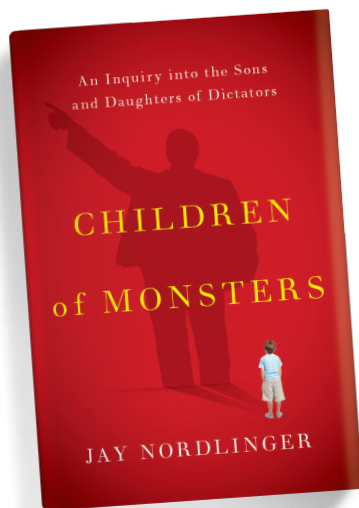


JAY NORDLINGER'S

# CHILDREN of MONSTERS

An Inquiry into the Sons and Daughters of Dictators



---

What's it like to be the son or daughter of a dictator? A monster on the Stalin level?

What's it like to bear a name synonymous with oppression, terror, and evil?

---

In writing *Children of Monsters*, Jay Nordlinger set out to answer that question. He surveys 20 dictators in all. They are the worst of the worst: Stalin, of course, and Mao, and Idi Amin, and Pol Pot, and Saddam Hussein, and so on. The book is not about them, though they figure in it. It's about their children.

Some of them are absolute loyalists. They admire, revere, or worship their father. Some of them actually succeed their father as dictator—as in North Korea, Syria, and Haiti. Some of them have doubts. A couple of them become full-blown dissenters, even defectors.

A few of the daughters have the experience of having their husband killed by their father. Most of these children are rocked by war, prison, exile, or other upheaval.

Obviously, the children have things in common. But they are also individuals, making of life what they can. The main thing they have in common is this: They have been dealt a very, very unusual hand.

---

---

## FROM CHILDREN OF MONSTERS WE LEARN THAT:

---

---

A son of Mussolini married the sister of Sophia Loren. Their daughter, Alessandra, is a member of the European Parliament. Earlier in her career, she was an actress, singer, and model. She appeared on the cover of *Playboy* (European editions): “The grit of Grandpa Benito, the sex appeal of Aunt Sophia Loren.”

---

Mao had ten children, by most counts. Several died young and tragically. He really knew just four of his children. He was phenomenally cold.

One of Tojo’s sons became chairman of Mitsubishi. One of Tojo’s daughters married an American and lives near Pearl Harbor.

Kim Jong-il’s first son, Jong-nam, lives abroad and occasionally argues for reform. So does his own son, Han-sol.

---

## ONE OF CASTRO’S DAUGHTERS DEFECTED AND BECAME A RADIO HOST IN MIAMI. SHE IS A STRONG ANTI-CASTROITE VOICE.

---

Qaddafi’s son Saadi was captain of the Tripoli soccer team. One day, Benghazi fans dressed a donkey in his jersey. He razed their stadium.

Another Qaddafi son, Mutassim, dated a Dutch *Playboy* model. He partied hard in Saint Barts. For entertainment, he would hire Beyoncé, Usher, Mariah, and more.

Saddam’s son Uday was the type to crash a wedding and rape the bride—leading the groom to kill himself.

---

## A GRANDSON OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI IS A FULL-BLOWN DEMOCRAT, WHO HAS CALLED FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THE KHOMEINIST REGIME, EVEN BY AMERICAN FORCE.

---

Late in life, Pol Pot had a daughter. As a schoolgirl, she was shy and kind. Teachers avoided all mention of the Khmer Rouge, not wanting to upset her.

Svetlana Stalin could not remember that her mother had ever hugged, praised, or kissed her. Try to imagine a household in which Josef Stalin is the more loving parent.

Jaffar Amin is one of his father’s 60 children. He works for reconciliation among Ugandans.

---

And there is a *great deal more*.

---



To schedule an interview with Jay Nordlinger contact:  
DEAN DRAZNIN | dean@drazninpr.com | 641.472.2257

---

---

# JAY NORDLINGER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“Jay Nordlinger is one of America’s  
most versatile and pungent writers.”

—PAUL JOHNSON, author of *Modern Times*



JAY NORDLINGER is a senior editor of *National Review*. He writes about a variety of subjects, including politics, foreign affairs, and the arts. He is the music critic of *The New Criterion*. His previous book is *Peace, They Say*, a history of the Nobel Peace Prize. The author lives in New York.

“Few writers are well qualified to  
write about the world’s cultures, and  
none more so than Jay Nordlinger.”

—ROBERT CONQUEST,  
author of *The Great Terror*

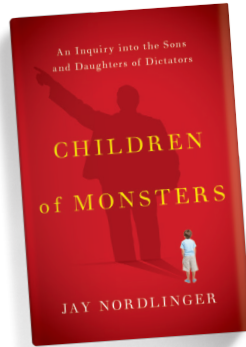
“Nordlinger offers a unique  
combination of depth and accuracy  
of knowledge with clarity and  
elegance of style. It is a pleasure  
to read sophistication without  
affectation.”

—BERNARD LEWIS,  
author of *What Went Wrong? The Clash between  
Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*

---

---

# PRAISE FOR CHILDREN of MONSTERS



“A magnetic page-turner that nonetheless is complex and deep. The fascinating and horrific details Nordlinger unearths flow together to pose important and disturbing questions about love, loyalty, history, and human nature. In the end, one is left somewhat shaken but profoundly grateful for the American Constitutional order. To the point where you say to yourself, thank God I live *here*.”

—MARK HELPRIN, author of *Winter's Tale*, *A Soldier of the Great War*, etc.

---

---

“This extraordinary book makes us all ask of ourselves: What would *we* do if we realized that our beloved father was also a blood-stained tyrant? Would we escape and denounce him—as Stalin’s and Castro’s daughters bravely did—or seek to help him and eventually succeed him in power—as Kim Jong-il, Bashar Assad and others did? Or would we just stay in denial? Jay Nordlinger’s exceptional investigation into the children of 20 modern dictators grips and convinces.”

—ANDREW ROBERTS, author of *The Storm of War*, *Napoleon*, etc.



To schedule an interview with Jay Nordlinger contact:  
DEAN DRAZNIN | [dean@drazninpr.com](mailto:dean@drazninpr.com) | 641.472.2257

---

---

JAY NORDLINGER

# Q & A



## How did this book come about?

**NORDLINGER:** I was in Albania—which had suffered one of the worst dictatorships in history. Enver Hoxha kept that country in a merciless grip. I wondered whether he had had children. And, if so, what their lives were like. What *they* were like.

## Some sons succeed their father as dictator. Who are those?

**NORDLINGER:** My book covers “Baby Doc” Duvalier in Haiti; Kim Jong-il in North Korea; Bashar Assad in Syria; and, back in North Korea, Kim Jong-un.

## Any other Duvaliers, Kims, or Assads waiting in the wings?

**NORDLINGER:** Yes, actually—in all three cases.

## Has a daughter ever become dictator? Has there ever been a female dictator?

**NORDLINGER:** You could count certain queens, and, if you stretched it, Indira Gandhi’s period of “emergency” rule. But mainly, dictatorship has been a man’s business. Several of the dictators in my book had daughters who *might* have succeeded the old man in “office,” had they been of the other sex.

## What is Hitler doing in your book? He didn’t have any children, did he?

**NORDLINGER:** Ah, but there was a claimant: a Frenchman named Jean-Marie Loret. And he believed himself the son of Hitler. (His mother, a French peasant girl during World War I, told him he was.) So *our* question is, What effect did this have on Loret? (By the way, he *looked* a lot like Hitler. As does his son.)

## What do dictators’ children have in common?

**NORDLINGER:** They are all individuals, and they have coped with their situation in various ways. Some are heroic, some are neither here nor there, and some are villainous. What they have in common is that they have been dealt a very unusual hand. A hard or tricky one, too.

## Stalin’s daughter defected to the United States, didn’t she?

**NORDLINGER:** Yes, in 1967. She “redefected” in 1984. And “re-redefected,” back to the United States, as soon as she could—which was a year and a half later.

## Have there been any dissenters in the Kim family?

**NORDLINGER:** One of Kim Jong-il’s sons is a semi-dissenter, and he lives abroad. According to reports, he has dodged assassination attempts by his half-brother, the ruling Kim.

## Any defectors in the Castro family?

**NORDLINGER:** Indeed, including two daughters.

## Tell us about the Qaddafi sons.

**NORDLINGER:** A gruesome crew. Totally gruesome. They had license, and they exercised it gruesomely.

## Saddam’s sons, Uday and Qusay—how bad were they?

**NORDLINGER:** Let me quote an Iraqi general, Georges Sada, who wrote a book called *Saddam’s Secrets*: “They were worse than Saddam, a hundred times over.” This



---

is hyperbole, of course—but understandable, once you get to know the boys.

---

**Do dictators leave terrible scars—emotional ones—on their children?**

**NORDLINGER:** Sure. And the ones who rise above, or even try to, you really admire.

---

**Did Idi Amin really have 60 kids?**

**NORDLINGER:** Yes, with 21 different women.

The first of his children was born in 1948, probably, and the last was born almost 50 years later: in 1996. He was a busy man, and a much-loved father to his children, actually.

---

**What kind of father was Pol Pot?**

**NORDLINGER:** He had a child, late in life—a daughter, when he was about 60. Evidently, he treated her very lovingly, very tenderly. And she remembers him with great fondness. (Pol Pot and his dictatorship killed about 2 million people, i.e., between a fifth and a quarter of the Cambodian population.)

---

**What is the ghastliest or most eye-popping story in your book?**

**NORDLINGER:** There are many, but anything having to do with Bokassa, the dictator of Central Africa, is pretty ghastly and eye-popping indeed. Put it this way: Two of his daughters were married in a double wedding. Before long, three of those four people were dead, along with the infant child of one of the couples. That's Bokassa for you.

---

**Which of the children, of all the children you cover, led the most fascinating life?**

**NORDLINGER:** Hard to beat Svetlana Stalin, whose life was tumultuous, almost unimaginable. But others

have had their own challenges, their own tumult, and their own unimaginability.

---

**What does your book tell us about nature vs. nurture?**

**NORDLINGER:** That is the \$64,000 question, or one of them. Consider Romania: The dictator Ceaușescu and his vicious wife, Elena, had two sons. One was a perfect monster: the little monster of bigger monsters. He raped and killed his way through life. The other son has never harmed a hair on anyone's head, so far as I'm aware. He has lived more or less blamelessly. And quietly.

---

**Why should people read your book?**

**NORDLINGER:** Well, that's not really for the author to say! But I'll take a stab at it. First, the book is a collection of interesting stories about interesting lives. (All too interesting, many of the "children" would tell you.) Second, a study of those lives enhances our understanding of tyranny, under which much of the world's population lives.

---

**Does the book also say something about the blessings of a free society and the rule of law?**

**NORDLINGER:** Indirectly, yes! I'll quote from a blurb by Mark Helprin, the novelist.

"In the end, one is left somewhat shaken but profoundly grateful for the American Constitutional order. To the point where you say to yourself, thank God I live *here*."

---

**PHOTO CREDITS:**

1. Papa Doc & Baby Doc Duvalier: Blackpast.org
2. Jean-Marie Loret: *Paris Match*
3. Svetlana & Father: Wikimedia Commons
4. Idi Amin: Blackpast.org
5. Bokassa: Wikimedia Commons



To schedule an interview with Jay Nordlinger contact:  
DEAN DRAZNIN | dean@drazninpr.com | 641.472.2257

---



AN EXCERPT FROM

# CHILDREN of MONSTERS



“You might contend that all of these dictators’ children are tragedies, but Saif is more tragic than most.”

Qaddafi had eight children. They came of two wives. He may have had an adopted child or two as well, but their existence is in dispute. . . . In a culture that especially prizes sons—namely, the Arab culture—Qaddafi was rich in them: He had seven. They were a gruesome crew, in the image of their father. A few of them vied to succeed him. One of the sons tried to go straight, which is to say, tried to be a good Western-style liberal or at least an Arab reformer. He made great strides in this direction. In the end, however, he returned to the fold, defending his father and the dictatorship with arms. Three of the brothers died in that war—the Libyan Civil War, which was fought in 2011—along with their father. Two of the brothers are today imprisoned in Libya. The other two live freely, in the Persian Gulf.

Moammar al-Qaddafi ruled Libya from 1969 until the end in 2011. They murdered him grotesquely. They did the same to his son Mutassim. Father and son were put on display in the city of Misrata. Their corpses were laid out in a commercial freezer at a market. For four days, Libyans filed by. . . .

Saif al-Islam was the dictator’s second son, and the first with his wife Safia. He was the one who tried to go straight: who tried to rise above dictatorship, embrace liberal values, and perhaps redeem the Qaddafi name. He was a playboy, like some of his brothers. But he was not a brute, and he had a sense that dictatorial rule, whether by his father or anyone else, was not right. . . .

In his happiest days, Saif was a toast of society, hobnobbing with Rothschilds and royalty in places such as Saint-Tropez and Corfu. (The royalty included at least two princes: Andrew of Britain and Albert of Monaco.) He touted friendships with Tony Blair, the British prime minister, and other democratic leaders. He surrounded himself with gurus and retainers, including three eminent political scientists from America. . . .

“THEIR CORPSES WERE LAID OUT IN A COMMERCIAL FREEZER AT A MARKET. FOR FOUR DAYS, LIBYANS FILED BY.”

He did not have a post in his father’s dictatorship, officially. He said that he would not accept a post until Libya had a constitution and a “more democratic and transparent” environment. One thing he did for his father was serve as a troubleshooter and negotiator. Qaddafi would dispatch his respectable son around the world in pursuit of Libya’s interests, or at least the dictatorship’s. . . .

The West was enamored with this son, understandably. He was a man you could do business with. *Newsweek* had an article about him titled “Our Man in Libya?” *The New York Times* called him “the un-Qaddafi.” *Esquire* magazine listed him as one of “The 75 Most Influential People of the 21st Century.” . . .

---

---

Always, in any number of forums, Saif talked about democracy, and the crying need for democracy in Libya and throughout the Arab world. One night, at dinner, an American congressional aide asked him, “What does Libya most need?” Saif said, “Democracy.” The aide said, “You mean more democracy?” Saif said, “No! ‘More democracy’ would imply that we had some.”

“IN HIS HAPPIEST DAYS,  
SAIF WAS A TOAST OF SOCIETY,  
HOBNOBBING WITH ROTHSCHILDS  
AND ROYALTY IN PLACES SUCH AS  
SAINT-TROPEZ AND CORFU.”

I myself encountered Saif once, in 2005. It was at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Qaddafi’s son was the guest at a “media coffee.” With about ten of us sitting around a table, he discoursed on a range of issues, including his pet theme, democracy. He said—and here I paraphrase, but closely—“Do you know why we Arabs have lost all our wars against Israel? Because Israel is democratic, and we are undemocratic. So, in one of our states, the worst general becomes army chief of staff, because he is no threat to carry out a *coup d’état*. Loyalty to the strongman is all that matters. Democracy, on the other hand, is a competitive mechanism—and that’s why Israel wins.”

An Israeli at the table said, humorously but nervously, “Please don’t ever have a democracy.” . . .

In 2008, Saif gave a daring, bridge-burning speech in Libya, decrying decades of “stagnation” and the curse of dictatorship. He said that he was giving up politics, and in fact left Libya. But three years later came the war: and he returned home, throwing in his lot with the family and the dictatorship. . . .

Among the Qaddafi children, Saif was second to none in defending the Qaddafi regime. He even changed his appearance: No longer was he the smooth-skinned Renaissance man who held art exhibitions in London

and clinked glasses with the prince of Monaco. He grew a beard, in the style of fundamentalist Muslims. He gave wild-eyed rants on television. He vowed, “We will fight until the last man, until the last woman, until the last bullet.” . . .

The last Qaddafi child standing in Libya, after the others had fled or been killed, was Saif al-Islam. As late as October 22, two days after his father was killed, he said, “I am alive and free and willing to fight to the end and take revenge.” He was finally captured on November 19, trying to flee to Niger, as his brother Saadi had. . . .

I should be careful about playing psychologist in this book—but perhaps I could put Saif on the couch for just a moment. It seems clear that he wanted to be something that, in the end, circumstances would not allow him to be. Or, to be slightly stricter about it: He could not find it within himself to surmount those circumstances, to be what he wished to be.

I believe that he had genuine Western leanings—that he was serious about liberalization and modernization. I don’t believe it was all an act. I think he knew dictatorship was wrong. I think he was embarrassed about it, for some years (while enjoying the wealth the regime generated for him). But when the crunch came, he could not cut his ties to his family and to his father in particular, and became just another despot, or despot’s helper. When the crunch came, he was not much different from Nicu Ceau escu or Saddam’s boys or Bashar Assad—or from Hannibal and Saadi and the rest of the Qaddafis, for that matter. During the civil war, James Verini, a veteran reporter in Africa, had an article in *New York* magazine. He reported that a Western associate of Saif’s had sent him a text message—sent it to Saif, that is. The text said, “You’re better than this.”

Was he? Is he? Maybe, but the pull of blood and power proved very strong. You might contend that all of these dictators’ children are tragedies, but Saif is more tragic than most.

“It seems clear that he wanted to be something that,  
in the end, circumstances would not allow him to be.”

---

---