

Chris  
Carter

YOU WATCH  
YOU VOTE  
THEY DIE

ONE  
BY ONE

THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ONE  
BY ONE

*About the author*

Born in Brazil of Italian origin, Chris Carter studied psychology and criminal behaviour at the University of Michigan. As a member of the Michigan State District Attorney's Criminal Psychology team, he interviewed and studied many criminals, including serial and multiple homicide offenders with life-imprisonment convictions.

Having departed for Los Angeles in the early 1990s, Chris spent ten years as a guitarist for numerous rock bands before leaving the music business to write full-time. He now lives in London and is a Top Ten *Sunday Times* bestselling author.

Visit [www.chriscarterbooks.com](http://www.chriscarterbooks.com) or find him on Facebook.

*Also by Chris Carter*

The Crucifix Killer  
The Executioner  
The Night Stalker  
The Death Sculptor

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ONE  
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# One

A single shot to the back of the head, execution style. Many people consider it a very violent way to die. But the truth is – it isn't. At least not for the victim.

A 9mm bullet will enter someone's skull and exit at the other side in three ten-thousandths of a second. It will shatter the cranium and rupture through the subject's brain matter so fast the nervous system has no time to register any pain. If the angle in which the bullet enters the head is correct, the bullet should splice the cerebral cortex, the cerebellum, even the thalamus in such a way that the brain will cease functioning, resulting in instant death. If the angle of the shot is wrong, the victim might survive, but not without extensive brain damage. The entry wound should be no larger than a small grape, but the exit wound could be as large as a tennis ball, depending on the type of bullet used.

The male victim on the photograph Detective Robert Hunter of the LAPD Robbery Homicide Division was looking at had died instantly. The bullet had transversed his entire skull, rupturing the cerebellum together with the temporal and the frontal lobes, causing fatal brain damage in three ten-thousandths of a second. Less than a full second later he was dead on the ground.



The case wasn't Hunter's; it belonged to Detective Terry Radley in the main detectives' floor, but the investigation photos had ended up on Hunter's desk by mistake. As he returned the photograph to the case file, the phone on his desk rang.

'Detective Hunter, Homicide Special,' he answered, half expecting it to be Detective Radley after the photo file.

Silence.

'Hello?'

'Is this Detective *Robert* Hunter?' The raspy voice on the other end was male, the tone calm.

'Yes, this is Detective Robert Hunter. Can I help you?'

Hunter heard the caller breathe out.

'That's what we're going to find out, Detective.'

Hunter frowned.

'I'm going to need your full attention for the next few minutes.'

Hunter cleared his throat. 'I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name—'

'Shut the fuck up and listen, Detective,' the caller interrupted him. His voice was still calm. 'This is not a conversation.'

Hunter went silent. The LAPD received tens, sometimes hundreds, of crazy calls a day – drunks, drug users on a high, gang members trying to look 'badass', psychics, people wanting to report a government conspiracy or an alien invasion, even people who claim to have seen Elvis down at the local diner. But there was something in the caller's tone of voice, something in the way he spoke that told Hunter that dismissing the call as a prank would be a mistake. He decided to play along for the time being.

Hunter's partner, Detective Carlos Garcia, was sitting at his desk, which faced Hunter's, inside their small office on

the fifth floor of the Police Administration Building in downtown Los Angeles. His longish dark brown hair was tied back in a slick ponytail. Garcia was reading something on his computer screen, unaware of his partner's conversation. He had pushed himself away from his desk and leisurely interlaced his fingers behind his head.

Hunter snapped his fingers to catch Garcia's attention, pointed to the receiver at his ear and made a circular motion with his index finger, indicating he needed that call recorded and traced.

Garcia instantly reached for the phone on his desk, punched the internal code that connected him to Operations and got everything rolling in less than five seconds. He signaled Hunter, who signaled back telling him to listen in. Garcia tapped into the line.

'I'm assuming you have a computer on your desk, Detective,' the caller said. 'And that that computer is connected to the Internet?'

'That's correct.'

An uneasy pause.

'OK. I want you to type the address I'm about to give you into your address bar . . . Are you ready?'

Hunter hesitated.

'Trust me, Detective, you will want to see this.'

Hunter leaned forward over his keyboard and brought up his Internet browser. Garcia did the same.

'OK, I'm ready,' Hunter replied in a calm tone.

The caller gave Hunter an internet address made up only of numbers and dots, no letters.

Hunter and Garcia both typed the sequence into their address bars and pressed 'enter'. Their computer screens flickered a couple of times before the web page loaded.

Both detectives went still, as a morbid silence took hold of the room.

The caller chuckled. 'I guess I have your full attention now.'

## Two

The FBI headquarters is located at number 935 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC, just a few blocks away from the White House and directly across the road from the US Attorney General. Aside from the headquarters, the FBI has fifty-six field offices scattered around the fifty American states. Most of those offices also control a number of satellite cells known as ‘resident agencies’.

The Los Angeles office in Wilshire Boulevard is one of the largest FBI field offices in the whole American territory. It controls ten resident agencies. It is also one of the few with a specific Cybercrime Division.

The FBI Cybercrime Division’s priority is to investigate high-tech crimes, including cyber-based terrorism, computer intrusions, online sexual exploitation and major cyber frauds. In the United States, in the past five years alone, cybercrime has increased ten-fold. The US government and its networks receive over a billion attacks each and every day, coming from multiple sources all around the world.

In 2011 a report was submitted to the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, estimating that internal cybercrime was bringing in illicit revenues of approximately US\$800 million a year, making it the

most lucrative illegal business in the USA, exceeding drug trafficking.

Thousands of the FBI's 'web crawlers', also known as 'bots' or 'spiders', search the net endlessly, looking for anything suspicious concerning any type of high-tech crime, inside and outside the United States. It's a mammoth job, and the FBI understands that what the crawlers find is merely a drop of water in a cybercrime ocean. For every threat they find, thousands go unnoticed. And that was why on that autumn morning at the end of September, no FBI web crawler came across the web page Detective Hunter and his partner were looking at back at the Police Administration Building.

## Three

Hunter and Garcia's eyes were glued to their computer screens, trying to take in the surreal images. They showed a large, see-through, square container. It looked like it was made of glass, but it could've been Perspex or other similar material. Hunter guessed each side to be approximately 1.5 meters wide, and at least 1.8 meters tall. The container was open-top – no lid – and it seemed to have been handmade. Metal frames and thick white sealant connected the four walls. The whole thing looked just like a reinforced shower enclosure. Inside the enclosure, two metal pipes of about three inches in diameter, one on the left and one on the right, ran from the floor all the way up and out the top. The pipes were sprinkled with holes, none wider than the diameter of a regular pencil. But two things worried Hunter. One was the fact that the images seemed to be streaming live. Two was what was at the center of the container, directly between the two metal pipes.

Sitting there, tied to a heavy metal chair, was a white male who looked to be in his mid to late twenties. His hair was light brown and cut short. The only piece of clothing he had on was a striped pair of boxers. He was a chubby man, with a round face, plump cheeks and chunky arms. He was sweating profusely, and though he didn't look hurt

there was no doubt about the expression on his face – pure fear. His eyes were wide open, and he was taking in quick gulps of air through the cloth gag in his mouth. Hunter could tell by the fast ‘up-and-down’ movement of his belly that he was almost hyperventilating. The man was shivering and looking around himself like a confused and frightened mouse.

The entire image had a green tint to it, indicating that the camera was using night-vision mode and lenses. Whoever that man was, he was sitting in a dark room.

‘Is this for real?’ Garcia whispered to Hunter, covering his mouthpiece.

Hunter shrugged without taking his eyes off the screen.

As if on cue, the caller broke his silence. ‘If you are wondering if this is live, Detective, let me show you.’

The camera panned right to a nondescript brick wall where a regular, round wall clock was mounted. It read 2:57 p.m. Hunter and Garcia checked their watches – 2:57 p.m. The camera then panned down and focused on the newspaper that had been placed at the foot of the wall, before zooming in on its front page and the date. It was a copy of this morning’s *LA Times*.

‘Satisfied?’ The caller chuckled.

The camera refocused on the man inside the box. His nose had started running and tears were streaming down his face.

‘The container you’re looking at is made of reinforced glass, strong enough to withstand a bullet,’ the caller explained in a chilling voice. ‘The door has a very secure locking mechanism, with an airtight seal. It only opens from the outside. In short, the man you can see on your screen is trapped inside. There’s no way out of there.’

The frightened man on the screen looked straight at the camera. Hunter quickly pressed the 'print screen' key on his keyboard, saving a snapshot of his entire desktop to the computer's clipboard. He now had what he hoped would be an identifiable shot of the man's face.

'Now, the reason why I'm calling you, Detective, is because I need your help.'

On the screen, the man started panting heavily. Fearful sweat covered his entire body. He was on the brink of a panic attack.

'OK, let's take it easy,' Hunter replied, being certain to keep his voice calm but authoritative. 'Tell me how I can help you?'

Silence.

Hunter knew the caller was still on the line. 'I'll do everything I can to help you. Just tell me how.'

'Well . . .' the caller responded. 'You can decide how he's going to die.'