

Proliferation of the Random Actor Profile





No One is Innocent, They're All Guilty

Setting: A statistically safe upper-middle-class suburb, the week I started writing this book.

Detective John Ford was alarmed.

"We're not even two weeks into the school year," he said, "and we've already had one really scary kid set off a bomb at the high school."

Ford, who had been trained to be able to identify someone's behavioral profile, including the "RANDOM ACTOR"* traits, added, "Dan, he's an extreme RANDOM ACTOR."

Detective Ford,¹ who serves in a wealthy North Dallas suburb, called me on Friday, August 24, 2002, almost a year after the 9/11 terrorist attack on America led by another RANDOM ACTOR, Mohammed Atta. An engineering student, described by Cairo neighbors as a "gentle flower," Atta killed indiscriminately, even his fellow Muslims, when he flew a hijacked American Airlines passenger jet into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

Ford said, "The kid told me, *No one is innocent. They're all guilty*. He also confessed that he fire-bombed a police car a few weeks ago, and he wasn't even on the school's radar. He's never been in trouble. And, both he and his father are extremely brilliant.

"When I asked the father if he saw this coming," Ford added, "he said that he went through his son's bedroom and didn't see anything out of the ordinary. But on the back of his door was a poster about the Columbine shooting and bomb-making materials were out in the open everywhere, just like at Columbine."

Ford was talking about the Littleton Massacre. On April 20, 1999, Hitler's birthday—other RANDOM ACTORS, two teen students Dylan Harris and Eric Klebold, armed with guns and bombs, killed twelve students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The killers completed their carnage by committing suicide—turning their guns on themselves when they couldn't detonate one of their suicidal

*Throughout this book, the capitalized designation "RANDOM ACTOR" refers to a specialized term in the *Korem Profiling System*, a system set forth in an earlier book, *The Art of Profiling: Reading People Right the First Time*, and more fully explained in Chapter 3.

bombs. Like Atta, the son of an affluent Cairo attorney, the teens came from prosperous families. They planned to commit homicide-suicide at Columbine and—again, like Atta—fantasized about hijacking a plane loaded with bombs and crashing into New York City.² And, like Atta's father, their parents were oddly unaware of the teens' activities, although their bomb-making materials were discovered by police in plain view in their bedrooms.

In 1997, two years before the Littleton Massacre, I identified Ford's suburb as a high risk candidate for a similar type of terrorist incident.

"Dan, this is crazy," said the usually stoic and unflappable Detective Ford. "They just got back to school."

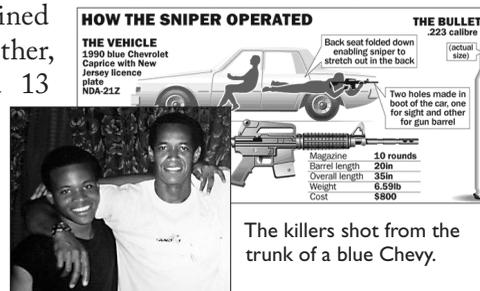
Investigating youths bent on destroying everything in sight was Ford's frequent task. That same week, two middle-school youths were found with detailed, hand-written manuscripts describing how to build explosive devices, and a few weeks later, the local community college, one of the nation's largest, received a bomb threat. But Ford's suburb wasn't the only one under attack.

October, 2002—RANDOM ACTOR, Random Rage

Less than sixty days later, beginning on October 2, another RANDOM ACTOR, John Lee Williams, aka John Allen Muhammad, and his 17-year-old Jamaican companion, Lee Malvo, randomly killed in Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland suburbs. Muhammad, a convert to Islam and a Desert Storm veteran, trained Malvo as a marksman. Together, they killed 10 and wounded 13 people³ with one shot per victim from a Bushmaster .223 caliber rifle. The victims were doing ordinary things like pumping gas, mowing a lawn, and loading home improvement materials in a van at a mall. Muhammad and Malvo even shot a 13-year-old being dropped off at school. Schools were locked down. Others closed. The shooters were given the moniker the "DC Snipers" by the media—to the chagrin of soldiers who served honorably, because no genuine sniper duo in wartime ever wreaked as much havoc on an entire region of a country.

The nation burned with questions: *Why? Why the Suburbs? Why kill people doing such mundane tasks? Was it another group of Middle-Eastern terrorists?*

Consumed with the terror of random killers on the loose, Americans didn't pay attention to unprecedented RANDOM ACTOR incidents abroad.



October 11, Finland—In a posh Helsinki suburban mall, Petri Gerdt, a 20-year-old chemistry student, blew himself up while standing next to a McDonalds, taking out three levels of the mall. He wasn't a terrorist. He wasn't even protesting anything. He just did it. Seven died and 80 were injured. On the Internet, Gerdt watched the DC killers taking out targets in strip malls . . . so he decided to blow himself up at a *bigger* mall, to do something like his young Palestinian counterparts who launched over 80 suicide attacks against Israel between 2000–2002. Finland declared a national day of mourning, and Gerdt became history's first suicide suburban bomber without a cause.



Petri Gerdt.

Europeans asked: *Why? Why a sedate suburb of Helsinki? Why a student who had no criminal record?*

October 17, Kuwait—A 17-year-old teenager in Fintas, south of Kuwait City, was arrested with ten homemade bombs he put in the trunk of his father's car. He said he received orders from Pakistan over the "Internet" and if he didn't comply he and his family would be killed. Authorities said the youth, who seemed "bewildered and confused," was not tied to a group. Police said he made an emergency call that a suspicious vehicle was parked in front of a complex housing Americans.

October 19, suburb outside Stuttgart, Germany—A 16-year-old laid siege to an elementary school in the sleepy hollow town of Waiblingen. He demanded a ransom of one million dollars and a get-away car before he would release the four kids he held at gunpoint. His weapon turned out to be an air-propelled pellet handgun.

Why this crazed act in a statistically safe suburb?

And then, back in the United States . . .

October 26, Sallisaw, Oklahoma—18-year-old Daniel Hawke Fears, went on a rampage in his car, killing two and randomly shooting others including a two-year-old toddler. Neighbors from around the statistically safe small-town community were confused.

Anita Doubrava said that the 9/11 and the "DC sniper" attacks didn't trouble her teenage daughter because they happened far away, but this *was the first time my daughter cried over something in the news . . . this was just too close to home.*⁴

Rev. Wade, a local pastor asked: *What causes a young guy to go off like that? That's what people want to find out. They hope there are answers.*⁵

And then the next day, the first American university in the 2002–2003 school year was hit by a RANDOM ACTOR . . .

October 28, Tucson, Arizona—Robert Stewart Flores Jr., a 41-year-old University of Arizona College of Nursing student, shot and killed three professors. *Are you ready to meet your maker?*, he asked, before shooting

point-blank into the chest of assistant professor Barbara Monroe. Before killing an ethics professor, Cheryl McGaffic, Flores declared that he was “going to give her a lesson in spirituality.” She studied death and dying and the relationship between health and spirituality in patients. Flores, a former Desert Storm veteran, threatened to blow up the university. Instead, he turned the gun on himself. The next day, stunned editors of the *Arizona Daily Star* received a 22-two page letter entitled, “Communication From the Dead,” explaining Flores’ rationale for the murders and his suicide.

A local reporter asked me: *Can these people be identified before they act, and if so, is there special intervention for them?*

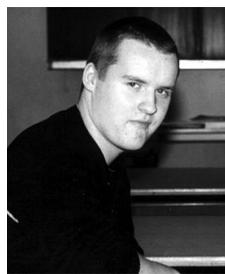
Warnings and Signals

Just days before Flores’s rampage, I had warned senior university officials at a major state university that domestic mass suicidal shootings or bombings would probably occur on campuses during the 2002–2003 school year—especially state universities in small towns and suburbs . . . and even more so if there was a significant military presence nearby. I explained why their campus was near the top of the list. The officials shook their heads in disbelief, and one said: *You mean to tell me that because we are in a safe, small, all-American community that we are a target. My God, that just sounds crazy.*

The Tucson shooting took place just days later . . . state university, small town atmosphere,⁶ statistically safe community, home of Davis-Monthan Air Force base.

It wasn’t the first time professionals were warned and shook their heads in disbelief.

In February 1999, two months before the Littleton Massacre, in an emergency address to the National Association of Secondary School Principals, I explained that bombs would be used in the next attacks on American high schools and that the loss of life could be greater than the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that claimed 168, including 19 children.



“I see him before my eyes and I just cannot fathom that he would be capable of a crime like this.” One of Steinhäuser’s teachers.

I showed only one video clip of a community that was a likely candidate: Denver suburbs. Six weeks later, the Littleton Massacre at Columbine shook the international community.

Three years later, in March 2002, in quiet Erfurt, Germany, Robert Steinhäuser, 19, a former student at Johannes Gutenberg secondary school, regarded as *intelligent* and *well-liked* by students, shot and killed 13 teachers, 2 fellow pupils, a police officer, and finally himself. It was the greatest slaughter of life rendered by a lone person in Germany since WWII. More

people died than at Columbine. A German officer, trained to identify the RANDOM ACTOR profile, emailed me every few hours with updates, including confirmation of the RANDOM ACTOR traits of the shooter. She understood why RANDOM ACTOR school incidents were ripe to occur in Europe, but European officials, such as German Interior Minister Otto Schily, posed the question that has been repeated around the globe: *We must also ask ourselves the deeper question of what actually is going on in our society when a young person causes such disaster in such a way.*⁸

To a rational person, the rage of the RANDOM ACTOR just doesn't make sense. We can handle it when rival gang members shoot each other in *another* part of town. But why should we die when we are just mowing the lawn, or working in our office building, or taking notes in a science class? These crazed acts seem similar, but are they? A random killing of innocents . . . often finished off with a suicidal act? Is it possible to predict acts that seem so irrational? Is it possible to take the wires apart before an attack? The answer is yes.

Succinctly stated, most suicide terrorists, random school shooters and bombers, random postal and company shooters, and serial killers, possess the extreme RANDOM ACTOR behavior profile. This is not a criminal profile, but a behavioral profile—one that has been used to thwart the impulse to commit catastrophic acts.

There has been a steady drum beat of unprecedented RANDOM ACTOR attacks that have changed how we view and live in our world: Oklahoma City bombing (1995), Columbine (1999), 9/11, Muhammad-Malvo (2002); suicide bombers attacking civilians (1980s–present), and many others—like Chechen terrorists taking a Russian grade school hostage and slaughtering 330, including 118 children (2004). Atta's attack brought down some of the largest buildings in the world. And daily, RANDOM ACTOR youths in the United States are found with bombs and plots to take out their schools—sobering, because the average age of a suicide bomber is 17 to 24.

Hatred is just a device to unleash pent-up rage. No rage, no hatred. Destroy a person's interior fabric and assemble the right behavioral traits, and you'll get rage. Let that rage simmer, present a justifying release valve, and that rage will destroy anyone in its way. You don't start with hatred, you start with rage. And killing en masse takes a special sort of rage. It takes the rage of the RANDOM ACTOR—a person in whom two behavioral wires are wound tight, just waiting for detonation.

This book was not written to rouse fears. It was written because it is possible to identify people with the RANDOM ACTOR traits before they strike—and without stereotyping. It is possible to take the behavioral wires apart so that those with the RANDOM ACTOR traits *don't* want to

kill others or themselves. Proven and thoughtful interventions can guide RANDOMACTORS out of this destructive profile so they can lead productive and life-giving lives. This is not wishful thinking, but has been proven in interventions developed by over twenty years of research, hundreds of interviews across twenty countries, a vast research data base, and hands-on training of over 25,000 professionals in North America and Europe.

Law enforcement professionals have used the information in this book to close cases before disaster struck (more on Ford's case and others in Chapter 7). Educators have applied their training to provide preemptive intervention to students before they committed a violent act. Corporate team leaders have learned why some organizations never have RANDOM ACTOR incidents and how to modify their organizations to avoid such occurrences. And people with the RANDOM ACTOR traits have identified these traits in themselves and initiated action that eliminated their destructive/catastrophic impulse.

Beyond those who launch catastrophic attacks and commit non-lethal destructive acts, there are even more who have the RANDOM ACTOR traits who are not violent, but lead hobbled and often defeated lives. This book emphasizes averting catastrophic acts, but if you are reading this book and realize you have the RANDOM ACTOR traits, you will also see that *it is possible* to live a healthy and robust life.

But kids and adults going homicidal crazy, killing innocents at random *does* seem senseless—until you connect the dots. So, let's begin.