

## After 7 Deaths, Digging for an Explanation

By TIMOTHY EGAN

SEATTLE, June 24 — It made no sense when Aaron Kyle Huff, a pizza delivery man with a vapid background, strolled into an early-morning party after a rave in Seattle three months ago and shot eight people at random, killing six before he turned his pistol-grip shotgun on himself.

From his hometown of Whitefish, Mont., where Mr. Huff had not made a huge impression despite his bearlike frame, to Seattle, where he lived with his identical twin, the question of "why" turned up blank stares and disbelief.

But with the victims buried and the killings solved beyond a doubt, there seemed little for the police to do. A city was left with its grief, and with a muddle for a motive.

"There were detectives here who said, 'Hey, Chief, it's over — let's move on,'" said R. Fox, 54, is among the nation's best-known criminologists, sometimes called the dean of death. The author of 16 books, he was an adviser to former President Bill Clinton and has been a frequent couch mate to Oprah Winfrey.

Usually, Dr. Fox is called on to make sense out of the soup of crime statistics. Never before had the authorities asked him to explain why someone had gone on a murderous rampage, he said. In a change of roles, Dr. Fox, an intense, bespectacled man who

speaks in a low, conspiratorial voice, has been acting as a detective of sorts.

Assisted by a panel of three people, he has been lucky that family members of the victims, as well as Mr. Huff's mother and twin brother, Kane, who were unavailable for interviews for this article, have spoken to him, Dr. Fox said. Chief Kerlikowske said he had hired Dr. Fox largely because he thought people who would not talk to the police would open up to a professor.

"Academics used to look at police like we were the white rats and they had the lab coats on," Chief Kerlikowske said. "But it's much better now. And for us, it's irresponsible not to seek their help when an entire city is trying to find some answers."

In about a week, Dr. Fox will present his findings to the police. He is confident, he said, that there are explanations for why Mr. Huff, who was 28, armed himself with a 12-gauge shotgun, a handgun and nearly 300 rounds of ammunition, and proceeded to commit the worst mass killing here in 20 years.

"In this case, the people who were killed didn't know Kyle Huff," Dr. Fox said in an interview. "But that doesn't mean they didn't represent something. Very, very few mass murderers just go out and shoot anything that moves. There's a reason they pick certain targets."

Dr. Fox said he was certain that Mr. Huff "didn't just snap."

"That's not what killers like this do," he said.

He noted that Mr. Huff was from a small town, and that once he left for the big city, he led an anonymous life.

In Whitefish, a resort community near Glacier National

Park, "people remember Kyle in a very positive way," Dr. Fox said. In Seattle, he said, people had a different perspective of him.

The police know that before the Seattle killings, Mr. Huff was charged after a violent outburst; he had shot up a moose sculpture in Whitefish. He was booked on a felony criminal mischief charge, later reduced to a misdemeanor, which allowed him to keep his arsenal of guns.

Dr. Fox does not make much of the incident, dismissing it as more a youthful prank than a precursor to multiple homicide.

The weapons went with Mr. Huff to Seattle when he moved here about five years ago to live with his brother. He seemed to have little ambition, the police said.

"He was a career pizza delivery guy," Chief Kerlikowske said. "What does that tell you?"

On Friday night, March 24, Mr. Huff attended a rave, a loose-knit party sometimes structured around a theme, at an arts center



Dr. Fox, usually a statistics man, has been acting as a detective of sorts. *Kevin P. Casey for The New York Times.*



Prof. James Alan Fox examined the yard of the Seattle house where a gunman killed six people and himself. *Kevin P. Casey for The New York Times.*

in Seattle. The theme of this one was "Better Off Undead," and some people had dressed in a zombie motif. Sometime in the early morning, Mr. Huff went by invitation from someone he had met at the rave to a party at a house in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. Nobody knew Mr. Huff, the police said, nor did he leave an impression of rage or resentment.

Near dawn, Mr. Huff left the party and went to his pickup truck. He retrieved his weapons and ammunition, spray-painted "NOW" on the sidewalk and began his killing spree. When an officer arrived, Mr. Huff put the shotgun in his mouth and killed himself.

The crime scene horrified Chief Kerlikowske, a 34-year police veteran. He said there had been dead people in zombie makeup, slumped and bloodied. A distraught woman had come up to him, saying she had been driving around all night trying to find her daughter and feared she was among the victims. It turned out that she was.

"The more I thought about it, the more I realized we had a responsibility to these victims to probe more and find out what caused this," Chief Kerlikowske said. "I sit up here in a rarefied atmosphere, with 2,000 people and a \$200 million budget, and sometimes you have to be reminded what this business is all about."

Not long after Dr. Fox was hired by private contract, a crumpled, single-page note was found in a trash bin near the apartment in which Mr. Huff and his brother had lived. Crime lab officials have concluded that it is "highly probable" that Mr. Huff wrote the note, which was handwritten and addressed to his brother.

The note, written shortly before the killings, provided Dr. Fox with an opening into Mr. Huff's mind. In it, Mr. Huff said goodbye to his brother and explained that he was dutybound to go after the ravers.

"I can't let them get away with what they're doing," he wrote. "I

hate this world of sex they are striving to make."

He was not specific, outside of several references to open sex. He referred to "things they say and do" and said: "It's just a question of if we're willing to be O.K. with it. And obviously I'm not."

He expressed regret at leaving his brother. "I hate leaving you by yourself, but this is something I feel I have to do," he wrote. "I can't let them get away with what they're doing."

Dr. Fox said, "Obviously you don't want to blame the victims, but he was clearly upset at the ravers."

He said there was a practical lesson in his work here for fellow academics: they should get out of school more.

"A lot of my colleagues just want to write scholarly articles for scholarly journals," he said. "But I think if you're in a field with specialized knowledge that can be useful to the community, you should engage the public and the policy makers."