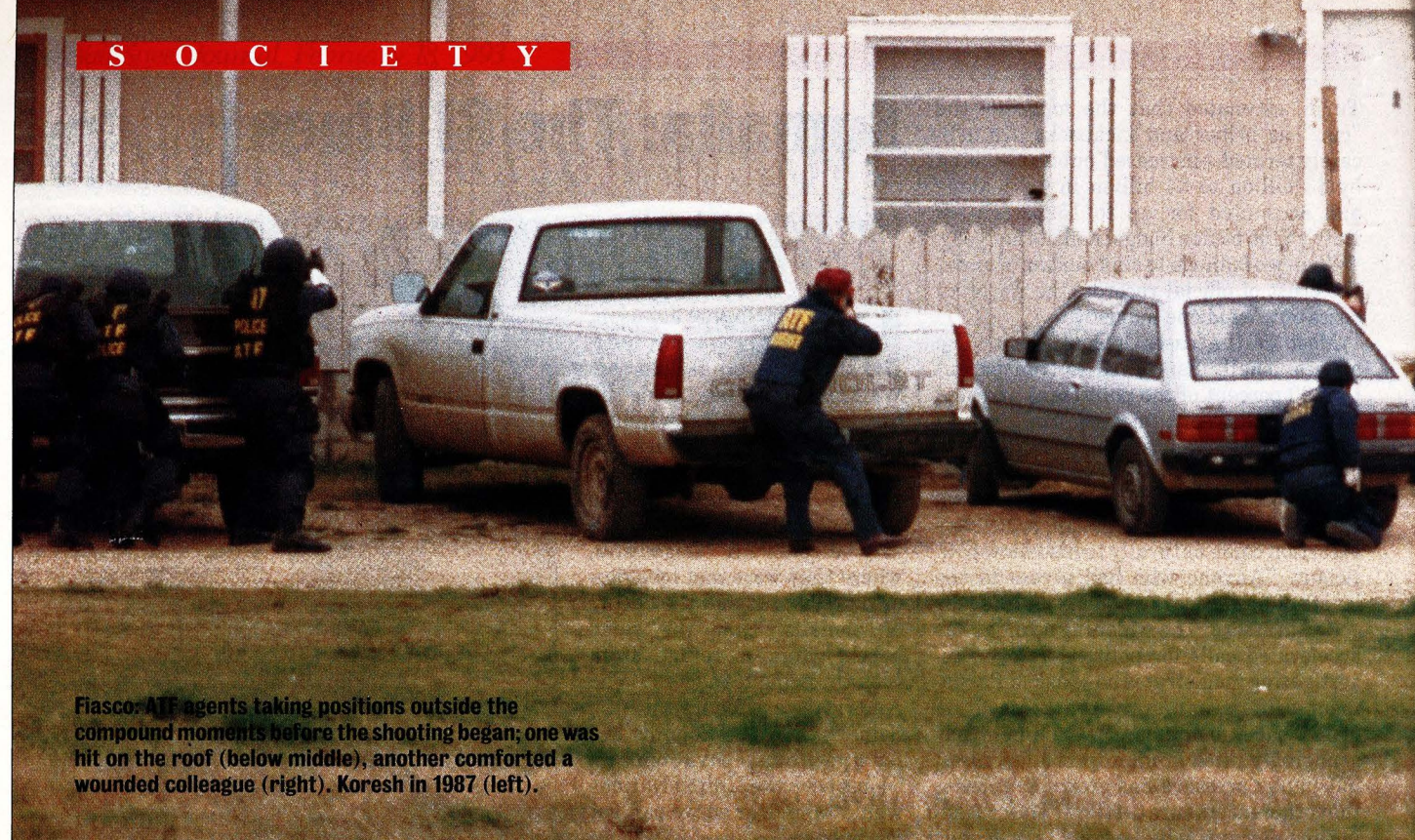
The Arts

Art: Fade from white	72
Movies: Three passionate family affairs	74
Books: Denazifying a Nobel laureate	76
In praise of divas who talk like Oscar Wilde	78
Book 'em	78
Theater: This goodbye is a bad buy	82
Fool's gold on Broadway	

Departments

Periscope	6
My Turn	10
Letters	14
Perspectives	25
Newsmakers	83
Transition	83
Meg Greenfield	84

Cover: Photo by Waco Tribune-Herald/Sygma.



Fiasco: ATF agents taking positions outside the compound moments before the shooting began; one was hit on the roof (below middle), another comforted a wounded colleague (right). Koresh in 1987 (left).



THY KINGDOM COME

A peaceful Sunday in Texas turns bloody. Four federal agents die. And a band of religious fanatics prepares for the last days.

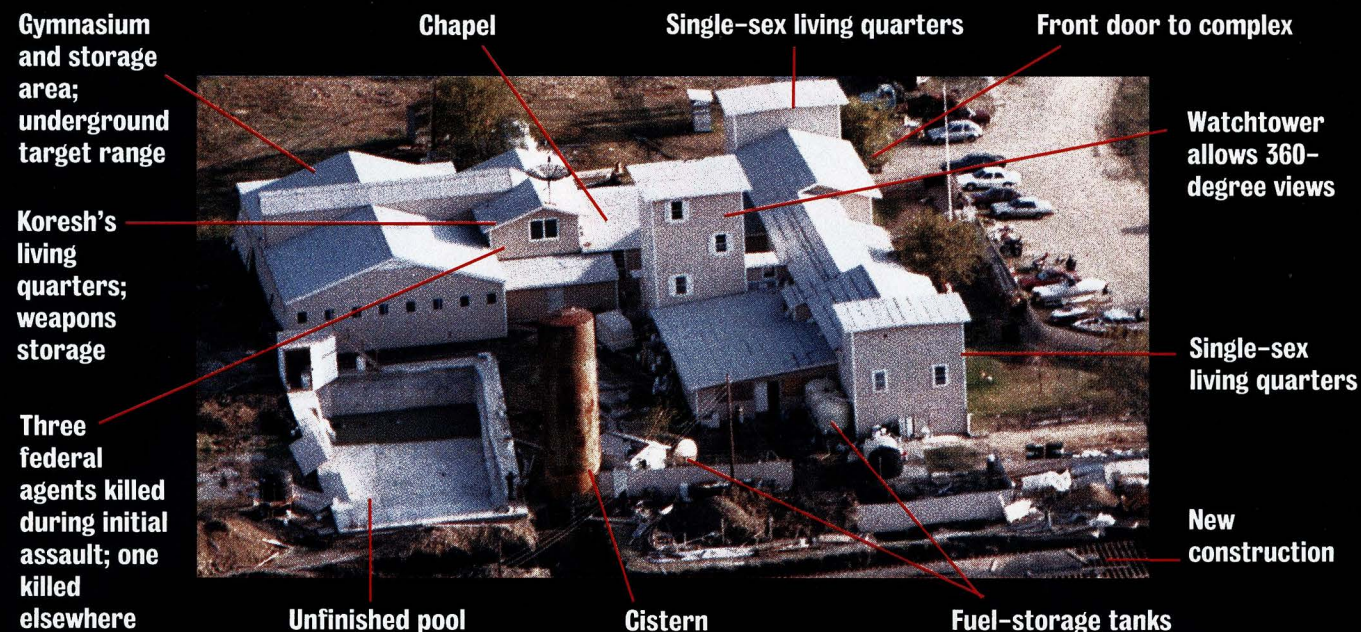
SECRETS OF THE CULT

One of the deadliest days in U.S. law-enforcement history began quietly on the flat plains outside Waco, Texas. About 8:30 Sunday morning, an undercover agent who had infiltrated the bizarre cult known as the Branch Davidians heard the phone ring in the group's sprawling compound. Soon after self-styled Messiah David Koresh was fervently reading Scriptures. The agent apparently thought little of the call at the time. He left and reported an "all clear" to his waiting colleagues from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

The ATF walked into an ambush. About an hour later, more than 100 agents in blue jumpsuits and flak jackets took up positions around the compound, only to be met by a hail of gunfire from assault rifles and semiautomatic weapons. As agents hoisted ladders and climbed onto the



RANCH APOCALYPSE: INSIDE THE CULT'S COMPOUND



BOBBY SANCHEZ-WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD—SYGMA

roof of the building, they were peppered with gunshots coming through the walls. Three National Guard helicopters closed in and also came under fire. Two were hit and forced to land. When the shooting had stopped 45 minutes later, four ATF agents were dead, 15 others lay wounded and Koresh was holed up inside the compound with more than 100 followers, including 38 young children, and enough guns and ammunition to wage a little war.

The assault turned into a siege. By the weekend the force encircling the compound had grown to more than 400 federal agents, buttressed by state and local police, SWAT teams, armored personnel carriers and Bradley fighting vehicles. No one knew what carnage was inside. Early on, Koresh told radio stations by phone that his 2-year-old daughter had been killed and he'd been hit in "the gut" in the gun battle. He also left a message on his mother's answering machine in Chandler, Texas: "Hello, Mama. It's your boy... They shot me and I'm dying, all right? But I'll be back real soon, OK? I'll see y'all in the skies." Koresh evidently made a miraculous recovery over the next few days—granting frequent interviews before agents cut his phone lines and promising to surrender if a rambling 58-minute discourse was aired. Several stations played it. But Koresh didn't come out. He said God had told him to wait.

The Feds waited, too, determined to avoid more bloodshed. As the week wore on, Koresh released 21 children and two

elderly women, but he still had 47 women, 43 men and 17 kids—some of whom he fathered—with him inside. How long they would last was anybody's guess: the group had stockpiled enough food for months and had its own wells and power generators. Families as far away as Britain and Australia, where Koresh recruited followers, waited for word of loved ones. "They are all at the mercy of this man. We can only hope he comes to his senses," says Lloyd Hardial, whose sister moved from Manchester last year to join Koresh.

Making sense of the raid was a difficult task, too. Bill Clinton let it be known that he wanted answers. "What the hell happened here?" Mack McLarty, his chief of staff, demanded of a top Justice Department official. But Justice was equally baffled. The ATF, a division of Treasury, had launched the operation, based on intelligence that the Branch Davidians were amassing heavy armaments. Clinton ordered the rival FBI in, and the bureau quickly took over, deploying its elite Hostage Rescue Team. Some FBI agents brought along Bibles. "This guy's a Bible-citing machine," said one. "We have to speak his language."

Publicly, authorities were united in their efforts to subdue Koresh peacefully and not fix

blame for the fiasco—at least until it was over. But FBI and other experts blasted the ATF's tactics, beginning with the decision to take the compound by force. "It's against our doctrine to do a frontal assault when women and children are present," said one FBI man. ATF officials said they had investigated the cult for months and practiced the raid repeatedly. "We were outgunned.

"What the hell happened here?" Embattled ATF agents carrying

KWTX-TV—SYGMA



Why the Raid Went Wrong

- The federal agents lost the advantage of surprise. Cult leader Koresh may have been tipped off by a phone call; was suspicious of undercover agent in the group.
- Intelligence glitch. The Feds didn't expect cult to have their guns ready; thought Koresh would be praying or napping.
- Several agents had no cover; were easy targets for high-powered weapons.
- Failed to negotiate in advance. With children inside, assault was wrong tactic.

How Long Can They Last?

- Authorities say about 100 people are inside; most used to short rations.
- Cult members reportedly have stockpiled tons of grain—mostly rice and millet—and crates of canned goods.
- Compound has two electric generators and a stockpile of batteries.

They had bigger firearms than we did," said spokesperson Sharon Wheeler. "'Outgunned' is a euphemism for 'outplanned,' or 'unplanned,'" said former New York City police commissioner Benjamin Ward. "They did it backwards. The accepted way is to talk first and shoot second."

That seems particularly apt in a potential hostage situation. There were eerie

their wounded and retreating from the scene as a tense stalemate with cult members began

ROD AYDELOTTE-WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD—SYGMA



parallels to the Idaho incident last year with white supremacist Randy Weaver. Feds had been after Weaver for months, but he was holed up, armed, in a cabin with his family. Washington sharpshooters came and fire fights erupted, killing Weaver's son, his wife and a U.S. marshal. He remained barricaded with two wounded adults and three girls, holding off 200 agents for 11 days before negotiators persuaded him to surrender. (One ATF source noted that the U.S. marshals answer to Justice officials: "Their underwear is not entirely clean in these situations either.")

Clearly the ATF had lost the element of surprise in the Waco raid, and either not realized it or decided to forge ahead anyway. The Los Angeles Times reported that even before agents had deployed from the staging area in downtown Waco, one was heard shouting: "We gotta move. He's been tipped off. He's nervous and he's reading his Bible and he's shaking." ATF officials denied that report but refused to comment on most other aspects of the raid, leaving rampant speculation about how the group might have been tipped. Conceivably, cult members could have monitored police scanners. The Waco Tribune-Herald reported that just before the raid, a voice came over saying, "There's no guns in the windows. Tell them it's a go."

The Tribune-Herald also played a role in the events. The day before the raid, the paper began publishing an extraordinary series on the cult based on months of reporting. ATF officials had asked the paper to hold off, citing its own investigation. The paper ran it anyway, citing a duty to warn

the public about what editor Bob Lott called "this menace in our community." Curiously, the Tribune-Herald also had seven staffers in the area of the compound when the shooting started Sunday morning.

Koresh was pretty savvy himself. Close followers told reporters the group had been suspicious all along of the undercover agent and a colleague who had moved in across the road; the agent visited at times, professing interest in the Bible. Had Koresh lured the Feds into an ambush?

There were other questions, too: why hadn't ATF agents tried to apprehend Koresh on one of his forays outside the compound? Officials claimed he had stopped venturing out. But Waco merchants said they'd seen him in recent weeks, perusing gun shops and sipping iced tea at a pub. Some residents said the Koresh they knew didn't match the macabre portrait painted by the Feds. "He was like a regular Joe," said Margaret Jones, who liked talking religion and politics with him. "The people with him certainly didn't seem brainwashed."

But some former cult members thought authorities should have stepped in long ago. Much of the warnings about Koresh's activities came from a breakaway group in Australia. The group hired a private investigator to alert local lawmen; he was told authorities couldn't act without more evidence. Last spring officials of the Seventh-day Adventist Church heard from colleagues in Sydney that the Branch Davidians were planning a mass suicide for Easter Sunday. About the same time the State Department got word from sources in Australia that Koresh's group was stockpiling arms and planning suicide. State passed it on to ATF, which began its investigation in June.

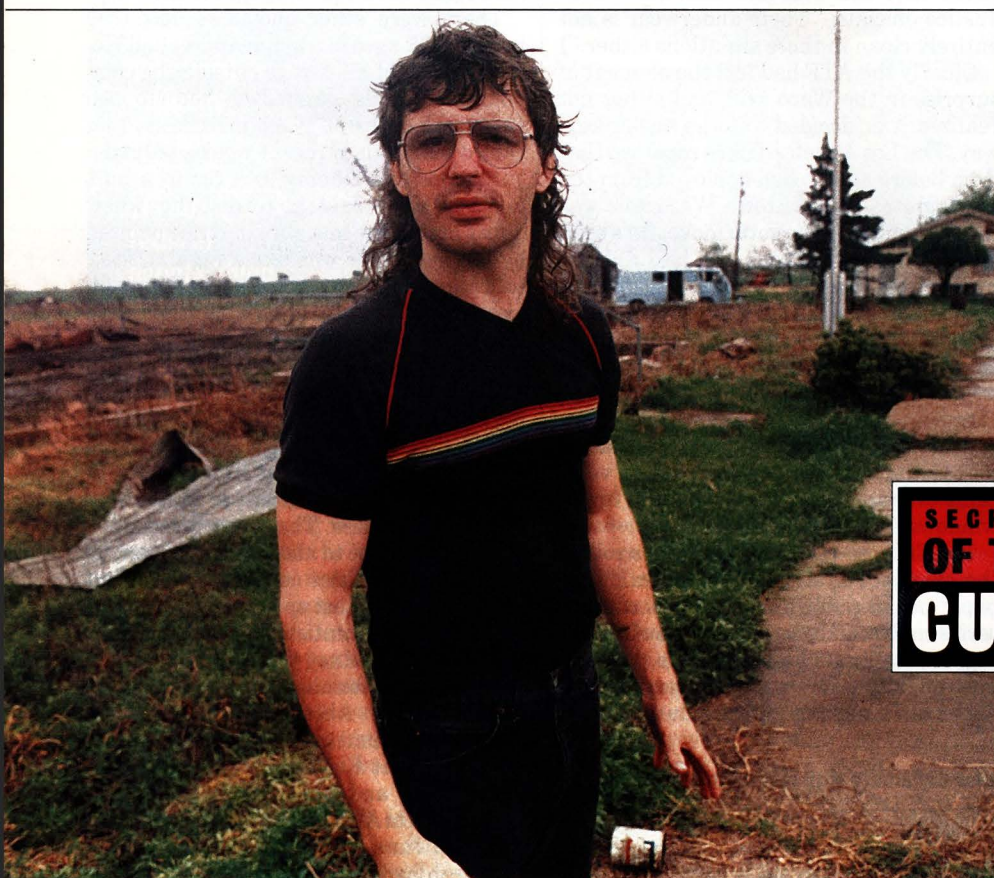
Koresh had been charged with attempted murder in a dispute with a rival cult leader in 1987; his trial ended in a hung jury. Vic Feazell, the local district attorney at the time, said he came to like the cult members: "They're peaceful and nonaggressive unless they are attacked." By going in, guns blazing, the ATF played right into the group's apocalyptic vision, he said. "They would see this as a holy war provoked by an oppressive government."

At the weekend Koresh told negotiators he had no plans for suicide—and he was growing irritated at reports that he claimed to be Christ. Call him a prophet, he said. But Messiah or madman, the fact remained that Koresh and his followers had killed more ATF agents in one bloody Sunday than had died in any day in the bureau's history, and the Davidians would remain a dangerous threat until the stalemate ended.

MELINDA BECK with GINNY CARROLL and PETER ANNIN in Waco, MELINDA LIU and BOB COHN in Washington and bureau reports

The Messiah of Waco

He loves God and he loves women. He has total control over the lives of his followers who believe his message: the Apocalypse is nigh.



WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD—SYGMA

He failed as a musician, but as a leader Koresh could get his adherents marching to his beat

Young girls and old women, innocent and worldly, virginal and fecund. Within the walls of the kingdom on the flat plains of Texas, David Koresh knew them all—in the Biblical sense, former followers say. He began a decade ago with Lois Roden. She was 67 and the widowed leader of the Branch Davidians when the 23-year-old Koresh, still called by his birth name of Vernon Howell, arrived at the Mount Carmel compound. He confessed to the group that he worried about his excessive masturbation. Ex-members say Roden felt sorry for him and they became lovers, even tried to have a child. Koresh now disavows the union, saying she was as ugly as Medusa.

His next lover was at least a little bit closer to his own age. In 1984, he married Rachel Jones, the 14-year-old daughter of

two followers; she bore him a son, Cyrus, and a daughter, Star. Koresh claimed to be monogamous for two entire years. But then, followers say, God told him to build a new House of David, one with many wives, just as King David had. Many wives, like Robyn Bunds, then 17, and later, her mother, Jeannine, 50. Robyn Bunds says Koresh fathered her 4-year-old son, Shaun. According to the Waco Tribune-Herald, she fled when Koresh took up with her mother. Both women now live in California.

As the years passed, the "wives" got younger and younger. Michelle Jones, 12, was his wife Rachel's little sister and, an ex-follower says, Koresh's special favorite. At least a dozen other nubile members of the flock succumbed; they wore Star of David pendants, a sign that they had been chosen. When the ex-husband of one Branch David-

ian heard that his 10-year-old daughter was wearing the star, he sued for custody and, after winning, whisked her away to his home in Michigan, according to the Waco paper. Former followers say Koresh claimed to pick his wives for their spirituality; it was probably just a coincidence that they were all good-looking. Some are now young mothers whose children's birth certificates show no father's name—a way of hiding the divine plan from civil authorities, according to the Waco paper.

Many of the girls' parents were Koresh's followers; they gave their blessings because "they believed in his message," says Robyn Bunds's brother David. All in the name of God, of course. Koresh often preached from the 45th Psalm, where it is written that the king's head is anointed with the "oil of gladness." Koresh's unique analysis: the oil refers to vaginal secretions. During intercourse, his "wives" anoint the head of their king's penis.

It sounds like crazy talk now. Who could have believed it? But there they were, dozens of devotees, lured to a lonesome place on the Texas prairie by the promise of salvation. They had traveled from all over the country and beyond—Hawaii, Britain, Australia. Koresh had recruited many on his forays around the globe in search of new blood. Some turned all their worldly goods over to him. In several cases, that amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. They were holed up in the fortress with the man who claimed to be both a prophet king and a warrior angel with the keys to heaven. Maybe even the Messiah.

He was a ninth-grade dropout, but his knowledge of the Scriptures was so formidable it truly seemed superhuman. And he could talk for hours and hours and hours, from early morning to well past midnight, while they listened until they could hear no more, not moving, not eating, not sleeping. "They lived in constant fear," says Rick Ross, a deprogrammer who counseled a former Branch Davidian. "He developed a crisis mentality, constantly talking about the end of the world, telling them they always had to be ready for the aggressors who would come from without the walls to destroy them." They

were ready for Armageddon, and when federal agents stormed their fortress, it must have seemed as though the Last Days had begun.

This wasn't what the Creator had in mind. The Branch Davidians are an offshoot of a schism of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their ancestors are the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, founded in the 1930s by Victor Houteff, a Bulgarian émigré and prominent Los Angeles area Adventist, who bolted to Texas when a book he had written upset church officials. Houteff believed that the Adventists had become lax. "He believed that the return of Christ was imminent but that it could not happen until there was a purer church that could receive Christ," says Bill Pitts, a Baylor University religion professor who has studied the sect.

Houteff attracted scores of members to his semicomunal farm in Waco, but the organization began to fall apart a few years after his death in 1955. His widow, Florence, took over the helm and moved the group to the current site. In 1959, Pitts says, she proclaimed that the Kingdom of God would arrive on Easter Day. Hundreds of followers across the country sold everything, quit their jobs and made the trip to Waco for the big event. They were looking for some sign that the kingdom would be coming—a war in the Mideast or some other signal of cataclysm. Alas, the Lord didn't come and the failed prophecy shook the Davidians to the core. "After two or three weeks," says Pitts, "they experienced what is called 'The Great Disappointment'."

Although a core group of about 50 stayed in Waco after this sad episode, most of the Davidians moved on. A power struggle ensued. The group splintered and eventually a man named Ben Roden rose up and declared himself the leader of a new group, the Branch Davidians. Roden ruled until he died in 1978 and was succeeded by his wife, Lois.

Enter Vernon Wayne Howell. A would-be rock musician, he was the illegitimate son of Bonnie Haldeman. Born in Houston, he grew up in Dallas where he was raised as an Adventist. "He was a very bright little boy in lots of ways," says his maternal grandmother, Earline Clark of Chandler, Texas, "but when he started

school, he was dyslexic." He went to a special school for a year or so, but never did well. By the ninth grade, he had dropped out. Despite these difficulties, he studied the Bible and played the guitar, Clark says. At 18 he moved to Tyler, Texas, not far from Chandler, where he joined the Adventist Church. But his grandmother says local church leaders didn't care for his long hair and casual dress. Clark says Howell became disillusioned with the Ty-

power vacuum. Over the next few years, he bedded Lois Roden and married Rachel Jones, according to ex-adherents. After his marriage, he shunned the old woman, declaring that his beliefs were now the true revealed word. He had a charismatic manner and a scriptural answer for everything. "He knew the Bible awful well," says Doug Mitchell, a former member of the group who now lives in California. "He was always teaching that Sister Roden had lost her inspiration." Howell also pestered Roden to get rid of her son. Howell and George Roden got into a few fights (Howell's relationship with his mother couldn't have helped), and George began wearing a gun around the compound. It was the first weapon ever seen at Mount Carmel, Mitchell says. Around this time, Mitchell recalls going to consult with Lois Roden about some minor issue. "Ask Vernon," she said with a sigh. "He seems to be in charge."

What put Vernon in charge was his new revelation. He was the seventh and final angel destined to be the agent of God who brought about the end of the world. This was truly an apocalyptic vision, but it was also the logical conclusion of Howell's earlier prophecies. He had originally preached that the end would come when he moved to Israel and began converting the Jews. The conversion, he claimed, would cause worldwide upheaval, start a war and would cause American armed forces to invade the Holy Land. That would signal the beginning of Armageddon. Then Howell would be transformed into a warrior angel who would cleanse the earth in preparation for the New Jerusalem.

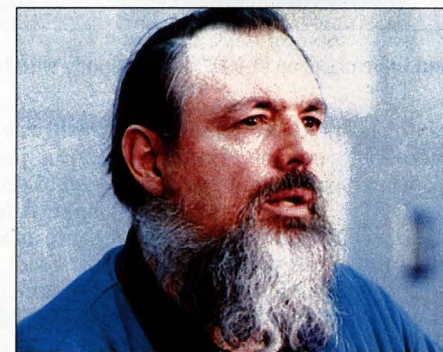
Howell actually went to Israel in the 1980s, but things didn't work out as he had predicted.

So he switched to Plan B. In 1990, he legally changed his name to David Koresh (Koresh is Hebrew for Cyrus, the Babylonian king who allowed the Jews to return to Israel). Abandoning the notion of an Apocalypse starting in Israel, he began predicting that the great battle would be in Texas, says David Bunds. The group would stay at Mount Carmel and await the moment when the American army attacked and brought about the end of the world.

In the meantime, they managed to keep



GAMMA-LIAISON



AP

Koresh arrived at Mount Carmel in the 1980s, became intimate with Lois Roden (above), then the cult's leader, and later wrested control from her son, George (left)

ler church and shortly thereafter moved to Waco to be with the Branch Davidians.

When Howell arrived, Lois Roden's control over the Branch was already waning. Her son, George, thought he should be his father's true successor, and some Branch Davidians were more than a little perturbed by Lois Roden's recent proclamation that the Holy Spirit was feminine. Former followers say they didn't like George Roden much, either. Thought he was nuts. Howell walked right into this

fairly busy with the mundane details of pre-apocalyptic earthly life. Howell and a core group of about 25 members left the compound after Lois Roden's death in 1986 and wandered through Waco, other parts of Texas and California. In 1987, they were living in the aptly named town of Palestine, Texas, when they decided to wrest back Mount Carmel from George Roden, who at that point claimed to be the true prophet of the Branch. Roden heard about their intentions and challenged his rival to a grisly contest. He dug up a coffin containing the corpse of an 85-year-old woman and announced that whoever of them could resurrect the woman was the true leader. Howell wisely declined to participate.

On Halloween of that year, Denise Wilkerson, then a prosecutor in Waco, received an unusual request from sheriff's deputies. Howell wanted to prosecute Roden for corpse abuse. "Given that it was Halloween, we thought it was a joke," Wilkerson says. Nevertheless, she told the sheriff's department that without evidence of a crime, say a photograph showing that there was actually a corpse in the coffin, she could not file charges. A few days later, in the early morning hours of Nov. 3, Howell and seven heavily armed comrades dressed in camouflage fatigues made their way from Palestine onto the grounds of Mount Carmel. Their alleged goal: to get a picture of the corpse. The invaders waited until many of the adults and children at Mount Carmel had left for work and school, then went from building to building warning members to leave because there might be trouble. One member notified Roden instead. Wilkerson says Roden grabbed his Uzi and a 20-minute fire fight followed. The sheriff was called and the shooting stopped. No one was killed, but Roden was slightly wounded in the hand and chest.

Howell and his men were charged with attempted murder and released on bond. Then Roden was jailed for contempt of court in an unrelated case after he filed "some of the most obscene and profane motions that probably have ever been filed in a federal courthouse," says Wilkerson. Howell seized the moment, moving his followers into Mount Carmel and fortifying the place.

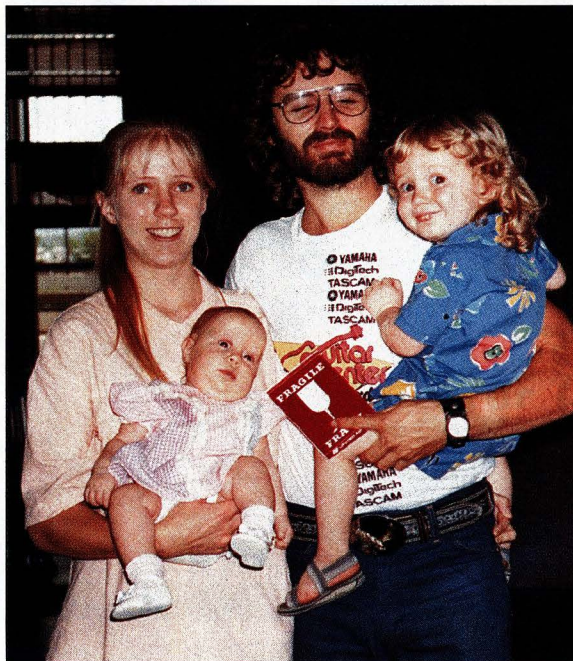
In early 1988, Howell and the seven members of his team went on trial for attempted murder. Claiming that he was

aiming at a tree, Howell admitted shooting in Roden's direction, and that his colleagues had merely fired their guns into the air to scare Roden into giving up. Howell's accomplices were acquitted, and Howell's trial ended in a hung jury. "After the verdict was announced," Wilkerson recalls, "a couple of jurors came over and hugged Vernon because they found him to be a very sympathetic character." Then, as the spectators were filing out of the courtroom, Howell invited everyone, including the jury, out to Mount Carmel for an ice-cream social.

A few months later George Roden got out of jail on the contempt charges and moved to Odessa. Not long afterward he was sent

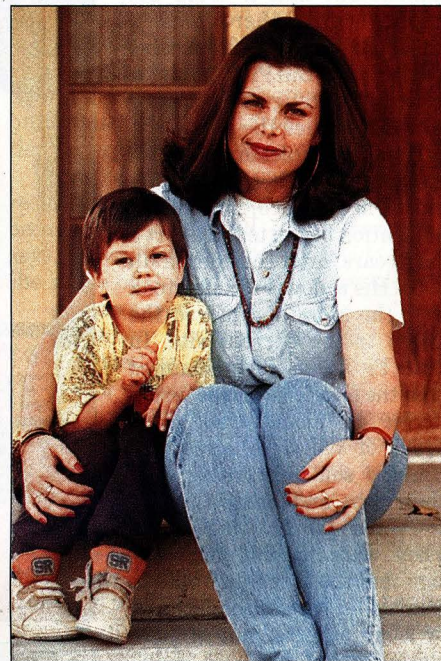
the only man allowed to have wives. Every other marriage was annulled. Many happily married couples in the group were shocked and quite a few left. Marc Breault was one of them. After moving to Australia, he organized other former Branch Davidians and hired an investigator to go to Waco to get local authorities to bust Koresh, according to the Waco paper.

In addition to the weird sex, there were charges of child abuse. Followers claimed that Koresh beat even very young children until they were bruised and bleeding. Koresh has denied these claims, and child-welfare workers who visited Mount Carmel said they found nothing wrong—although some followers say Ko-



ELIZABETH BARANYAI—SYGMA

Koresh with wife Rachel and their children in 1987, Robyn Bunds with her son, Shaun, in Los Angeles



WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD—SYGMA

to a state mental hospital after killing a man. (Still there last week, he said, "I've been trying to warn people about Vernon for years.")

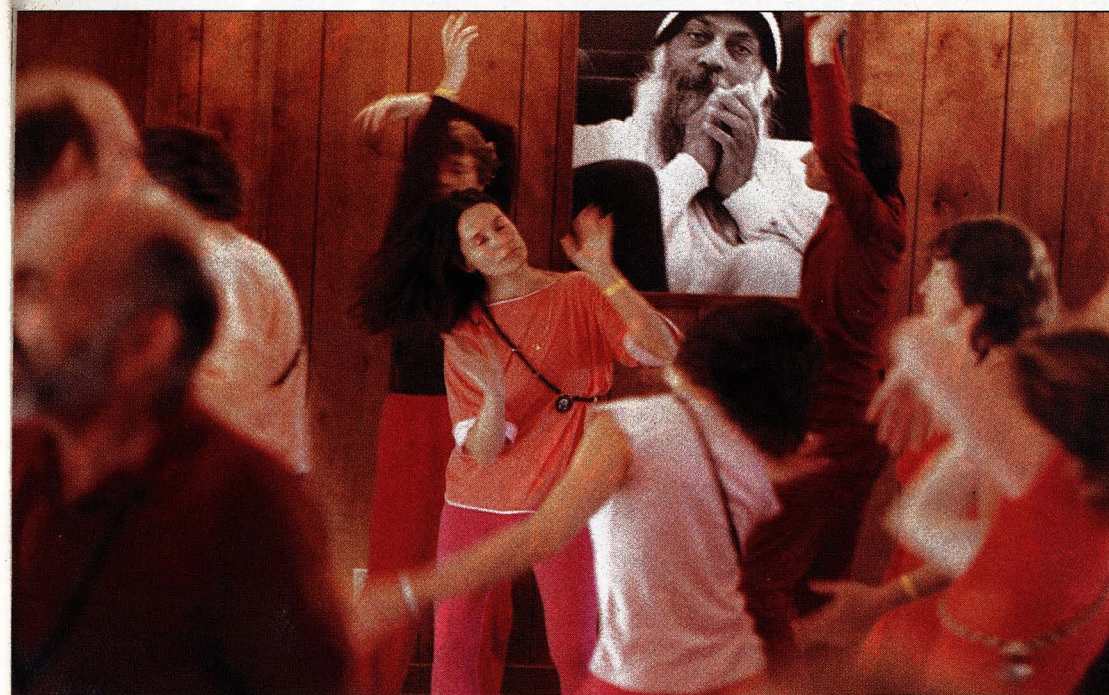
Since the trial, Mount Carmel has presented a quiet front to the outside world. Neighbors reported that Howell/Koresh was a regular guy, who often turned up at local clubs to listen to live music. Brent Moore, manager of the Chelsea Street Pub, says he last saw Koresh about a month ago, when he came to the pub with a man and a woman in their early 20s. They were happily chowing down bean and cheese nachos with iced tea.

But within the cult, former followers say life grew more and more bizarre. At the compound, there was an armed guard at all times and Koresh was in total control. In August 1989, former followers say, he announced that not only was he allowed to have as many wives as he wanted; he was

resh was tipped off before their arrival.

But just as Koresh had predicted, the end of the world—at least his world—was near. A few years ago a bus was buried to serve as a bunker; in recent months stores of food and ammunition have been brought in. None of the children Koresh released after the shoot-out were his, the heirs to the House of David, ex-members believe. So all is still in place for the grand finale. The adults, says Bunds, are probably happy to stay. "They are waiting to get zapped up to heaven where they'll be transformed and fight a war where they get to kill all their enemies . . . The only people that may be sorry are the parents who had to let their children be released." With the youngsters gone, they had but one life to lose for their prophet.

BARBARA KANTROWITZ with ANDREW MURR in Los Angeles, PETER ANNIN and GINNY CARROLL in Waco and TONY CLIFTON in Australia



LAFFONT—SYGMA

Followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh found bliss while he bought expensive sedans

Cultic America: A Tower of Babel

They tend to be small, scattered and strange. And on occasion their pursuers may outnumber their members.

Waco is a wake-up call. If the cult watchers are to be believed, there are thousands of groups out there poised to snatch your body, control your mind, corrupt your soul. Witches' covens, satanic rituals, Krishna consciousness, fanatic fundamentalists, black and white supremacists, New Age cosmic crazies—few are armed but most are considered dangerous. They'll seduce you and fleece you, marry and bury you. Warning: do you know where your children are?

Prophecy or paranoia—it's hard to judge. Christianity itself began as a cult and so did America's most distinctive, homegrown religious movements: Mormonism, Seventh-day Adventism and Christian Science. In religion, as in economics, the United States has always been free enterprising and market driven. Anglicans begat Methodists, Methodists begat Pentecostals, and Baptists now come in 57 colorful varieties. "That's why we

have the First Amendment," says Leo Sandon, professor of religion at Florida State University. "If people want to follow Donald Duck, so be it. The First Amendment guarantees neither taste nor truth."

But when Donald Duck turns out to be Charles Manson or Jim Jones, people die. Toward the end of the '60s, repeated shocks to the American psyche prepared the way for mesmerizing gurus. Coincidentally, changes in U.S. immigration laws allowed a number of Hindu, Buddhist and other spiritual masters to migrate here. Among them: the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, teacher of Transcendental Meditation whose followers now run a fully accredited university in Fairfield, Iowa; Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who purchased a ranch in Oregon, a fleet of Rolls-Royces, and has since died, and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the South Korean whose well-heeled Unification

Church is developing into a worldwide faith. Since these masters are their message, their movements are labeled by many as cults.

In religion, as in physics, actions breed equal and opposite reactions. Prodded by former cultists and parents who "lost" their children to the new religious movements, Christian and Jewish groups established an array of cult-watching organizations in the '70s. Today there may be more than 500 such groups, a figure that suggests that the watchdogs are almost as prolific as the cults they monitor. The largest is the Cult Awareness Network, which has 2,000 members in 20 cities and says it receives 18,000 complaints a year. And now these organizations determine what qualifies as a cult.

How many cults are there? The answer varies from 700 to

5,000, depending on whom you ask and what they mean by "cult." Sociologists routinely distinguish cults from sects, and sects from denominations or churches. Sects are usually offshoots of an older religious tradition and—if they thrive—often achieve the status of denominations. Cults are normally small, fringe groups whose members derive their identity and purpose from a single, charismatic individual. David Koresh is unusual in that he took over a heretical sect of former Seventh-day Adventists and turned it into a personal cult.

"The one thing all cults have in common is a leader who presents himself as the answer to all [the group's] questions and choices," says Woody Carlson, a sociologist at the University of South Carolina. But without further nuance that yardstick might well include everyone from Menachem Schneerson, the revered Lubavitcher rebbe, to Bobby Knight, the feared

Indiana University basketball coach. The best working definition of a cult distinguishes the destructive from the benign. Focusing on behavior rather than ideology or creed, Marcia Rudin, director of International Cult Education Program in New York, defines the destruc-

tive types as "groups which manipulate, mistreat and exploit their followers and misrepresent themselves both to their followers and to the outside society."

The groups that are among the most troubling, however, are those that may be armed. Very few of these are religious. According to former members, the Church Universal and Triumphant, an apocalyp-

SECRETS
OF THE
CULT

tic cult estimated at 5,000 in Montana, has amassed an arsenal. The movement, whose followers harken to the words of Elizabeth Clare Prophet, is an odd assortment of survivalists, mystics and doomsday-sayers. But a CUT spokesman says, "There's no stockpile of weapons. The only guns the church has are for hunting." Cult watchers claim that other, smaller groups hoarding food and guns are scattered throughout the West—but details are lacking.

Closer to the definition of a "destructive" but nonviolent cult is the blandly named Los Angeles Church of Christ, a branch of a movement that began in Boston and, with an estimated 100,000 members, is now the fastest-growing religious cult in cultic southern California. Headed by founder Kip McKean, the church alleg-

edly practices a particularly domineering form of "shepherding." According to cult watchers, each recruit is assigned a personal shepherd to whom they must report on their activities: when they wake up, what they eat, how often they masturbate and whenever they have sex with their spouses. Fraternizing with outsiders is discouraged and church permission is often required of college students before they visit parents. The church did not return NEWSWEEK's calls.

The cult-watchers network is now broadening its net. Researcher Rudin says that a new trend in cults stresses techniques rather than charismatic leaders and promises self-fulfillment rather than salvation. Instead of churches they use workshops but the result, Rudin insists, is the same "psychological hold, imprison-

ment and control over people's lives." These can be, she says, active on campuses and in corporate America, often appearing as benign efforts to help bring order and meaning to a chaotic culture.

Again, the wonder is that there aren't even more. In an age when millions of Americans feel codependent, when children readily label their families dysfunctional and there are as many therapies as there are pains, the search for a fast, fast relief can turn strange. G. K. Chesterton, an astute Christian apologist, once warned that when people stopped believing anything, they are prepared to believe everything. If the cult watchers are right, that time has come to pass.

KENNETH L. WOODWARD with CHARLES FLEMING in Los Angeles, SPENCER REISS in Miami, SCOTT RAFSHOON in Atlanta and ELIZABETH ANN LEONARD in New York

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Cults traffic in the prediction of disaster; sometimes they bring it on themselves. Manson, MOVE and Jones ended in death. Prophet awaits the final battle.



JIM JONES
The self-proclaimed messiah and over 900 followers committed suicide in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978

MOVE
To end a standoff, Philadelphia police bombed the radical group, killing 11, leveling two city blocks



PROPHET
Elizabeth Clare Prophet and her Church Universal and Triumphant await Armageddon in Montana

CHARLES MANSON
His 'family' murdered eight people, including actress Sharon Tate. He's serving a life sentence in prison.



From Prophets to Losses

Who joins a cult? The alienated and the vulnerable. Who leads? A charismatic with a vision and no taste for limits.

It can begin almost subliminally, with a couple of eye-catching sentences glimpsed among the notices for movers and painters at the bus kiosk: "Confused? Searching? Come meet kindred spirits. Refreshments." Or the approach might be direct—an alert recruiter chatting up the lonely soul at the back of the church, the dazed-looking freshman on the college library steps: "Why not look in on our group, we're getting together tomorrow night."

For Corey Slavin, it came from a co-worker. At 25, she was living away from her parents for the first time and feeling shaky, she confided. The other woman was reassuring. Corey's parents obviously didn't understand her, but never mind, she did—and so did God. From that comforting beginning, Slavin, who is Jewish, fell ultimately into the embrace of the Church Universal and Triumphant, a Montana-based Christian-cum-New Age group. The church leader had her followers build underground shelters against the coming nuclear holocaust while transmitting to them the amalgamated wisdom of "ascended masters," such as Christ, Buddha and Hercules. Before Slavin got out, she spent much of her time "decreeing"—repeating the sect's spiritual chant as much as five hours a day, at hypnotic speed.

It often happens that way in the cults. Ordinary people, many of them favored with sound intelligence and high education, are recruited at a point in their lives when the summons to some larger collective purpose seems just the antidote for their alienation. Gradually they're induced, under the sway of a mesmerizing leader and mind-numbing rituals, to surrender the judgment, the scruples and, sometimes, the savings of a lifetime. Slavin was one of the luckier ones. She stayed with the Triumphants only eight months, long enough to run through all her money, including the \$6,500 she paid for a space in the bomb shelters. When she was hurt in a tumble into one of the shelters, she was told it was because she wasn't "holy" enough. That started the doubts that led her to quit.

Outsiders usually shake their heads in disbelief at the more bizarre cultic practices. But in the calculated isolation that envelops members, almost anything is possible. At first, they are made welcome by fellow cultists, who seem always to be bliss-



UPI-BETTMANN
For obedience, nothing beats Jonestown's poisoned brew

fully smiling. "Belonging" boosts their self-regard, and the cult leader's often messianic agenda gives them a core belief that may have been lacking in their lives. But somehow they are also made to feel unworthy. Former members tell of a "1984" atmosphere that encourages cultists to monitor each other and report infractions.

Chosen ones: Sometimes, it appears cult leaders have all read the same operating manual. Many seem to know instinctively that an outside threat increases the cohesion of a group. They foster a them-and-us mentality: members are the chosen ones, and their mission is transcendent, whether it is building bomb shelters or preparing for the Second Coming. Everyone else is an "outsider" and a potential enemy—particularly family members.

Before long, a cultist's sense of well-being comes to depend on remaining close to oth-

er members. Social psychologist Richard Ofshe, who shared a Pulitzer for a newspaper exposé of the Synanon cult, says that the tie with peers is what ultimately binds the members. An intimacy develops among them, based on revealing weaknesses in collective sessions. "Then the leader," says Ofshe, "can use everything they revealed to manipulate them."

The leaders themselves have no peers to keep them in line. They may start out benignly enough, but their increasing power over their followers becomes intoxicating. Many present themselves as prophets, with special trunk lines to God. Eager to preserve the illusion, members will rationalize the leader's abuses ("He's just testing us"). In the process, says Marc Galanter, a psychiatry professor at New York University School of Medicine, "leaders who are not necessarily grandiose may become so. There's an interplay between leaders whose needs become increasingly bizarre and followers who are willing to serve their every need." At that point, danger looms. "When there's absolute control, it suggests something is quite pathological," says Alexander Deutsch, director of inpatient psychiatry at New York's Cabrini Medical Center. "The group and the leader get so bound together that it's almost as if they were part of the same organism." The only check on the leader is the limit of his imagination: Jim Jones led his

flock to a tub of poisoned Kool-Aid; former members say many Branch Davidians surrendered their daughters to David Koresh.

People, of course, do leave cults. They get out when their doubts begin to overwhelm their trust. In most situations, they're held back only by their own fears. "I've interviewed people who said they wanted to leave for six months before they told their spouse, fearing the spouse might turn them in—only to discover the spouse had the same desire and fear," says Ofshe.

After they've resumed normal lives, defectors may be as puzzled as the rest of us over how they joined a cult to begin with. Slavin, who went to Wellspring, an Ohio rehabilitation center for ex-cultists, and then to a psychotherapist before she could pick up her life again, is still trying to come to terms with the episode. "I know that I was in a vulnerable period," she says. "I felt lost. I didn't feel I could go to anybody." As it turned out, she went to the wrong people.

DAVID GELMAN