

METHOD MACHINE

CHAPTER ONE: "IT WAS A BAD KILL"

By

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Chapter One: "It Was a Bad Kill"

FADE IN:

INT. GRAY ROOM - DAY

MAX SUBBAN, 33, looks directly at us, he is distressed, his dark eyes water with sadness.

MAX

God I feel like I let you down.
(distraught)
You shouldn't have to go through
this Chris. I don't know ... it's
hard for you-I know, but I ...

From the back, Chris's long platinum hair shines.

CHRIS (O.S.)

(he lisps)
Hard, yesh ... but it'sh not your
fault. You shaid it yourshelf when
we firsh met ... it'sh not up to
you.

Max has disheveled black hair like a rock star and he wears dark mascara; it does not hide his compassion.

MAX

I just wish there's more time. I
mean-if they knew what I've found.

CHRIS (O.S.)

There'sh no more time, Maxsh. You
have to be shtrong now, for me ...
I don't know if I can do thish,
Maxsh ... walk out there on my own.

Max is mulatto, more black than white, his features hard and beautiful at once. He fusses with something around Chris's face with a sympathetic touch.

MAX

You can ... you will.
(emotional)
It's not like there's a choice at
this point.

CHRIS DAWSON, 14, looks directly at us. HIS FACE IS FRAMED BY LONG BLOND TRESSES, HE WEARS SOLID RED CONTACTS AND FALSE FANGS LIKE A PEDESTRIAN VAMPIRE. HE LOOKS LIKE HE COULD CRY.

CHRIS
I don't want to die.

Max stares down, wipes his eyes and looks straight on.

MAX
I don't want to kill you.
(beat)
And it's breaking my heart.

INT. PRISON WAREHOUSE/ TELEVISION STUDIO SET - NIGHT

The set is in a prison warehouse. Scarlet curtains hang behind an elaborately carved Victorian style chair.

Chris wears a tuxedo, his face hidden under his blond locks.

Fashioned like a ringmaster in black leggings and a sleeveless red vest, Max has heavily tattooed arms.

Chris faces the crowd, eyes wild, teeth flaring like a wolf.

Next to him, Max whispers so the crowd and cameras won't see or hear.

MAX
Okay brother, just like we talked.

Chris growls at the crowd and stiffens against the chair.

Max fastens the ornately crafted garrotte over Chris's neck.

Chris looks straight into Max's eyes, nervous.

CHRIS
Thish will be quick right.

Max gives him an odd grin.

MAX
Be over before you know it.

Chris retreats into himself, defeated.

QUICK SUCCESSION OF EVENTS:

Max screws the garrotte in place, it presses at Chris's Adam's apple.

Max holds the release handle of an antique looking switch lever. HE PULLS THE RELEASE AND YANKS THE LEVER BACK.

BANG! A HUGE STEEL WEIGHT DROPS AND THE GAROTTE SNAPS BACK.

CHRIS'S EYES POP AND THERE IS ONE LOUD COUGHING EXHALE.

THE FANGED MOUTHPIECE SPINS ACROSS THE FLOOR.

THE CROWD ROARS.

Max turns to the camera wearing an uncomfortable smile.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - PRESENT - 2025

HEINRICH JAMES, 38, is imposing, staring across the table. His rough hands lay flat on the smooth mahogany table.

Tall with long hair, his face is rugged and bearded. He wears a buckskin shirt complete with fringes. His look is severe.

The windows behind him look down on Los Angeles coastline.

Heinrich is comfortable in his skin as he drinks his water. Words dissolve on-screen below him in a courier font.

GRAPHIC OVERLAY: Conference Room A, *The Method*, Television Show, September 2025

HEINRICH

(straight on)

No ... no, it couldn't have been a mistake. But I don't think the kid knew. I mean, you saw his face, he was just as surprised as all of you.

(beat)

And Max ... he doesn't make mistakes. That's why we call him the Artist, Terribilita.

He takes a drink and reflects back on some memory.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

When you all brought him on ***The Method*** ... I wasn't sure I liked his brand of, showmanship. Shit, I wasn't so sure I liked him at all, his intellect. I'm supposed to be the smart one.

(beat)

But he is ... unequivocally, thee smartest man I've ever known.

(MORE)

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Scientist, intellectual ...
musician, more. His killing is high
art. It's new ... it is beautiful
stuff-and that's hard to do in our
line of work.

Sitting back, he puzzles over a thought.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

I can tell you this much about Max.
I mean we've been friends a long
time now so, let me borrow a cliché
...

(leans in)

He doesn't lie, he doesn't cheat at
poker and he sure as shit doesn't
kill innocent people.

(beat)

What we do here ... Government
owned and operated-it doesn't
matter. If he thought for a second
the perp was an innocent ... he
wouldn't do it. Hey-you saw it.
That boy is alive for a reason.

INT. PRISON WAREHOUSE/ STUDIO SET - NIGHT

Chris's blood red face lifts slowly and lights up with glee
understanding his survival means his release.

He begins to writhe about, helpless against the restraints.

CHRIS

Get me outta this fucking thing ...
get me out, out ... NOW! Ahhh!

Max's eyes shift about the room, past the suits who monitor
things from their safe vantage point, they meet Chris's.

Max places a hand back on the lever, squeezes the control
grip and yanks it back.

CLANK! The garrotte snaps loose. HUUUHHH AAAHHH! Chris takes
a deep breath and looks straight into the camera.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Free at last ... thank God almighty
... free at fucking lassst.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Max sits on the sill looking over the Los Angeles city-scape, the same conference room Heinrich was in earlier.

Dressed in his usual rock star attire, Max is stunningly handsome and his hair is the usual mess.

Relaxing with a glass full of whiskey, the bottle on the table. He sucks his teeth after a slug and takes a seat.

MAX

(straight on)

Do you want me to answer that so you have it on record. I mean, do you want me to pretend that you don't know.

He fills his glass and takes more than a sip.

MAX (CONT'D)

The boy is innocent and any mother fucker with a scintilla of common sense knows it. **The fix was in on this kid. By you or the machine, I just don't know.**

(beat)

I am a tool of the state, sure. But do not be confused, I am not a man without principle. We're in a new era here of law and order. I believe that, and I am not going to kill a kid because some bullshit artist in a courtroom tells a better lie ... for money? No-fucking-way. The boy didn't do it ... I'm not going to pull the trigger on him.

He leans back looking pleased with himself and wagging his finger.

MAX (CONT'D)

I also knew if you knew that, you'd find someone who would.

(beat)

Thinking back ... from the first time I saw the reports on this thing something seemed off.

EXT. FORESTED RIVER BANK, OREGON - DAY

GRAINY TELEVISION FOOTAGE:

It's SHADY under the CANOPY OF TREES; the SUN SHINES ON THE WILLAMETTE RIVER behind the crime scene. The area is flat and barren.

AT LEAST TWENTY OFFICERS work the scene. A FORENSICS team in WHITE BODY SUITS collect evidence.

TWO LADDERS WITH A FORENSIC OFFICER on each tend to a DEAD MAN that hangs from a limb, hands and feet tied intricately.

In handcuffs, Chris stands dazed between two officers. He displays no emotion as he looks up to the hanging man.

MAX (V.O.)

We all saw the footage. That kid was the walking dead, he had no idea what was going on.

Chris looks absent as the news camera zooms in for a tight shot. It zooms back out emphasizing his skinny frame.

MAX (V.O.)

Hundred twenty pounds soaking wet and you're telling me he hoisted, Merritt O'Dowd, all two hundred pounds of him, eight feet off the ground.

The officers turn him away and take him up the trail.

Three officers stand below the hanging man when a cop on a ladder cuts the rope and he falls into their waiting hands.

MAX (V.O.)

When I got the call he requested me. I was very curious ... see how things would fit together.

A panoramic view of the trees show the sun piercing openings in the leaves ending on the rope tied around the thick limb.

INT. OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

An officer leads Max through a concrete corridor that ends at an iron door. The guard taps his night stick on the glass - BZZZT - his peer buzzes them through.

Max looks at the men who inhabit the death row cells without any concern. He has seen this many times before.

Through their bars, they watch him pass and all recognize him, some smile, others look afraid. A creepy guy comments.

CREEPY GUY
Here for that Baby Faced Vampire,
Max?

Max does not acknowledge him as he walks.

 CREEPY GUY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Better watch out Maxy boy - hear he
likes to chew on niggers ...
niggers like you.

Max turns back and calmly confronts the man, looking him up
and down before holding his eyes.

 MAX
 (subtle)
For God's sake man. Transcend
yourself.

The unnerved man drops his eyes and falls to his bunk. Max
moves on.

Arriving in front of the cell, Max looks straight in through
the bars. He doesn't know what to make of the sight.

Chris looks at him with the empty face of a lost toddler.

Max nods to the guard and the guard keys his radio.

 GUARD
Open seven.

BNNNT CLANG! The cell door unlatches. The guard pulls the
door open and Max steps in without a word or hesitation.

The accused and the executioner look at each other in silence
until Max turns back to the guard.

 MAX
I need to talk to my young friend
here alone.

The guard hesitates looking up and down the tier. He nods and
points down the hall with his night stick.

 GUARD
If you need me.

 MAX
**Ohhh, this boys going to be just
fine.**

He looks at Chris with a shrug and a smile. Chris nods and
the officer leaves.

Max reaches out and Chris takes his hand for a firm shake.

MAX (CONT'D)
I'm Max Subban.

CHRIS
You think I don't know that? I
asked for you.

Max sits at the end of Chris's bed facing him, evaluating his every move.

MAX
How'd you do it?

CHRIS
I didn't.

MAX
Machine thinks you did.

CHRIS
The SAID-GOD program's bullshit.
It's biased against me.

MAX
It's an algorithm, it can't be
biased. Besides, the jury said
guilty before the secondary appeals
input did, so ... how's that stack
up.

Chris goes to the door, poking his head into the hall and looking at the officer who motions him back in.

CHRIS
It doesn't, I know. But I also know
I didn't kill Merritt. I don't
remember much about that night ...
think I'd remember that.

MAX
So how did you come to know him ...
the deceased, Merritt O'Dowd?

Chris sits and stares at the wall, his fingers dig into his knees.

CHRIS
Merritt. He was just a freak in the
woods.
(looks at Max)
That's where me and Clement found
him.

MAX
Clement Babtist, the missing boy?

Chris nods.

MAX (CONT'D)
You have any idea where he is now?

Chris shakes his head.

MAX (CONT'D)
Okay. So you found this fellow in
the woods, what then.

Chris becomes pensive.

EXT. WILLAMETTE RIVER BANK, OREGON - DAY

CHRIS (V.O.)
We found him by the river ...

Merritt O'Dowd, 37, stands tall, six one, on the bank of the Willamette with a fishing pole cast out into the water.

He has dirty, shoulder length hair and black logging boots that show under the dress he wears over his emaciated frame, a dress that looks like it came from the late 1800s.

CHRIS (V.O.)
It was quite a sight.

He hums a tune as he reels in the line and checks the bait.

ON THE TRAIL: Chris and **CLEMENT BAPTIST, 13**, a scrawny little guy with black hair, yellow eyes and a thin-lipped grin that reeks of wrong doing, head toward the river.

MERRITT (O.S.)
God damn son of a bitchin mother
fuckin worm eatin little bitch!

The boys stop cold, eyes wide. Chris grabs Clement by the shirt and urges him back up the trail.

Clement smiles and lowers himself, creeping forward to see the source.

MERRITT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Eat my fuckin worm will ya, well
take the hook too god dammit, I
gotta eat too!

Just inside the brush, the boys peer through at the slinky, Gollum-like figure as he crouches and shoves another worm onto his hook.

Merritt looks at the worm for a length of time, lost in a distant thought.

HE GROWLS AND HIS FACE SNAPS BACK, LOOKING POINT ON AT THE BOYS. HE SCREAMS:

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Yaaahhh! Yaaahhh!

INT. OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

Chris smiles at the thought now.

CHRIS
I just about shit my pants. We dug out of there so fast I actually lost a shoe.

MAX
But you went back. Why?

CHRIS
I wish I knew. Clement, I guess. He's just that way, always, always doing something to get me in trouble. Never him, it's always me.

MAX
And here you sit.

Chris nods looking down.

EXT. MAX'S WAREHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING: An old warehouse in a dark part of an industrial park. Lights burn through the second floor windows.

INT. MAX'S WAREHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

GRANT VAN ZANT, 40, meticulous and impetuous, perfectly quaffed in his \$4000.00 Suit, stands next to **FEODORA (Feo) FORBES-SANDER, 33**.

Feo is English, casually refined, she is a comfortable beauty with curly red tresses and brilliant green eyes.

They stand close together looking straight on at the television. A news program reports the Christopher Dawson murder. Their expressions move from interest to disgust.

REPORTER (V.O.)

The man we see hanging from the tree has been identified as Merritt O'Dowd, a transient who has lived in the forest outside the city of Canby, Oregon for the last year.

GRANT

Look at the guys neck, it's a foot long.

FEODORA

(English accent)

Do they really need to show this?

Grant smiles at her, she returns a cool stare.

GRANT

You execute people on my show and this is to much for you?

FEODORA

That's different, I'm a professional.

HEINRICH (O.S.)

(yells)

You're a rookie!

Grant and Feodora look back into the giant room where Heinrich and Max sit on a couch with their feet on the coffee table having drinks. Feo gives Heinrich the finger.

REPORTER (V.O.)

This is the boy, **Christopher Dawson**, already dubbed the, "**Baby Faced Vampire**," for his alleged involvement in the murder of two other teens along with Merritt. His friend, Clement Babtist is still missing.

Max makes his way over to the pair and watches with them.

ON SCREEN: SIDE BY SIDE MUG SHOTS OF CHRIS DAWSON AND MERRITT O'DOWD - DISSOLVES TO - CHRIS HANDCUFFED UNDER THE HANGING BODY.

GRANT
(off Max)
You want to follow this one?

FEODORA
He's just a teen, there's never
been a minor dispatched.

GRANT
Exactly. The ratings would be
massive, a first, **and** they call him
a, **VAMPIRE**.

MAX
You sure that's where you want to
go with your show.

GRANT
(duh, sounding)
Well yeah.

MAX
You're the producer, you want the
vampire, I'll serve you the
vampire.

GRANT
I want the vampire ...
(back to Heinrich)
I definitely want the vampire.

FEODORA
You ever think I might want the
vampire.

HEINRICH
(yells again)
You got the, ELF!

MAX
He's right. The Elf was a big kill,
especially for your first.

She turns and gives Heinrich a look of disapproval, he smiles
in return.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Heinrich is at the table, sipping his water.

HEINRICH

He started looking at it, and he started looking hard, lot harder than the cops. Thing is, what he told me, what I saw when I was working it with him, the cops weren't working it at all.

He looks at someone as if a question had been asked.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

Their minds were made up. Now if that means they were told from a higher authority, or they just figured it for open-shut, I don't know. Didn't ask them, but Max did.

Takes a drink of water and smiles.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

He asked their lead dick how he figured the kid got Merritt up in the tree. The guy points down, says, "Footprints tell me all I need to know."

EXT. FORESTED RIVER BANK, OREGON - DAY

Merritt stands at the river bank, clumsily trying to yank his lure from a tree limb.

MERRITT

(kid like voice)

Gosh dangit, come on, of all the
...

His eyes fix on something and he stops jerking the line and sets his fishing rod against a tree.

He is dressed in dirty old jeans and a matching filthy T-shirt. His face is loose, innocent like a child's and he is barefoot.

He cautiously steps forward and gives a shy smile.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Hi. I'm Merritt ... just fishing,
dinner ...

(tepidly offers a hand)

Who are you?

Chris is the first to step forward with his hand out. Merritt has a soft shake, Chris notices.

CHRIS
I'm Chris ... This is Clement.

Clement shakes, giving Chris a glance noticing the effeminate hand shake, Chris's eyes tell Clement not to say what's on his mind.

CLEMENT
Where's the dress?

Chris cringes and Merritt looks at Clement with a puzzled expression.

CLEMENT (CONT'D)
The one you were wearing when we came down here the other day.

Merritt smiles brightly, he gets it now.

MERRITT
That was **you** mamma told me about. She said a couple rascals come sneakin about the fishin hole.

CHRIS
Your ... Mamma?

MERRITT
Yeah, she does most the fishin, she said you snuck right up on her, embarrassed her to the high heavens, cussin and carryin on an all.

CLEMENT
I'm pretty sure that was you in the dress ...

Clement is picking at the man's patience.

Merritt's body language shifts and his voice alters; he is becoming annoyed.

MERRITT
What are you gettin at, Clem?

CLEMENT
What's your mom's name, Merritt?

Merritt pauses and feels a trap around his brain, he doesn't know the answer.

MERRITT

That's not really of much
importance seein's you probably
won't never meet her anyway.

Chris is by the tree looking at Merritt's fishing pole.

CHRIS

Why not, she seemed pretty cool.

MERRITT

Cool? You call that cool? Ol lady
runnin round in a filthy dress and
boots.

(he laughs)

I call that weird, cookoo. We tell
her to clean up an wear normal lady
shoes but she says she can't. She
says, "I got feet like a man who's
big in the pants."

(laughs harder)

Funny huh, big in the ...

Chris stretches the line tight with the rod pointing straight
away from the snag and gives it a quick tug. The hook SNAPS
free.

Merritt's face is bright with Chris's success. HIS EXPRESSION
AND POSTURE SUDDENLY CHANGE, HIS EYES GO DARK.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

(deep, manly voice)

Give me that rod boy.

INT. OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

Chris looks up from the floor.

CHRIS

At that moment I knew he was
fucking whacked. Somehow, I just
knew things were going to turn bad.

Max looks straight ahead, concentrating.

MAX

What happened next?

CHRIS

He invited us to his cabin.

INT. DARK DIRTY CABIN - NIGHT

Merritt leans over a small fire that burns in the center pit of his cabin. Chris and Clement sit across from him, listening intently.

MERRITT

(raspy dark voice)

No. It don't change, but I do. And when I do ... when I do, who knows. You oughta look at the water man, it's a trap ...

(waves his fingers over his face)

There's like a ... lick of light, a sheen. Something you're not sure you saw, but you're sure you saw something.

CLEMENT

What is it?

MERRITT

A mirror maybe ... a window to your soul. What comes back ain't what you put in ... not the same. It's twisted, a narcissistic kind of love.

CHRIS

And what'd you get out Merritt?

INT. MAX'S WAREHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Max and Heinrich have a dummy on a work table in a corner of Max's warehouse.

The hands and feet are bound and there is a noose around it's neck; the rope is thrown over a pulley and runs to a winch.

They watch a digital weight readout as they hoist the body up from the table, the readings climb to over 250lbs.

Max looks at Heinrich and shakes his head. Heinrich's eyes follow the body up the noose, through the pulley and back to the machine; he is concentrating.

HEINRICH

Nope.

MAX

Nope.

EXT. MERRITT'S CABIN - DAY

Max walks the perimeter of Merritt's old place, carefully looking over the scene.

He uses a laser measuring device to mark distances in an ipad style device.

He takes pictures of the footpath that runs from the cabin to the clearing where Merritt was killed.

He looks at the marks on the hanging branch and follows it to the tree.

He runs his hands over the surface. There are no branches that could be used to climb to where Merritt was hung.

He stretches an arm up and there is at least a body length to the branch.

He walks the circumference of the area scanning the ground, he shakes his head, contemplative.

MAX

There's a ghost at work here,
Merritt ...

(looks into the shadows)

And I don't believe it's yours.

He finds himself back at the cabin, walking the perimeter and fingering the boards, road-signs and other debris used to make the exterior walls.

CLASSICAL GUITAR COMES UP:

He runs a stick through a large outdoor fire-pit and finds a wire hanger twisted into the half melted shape of a fluer de lis. He bags it and stuffs it into his bag.

He lifts the lid off a rusty pot and quickly drops it back on with a, "whew."

INT. MERRITT'S CABIN - DAY

A fire lit in the pit, Max looks about the glowing area of Merritt's home.

He sits where Chris and Clement once shared time with the deceased and stares across the pit in a meditative state.

His mind drifts to his conversations with Chris:

VISUALIZATION OF MERRITT AND THE BOYS CONVERSATION:

GUITAR PRE-LAP:

The boys stare straight ahead, wide eyed at Merritt.

MERRITT

What did I get out of it? Wouldn't you want to know what I put in first?

CLEMENT

Between us Merritt, you don't seem to really want to tell us anything that's true. Even if you do know, can you give an honest answer?

MERRITT

What makes you think you want an honest answer smart ass? If you had any idea what I deal with out here.

Clement's squinty little eyes dig into the man, prying an emotional response from him.

CLEMENT

From where I sit it looks like you're dealing with a warped sense of reality ...

Merritt is surprised by the bluntness of the boy, he becomes agitated.

CLEMENT (CONT'D)

How many of you are there ...
(circling a finger around
Merritt's face)
In there? Do you even know?

Merritt's eyes burn ...

GUITAR PICKS UP PACE:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MAX SUBBAN'S STUDIO - NIGHT**GUITAR PRE-LAP:**

Max sits back on his couch playing his guitar and looking at a wall covered in crime scene photos:

Pictures of Merritt, alive and dead, school pictures of Chris.

The bloody bodies of the two dead teenagers that are mentioned by the reporter.

Finally, an 8 x 11, (HAVE YOU SEEN ME,) picture of Clement.

MAX'S GUITAR SOLO SPEEDS IN INTENSITY as he focuses on Clement's picture and with a VIOLENT STROKE HE STOPS PLAYING.

As he stares at the picture, Max picks up a fancy throwing knife that sticks out of the surface of his coffee table.

WHAM! It sticks in Clement's picture. He picks up the piece of wire hanger he took from the fire pit and examines it.

EMPHASIS on the fleur de lis.

MAX

What are you up to, Clement
Babtist. You little French fiend.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

The fluorescent lights radiate and BUZZ over Chris's bloodshot eyes as he looks at Max.

CHRIS

He kicked us out. Told us to never
come back. Said someone was going
to get hurt, maybe killed, if we
kept pushing his buttons.

MAX

Did you believe him?

CHRIS

Absolutely. The guy was fucking
nuts.

MAX

He kill those boys?

Chris stares at him.

MAX (CONT'D)

Why'd you go back.

CHRIS

Clement ...

INT. DARK DIRTY CABIN - DAY - 1 YEAR EARLIER

Merritt moves around his room, tidying up while the boys watch in silence.

He holds the old farm dress and joyously pretends to dance with it's unseen occupant.

MERRITT

So fair. So pretty. My false pride.

He looks at the bemused boys with a crazy grin and pulls the dress up, mimicking wearing it.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

I declare it makes me feel just blasphemous. God may decree I be cast down.

Coming low, he nearly touches his nose to Clement's and flashes his muck stained teeth in a smile.

He pivots to Chris like he's on a turret and Chris recoils.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Shalt thou give law to God?

Standing straight, he crosses the room and strikes a pose.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Why of course not ... I'll make him keep me boys.

Chris and Clement exchange looks before breaking into all out laughter.

CLEMENT

You're an odd duck Merritt O'Dowd.

CHRIS

Crazy mother fucker is what he is.

Merritt spins in circles around the fire, the dress filling his dance card.

HUMMING a TUNE, he folds the dress neatly on the table and places it on a shelf.

Coming back to Chris he casually leans into him and places a fingertip on Chris's nose, penetrating him with his eyes.

MERRITT

Don't cha be callin me crazy.

His face slackens and goes cold and mean, leaning in close.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Mother fucker.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - SIX MONTHS AGO

Grant sits at the head of the table with Max, Feodora and Heinrich on either side of him. A group of men and women in suits fill the extra chairs.

Max has a large folder with photo's and testimonial documents from Chris's trial.

He has a complicated spreadsheet that has something to do with the SAID-GOD computer algorithms.

MAX
You see this - relative importance as a percentage for conviction. Crime scene, consistency in statement, physical evidence, psyc eval, alibi, all of them below the required margins for an uphold. How does that happen.

WOMAN IN SUIT
Did you notice the last one.

MAX
SGAR aggregate, what's that mean?

MAN IN SUIT
We call it the sugar option. Stands for SAID-GOD analytical Rating.

FEODORA
And that's different from the relative percentages?
(man in suit nods)
You're telling us the computer overrides its own acquittal?

The suits nod.

HEINRICH
This is a child we're talking about here.

WOMAN IN SUIT
It doesn't matter if it's a child.

MAX

It matters if it's a person. It matters if he's innocent.

WOMAN IN SUIT

That's not what I meant ...

GRANT

(off Max)

Are you trying to kill the show here or what? I mean, what's your hook with this, Max.

MAX

My hook, Grant, is that I think he's innocent and you seem interested in nothing but your ratings ...

(rubbing fingers together)

This is supposed to be the newer, better criminal justice system. SAID-GOD means, Secondary Appeals Input Data - Generated **OPTIMAL DECISION**. SAID-GOD has the final say here fellas. But not at it's own discretion. It's a machine!

HEINRICH

Is it?

(looks around table)

Is it just a machine? Did you give this thing AI? We all know AI without sex can't form a real base sense of motivational context, they don't think straight.

GRANT

What do you expect man, we've only been doing this for five years, the Supreme court had 250 to get it right.

HEINRICH

It's like an abused child you fuckhead.

MAX

231 years Grant, and it got it right for the first 190. We're starting on shaky ground and the people only see Heinrich, Feo and me at the top of this game.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

The whole balance of the nine judge thing is gone and the people didn't even trust that.

MAN IN SUIT TWO

The supreme's aren't coming back Max. What we have now is a judge, jury, sugar ... and you three. I'd suggest you get your head in our game.

MAX

Or what? You going to replace me? My last show pulled a 56 rating and a 78 share point. Those are my averages.

Grant shrugs and acquiesces the point to his colleagues around the table, they doodle and look about.

GRANT

Right ... right. Okay, so no one is going anywhere. That still leaves the question. What do we do about it.

WOMAN IN SUIT

We can't reverse it, that's the point of the new system ...

HEINRICH

The point of the new system is to speed things up, kill em faster and not only save on the expense of holding them through appeals. You turn crypto into gold in the process.

WOMAN IN SUIT TWO

We're all enriched through the process, but the revenues to the Federation are spectacular. We never dreamed it would generate this kind of currency.

GRANT

Do you want us to re-task it? We could give it to Feo. She's new, exciting, people love her.

HEINRICH

I am sitting right here, Grant.

GRANT

I know, not my point. Hear me out before you judge.

(they lean in for his answer)

Your numbers are already established, she's new. She's good, she's popular, but a leg up would help us all out.

MAX

I'm not dropping off the kill, that's not what I'm saying.

GRANT

Okay ... what are you saying?

MAX

We can use this as an example of what we are supposed to be. A fair and impartial system. We can use the evidence; lack of evidence to make a point, corrections - we need to fix the system, top to bottom, juries, SAID-GOD, the whole thing.

FEODORA

And we make Christopher Dawson a martyr along the way, is that it?

MAX

Yeah ...

FEODORA

You're actually going to do this.

MAX

(nods)

It has to start somewhere ... If we leak the spoilation of evidence after the execution - a week, two.

WOMAN IN SUIT

Spoilation?

HEINRICH

(off Max)

You haven't told them?

Silence around the table. Max shakes his head and the rest of the group share acknowledging glances.

EXT/INT. OREGON STATE DEPARTMENT OF FORENSICS - DAY

ESTABLISHING: A single story concrete building in the back of the State Police Headquarters. There are no flags, no fancy cars, just a single official seal on the glass door.

FORENSIC TECH, DREW ANDREWS, 65, greets Max at the door.

WALKING IN THE HALL:

DREW

Never thought I'd see a, "JOEY"
around one of these places. I
thought you **Justices** stuck to
Executions, not investigations.

MAX

Look like a good kill to you?

INT. FORENSICS EXAMINATION ROOM- DAY

Bright white, nothing goes unnoticed in this exam room. Max and Drew discuss the photos on the wall board near the body of Merritt.

DREW

Murdered? No. Suicide ... maybe.
This guy was hauled eight feet off
the deck, right?

MAX

I couldn't touch his feet.

DREW

Makes this all the more
interesting.

He points to side by side photo's of the tree limb, one with the rope, one without.

DREW (CONT'D)

What do you see.

MAX

Nothing. Besides the obvious, rope,
no rope.

DREW

Exactly, look here ...
(picture without rope)
There should be rope burns over
this. The guy weighed in at 96
kilo's, but look.

(MORE)

DREW (CONT'D)

There's pressure all the way around
the limb, the rope was tight.

MAX

So he tied the rope off before he
put him up.

Drew picks up a stack of photo's and begins to run through
them: Skinny Chris first.

DREW

He lifted him? This kid, and while
he's still alive?

MAX

Was he drugged?

The next photo is the ground.

DREW

Tox screen was clean. And here, no
imprints on the ground from a
ladder, just Chris's feet.

Photo of the tree.

DREW (CONT'D)

No marks on the trunk ...
(looks over his glasses)
I can't figure out how he got him
up there.

MAX

Think maybe he just floated him up
there.

DREW

What I'm thinking. At the very
least - he didn't do it alone. Look
at the knots on the feet and hands
...
(pictures of fancy knots)
That's art, it's called a French
whipping knot. The kind of shit you
do for your fancy executions on
your fancy show.

Max smiles. Drew pauses looking closely at a photo of the
ground and shaking his head.

MAX

What is it?

DREW

Well, I think Chris's prints are all post-mortem.

(Max raises an eye)

The mud ...

(photo of Chris's muddy shoes)

There's no mud on Merritt in the pictures.

MAX

So he was trying to get him down?

DREW

There was mud on him when he came in here, it got on him after he was cut loose.

MAX

Set up?

Drew raises an eyebrow.

They turn to Merritt's body on the gurney. Max picks up a hand and looks at his nails; they are a perfect French manicure. He looks up to Drew.

DREW

I don't do nails. And there's this.

He draws Max to Merritt's feet and points to a mark of a fleur de lis on the soul of his foot.

DREW (CONT'D)

That's branded on his skin, a fleur de lis. It's fresh.

MAX

Huh ... got a theme.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

Max has emptied the glass and holds the bottle, ready to pour, but lost in a memory.

MAX

From the beginning I believed there was a big fat hole in the case. I'd lay awake thinking about how it came to this point.

Silent for a time, he sniffs the bottle, looks up and pours.

MAX (CONT'D)

It was more than the show, you know, ratings and all. The murder itself was so fucked up ... made no sense. Right up to the open of the show he still denied, denied, denied. And this Clement friend of his ... what's his role? We don't know if he's dead, we don't know anything about him, yet the show goes on ...

He looks around as if off of multiple people.

INT. PRISON WAREHOUSE/ TELEVISION STUDIO SET - NIGHT

Grant sits in the anchor chair waiting to go on air. He checks himself in a mirror held by an assistant.

GRANT

Oh I look good, don't ya think? How about here, this gunna show? No, okay.

The floor director holds his hand in front of the camera for a five count.

FLOOR DIRECTOR

And five, four, three ...

GAME SHOW MUSIC FADES IN:

GRANT

Good evening everyone, I'm Grant Van Zant, and tonight we come to you live from the Oregon State Penitentiary where in two short hours, Christopher Dawson, the Baby Faced Vampire will be executed at the hands of none other than the Terribilita himself, Max Ruel Subban.

PRE-LAP TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

GRANT (O.S.)

That's right, at 12:01 Pacific time, the vampire will be ...

GRANT FADES OUT:

Max looks on as if listening to a query:

MAX

So Grant's doing his thing. You know they had a TV on just down the hall from Chris's cell, guards watching, it's pretty morbid if you ask me. But I'm asking Chris about this Clement fellow he runs with, the missing boy ...

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Max is casual in jeans and a tank top. Chris sits in his underwear.

MAX

So this buddy of yours, you have no memory of when you last saw him?

CHRIS

You mean Clement?

MAX

Clement Babtist, yeah. When is the last time you remember seeing him.

Chris chuckles.

CHRIS

The night before, maybe two ... we go down to Merritt's place and we're listening from outside, cause he's singing. Funny as shit. French nursery songs or some shit like that, and what's weird ... Clement understands him ...

INT. MERRITT'S CABIN - NIGHT

Merritt wanders the cabin in his dress, singing quietly to himself.

MERRITT

Au clair de la lune, Mon ami
Pierrot, Prete-moi ta plume pour
ecrire un mot.

GRAPHIC OVERLAY:

By the light of the moon, my friend
Pierrot, lend me your quill to
write a word.

He casts himself down like a sad ballerina.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Ma chandelle est morte, je n'ai
plus de fue.

GRAPHIC OVERLAY:

My candle is dead, I have no more
fire.

He now pleads as if to heaven.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
Ouvre-moi ta porte pour l'amour de
Dieu.

GRAPHIC OVERLAY:

Open your door for me for the love
of God.

CLEMENT SPEAKS TO MERRITT:

CLEMENT (O.S.)
Est votre porte ouvert pour moi?

Startled, Merritt spins and sees Clement staring back at him
with his dark smile.

MERRITT
I guess my doors open for you
whether you're invited or not.

They circle the fire-pit across from one another.

MERRITT (CONT'D)
You are such a strange young thing.
I sometimes think you just float
from here to there ... like a
little ghost or some such thing.
(leans over the fire)
Or maybe a little devil. That's it
isn't it. You're a little French
speaking devil.

CLEMENT
Devils old and devils new, one from
God and one from you ...
(he laughs)

MERRITT
I had no idea you were so
cultured.

Clement leans over the fire, two glowing faces in opposition.

CLEMENT

I'm just a mirror ... a window to
your soul.

(leans back)

I'm living your lie, Merritt.

MERRITT

Don't get smart with me boy.

Merritt begins to unbutton his dress and his voice changes to a deep, commanding tone.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

And where's that scoundrel you're
always running around with.

Chris comes through the door, unconcerned.

CHRIS

I'm right here, what's up your ass.

Merritt points a rigid finger at Chris.

MERRITT

Don't!

He continues to undo the dress at a frantic pace, his breathing labored.

CHRIS

Maybe we should go.

CLEMENT

He'll be all right, just give him a
minute ... you'll be all right now,
won't you Merritt.

(beat)

Merritt ... you're all right now,
right ... Merritt?

Trance-like, Merritt turns and lets the dress slip from his shoulders exposing his bare body.

He is filthy and covered in deep bruises. He wears old, dirty, women's underwear and bra.

MERRITT

I'm fine! It's just you kids are
killing me!

He snaps off the bra and throws it at Clement.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Little fucker!

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Max looks thoughtful.

MAX

That is ... odd.

(beat)

Does a fleur de lis mean anything to you?

CHRIS

A what?

Max looks down, shakes off the question.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Heinrich looks across the table to his questioner.

HEINRICH

He didn't even decide until we were in knee deep in the show. It was just after the first break. Max came out to the green room where Feo and I were watching ... that's when he asked ...

WOMAN IN SUIT TWO (O.S.)

Asked you to sabotage the show?

HEINRICH

The machine yeah, the show was great.

WOMAN IN SUIT TWO

And you just went along with this. Decided the laws of the Federation didn't apply to you, or Max.

(he shrugs)

How about our Most Noble Feodora? Did her Templar code bind her to the Federation or her conscience.

HEINRICH

Being in the order of the Knights Templar isn't a club, it's serious shit and I respect her for it. You want to know how she felt about it, ask her. I fixed the garotte.

EXT. PRISON WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

COLTON BAKER, 30, stands guard at the door to the execution room. He tenses at the SOUND of FOOTSTEPS and CONVERSATION.

Through the overhead funnels of light he sees two shadow figures approach.

He hides his excitement to see that it is two famous JOEY's, Heinrich James and Feodora Forbes-Sander.

They walk close together, SPEAKING IN HUSHED TONES.

COLTON
(apprehensive)
Good evening ... Mr. James, Miss Sanders.

They smile at Colton.

FEODORA
Forbes-Sander. And you are?

COLTON
It's Colton Ma'am, Colton Baker.

Heinrich offers a hand and they shake, Feo does the same.

COLTON (CONT'D)
I'm really sorry, but this area is supposed to be off limits.

HEINRICH
I got-cha, but Max asked us to come by. He needs us to check a tolerance on the machine.

COLTON
I can't let you in there.

Heinrich's phone buzzes, he takes it from his pocket.

HEINRICH
That's Max now ...
(answers)
Yeah ... sure ...
(off Feo)
You can do this right? He needs me in the green room.

She nods. Colton is unsure.

HEINRICH (CONT'D)

On my way.

(hangs up, off Feo)

It's the 9/16ths, right side.

(shakes Colton's hand)

Max says thanks man.

COLTON

He does? Cool, yeah, tell him he's welcome.

HEINRICH

Will do.

Heinrich and Feo switch a glance and he rushes off. Colton turns to the beautiful Feodora, She smiles.

MINUTES LATER:

FEODORA IS IN THE ROOM, shoulder deep into a canvas that covers most of a secret execution machine.

CLICK! She pulls her arm free from the machine and sticks a small ratchet in her pocket.

EXT. PRISON WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Feodora exits the set warehouse and addresses Colton.

FEODORA

Thank you so much Colton, this could have been a disaster.

COLTON

Yeah, sure. If I helped in any way, it's an honor, I really appreciate what you guys ... um, you, do.

FEODORA

You were a great help, more than you know.

INT. PRISON WAREHOUSE/ TELEVISION STUDIO SET - NIGHT

Grant is on set, still in the throws of the show.

GRANT

There is still the mystery of the missing boy, Clement Babtist and the true identity of Merritt O'Dowd, Neil Silver in his other life. Then onto the ...

(MORE)

GRANT (CONT'D)

(finger quotes)
 "killing machine," and interviews
 with all three Justice's of
 Execution, the JOEY'S! It's about
 to get nuts! You're tuned to, THE
 METHOD, see you on the other side.
 (salutes)

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

A guard rolls a wardrobe box to the cell door.

GUARD ONE

Is this everything Mr. Subban?

MAX

Just Max ...
 (looks at guards name tag)
 Mr. Martin.

GUARD ONE

(smiles)
 Just Greg.

MAX

That's it Greg, thanks.
 (waits for him to leave)
 Can we have some privacy.

GUARD ONE

Can't leave my post, dead man
 walking belongs to me.

MAX

I know it's your job Greg, but this
 part, can you make an exception.

GRANT

Let me look in the box.

MAX

(growing impatient)
 It's our costumes man, this isn't a
 fucking jail break!
 (Greg raises his radio,
 Max calms)
 Look, you'll be the first to see,
 but we're getting naked in here and
 that's not part of the show ...
 please.

GREG

I'll be right down here.

Greg leaves. Max strips, Chris sees an amazing story told in tattoo's that run all over his torso. He fixates on his back.

The tattoo covers Max's entire back; a tree barren of leaves and dotted with nooses, one for every kill he's performed.

CHRIS

What's that one, the tree?

MAX

The maid freed from the gallows. An old Creole folk song about a maiden who wants to be saved from hanging. She begs for someone to buy her freedom. I got the idea from the Zeppelin song, *Gallows pole*. Ever heard of it?

CHRIS

Not by name, might recognize it if I heard it.

MAX

Plant's haunting man ... fucking shamonic.

CHRIS

Wish I could hear it.

MAX

Never know ... music's timeless, might just be waiting for you out there.

CHRIS

You are not reassuring.

MAX

We gotta start getting you ready, this is gonna take a while.

INT. PRISON WAREHOUSE / GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

Heinrich waits, Feo enters and takes a seat next to him.

FEODORA

Pour me one of those?

He sits forward and pours her a drink from an expensive bottle.

HEINRICH

What do you think princess?

FEODORA

I think you're not the only one
whose going to be living in the
woods anymore. They'll crucify him.

HEINRICH

There's a reason you and I didn't
get this one. He's the Neil Peart
of this little rock band and this
don't exist without him.

FEODORA

How much you had to drink?
(she gulps her's down)
Neil who?

HEINRICH

RUSH, the rock band? No?
(beat)
Max isn't going anywhere sister.
Not unless Max wants to go
somewhere.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Greg comes toward the cell. Max steps out to greet him.

GREG

It's time. Camera's are out here
waiting.

Max nods and looks to Chris.

Chris looks down, his face hidden under the white wig. His
fingers laced together, he wears long sharp nails and
twiddles his thumbs.

MAX

Just like we said, Chris. Let's do
this.

Chris does not look up.

CHRIS

Sure.

Max looks straight down on him.

MAX

I know you don't think this is
right, fair.

(beat)
(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

I think you also know that I believe in you, Chris. But it's not for me to say if you're innocent or not.

Chris continues to look down, twiddling.

MAX (CONT'D)

You tell me you can't remember, I believe you. I've been in front of a lot of dead men and we get to a point - they either confess, ask God for forgiveness, or they maintain their innocence and ask God for help.

(beat)

I don't get either from you. I don't get anything.

Chris looks up with his red eyes and fangs.

CHRIS

All I have left is my death.

INT. DARK DIRTY CABIN - DAY

Cracks of sunlight slip through the wall of the small cabin. The young boys are close together, across from Merritt, watching silently as he works the rope.

SOFT MUSIC plays as his hands carefully tend to his noose. The loops are precise, one methodical turn after the other.

MERRITT

(whispers)

Twelve, thirteen.

(smiles at the boys)

That's it.

Slipping the rope through the coil, he pulls the knot tight. He dangles the noose.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

Pretty isn't it.

(his face relaxes)

I'm gunna have to comb my hair if I'm to wear a necktie.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

It's Feodora's time in the hot seat and she doesn't mind at all. She flips an unlit cigarette around in her fingers, looking straight into the faces of the inquisitors.

MAN IN SUIT TWO

Don't the Templars have rules, a doctrine, a credo, about honoring contracts ...

FEODORA

Does that make you feel clever. Rhetorical statements about contracts while you murder children under false pretense for profit.

MAN IN SUIT TWO

You believe everything Max tells you.

Feodora's face freezes.

FEODORA

A child could see through your ruse.

WOMAN IN SUIT

This isn't a ruse, Feodora.

FEODORA

Tell yourself what you want.
(off man in suit two)
But as for the Templars, we don't kill innocents and we don't stand idly by and watch others do it either.

WOMAN IN SUIT TWO

How can you be so sure? His innocence.

FEODORA

It's an alien concept in your world ... friendship, trust. Max is sure, his word is good enough for me.

WOMAN IN SUIT

We pay you millions, doesn't that make us friends?

FEODORA

No it does not. Your money. Never.
I'm not capable of having friends
like you.

(off man in suit two)

That part is in the Templar credo.

WOMAN IN SUIT TWO

We're just trying to make sense of
this. Find out why Max did what he
did.

FEODORA

He did it because you got it wrong.
The system got it wrong. On
purpose. You know it, I know it,
everyone knows it ... this trial
exemplified it.

MAN IN SUIT

Did you help?

FEODORA

Of course I did. Nine sixteenths
tension rod on the back of the
garotte. One click ...

(snaps her fingers)

That's all it took.

WOMAN IN SUIT

The boy walks.

FEODORA

The boy walks ...

EXT. DARK DIRTY CABIN - DAY

Merritt wears his best pair of pants and a button up shirt,
as clean and straight as he could get them. He adjusts his
belt as Clement talks to him in musical, hypnotic tones.

CLEMENT

How many loops to you have to place
in the noose before it is
sufficient to replace your cross,
Merritt?

Merritt is in a transcendent state as he whispers his reply.

MERRITT

Thirteen ...

CLEMENT

How many sins will your starving
soul devour before the weight of
your depravity is terminal?

(grins)

Will snap your spine.

MERRITT

Seven.

CLEMENT

This penalty must be inflicted upon
you Merritt, and you can thank your
God we are not boiling oil.

MERRITT

Thank you Lord.

Frozen, Merritt looks at the noose he holds in his hands,
trembling and whispering to himself, SILENTLY, THEN RISING.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

I've thrown off my yolk of morality
... pleasures, too strong ...

(beat)

God is a prowling figure, searching
... searching for me. The Devil
howls his presence, no corruption
in his intent.

Clement places his hand on Merritt's and their eyes meet.

CLEMENT

Your tongue sounds tainted Merritt.
It's doing justice to the voices in
my head. Reviving old memories.

MERRITT

(whispering)

You are an old soul aren't you
Clement? You are not yet in the
dawn of your darkness?

Chris stands to the side in a trance. His eyes shift back and
forth, yet he is not present in thought.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

You remind me of a song ... back in
the days when you only heard music
played on instruments, or real
voices.

He begins to conduct unheard music with his hands, the noose
in one.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

You might only hear a song once in your entire lifetime ... but you never forgot it.

He stops and looks at Clement, his voice goes raspy, dry.

MERRITT (CONT'D)

You're like one of those songs Clement. I don't know where I've heard your song before, but I know I've heard you before now ...

Chris's face is pallid and his eyes could pop from his skull.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Chris stares at Max as he changes into his executioner's outfit.

CHRIS

Sitting here, alone. Lots of time to think, I ... think I finally figured out what he meant.

MAX

What who meant?

CHRIS

Clement. You see, he's just as fucked up in the head as Merritt, but I didn't see it until I landed here.

MAX

What is it? That you've, finally figured out.

Chris looks at him with the same cunning Clement had when he spoke the words.

CHRIS

He told me, he says, "Merritt and I are in an epic dance, Shakespearian in proportion, and you Chris, you're our foil."

(beat)

I had to look it up. But I get it now. There's more than one side to Clement too, and he intended for me to be here all along. With you.

MAX

Is he dead?

CHRIS

No way. He ... or Merritt really, I don't know how many people they have running around in those heads of theirs, but I know ... knew, from the beginning it would lead somewhere like this.

(heavy sigh)

I'm a couple hours away from execution and I don't even know what fucking happened.

MAX

You and I have a date with destiny, Chris. We know it's not going to change, not now.

(he pats the bed)

Come here.

(Chris sits)

Look at me Chris.

(he does)

Trust me man, just a little longer brother, this whole nightmare will be behind you. You'll have a whole new life ...

(springs his fingers out)

Out there.

Chris jumps to his feet.

CHRIS

Trust you! Is that supposed to be funny? Out there ... out where ... what the fuck is that supposed to mean?

MAX

Means I got your back.

Staring at Max, Chris drops back against the wall and stares at the ceiling.

CHRIS

That's it then?

(looks at Max)

There's nothing?

MAX

There's no need.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Max is amused.

MAX

I don't know why I even feel the need to explain myself to you. It's you ... yeah you who should be explaining yourself to me, to that boy ... to the whole god damned world.

Max face turns from disgust to anger listening to the suits.

MAN IN SUIT

So you think we should just tell the people we've been making mistakes?

WOMAN IN SUIT

Tell them we've been killing people in a flawed system? That SAID-GOD is unreliable?

MAX

Unreliable? Is that what you call it? The whole thing is a fucking sham and that we're all pawns of the system, killing people for entertainment - pacifying the masses for profit? I wish it was that fucking easy.

WOMAN IN SUIT

But it means your neck to.

He smiles and points to her good judgement.

MAX

I'm not worried about my neck ... I use my God given talents to provide a much needed public service. And it pays well. But yes, I'm saying we do just that. We use discretion, a little bit at a time.

MAN IN SUIT TWO

Do you have any understanding of the currency we're talking about here? The lawsuits if the public thinks there may have been a malfunction in SAID-GOD? Do you know what it took to put the Federation together?

(MORE)

MAN IN SUIT TWO (CONT'D)

It was this tax plan, the revenue sharing! Europe, Australia, most of South Ame ...

WHAM! Max slams his hand on the table and jumps to his feet.

MAX

Are **you** fucking lecturing **me!** You! You're telling me about this show, **this** fucking world! You're not even in the same philosophical realm of what it is I am, what I do ... money, ratings? That's wheels on the bus, see spot run. This is the big leagues man. People here bat four hundred you spineless worm.

Max rounds the table, takes the man by the coat and shoves him from the room.

MAX (CONT'D)

Get the fuck outta here!

SLAM! He makes a point with the door.

MAX (CONT'D)

If I ever see him around here I'll kill him.

(stretches his neck and smiles)

I'm serious. I will ... talking down to me like that ... shit!

He takes a seat.

MAX (CONT'D)

Where were we.

Smiles. Looks go around the table, shrugs.

WOMAN IN SUIT

We're trying to decide what we're going to do with you.

Max looks at the group, one by one, they remain expressionless, watching him. MAN IN SUIT, AKA, **LYNEL KANNIER, 50**, speaks up.

MAN IN SUIT

There's a reason you don't know any of us by name Max.

WOMAN IN SUIT places a hand on Lynel's arm, warning him from saying too much. He looks at her and shakes his head.

LYNEL

He's going to find out anyway if this leaves the room. My name is Lynel Kannier, I'm an adjunct to an auxiliary to a person I'll never know. I'm a cog in a wheel, a mouth piece.

He turns to WOMAN IN SUIT, KAREN HARRIS, 45.

LYNEL (CONT'D)

This is Karen Harris ...
(across to WOMAN IN SUIT
TWO)

Lindsay Connelley.

(she nods)

We understand your issue. We actually agree with you. But this is bigger than all of us. Us here, Heinrich, Feo.

LINDSAY

We need to resolve this, here, now. We need to walk out of this room with a fix, an understanding.

MAX

I'm supposed to just let this go?

KAREN

For now, yes.

(beat)

We'll make up an excuse, investigate until it goes quiet. Delay, delay, delay.

LINDSAY

A new show comes along and everyone forgets.

MAX

And then what? I won't forget.

LYNEL

Can you just try and trust us for now. We're of like purpose.

They all lean back in silence.

INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Greg stands at the cell door looking at the killer and the victim.

Chris slowly raises his head, revealing the red eyes and sharp teeth.

Greg gasps and steps back. He hesitates.

GREG
Looks like they're getting
impatient gentlemen.

The hallway has two camera's waiting for Max and the DRI, (Death Row Inmate,) to emerge from the cell.

Max comes out first; he wears black leggings with high white socks and buckled shoes. He wears no shirt under a red leather vest and has long black gloves that run up to his elbows.

His African hair stands straight out from below the rim of his Van Helsing style hat and his eyes are adorned with gold contacts, accompanied with deep scarlet lipstick.

He stares straight on in to the camera before turning to the cell. He holds out an arm, beckoning his prey.

Chris emerges covered from head to toe in a black hooded cloak.

The only distinguishable thing is a single gold chain that circles his waist and connects to gold shackles that bind his wrists.

His face is hidden under the black of the hood and his clenched fists are just visible below the cuff of the broad sleeves.

Without a word, the pair begin their progression toward the camera and along the length of the corridor.

SULTRY ROCK PLAYS LOW UNDER THE TINKLE OF THE CHAINS AND THE SHUFFLE OF THEIR FEET. WHISPERS CAN BE HEARD AMONG THE DEATH ROW GUARDS.

TV's are visible scattered along the route. GRANT'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD DESCRIBING THE VISUAL ON THE SCREEN AS THEY PASS.

GRANT (O.S.)
A play on the famous mythos of Van Helsing, the **Vampire Killer**. We have yet to see the secret killing machine, but we can guess it will play along the same theme.

IN THE DIRECTORS BOOTH:

The faces of the crew who produce the show are all transfixed on the screen. Lynel, Karen, Lindsay and MAN IN SUIT TWO are among them.

PRISON PARKING LOT:

A large crowd in the lot of the prison quietly watches the large monitors that are set atop the production trucks.

END OF THE CORRIDOR IN PRISON:

Max and Chris come to a large steel, double door. A guard stands on either side, staring straight ahead like Buckingham Soldiers.

Max tries not to move his lips.

MAX

This is it ... you ready?

The hood bobs once. Max nods to the guards.

They grab the handles and the doors swing open to a bright, white light.

EXT. DARK DIRTY CABIN - NIGHT

Merritt and the boys are outside the cabin standing on blue tarps that cover a wide area.

The rope is neatly tied around the limb of the tree.

Chris stands off to one side. His face gives no sign of awareness of anything that is going on.

Merritt suddenly comes out of his hypnotic trance and realizes that his hands and feet are tied.

He falls on his side and struggles to turn to Clement. He pleads in his normal voice.

MERRITT

What's happening! What are you doing to me!

(looks up to the noose)

Are you going to hang me? You're going to fucking hang me!

He begins a violent struggle against the knots. He jerks as Clement watches, amused at the futility. Chris stares straight ahead.

CLEMENT

Merritt, Merritt, Merritt ... it does take you a while to catch on doesn't it. I'd have thought you'd have seen this coming.

MERRITT

Merritt? Who the fuck is Merritt man? My name is Neil! Neil Silver! Let me go! What the hell are you ... let me go! Get me out of this thing!

He struggles, the knots are too tight, he has no chance.

CLEMENT

Neil, Merritt, Merritt, Neil ... it's really so boring.

He leans into Merritt's face.

CLEMENT (CONT'D)

You see, what we have here ... Neil. We have an old soul that's been kicking around in your new body. He made you kill those boys.
(he pets Merritt's hair)
It's time to atone ... Neil.

MERRITT

Atone? Atone? Atone for what you crazy little fuck! Who the fuck are you!
(panicking, struggling)
Get me out of this! You sick ... fuck!

CLEMENT

You know what you've done. Now calm down!

Merritt freezes and his body straightens.

CLEMENT (CONT'D)

Se lever le cochon!
(beat)
I said, get up pig!

INT. PRISON WAREHOUSE/ TELEVISION STUDIO SET - NIGHT

Max walks Chris in front of the black curtain that covers the death machine.

Max bows deep, one arm extended as in the days of old.

He takes hold of the gold chain at Chris's waist and gives it a rattle.

The black curtain drops to reveal the exquisite machine.

A giant tree carved from exotic wood, leafless with hundreds of limbs that curve out, down and then in toward the chair.

The limbs grow into, or out of the finely carved renaissance throne. There are gold leaf inlays, gilding and floral designs throughout.

The upper center of the back contains a single golden bar, ornamental in design, it is held in place by a golden rod on either side.

It is made to be snapped back against the neck of the chairs occupant, the small indent behind it leaving room for the vertebra to be yanked free of their natural form.

LOOKING STRAIGHT ON AT THE ENTIRE TREE/CHAIR: CHRIS STANDS HAUNTINGLY TO ONE SIDE OF THE BOUGHS:

DISSOLVE TO:

MERRITT HANGS FROM A TREE IN THE LIGHT OF THE CAMP FIRE.

Moving back, he is the solitary figure in the scene.

THE CRACKLE OF THE BLAZE CAN BE HEARD AS MERRITT'S FOOT MAKES A FINAL TWITCH.

DISSOLVE TO:

Chris pretends to resist as Max pulls him to the chair by the chain.

Max circles his kill, looking him up and down. He is in full showmanship mode.

He pulls a large gold key on a chain from the pocket of his vest.

He yanks at the lock and sets the key. KACHUNCK, it falls open and the CHAIN RATTLES TO THE GROUND.

Chris still holds his fists clenched tight under the length of the sleeves.

Max places himself behind Chris with his hands on his shoulders.

Chris's fingers slowly fall open revealing his long, sharp nails.

Max pulls open the robe to show a finely crafted suit; scarlet vest under a black jacket, he wears patent black shoes.

The hood comes off and his long white tresses hang over his shoulders, his piercing red glare sends hatred out to the audience.

In the monstrous moment his slow grin turns to a rancid smile and the full horror of his protruding fangs make their mark on the crowd.

CUT AWAY SHOTS OF PEOPLES FACES: INCLUDING HEINRICH AND FEO WHO BOTH SMILE.

CHRIS

Kill me ... if you can ...

(hisses)

Cowards! Kill the boy! Kill the boy!

(he scans the area)

A parlor trick, no more ...

(emphasise ck)

Tricks on you!

HE SNAPS A HAND TO HIS FACE.

REACTION SHOTS OF PEOPLE JERKING BACK: NOT MAX, HE LOOKS COOL.

With his middle finger in an obvious taunt, **Chris uses the razor sharp nail to slice open his cheek**, blood runs freely.

His eyes wander over to Max.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Terribilita ... shall we proceed?

Max directs him to the chair with a formal gesture and opens one side of the garotte. Chris sits with his neck between the rods.

He closes the arm rest shackles over Chris's wrists, then secures the feet.

Up to Chris's neck, he swings the garotte over and affixes it in place.

He grabs an old fashion handle on the side of the chair and begins to crank it back and forth. CLICKING AND WINDING FROM THE INTERNAL SPRING CAN BE HEARD.

The garotte rod begins to press against the flesh of Chris's neck.

Max stops and locks the handle in place.

MAX

Any final thoughts before we ...
commence?

The garotte holds Chris in a vice-like grip, yet he manages to shift his eyes around the small crowd in the room. He works the cameras as well.

CHRIS

Is it a prayer you'd like to hear?
Perhaps an apology? Pious, virtuous
sheep ... you'll hear no such words
uttered here.

(smiles)

Would you prefer I beg you for
forgiveness? In this position it
would be easy for one to beg, don't
you agree? It is so easy to demand
it from me now, slaves. You are all
born to servitude. To bow, to beg,
to pay. I die a free man.

(beat)

Tell me ... who will save you when
SAID-GOD says it's your time?

Chris laughs and lifts a bony finger to Max.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(yells)

Pull your lever executioner!

Max gives Chris a smile and a nod. HE PAUSES, HOLDING CHRIS'S EYES AS IF HE IS SENDING A TELEPATHIC MESSAGE.

Chris relaxes and lets his eyes contact every enthralled viewer in the room. His face is anything but kind.

Max takes hold of the lever and flexes his fingers over the release handle.

CLICK, the release handle is depressed.

Max looks over the crowd and into the camera.

MAX

The people have spoken, the jury
rendered it's decision, SAID-GOD
has upheld.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

In the name of The Federation of
the United American Nations, I pull
this lever and carry forth the
final step in this young man's
journey through this justice
system.

A FEW UNHEARD WORDS ARE WHISPERED BETWEEN MAX AND CHRIS.

KLANK! The handle is pulled. There is a deafening BOOM As the
garotte weight drops.

A LOUD CHOKING GASP! Exhales from Chris as the rod SNAPS back
against his neck.

Through the LOUD COUGH, his fanged tooth apparatus CLICKS to
the floor and slides, spinning to a stop.

DEAD SILENCE:

Faces agape in disbelief and horror.

Chris's dead red eyes stare out devoid of life.

The crows feet of Chris's eyes twitch - then tighten.

HIS GASP IS LONG AND SUDDEN. HIS HEAD LIFTS AND HIS SMILE IS
BRIGHT WITH BLOOD ON HIS TEETH AND LIPS.

CHRIS

Missed me!

THE CROWD OUTSIDE THE PRISON SCREAMS IT'S APPROVAL.

IN THE DIRECTOR'S BOOTH, THERE IS CUSSING AND SURPRISE.

**KAREN AND LYNEL SHARE A COMMON GLANCE AND SUBTLE CROOK OF THE
LIPS.**

Chris jerks around in the chair, laughing as if he is
possessed, he looks like he is.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Are we feeling a sense of loss!

(laughter)

Get me out of this thing!

Max offers a broad smile to the cameras and takes a long, low
bow. Standing he looks straight on into the camera.

EXT. FORESTED RIVER BANK, OREGON - DAY

Chris looks off at some distant thing. His expression softens and he breaks a tepid smile.

Time has passed and Chris stands along a beach of the Willamette River.

From above, the cabin where Merritt used to dwell is visible in the trees.

Down the beach a second figure walks toward Chris.

Chris adjusts his eyes and then smiles; a smile that is revealing in it's duplicity of sinister victory.

CLEMENT APPROACHES HIM: He smiles.

The boys come together and shake hands.

CHRIS

I don't know what to say.

Clement smiles.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

What are you Clement? You a ghost or something?

CLEMENT

Let me draw you an analogy okay?

CHRIS

A what?

CLEMENT

A comparison ... You see, when a doctor fights a cancer, the doctor introduces a drug to fight that cancer. And from where people sit, they think I am the cancer, but I'm not, I'm the drug. I clear the board so the patient can survive.

CHRIS

I'm not sure ... what's the patient? If you're a drug.

CLEMENT

Human kind, Chris ... the patient. The cancer ... that would be your SAID-GOD. Giving artificial intelligence power ... it will be the end of you all.

(MORE)

CLEMENT (CONT'D)

You'll kill yourselves off just fine without it.

CHRIS

So what does this have to do with me?

CLEMENT

In this game, sometimes we need a sacrifice, for the greater good of the body. Entropy of the gestalt, we slow it down, maintain a natural order.

CHRIS

So I was supposed to be the sacrifice? What am I, a pawn?

CLEMENT

A pawn, sure. Now I will make you a king.

Chris just stands and thinks, pensive and lost.

CHRIS

Are you human?

CLEMENT

I'm old, we are ummm, we are for you, the illusion of free will.

CHRIS

We?

Clement smiles his unsettling smile.

Moving up and away, the boys fade into smaller images along the shrinking line of the river.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Max looks straight at us. He has no discernible expression. His eyes dip and come back up.

MAX

At this point it seems pretty clear. The system's a monster and our leaders aren't our rulers.

(beat)

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

There is a trap being set for us
and I'm not sure who's behind, if
there even is anyone behind it,
wittingly, or if this is just
another example of us destined to
serve the servants. Machine fodder
... that ain't for me man. I'm
gunna break it, I'm gunna tear the
mother-fucker down ... question is
...

(beat)

Are you coming along?

MUSIC UP:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMPTY WHITE HALLWAY - DAY

A SINGLE WORD SPRAY PAINTED IN STENCILED LETTERS OVER A PLAIN
WHITE DOOR:

S.A.I.D.G.O.D.

INT. SAID-GOD ROOM - DAY

SAID-GOD SITS ON A PILLOW ATOP A PEDESTAL. A BASKETBALL SIZED
ORB, IT GLOWS IN A DULL GOLDEN HUE, BEGINS PULSING AND FLARES
INTO A MIRROR FINISHED 18 KARAT BRIGHT AND SHINY THING.

FADE TO BLACK.

