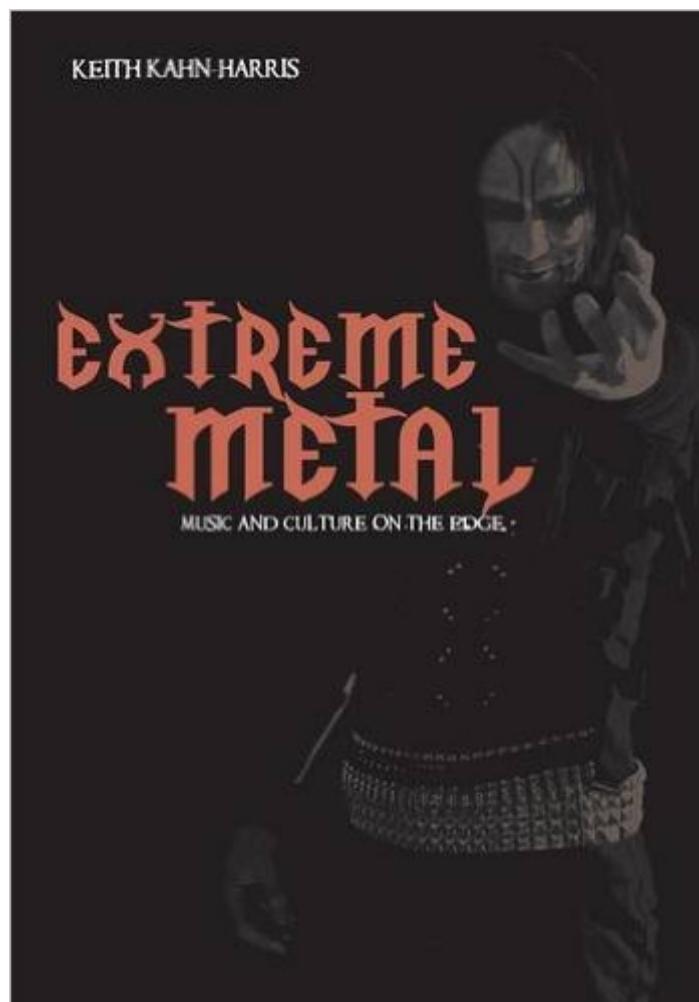


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# Extreme Metal: Music And Culture On The Edge



## **Synopsis**

Extreme metal--one step beyond heavy metal--can appear bizarre or terrifying to the uninitiated. Musicians of this genre have developed an often impenetrable sound that teeters on the edge of screaming, incomprehensible noise. Extreme metal circulates on the edge of mainstream culture within the confines of an obscure 'scene', in which members explore dangerous themes such as death, war and the occult, sometimes embracing violence, neo-fascism and Satanism. In the first book-length study of extreme metal, Keith Kahn-Harris draws on first-hand research to explore the global extreme metal scene. He shows how the scene is a space in which members creatively explore destructive themes, but also a space in which members experience the everyday pleasures of community and friendship. Including interviews with band members and fans, from countries ranging from the UK and US to Israel and Sweden, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* demonstrates the power and subtlety of an often surprising and misunderstood musical form.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This book is neither a fan pleasing exploration of different extreme metal scenes or genres nor a catalogue of underground heavy metal bands and their discographies. In fact, this is a very serious study of the extreme metal subculture from a socio-anthropological point of view written with a very dry, academic style. The core material used in this book comes from the author's doctoral thesis investigations, so don't expect any fun anecdotes or trivial band information here: the subjects tackled by the author (underground metal label economics, gender relationships, cultural capital, racism and political activism to name a few) are far from light hearted, and while not mandatory, an

academic background in social science or communications will surely help the reader sift through some of the harder theoretical constructs this investigation is based upon. Even if the author considers himself a big fan of the music, he does manage to maintain an observant and neutral point of view throughout most of his analysis and makes some very valid points regarding the scene's future and its irresponsible handling of sexism and undesirable white power bands using the excuse that musical credibility is far more important than politics. This book is ideal for metal fans seeking to expand their knowledge about the subject beyond the usual band discography information and reviews usually found in books that cover heavy metal.

Keith Kahn-Harris' book on extreme metal started out as a PhD thesis called "Transgression and Mundanity: The Global Extreme Music Scene," and this tells you a few things about the nature of the book. While I found it a fairly entertaining read, some might say it's overly scholarly and dry. It also largely focuses on themes and the "scene" more than it does the actual music involved. It starts off with the reasons that KKH thinks that extreme metal is culturally important, and goes on to discuss issues such as gender, race and sexuality in extreme metal, and to compare/contrast the relative absence of women, gays and ethnic minorities in extreme metal to those in the more mainstream metal scenes. This was some of the more interesting material covered in the book, and most of his ideas seemed fairly sound. He suggests that the above groups tend to exclude themselves, and that "certain backgrounds seem to engender a dislike of extreme metal." He could have written more on outright misogyny and racism, but it's probably all been said before anyway. I liked the discussion of the lack of "out" homosexuals in the extreme metal scene, despite the abundance of people in black metal who dress a lot like Rob Halford. He quotes another author in saying that a "key element of metal is the misogynist fantasy of a world without women," and cites some of the rather ridiculous (homoerotic?) photoshoots of the band Manowar. Having spent some time at a few metal messageboards and having run a metal fanzine in the mid-90s, I'm inclined to agree with a lot of this. In fact, I'd say the average metal messageboard user appears to be about 15, male, and still under the impression that women all have cooties. It may also be that the older/wiser/less misogynistic people just have other things to do besides hang around messageboards, but the fact remains that the internet has become a widespread and visible way of discussing music, and the global extreme metal community has changed greatly with the advent of the internet. The views of Kahn-Harris on the subject are thought-provoking, anyway, and the apparent views of the community at large are something that merits thought, even the ones not universally accepted. Kahn-Harris discusses the ways that music was traded and bought in the early

days versus today's file sharing and internet distribution, as well as the impact of things like nu-metal. He suggests that more mainstream bands calling themselves black metal, such as Cradle of Filth, are shunned not only because they suck, but also because they wear bondage gear, have dreadlocks, and feature women on album covers. An interesting book, but most will probably just skim it here and there. It's not really something to sit down with at night and read cover to cover.

If you love metal but have always wondered what does a scholar think of my music? Then this book would be your answer. It's a bit dense in places and the author has a way of writing that sometimes causes his meaning to be lost and his sentences to collapse under their own weight. This book doesn't delve too much into the anthropology and culture of the music, if you want that you'll have to settle for Headbangers Journey. Overall, I would suggest this book to lifelong Hessians, music critics, and people who regularly watch documentaries or read dissertations.

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