

Although Joseph had managed to escape from jail, criminal charges against him were still pending in Missouri. Considered a fugitive from justice, he was under constant threat of being extradited to stand trial. There was a bounty on his head. Sheriffs from Missouri came to Illinois on at least two occasions bearing writs for Joseph's arrest. In May 1841 a sheriff's posse managed to surprise the prophet outside of Nauvoo, arrested him, and had almost hauled him across the border into Missouri before Joseph managed to finagle his release with a writ of habeas corpus. It was a very close scrape, and the harassment provoked Joseph's ire. During a public speech soon after his 1841 arrest, he vented his anger by prophesying that retired governor of Missouri Lilburn Boggs—the Saints' despised nemesis—would "die by violent hands within one year."

On the evening of May 6, 1842, Boggs was reading a newspaper in the study of his Independence home when a gunman lurking outside shot him four times through a window. Two balls hit Boggs in the neck; the other two pierced his skull and lodged in the left lobe of his brain. Everyone assumed that he would die, and Boggs's demise was reported in newspapers across the country. Most of these papers speculated that the assassin had been a Mormon bent on fulfilling Joseph Smith's prophecy.

The handgun used to shoot the ex-governor was discovered outside Boggs's study, where it had been tossed into a puddle. An investigation quickly determined that the pistol had recently been stolen from a local store. The storekeeper told the sheriff, "I thought the niggers had taken it, but that hired man of Ward's—the one who used to work with the stallion—he came in to look at it just before it turned up missing!" The "hired man of Ward's" was an accomplished horseman from Nauvoo named Orrin Porter Rockwell. He had arrived in Independence a couple of months earlier, then quietly slipped out of town immediately after Boggs was shot.

As it turned out, the reports of Boggs's death were premature. Somehow he recovered from his severe brain injuries. The papers were right about the would-be killer, though: Rockwell was almost certainly the would-be assassin, and he was a Mormon. Afraid of nothing, and fiercely devoted to the prophet, Rockwell was already becoming leg-

endary for his willingness to spill the blood of those who had wronged the church, thereby giving them an opportunity to atone for their sins—a career that would become his life's work and inspire admiring Mormons to christen him the "Destroying Angel" and the "Mormon Samson."

Although Joseph may not have ordered Rockwell to shoot Boggs, it was commonly understood by the faithful that it was a Saint's sacred duty to assist in the fulfilling of prophecies when the opportunity arose. Once Boggs's death had been foretold by the prophet, nobody needed to tell Porter Rockwell what to do. Few inhabitants of Missouri (and perhaps even fewer Saints up the river in Nauvoo) doubted that the attempted assassination was the work of Mormondom's Destroying Angel, but neither Rockwell nor any other Saint was ever brought to justice for the deed.

Life in Nauvoo, meanwhile, continued apace. The city of the Saints was booming. There on the banks of the great American river, the Mormons seemed to have at last found a secure foothold from which to spread Joseph's religion far and wide. He and his followers had come an impressively long way in the seventeen years since Moroni had entrusted Joseph with the gold plates. And new converts to the Mormon Church were arriving in Nauvoo in ever greater throngs, many now coming from as far afield as England and Scandinavia.

The Second Great Awakening had been crawling with impassioned, silver-tongued prophets who roamed the land hawking upstart creeds. Almost all of these novel faiths provided reassuring answers to the mysteries of life and death, and promised converts that they would be rewarded for their devotion by spending the hereafter on easy street. But almost none of the new churches managed to establish an enduring body of followers. Most are now long forgotten. So why did Joseph's new religion triumph when so many of his competitors vanished with scarcely a trace? To be sure, there were numerous reasons why so many people found Mormonism so appealing. Probably none, however, was more salient than the colossal force of Joseph's personality.

Charisma is a quality that's hard to define and even harder to explain, but Joseph was flush with it. The term is derived from the Greek