



SKELETON SONG

WRITING AND DESIGN

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LAYOUT AND ART

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THANKS TO

Alden Strock, Andrew Sirkin, Blaine C Rineer, Craig Eisenberger, David Leaman, Elizabeth Stong, Erykah Rose, Ian Watson, Stephen Dewey, Justin Buckley, Katriel Paige, Kerstin Wolff, Natalie Walschots, Rose Bailey, Satyros Phil Brucato, and all my other patrons for supporting my work.

Andrew Bancroft, Ben Walker, and Geoff Cabrera for reading over the initial draft.

A SUBMISSION TO THE SCREAMWORLD GAME JAM

CONTENT NOTE

This game is about trauma inflicted on the bodies and minds of victims by a male serial killer. While the focus is not on the details of the murders, themes of sexual violence, other physical violence, abuse, gaslighting, and death may crop up in game. Please see the safety notes for suggestions on how to handle these themes responsibly.

MEDIA REFERENCES

Criminal Minds (especially S3E13: Limelight)

The Ted Bundy Tapes

Abducted In Plain Sight

The "And That's Why We Drink" podcast

Hope: A Memoir of Survival in Cleveland by Gina DeJesus and Amanda Berry

Life After Darkness by Michelle Knight

Page 32 of the *Book of Vile Darkness*,

by Monte Cook for Dungeons and Dragons 3rd ed.

Hell by Sarah Manguso

YOU WILL NEED

One or more facilitators

Five players

The Memory and Casualties sheets

A room with a dimmer switch

Art supplies (suggested: paper, markers, notecards, colored pencils)

Optional: white noise or tonal drone generator

FACILITATOR NOTES FOR PLAY

The timeline is not a strict ninety minutes. If you need to go longer or shorter, feel free, just make sure all fifteen memories get their own monologue.

Do not interfere unless safety requires it.

Once all fifteen memories are played out, dim the lights (or progressively dim them as the game goes on). As they begin to sing, whisper to them as the Killer. Tell them how much you missed them, how much they meant to you. Or tell them they're nothing. Play on their memories and try and drag them into the darkness with you.

Turn on the lights at the end of play, and announce the debrief.

SAFETY

Read this out loud first, either as a group, or the facilitator to the group.

The Ok Check-in can be used at any point during the game. When asking if someone is ok, make an "ok" sign with your hands. If you are being asked if you're ok, do not flash an ok sign back! Instead, give a thumbs up (I'm ok), a hand-waggle (I'm not sure) or a thumbs down (I'm not ok). Anything other than a thumbs up means that the asker must go out of game and check in on the person they asked. If somebody uses Largo, make sure to check in on them afterwards.



Loudly saying Cut! And making an "X" with your hands or arms stops all play. Cut should be used if someone is in immediate distress.

If someone is making you uncomfortable with their intensity and they are not checking in with you, hold your hands out in front of you in a "whoa, stop" gesture and say Largo. If someone does this to you, pull back from the scene a little bit and reassess your intensity level. It is not a punishment if someone uses Largo in your direction, it is a statement of boundaries, and that should be respected.

MECHANICS

Read this out loud once everyone understands the safety mechanics, either as a group or as a facilitator to the group.

In order to facilitate our shared experience, we will be using several LARP techniques to represent memories, bonding, and purgatory. These are: **prompt matching, monologue, interrupt, light adjustment, and chanting.**

PROMPT MATCHING is selecting a prompt and applying it to your character. You will find fifteen prompts on the table, three for each character, each asking questions about a memory. There is no "right" prompt for your character, merely the one that you feel is right. Once you select a prompt, say "I've found one" and hold it up in the air until everyone else quiets down -- if someone else says "I've found one", you should be the one quieting down. Once everyone is quiet, read the prompt out loud, and then move to the monologue.

A MONOLOGUE is a common technique used to express a character's memories or inner thoughts. Once a character selects a prompt, they deliver a short monologue (between thirty seconds and a minute) detailing the memory in the first person. It can be present or past-tense. Players are encouraged to include sensory details and characters from their character's past -- including other player characters.

At any point during the monologue, another player character can **INTERRUPT** the monologuing character by saying "That's not what I remember" and providing a differing detail. If the monologuing character wishes to challenge the interruption, they say "But were you there?" after the interruptor gives their details. If the interruptor wishes to push it, they can say yes, if not, they say no and let the monologue continue. If the interruptor says yes, the monologuing player should incorporate their details. Remember, if you interrupt a monologue, this puts your character in that scene, so don't interrupt every scene.

About 90 minutes into the game, the facilitator will **ADJUST THE LIGHTS**. This signals that the Killer is drawing near -- this is explained further in the Introduction.

THE GAME ENDS WITH CHANTING to drive the Killer away. This can be random vocalizations or the characters can sing a song that is important to them. Don't worry about being "good" at singing -- it's the voices of the voiceless that're important. If you sing or hum for the duration of the chanting, you're safe. If you decide to stop and submit to the Killer, cross your arms in front of you and go quiet. You are lost to your fellow characters.

Pick one of the five casualty sheets now. The information on them is intentionally sparse -- you'll be building your personality as the game progresses.

INTRODUCTION

Facilitator, read this as soon as everyone has picked their casualty sheet.

"Have a seat. Close your eyes and listen to your breathing for a moment."

SHORT PAUSE.

"Catch your breath, and let it flow out of you again. You, as a player are still breathing. You, as a character, have taken your last breath."

"Your name was on the front page. You were a victim with a number. One, two, three, four, five. When they caught him, your Killer's full name was splashed across the front page too, along with smaller pictures of the rest of his victims. They wrote hundreds of words dedicated to his motives: what he wanted, why he wanted it, how could such a monster exist among us. You were relegated to his kills, his trophies. He captured the public imagination."

"I'm going to count to three. When I reach three, scream. They won't hear you, but it feels so good. One, two, three."

LET THEM SCREAM.

"They haven't heard you since you went missing. Your voice was snuffed out, or added to the background noise of the Killer's glamour. You became a part of him, part of his past, his present, and his future.

Even beyond death, he has you. You and the four other victims are trapped in this purgatory, this grey room, with each other. You have art supplies to pass the time, but you're waiting for something. You're waiting for Him, and you all know it, in your voiceless, nameless way.

Now your Killer is dying. It doesn't matter how. This story isn't about him. It's about you. But who were you? Who are you?

Your memories are scattered among your art supplies on the table, relics from a time when being murdered wasn't your most notable accomplishment. Put them back together, remember who you are, before he comes to your purgatory and claims you all for his eternal pleasure. Sing together when you remember, and your resurgent voices may protect you as he passes from one world to the next. Remember not to listen to him."

"You may open your eyes and begin play."

DEBRIEF

Facilitator, read the following, and allow enough time for players to answer questions.

"Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in, and out. In, and out."

"He's gone now. You never have to worry about him again. He--"

"Open your eyes. You're alive again, and you're safe, here in this room with us. There is no Killer -- we left him in his own world."

"Take a moment and ask the person next to you for a hug or a fistbump."

PAUSE FOR AFFECTION.

"Now think: what's one thing you'd like to take with you from this game? What's one thing you'd like to leave behind?"

PAUSE FOR ANSWERS.

"What did you like about this experience? If anything inhibited the experience, what was it?"

PAUSE FOR ANSWERS.

"Thank you for playing Skeleton Song. Remember to please take care of yourself and each other after this game. If you need to talk, I'll be around."

MEMORIES

Facilitator, cut out these memory strips and scatter them in the same pile as the art supplies.

INADEQUATE

When did you know you weren't enough? Who told you? How did you continue to fail afterwards?

BORED

When did you feel you had outgrown your surroundings? Where did you go next?

LOVING

When did you feel most loved? How did they disappoint you? Did you ever find that love again?

FURIOUS

What little things enrage you beyond your better nature?
Give an example of a time you lashed out.

HOPEFUL

What big thing did you want but never get?
What was "good enough" in comparison, and how did you make the best of it?

ENVIOUS

Who had what you couldn't? How did you try to get it?

CLOSE

Who do you trust most? How could they have failed you, but they didn't?

MISERABLE

What is a hurt you can't let go of?
Why does it hurt so much now, even after death?

FRIGHTENED

What frightened you more than your own death? Why does it seem small now?

SERENE

Where would you go to be alone? Why do you hope you will be buried close by?
What happy memory will remain there?

ENTHUSIASTIC

Who first told you that you were "too much"?
Why have you held onto that? Couldn't you be more?

SUSPICIOUS

When did you listen to your instincts when other people told you you should ignore them?
What good but unexpected thing came of that?

UNDERSTANDING

How do you best relate to people? In what unlikely circumstance did you meet your best friend?

INDEPENDENT

What memory defines you? Why do other people dismiss it? Why do you hold onto it like a talisman?

ECSTATIC

What is your single greatest accomplishment? Who helped you? Why will they still celebrate it even after you're dead?

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

MEMORIES

CASUALTIES



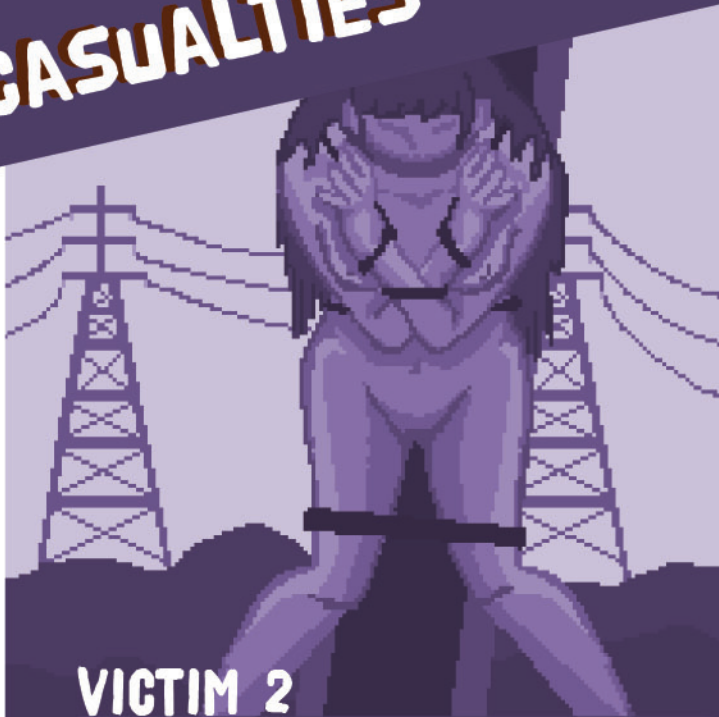
VICTIM 1

NAME UNKNOWN.
POTENTIALLY A SEX WORKER.

STRANGLER. HESITATION MARKS,
SHALLOW PUNCTURE WOUNDS.

HANDS UNFOLDED,
BODY LEFT IN A SHALLOW GRAVE.

CASUALTIES



VICTIM 2

ALEXIS KUIPER.

COLLEGE STUDENT, MAJORING IN EDUCATION. FRIENDS DESCRIBED THEM AS “OUTGOING” AND “CHEERFUL”.

MISSING FOR THREE DAYS BEFORE BODY WAS FOUND IN A POWER LINE CORRIDOR.

HANDS FOLDED OVER CHEST, CLOTHING REMOVED. STRANGLED.

MEMORIES

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

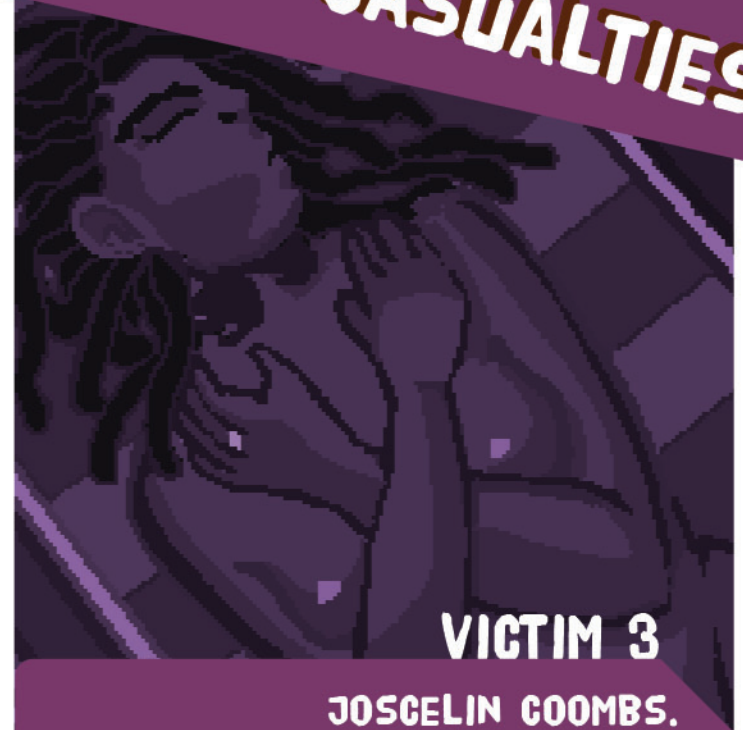
Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

MEMORIES

CASUALTIES



VICTIM 3

JOSCELIN COOMBS.

**COLLEGE STUDENT,
MAJORING IN CIVIL ENGINEERING.**

**MISSING FOR THREE DAYS
BEFORE BODY WAS FOUND ON
NEARBY TRAIN TRACKS.**

**HANDS FOLDED, CLOTHING
REMOVED, ENGAGEMENT RING
STILL ON FINGER.**

STRANGLED.

CASUALTIES



VICTIM 4

NAME UNKNOWN.

FOUND IN DRAINAGE DITCH NEAR
MAJOR ROAD WITH BACKPACK,
SUGGESTS RUNAWAY.

STRANGLED.

HANDS FOLDED,
CLOTHING REMOVED.

MEMORIES

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

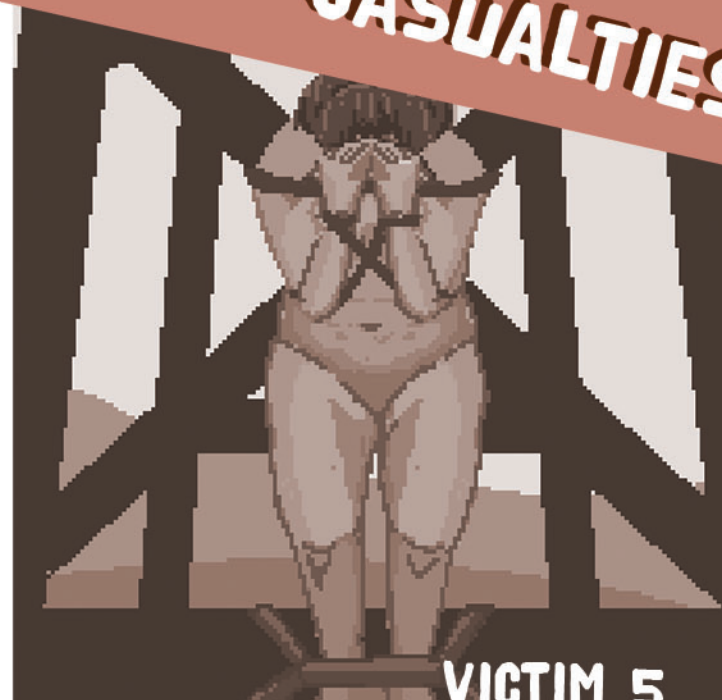
Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

Write about your memory prompt below.

MEMORIES

CASUALTIES



VICTIM 5

VAL HARRELSON.

MARRIED PARENT OF TWO.

**MISSING FOR THREE DAYS
BEFORE BODY WAS FOUND
IN A POWER CORRIDOR.**

**HANDS FOLDED,
CLOTHING REMOVED,
RINGS LEFT ON FINGERS.**

STRANGLED WITH A LIGATURE.