

Stranger Than Fiction

For *Boyz n the Hood* actor
Lloyd Avery II,

the calls of thug life were loud. So he answered.
What followed? Paranoia.
A double homicide. And death at the hands of a Satanist.
This isn't your ordinary screen gem

story THOMAS GOLIANOPOULOS

On his last night as a free man,

Lloyd Avery II was taking hits from a bong and giving his younger brother the creeps. They were sitting in the two-car garage of their grandmother's house on Crescent Heights Boulevard near Beverly Hills. The conversation soon grew heavy.

Lloyd knew the walls were closing in. "I've had a good life," he said. The smoke wafted through the comfortable California night. He passed the bong to Che, who could muster only a single toke. It was potent, and weed made him nervous. The strained look on his brother's face wasn't easing Che's paranoia, either. "You want to hear something scary?" Lloyd asked.

Che knew that in recent weeks, detectives had visited their grandma's and father's residences in search of his brother. He wasn't surprised. He noticed Lloyd had been acting a little more self-destructive than usual. Che sensed Lloyd was trying to get something off his chest but was wary of what he might say. "I don't want to hear that shit," Che muttered. "[I know] you're in trouble." Maybe it was the THC, but Che pulled out a pocketknife and brandished it toward his big bro. Che insists he wasn't going to stab him; this was his way of cutting the conversation short. They didn't say anything more that night, and Lloyd retreated to his

grandma's room to crash at the foot of her king-size bed. The LAPD knew where he was sleeping. By the next morning, they pounced.

Che remembers the helicopters being louder than usual and seeing a lot of foot traffic out front. Lloyd was with his bike in the kitchen, where he gave his brother a hug, last night's situation already forgotten, and then left through the back door. Riding on Crescent Heights Boulevard, he made a U-turn and pulled up to the driver's side of a police car.

Lloyd leaned down, brazenly asked, "What's up?" and released his grasp from the handlebars of his aluminum Mongoose. The officer opened his door, and Lloyd stumbled. He quickly recovered and sped west in an attempt to elude the cops but soon collided with another police vehicle. He was arrested for a double homicide.

At the time of his capture, Lloyd Avery was a 30-year-old actor who was finally landing some work. He made his name in a small but memorable part in *Boyz n the Hood* but was quickly sidetracked. Earlier that summer, Lloyd booked back-to-back features, the Master P-produced *Lockdown*, and *Shot*, where he also served as a technical advisor. In the latter, he played G-Ride, a menacing yet charismatic gang member. To those who knew him then, it wasn't much of a stretch. But to others, it just didn't make sense.

"He was kind of meek," says Malcolm Norrington, who played Knucklehead No. 1 to Lloyd's Knucklehead No. 2 in *Boyz*. "He was not anything near a street guy. Within a year of *Boyz*, I was hearing about him missing auditions. I don't remember when I heard about him joining [a gang]. I just remember being perplexed. To me, it was like, 'What is he doing Blooding? Lloyd? C'mon.'"

Indeed, shortly after *Boyz*, Lloyd baffled those closest to him by leaving his middle-class neighborhood for the Jungle, a heavily Blood-affiliated area between La Brea Avenue, Crenshaw Boulevard, Santo Tomas Drive and Coliseum Street. Lloyd embraced his new home, tattooing the word "JUNGLEZ" above his left eyebrow.

"Instead of just being a Hollywood-like studio gangster, he was living it," Che says, speaking from his mom Linda's house. His voice, a soulful, gruff twang, is contemplative. "My brother turned into a for-real for-real gangster." Apparently, Lloyd Avery never got over playing Knucklehead No. 2.

"I like to call it the Tupac Syndrome," Che says. "He felt like he had something to prove when he really didn't. Even if you have money and fame, you will sacrifice all of that just to have respect from a bunch of thugs." But unlike Pac's demise under the glitz of the Vegas strip, Lloyd's murder was far from glamorous. He was killed by his Satan-worshipping cellmate in Pelican Bay State Prison. Outside of his family, it wasn't really news. Not even to the corrections officers who took two days to discover his body.

"He hung out with gang members who sent him on these crazy missions. I can't get into specifics, but people weren't sure if he would come back." —Quincy "QD3" Jones III

In the early 1990s, Los Angeles was in chaos. The Bloods and Crips truce was short-lived, the crack era was in full swing and a nationwide recession was taking its toll. Despite those problems, South Central was the center of the pop-culture universe. *Boyz n the Hood*, *South Central* and *Menace II Society* illustrated life in the city's slums while *The Chronic* and *Doggystyle* sold millions of records romanticizing gang life. Clearly, there was an allure. Even a MC Hammer got down with Death Row.

The characters Lloyd Avery played in the movies were a perfect iteration of the times: Death could arrive anywhere, at any time. In 1991's *Boyz*, that was him leaning out of the red Hyundai, firing two shotgun blasts at Morris Chestnut's saintly character, Ricky Baker. Then, as Thug No. 1 in *Poetic Justice*, he snuck up on a lovestruck Q-Tip and executed him before the opening credits. Both gigs materialized from his friendship with director John Singleton, who used to chow down at the Avery household during their famous Friday-night fish fries. But Lloyd's roles bore little resemblance to this shy, popular kid who lettered in water polo and baseball at Beverly Hills High School.

"He was relatively square in the beginning," says Quincy "QD3" Jones III, son of music producer Quincy Jones, who met Lloyd freshman year. "Out of our clique"—a who's-who of entertainment royalty offspring, including former Motown head Clarence Avant's son Alex and Smokey Robinson's daughter Tamla—"he was most likely to succeed. He was the one who motivated people to do better." The eldest son of a self-employed handyman and a stay-at-home mom, Lloyd grew up in white-collar View Park with a swimming pool in the backyard. As a kid, he wasn't allowed to play in the streets after dark, and in high school, he was the type of guy who would hold a beer at parties and feign drinking it to avoid peer pressure. His favorite song was Elton John's "Benny and the Jets."

He fit in with all the social circles at Beverly High but was a little unsettled by his peers' affluence. Lloyd's mom, Linda, remembers him telling her that a classmate had been promised a new car if he brought

home straight Cs. "Lloyd had a car," she says; it was a brown flatbed truck. "But I remember [people] telling me he used to park it a couple blocks away [from school]." Whether motivated by fame or fortune, Lloyd wanted a taste of the fabulous life. Che says, "He told me, 'I'ma be rich one day.'"

After graduating from Beverly High in 1987, he didn't last a year at L.A. Trade Tech, and he worked a succession of menial jobs, even a brief stint at McDonald's. He was more interested in the entertainment industry, but that didn't go over well with his father, Lloyd Sr. "Dad was like, 'Keep that shit as a hobby,'" Che recalls. "My dad always put a damper on Lloyd's dreams of being a producer and being in the movies. He was like, 'That shit is cool, but you have to learn a trade.'" Lloyd, for his part, had some success early on: He produced the minor New Jack Swing hit "Push It" for Tisha Campbell and had a budding acting career as Singleton's de facto villain. (Perhaps it was his dead-on glare or his praying mantis-like 6-foot-2 frame, but this nice guy played an awfully good bad guy.) But his relationship with Singleton took a turn after the *Poetic Justice* premiere. "Lloyd was sitting next to John," QD3 remembers, "and when the movie was over, Lloyd stood up and [yelled], 'That shit is wack.' John, understandably, got upset by it."

By the summer of 1993, Lloyd's increasingly bizarre behavior was worrying his friends and family. There was the time he told Ice Cube that he had "a punk-ass handshake." On another occasion, he screamed at one of Che's female friends at a shopping mall. "He basically became the role," Singleton says. "After [*Boyz*] came out,

that became his life. He acted that role out in life."

"It was like a split personality," says Linda Avery. "[He] seemed a little angry. But then, he was still loving. One thing about Lloyd: He always started a conversation with 'I love you' and ended it with 'I love you.'"

Indeed, those close to him speculated something had come unhinged. QD3 thinks Lloyd was already teetering, but a breakup with his first real girlfriend, Lisa, pushed him over the edge. "When they broke up, that's when he went all-out," he says. "It was like what happened to Tupac's character in *Juice*: Every day, something got a little crazier."

Lloyd Avery needed inspiration. He was writing a script about the streets and cutting gangster rap under the *nom de hip-hop* L.A. Deuce, and his new neighborhood was the perfect source of material. The Jungle never recovered from the Watts riots. In the late '60s and early '70s, drug dealers infiltrated it, selling mostly PCP—one block was even dubbed Sherm Alley. In the '80s, crack hit. Beneath the palm trees' heavy foliage, the Black P Stones, a Blood subset, controlled the trade. Now known as Baldwin Village, it's still one of L.A.'s most violent areas. For Lloyd, it was a place to earn his stripes.

He paid \$150 a month in rent to share a two-floor apartment with QD3, who paid \$500. While rooming together, Jones remembers Lloyd, then in his mid-20s, hanging out with teenage gang members, who "sent him on these crazy missions. I can't get into specifics, but they sent him on missions where people weren't sure if he would come back." Legit gigs were now sparse, and his hotheaded reputation didn't help matters.

Perhaps, as his colleague Charles "Chuckie D" Dirden speculated, he was merely acting out the frustrations of being famous and broke. "When you got people looking at you like, 'Why are you still living in the ghetto?' You start getting irritable, and it's 'Fuck you, I am a real gangster.'" His extensive police record told another story, though. Many of the Jungle's hardened OGs were impressed with his rap sheet, highlighted by a September 1997 burglary conviction. "He was respected," Che says. "I ran into a dude that got my brother's face tattooed on his forearm."

But things began to overwhelm Lloyd. In March 1999, he was shot at (he fired back) during a drive-by on Hillcrest Avenue. A month later, on April 20, he got into an altercation with members of the Islamic Center in Santa Barbara Plaza, a shopping center on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in the Jungle. At 11:30 p.m. that night, Lloyd threw a concrete water meter through the window of the center, and a shootout ensued.

Lloyd was spooked. Days later, he moved from the area. "I was paranoid," he later said. (Lloyd had already been distancing himself from the neighborhood: In May 1998, he visited a laser surgeon in Beverly Hills to begin removing the "JUNGLEZ" tattoo.) His move, however, didn't signal an overhaul of his troubles. He still had some baggage.

On July 14, *Lockdown* began shooting in New Mexico. It was filmed primarily at the New Mexico State Penitentiary, site of one of the most violent prison riots in U.S. history. Throughout the shoot, Lloyd reportedly seemed upset over his role as a drug-addicted prison snitch and the on-screen ribbing he endured. It didn't make for a smooth set. "Lloyd went fucking nuts," says co-star Tait Fletcher. "He had a baseball bat or something and went swinging it through the halls on a tirade."

Lloyd's distortion between fiction and reality seemed to worsen when he returned to L.A. to film *Shot*. The casting director, Mark Sikes, recalls him nailing his audition—"It was like Wesley Snipes in *New Jack City*," he says—and that during filming he showed impressive ad-lib skills. But he was still acting up. Producer Echo Gaffney and director Roger Roth took turns picking him up and dropping him off from the set (except for the day he stole a car); Lloyd smoked a blunt outside a child actor's trailer; and he started a fight with a gang. Afterward, Roth spoke with his actor about his behavior.

"There is too much reasonable doubt," he continues. "But I'm not too sure if he did it or not. I never got a chance to ask him. I always felt in my heart that he couldn't do it. To this day, I still don't want to know."

Despite a \$180 million-plus budget, Pelican Bay State Prison, like most California jails, is grossly overpopulated. Its design capacity was for 2,280 inmates, yet it houses nearly 3,500. They're a bad bunch, too. Eighty percent are serving life sentences, and since August 2000, prison officials have confiscated 1,690 handmade weapons.

"He wanted to go to Pelican Bay because it was the roughest shit," Che says. "He wanted to say he went to Pelican Bay, beat his case, [and then] go back on the street as a convicted murderer writing raps... Snoo Dogg, can't none of them motherfuckers say that." But it wouldn't be that simple. Lloyd was granted a retrial but was again found guilty in July 2005.

While in jail between trials, something inside Lloyd changed. He befriended Chaplain Dennis Clark of the Los Angeles County Jail and, before long, became a born-again Christian. He stopped cursing and fighting. People on the outside noticed. "We had a close friend we went to elementary school with who committed suicide," says Lloyd's longtime friend Doran Reed. "Lloyd heard about it and called me from prison to make sure I was doing all right. That touched me."

When Lloyd returned to Pelican Bay after his retrial, he led prayer services with other inmates and tried spreading his gospel to his cellmate, Kevin Roby. This was a problem: Roby was a Satan worshipper who was in year 17 of three life sentences for murder. They shared a cramped cell with two bunks, a table and a steel sink-toilet combination. In an Aug. 29 letter to Chaplain Clark, Lloyd said of Roby: "I know God has me



"He basically became the role he played in *Boyz*. After it came out, that became his life. He acted that role out in life." —John Singleton

"It's hard," Lloyd said.

"No, it's not. Be honest and tell the truth. Why is it hard?"

"Everybody recognizes me," Lloyd said. The actor was still wary of too much attention. He would wear thick black-rimmed glasses and preppy clothes to the set almost as a disguise. "Some people recognize me from *Boyz N the Hood*. Other people recognize me, but they don't know why. And those are the guys that I got to watch out for, because they think I might have killed one of their brothers."

When the LAPD finally chased down Lloyd Avery on the morning of Dec. 8, 1999, he was charged with the killings of Annette Lewis and Percy Branch, who had been murdered five months earlier. Prosecutors said that Lewis and Branch were gathered under a large tree in Santa Barbara Plaza when, around 4 p.m., Lloyd approached Lewis and, after an argument, shot her five times, including once in the back. He then shot Branch once in the arm and abdomen, they said.

The three eyewitnesses who identified him as the shooter all had credibility issues. In addition, no murder weapon was recovered and bullet casings allegedly linking him to the murder were destroyed. Still, Lloyd was found guilty of two counts of first-degree murder. He also admitted to, but was not charged with, macing former MTV VJ Downtown Julie Brown. Lloyd's family remains split over his conviction. "I never felt like he did it," says Lloyd's youngest sibling, Tikco Avery-Dixon. "I wasn't there. I don't know," says Che. "But my dad felt that Lloyd was not innocent of those charges. He said that Lloyd came to the house one time [after the murders took place] and was going off, like, 'I fucking kill people.' My dad was like, 'Get out of my house.' [And Lloyd replied,] 'I don't give a fuck. Junglez!'"

around him for a reason. He knows

very well that I am a devout Christian, and I pray for him to the Lord Jesus every day that he gives his life to God." Less than a week later, it became clear Lloyd's missionary work had failed.

On Sunday, Sept. 4, 2005, after attending church services, Lloyd was in his top bunk talking about the Gospel. Roby was worshipping near a pentagram he'd drawn on the floor. Predictably, this ideological battle turned violent, and according to Roby, Lloyd began throwing wild punches, hitting everything in the cell. After a brutal fight, Lloyd succumbed to a chokehold.

That night, corrections officers counted all the inmates; nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

The next day, with the body somewhere in the cell, Che Avery says that Roby conducted a grisly courtship: He wrote a flirtatious letter to one of Lloyd's female friends. It was postmarked Sept. 5.

Correction officers again counted all the inmates; again, nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

Despite 11 overall counts, including many standing counts, Lloyd's body wasn't discovered until Roby laid the corpse on the pentagram on Sept. 6 and performed a Satanic ritual over it. At 11:55 a.m., an officer entered the cell. Roby was handcuffed and Lloyd's body was brought to the infirmary. CPR was administered for 10 minutes, but his body was already decomposing; according to the coroner, Lloyd's fractured sternum was probably caused by the CPR. Lloyd's eyelids were swollen shut, his nose was fractured and there was a 1.5-inch abrasion on his temple. The cause of death was aspiration of blood; probable strangulation and a depressed skull fracture were listed as other conditions. His body's core temperature was 76 degrees. He was pronounced dead at 12:10 p.m. [continued on page 146]

50 CENT

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Jay-Z, Diddy and Kanye to your advantage.

You weren't cleared to be there, were you?

No, I wasn't. But I felt like it. When the security people saw me, they went, "Wow, this is 50 Cent. He's the hottest." They let me walk onto the stage, and I ruined [Kanye's] little moment. It was supposed to be him and Jay-Z. Nah, it's me, him and Jay-Z. **So you planned to steal Kanye and Jay-Z's shine?** No, not steal the shine from Kanye and Jay-Z, but share the moment [laughs]. You see how they point out that it was a monumental moment? That's something I created. **Do you think people have come to expect certain behavior from 50 Cent?** People already know what my response to something is going to be based on a previous situation. They can already assume that if somebody says something, I'm going to respond to it immediately, because that's my personality. Jay-Z will sit there and watch these guys say something and go, "I'm not going to say anything to this guy. He's a bum; he's nothing." They grow more disrespectful of Jay-Z as they go. Jay-Z has had issues with Ja Rule, Jadakiss, Fat Joe...uh, who else? Lil' Wayne. Every single one of them has had incidents with Jay-Z before me, because they feel like at one point he was in the position I'm in now. They started calling him a flat-out faggot. That he's wearing *chancletas*. That he's a camel and all this other shit. Look at the disrespect he bears from Cam'ron. Where's Cam'ron at now [since he came at me]? He's on mute. I'll put his ass out of business right away. **You went after Lil' Wayne on "Part-Time Lover" with the rhyme "You make me want to kiss you like Baby do Wayne/And make you call me Daddy like Baby do Wayne/Damn, that shit sounds gay, it's insane/I guess that's the price a lil' nigga pay for fame." What's that about?** I've already baited Lil' Wayne to come on out so I can break his little neck. My consistency will break his neck the same way LL's consistency broke Canibus'. Lil' Wayne is a talented rapper but not a great songwriter. He has had great verses on other people's projects, but they were not his complete ideas over production that he picked. He's not marrying the right production and lyrics to make classic hit records. **But if he's not coming after you, why bother him? Why not break his neck? I got nothing else to do. If they set you up to believe you are in a situation you're not actually in yet, then you go out there... See, he's saying what he's saying to Jay because Jay didn't respond to him. I'm giving him something to work off. Is that one of 50's laws? Yeah. Sometimes the best defense is a good offense.** 🍷

LLOYD AVERY II

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When the Averys were notified that night, Che flew to Pelican Bay for answers. He was allowed to view the body but became suspicious at the funeral home. "I was overpowered by the smell. It took the breath out of me," he remembers. "I smelled old death. I thought, 'That didn't just happen.'" He confronted the mortuary, who said Lloyd had been dead for "at least two days." The family then paid for a private autopsy, which listed a slightly different cause of death than the prison autopsy: blunt force trauma to the head complicated by an aspiration of blood. It also said that the injury to Lloyd's skull was "suggestive of either a blow due to a flat surface such as a carpenter's hammer or impact on a similar type surface."

Two investigations were already under way: The district attorney's office handled the criminal aspect, and the Inspector General's Bureau of Independent Review probed administrative misconduct. Eight months later, the bureau determined that the prison's handling of security issues and the crime scene were "inadequate."

Meanwhile, Roby confessed to the murder and is in solitary confinement to this day. But the DA has yet to file charges. "Roby is doing three life terms and never getting out," says Del Norte County DA Mike Riese. "I want the guy to get punished for what he did, but it's ironic that once I file, he'll get better treatment than the average prisoner. If it were a death-penalty case, we wouldn't be having this discussion."

The Averys, however, insist a trial is the only way to discover the truth. "All I want to do is prove that the corrections officers had nothing to do with it," says Che, who thinks Roby's confession sounded coached. They've also sent a request to the attorney general, who can supersede the local DA, but he is standing pat. "We are going to allow the DA the discretion a locally elected official gets, which is to investigate the case,"

says California Deputy AG Geoffrey Lauter. "We will wait till a decision is made [by the DA]. Because Mr. Avery has asked us to review the case, we will."

It is still unknown, however, why Lloyd, a born-again Christian, and Roby, a Satanist, were housed together. "That was a recipe for disaster," says prisoner-rights attorney Charles Carbone. "The department is well equipped and should be sophisticated enough that two obviously incompatible people do not live with one another." Because the criminal investigation is still open, the Averys don't know who approved their pairing and why.

On the two-year anniversary of Lloyd's death, Che thought about the homecoming that never occurred. "I saw the change that happened in my brother," he says. "If he did kill them people, he had to live with that. I was just looking for him to come out and do big things with the evangelism. His whole life had turned around; it was like he was a different person." He jokes that L.A. Deuce would have probably hung up the mic, considering that he didn't curse anymore.

He then found the movie script Lloyd was writing while living in the Jungle and then again in prison. He skimmed through it. "It's kind of autobiographical," he says. The lead character is named L.A. Deuce. "He's this badass motherfucker who got in trouble, and that's what the movie script is about—his experiences in jail, going through trial. In one scene, he wrote how he was talking shit to the police, and they said, 'We going to fix you.' And they sent an inmate with a knife to kill Lloyd. But Lloyd ended up killing him. Then it shows that Lloyd covered his body with a sheet and had him in there for two days.

"I bullshit you not; I'm not lying," he says. "I think the script is called *Junglez*." 🍷

FASHION CREDITS

BREAK OPENER: Vest and tuxedo shorts by H&M

ASHANTI: Styled by Deborah Waknin/The Wall Group and Jenni Lee; assisted by Holland Ingersoll. (Look 1) Pant by Valentino; gray vest by To the Max; jewelry by Robert Lee Morris. (Look 2) Black dress by D-Squared; shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti; jewelry by Lorraine Schwartz. (Look 3) Sequined cape by Kara Janx; shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti; earrings by Lorraine Schwartz. (Look 4) Jacket by JPG; leggings by American Apparel; belt by Valentino; boots by D-Squared; earrings by Lorraine Schwartz; ring by Stephen Dweck

MELISSA DE SOUSA: Styled by Joe eXclusive. (Look 1) Lace bra by Ravage; panties by Biatta; all shoes by Michael Antonio; earrings by 14k; rings by Romy M. (Look 2) Purple lace lingerie by Biatta; red bag by J.J. Winters; ring by 14k; earrings by Romy M.; bracelet stylist's own. (Look 3) Blue and white stripe by Biatta; vest by Guess; bracelets by Bebe; earrings stylist's own. (Look 4) Black lingerie by Biatta. (Look 5) Camisole by Baby Phat

KHADIJAH AND MALIKA HAQQ: Styled by Joe eXclusive. (Look 1) Gold sequined one-piece by Cherry Pie by Saleem; trenchcoat by Deener; leopard lingerie by Biatta; shoes by Michael Antonio; cuff by Romy M. (Look 2, phone booth) Lingerie by Biatta. (Look 3, car) Leopard lingerie by Biatta; black corset by Forplay. (Look 4) Zebra lingerie by Biatta; shoes by Fendi; polka-dot three-piece by Ravage

ELISE NEAL: Styled by Joe eXclusive. (Look 1) Sheer teddy by Forplay; shoes by Lanvin; earrings, pearl ring and necklace by 14k; black onyx ring by Ricardo Basta. (Look 2) Swimsuit by Lenny; blue stone ring by Ricardo Basta; necklace, earrings, bracelet and ring by 14k; shoes by Roberto Cavalli. (Look 3) Swimsuit by Cherry Pie by Saleem; earrings by Ricardo Basta; shoes by Gucci. (Look 4) White swimsuit by Lenny; bracelets and earrings by 14k; ring by Ricardo Basta. (Look 5) Red lace lingerie by Dreamgirl; shoes by Dolce & Gabbana. (Look 6) Red and black lingerie by Forplay; shoes by Giambattista Valli