

00:03.61

astudyincrime24

Howard, welcome to the show.

00:05.57

Howard Blum

Nice to speak with you.

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astudyincrime24

Well, it is my pleasure. i I've got to tell you, I've read my share of two crime books over the years, and many of them, I don't know if it's a majority, but many of them are written in a a real lurid, graphic manner to, I think to trigger schadenfreude in the reader.

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Howard Blum

you

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astudyincrime24

Your book, When the Night Comes Falling, a Requiem for the Idaho Student Murders is different. And despite the tragic topic, I found your prose compelling and I thought it was a superb book.

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Howard Blum

ah Thank you very much. I tried to write a sustained narrative that also would be suspenseful and also make the characters come alive.

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astudyincrime24

Well, I i believe you have ah you have succeeded as far as I'm concerned.

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Howard Blum

Great.

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astudyincrime24

So what what led you to write about this incident? What inspired your, was this an assignment with air mail or what?

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Howard Blum

Here's how it all actually went down. It was Thanksgiving of 2022, nearly two years ago, it was just a week or so after the the murders occurred in Moscow, Idaho. And we were sitting around the table and I hadn't really paid too much attention to the case, but someone brought

it up. And when they started talking about it, this perplexing mystery, no reason why the four students were killed, no understanding of

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astudyincrime24
Thank

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Howard Blum
how the assailant got into the house.

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astudyincrime24
you.

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Howard Blum
The house was filled with blood, but there was no trail of blood leaving the house. It seemed like this perplexing mystery. And I had measured out a large part of my professional career as a New York Times reporter and then as an author looking into mysteries. And I thought, well, This might be interesting. And the fact that they had no suspect, ah that no one had been identified as yet, that encouraged me even more. I thought in my vanity that maybe I could go out there and even solve the case, find a suspect. So I contacted a Graydon Carter who ran air mail. And he said, sure, go on out there, hard dime. And I said, no promises that I'll find anything. And he said, nevertheless, go you know do your thing. So I went out there on knocking on doors.

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Howard Blum
And fairly quickly to my vanity, I thought I had solved the case. The house was in a gully ah in in town and surrounding it and the behind it were grander homes and they were mostly occupied by members of a church group in town. And this church group in town was a pretty problematic group in many ways. They had they wanted to turn the town into a theocracy, a Christian capital, and that was at odds with this very liberal university that made up the town that was the University of Idaho was voted the number one party school in the state. So there was this tension. And to add to that, members of the church group had

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Howard Blum
ah published ah videos, put videos online saying that they had been assaulted by other members of the group and the deacon of the church group had gone to prison. He'd been convicted of pedophilia. So I thought, well, maybe there was something to someone from this church group on his way home would have seen this house, would have seen the

parties there, would have seen these pretty young women and his repressed way there their joy, their vivaciousness or whatever would have rebuked to him, and that would have driven him to murder. I mean, I had a B minus in psychology in college, so I thought I could put all the pieces together. So I decided I first thing I need to do is to speak with the pastor of this church, ah Doug Wilson, and he's a very articulate, charismatic man, but he wasn't re returning my calls. So I

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Howard Blum

go to see him outside the parking lot of the church. And I meet him there, sort of ambush him. He invites me in. And we go to his subterranean office. There are no windows in the office that I noticed. And in the course of the conversation, he begins to tell me how the church group is fighting the town over the pandemic restrictions, how they're against wearing masks. They've had demonstrations. And I realize this is in the midst of the pandemic, and I'm sitting just about a foot or so away from him. And the upshot is three days later, I didn't solve the case, but I did get COVID. ah So that was my introduction into Moscow and to the case.

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astudyincrime24

Well, I got it too, so, but evidently we both recovered. Well, unless you've been out of touch, i I assume most folks are familiar with what happened, but for those who are not, could you give me just a ah real brief narrative of what happened and in the early morning hours of Sunday, November 13th, 2022?

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Howard Blum

Yes, at about four in the morning on Sunday, November 13th, in a small college town of Moscow, Idaho, someone entered the house through a door on the second floor and proceeded to kill, not just kill, but to bludgeon ah with with with a knife, a sharp-edged weapon, a hunting knife in reality. a Four of the students, ah they were Matty Mogin, Kelly Conclaves, Ethan Chapin, and ze Zana Carnoodle.

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Howard Blum

And the assailant was able, the house was filled with blood, the assailant was able to somehow get out of the house, not leave a trail of blood and seemingly disappear.

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astudyincrime24

you

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Howard Blum

It wasn't until nearly seven weeks later that across the country from Idaho in the hills of the Poconos in Pennsylvania, A graduate student in criminology was attending the University of Washington ah just 10 miles from Moscow, but now is home for the holidays, was arrested and charged with these crimes. He's still in jail, as we speak. He's still awaiting trial. The lawyers have been going back and forth in pretrial motions. ah But the trial is is not taking place.

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Howard Blum

And the latest scheduling is for a year, pretty much a year from today in the June of 2025.

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astudyincrime24

And the suspect in this case is Brian Coburger, and we should say that to he's presumed innocent until proven guilty. um With regards to to this to the situation, to the story, why did you write a book about about such a tragic event when the story is is not yet finished? Or maybe after your research, do you consider it finished in a way and that maybe the trial is just ah ah for a formality?

07:09.58

Howard Blum

Well, I gave it a lot of thought. Is this the time to write about this case, as you say, before there's a trial, before there is a complete resolution? But the subtitle of my book is A Requiem for the Idaho Student Murders. And I wanted to give a loving remembrance of of these young lives, of these young lives how they were lived and what was lost. For example, one of the victims, Zaina Carnoodle, she wore a mortarboard to her high school graduation where she had written, for the lives I will change. For the lives I will change. That that stuck in my mind very poignantly. And yet now she will never have the the opportunity tu to affect any lives. another None of these four victims will. And I wanted to give them

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Howard Blum

a ah remembrance of a sort. I also felt that I could tell a fairly sustained and well-developed and factual detective story of how the suspect was tracked down. And central to that story was to me a completely perplexing ah event and a perplexing story. A week after the or two weeks after the murders, the suspect, Brian Coburger, was going to school at Washington State about 10 miles ah from the side of the killings.

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astudyincrime24

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Howard Blum

Has his father come out from Pennsylvania to drive back across the country with him for Christmas break? And the father is sitting shoulder to shoulder with his son in a white Hyundai Elantra. And in the course of this five-day journey, the father begins to realize as if he were following footsteps, that suddenly these footsteps are turning bloody and that his son, against everything he wants to believe, he's fighting against this realization, but he comes slowly, closer and closer to the realization that his son is a monster, that his son is in fact a murderer and could be very very likely guilty of these crimes. So I had that central element to tell the story would almost be

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Howard Blum

you know, of a voyage across country was structured in many ways, sounds pretentious, but like ah The Odyssey, of Homer's Story, which is a 12-year journey, this is a five-day journey, and I use that to go back and forth in time to tell my story. And then that convinced me, but also the trial itself to me it didn't seem to be that important.

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astudyincrime24

Yeah, and I like how you structured.

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Howard Blum

The way the trial was shaping up the dialectics of it were going to be really a battle of experts. You'd have one person say that the DNA was yeah was and important information. The other expert from the other side would impugn the DNA and back and forth. And you'd never really get to a real understandable motive. I thought I could come closest to what really happened in telling the story now.

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astudyincrime24

And we're going to touch on that particular subject, which you just mentioned here just a little bit later. But ah so with the trial, when the trial comes out and it is completed, will there be a follow up book at that point?

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Howard Blum

I'm not sure. i' you know I've had interest in my writing more about it. I'd like to see what takes place at the trial. I'll be following it. I'll certainly write more articles for it, for AML, I hope. and But I'll have to see if there's a large enough story there, a unique enough story that's beyond what I've already written to decide if I want to write a book just about a trial, if I want to do, in effect, a

sequel to what I've already written.

11:08.58

astudyincrime24

In your book, you provide perspective and details regarding Koberger's father, the victims, law enforcement, the forensic scientists, the attorneys and the victim's family, even the town itself. It's a very complete picture. I'm curious, how did the gag order make writing this book difficult, especially in terms of interviewing people and doing research there?

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Howard Blum

The gag order was a real hurdle. I had to jump over. It certainly was a detriment. One of the things that I had in my favor was I got out to Moscow before there was a gag order. I had been out there in the early days of the case when it was when I was there was a suspect.

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astudyincrime24

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Howard Blum

The police were were talking, people close to the police, as for example, the department psychologist, the department's chaplain. Those people were also talking in those days. Lawyers close to the case we were talking. And then once there was an arrest and a gag order, I did sort of a bit of what the FBI did. ah The FBI was able to build a family tree from that one DNA sample they had. They used what's called investigative genetic genealogy.

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Howard Blum

and they use this to build out a family tree. And on the father's limb of this tree, they were able to identify the suspect, Brian Kohberger. Well, I took that family tree of relatives, and in effect, I walked backwards, and I got people who weren't bound by the gag order, but who knew the people involved, who knew the events, and I got them to speak with Nick.

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astudyincrime24

Excellent. You know, you've ah you you have received some criticism for this, but you write in the book that Maddie Mogan was the sole target, your belief she was the sole target of the killer. I tend to believe exactly that. what What's your reasoning behind it?

13:07.12

Howard Blum

Well, you have to look what happens on the night of the murder. And on that night, just to reconstruct it a bit, the suspect, you know, goes by the house three times, three times, and he's not, I believe, casing it. What he's trying to do is define the will ah to find to find the state of mind where he can give in to the demons that are racing around his head and become the monster he's thinking of becoming.

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Howard Blum

So then when he finally turns off the ignition of his car, it requires the strength of Hercules, in effect, to make to take that action.

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astudyincrime24

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Howard Blum

But then he's made up his mind. He's going to be a killer. He walks down this incline with a knife in his hand. ah towards the house. He goes in on the second floor. The second floor sliding door was never locked. He enters ah the house that way. And on the second floor, there are two bedrooms filled with ah students. He doesn't go into either of the bedrooms. Instead, he makes a direct path up the third floor to Maddie Mogan's a bedroom.

14:21.63

Howard Blum

up I believe, because he goes into that bedroom right away, that she was his his target. Everyone else who is killed is, in effect, collateral damage. To his surprise, he finds that in Maddie's bedroom, ah there was another young woman staying over, Kaylee Gonclavis. She's killed. ah He then walks down the stairs, and he's confronted by Ethan Chapin, who's sleeping over with his girlfriend, Zaina.

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Howard Blum

ah Ethan is six foot four, an athlete, but he's killed very quickly with a slash to the neck. And then the killer approaches Zaina and he tells her, this has been overheard by ah someone who was in the house, don't worry, I won't hurt you. And yet, of course, he does hurt her. He kills her. And all these other people are collateral damage. How does now the big question is, how does he know Maddie? What's his connection to Maddie?

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Howard Blum

And that's the particularly interesting thing. There is no direct evidence of Brian Kohberger ever talking to Maddie, talking to any of the victims, or following Maddie, or any of the victims on social

media. But what is known is that Brian Kohberger frequented a restaurant in town that had a sort of vegan menu. And he was, he liked to eat vegan foods. It was called the Mad Greek. Mattie was a waitress there. Did they have to talk? Did they have to exchange words? I don't think that's necessary. I think for some of my co-burger, a man to whom obsessions come easily, all he needed was to get her image in his mind. There was something about her. Blonde good looks, her vivaciousness, her exuberance, which she found as a rebuke to the outsider's life he was living.

16:20.00

Howard Blum

ah And I believe, and and this is again just theory, that he would have followed her a bit even if she didn't notice it. He would have seen what her bedroom is and that allowed him to, when he entered the house and he finally decided that he could not live in a world where she where her presence was a constant rebuke to the life, isolated, grim life he was leading. that he decided to kill her and then once he stepped into her bedroom all his previous plans fell apart when he found out there were another girl in that bedroom and he also encountered other people on the way out and he had no choice but to kill them too. Interestingly enough the most perplexing part of this whole perplexing story is that his Kohlberger

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Howard Blum

has now killed all four young people out of one of the bedrooms steps another a young woman, Dylan Mortensen. She sees someone dressed in black. He's wearing a black mask. And she's in, as she describes it, a frozen state of shock. She can't speak At the same time, Coburger is locked in his own manic state. He's surrounded by his own armory of hate, if you will. And he doesn't even notice her. If she had said one word, if she had screamed, if she had shouted, if she had called for help, Coburger, I believe, would have turned towards her and would have killed her too. She too would have become another victim. But instead, she simply stands there and Coburger walks out

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Howard Blum

of this kitchen door into the night.

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astudyincrime24

Well, let's take a quick break and I will be right back.

18:12.42

astudyincrime24

I am back with Howard Bloom, author of When the Night Comes Falling, a Requiem for the Idaho Student Murders. ah Speaking of the book title, I'm thinking you're a Bob Dylan fan. Did you get the title from When

the Night Comes Falling from the Sky?

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Howard Blum

Very much so. And i um I give Bob a credit for that in the book. ah And yeah, i that image of Bob's, the knife come falling from the the sky, something that stuck with me. Sort of time standing still, and some momentous events about to happen.

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astudyincrime24

You call the book a Requiem, which is an act of remembrance. when When I finished the book and I finished it a couple of days ago, it occurred to me it was not just a Requiem for the victims, but it was also one for the families. I'm curious, what's the message of the book? What do you hope to convey to the reader about this incident?

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Howard Blum

I don't so much see the book as offering a message. I have, what I set out to do was to create a moment in a small town and what happens when madness hits it and how it affects the people in the town and the families and how it turns into a drama with the police who are part of this community too, and how they try to put the pieces together, and how it affects not just the families of the victims, but also the family of the accused, how they are turned into victims too in effect.

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astudyincrime24

you Well, you have some very thought-provoking insights in the book, especially in the epilogue. and But i'm goingnna I'm going to preserve most of that mystery. I recommend everyone buy a copy of When the Night Comes Falling. it's not like a ah I don't even want to compare it to a a typical, quote, true crime book, because some of those are are very they're just salacious. But anyway.

20:16.82

astudyincrime24

Uh, you you did you mentioned earlier that coburger drove by well, we believe he the suspect he's the suspect and we believe it was him that he drove by the house on king road three times before he finally stopped And committed the murders and you speculate uh that as to the reason for these three I guess drive-bys like the better word and you just mentioned that it was him trying to for lack of a better phrase, get the courage up to do what has been on his mind all this time. Others think that, again, that he was it was a ah time of him stalking, but I think the stalking would have already happened, don't you think?

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Howard Blum

We'll also look what was happening at the house that night if he was checking out the house to see if it was a suitable time to attack, or to give into his urges, he would have seen that in front of the house was a row of cars. There were four different cars there. He would have known that they were filled with people. Also, at 4 a.m., there was a door dash delivery from Jack in the Box to one of the people in the house, and he knew that they were up. This would be in the nu ah not a very good time to attack. So I think if he had been paying attention to any of that, he would have

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Howard Blum

If he was trying to commit, really, if he was focused on trying to commit a perfect crime where he could get away, he wouldn't have done it at that moment. Instead, though, he was locked in his own minds, his own thoughts. He was trying to find the will to cross over into this world where he could become a killer.

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astudyincrime24

ah ah About an episode back, I talked to Dr. Ann Burgess, who is very famous for working with the FBI's BSU, the Behavioral Science Unit, now called the BAU. She was working with him, with John Douglas and Robert Ressler on the study they made of serial offenders, serial killers and serial rapists. and You know, they talk about, as you said, trying to to this fight this demon in their head. It's something that they've been thinking about for quite some time and dreaming about, and they want to bring it to fruition. It's it's an itch that they have to scratch. And I think that's why, ah again, when you say he was walking out and the other, ah ah the woman, Dylan, was you know standing there in the doorway,

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astudyincrime24

He was probably just, his adrenal glands were going off. Uh, and I don't know if, uh, if afterwards, you know, a lot of killers, it's what they wanted it to be some, it's not what they wanted it to be. But, uh, yeah, I tend to agree with you on, on what you say about that. Well, about a month ago, you were on a podcast on Andrew Meyer's podcasts. And you said a you said that there have been some questions raised about a possible break-in at the chemistry lab at the University of Washington. you what was that What was that all about?

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Howard Blum

Well, it's something that the federal authorities are looking into. There was a, at the University of Washington where Kohberger had gone to school, there was a past stolen that gave access into the chem labs and the authorities are actively investigating at this moment where

the Kohlberger was the one who stole that pass that allowed access into the chem lab and that materials were taken that could be used to make a bomb was Kohlberger planning to make a bomb. yeah This is very tantalizing

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Howard Blum

stuff, I know, but at this moment, that's all the federal authorities have been able to find out and to document.

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astudyincrime24

So it's kind of still in a state of flux, basically.

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Howard Blum

Well, it's an ongoing investigation, as the authorities like to say.

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astudyincrime24

Yes, that's they and that's what they say. Well, as you suggested earlier in our conversation, you suggested that the trial will come down to the battle of the experts. And other than the touch DNA on the knife sheath that was found in the in the house underneath one of the victims, I believe all the other evidence against the suspect is it's purely circumstantial now taken together. Yes, but it is still circumstantial. I know you don't have a crystal ball, but I know you've probably thought about this. So what say you, will he take a plea? Will he be found guilty? Will he be found not guilty?

25:04.55

Howard Blum

I don't, yeah again, to just totally speculate. I don't think Brian Kolberger will take a plea. His legal team has gone out of their way to proclaim his innocence time after time, almost at every hearing there is. I think the case will go to trial. I think he will be convicted, and I think he'll be sentenced to death.

25:32.02

astudyincrime24

All right, Howard, I will give you the last word. How would you like to tie all this up? What would you like to say?

25:38.28

Howard Blum

Well, I would like anyone who is interested in picking up my book to sit down and read it as if it's not just a story about one isolated event, but almost as if it were a mystery case that I'm trying to put before them with characters that come alive. Only all these characters and all these horrific events were true, and that makes it perhaps

even more shocking, even more resonating.