

CHRIS CARTER

THE EXPLOSIVE NEW ROBERT HUNTER THRILLER

I AM
DEATH

About the author

Born in Brazil of Italian origin, Chris Carter studied psychology and criminal behaviour at the University of Michigan. As a member of the Michigan State District Attorney's Criminal Psychology team, he interviewed and studied many criminals, including serial and multiple homicide offenders with life-imprisonment convictions.

Having departed for Los Angeles in the early 1990s, Chris spent ten years as a guitarist for numerous rock bands before leaving the music business to write full-time. He now lives in London and is a Top Ten *Sunday Times* bestselling author.

Visit www.chriscarterbooks.com or find him on Facebook.

Also by Chris Carter

The Crucifix Killer

The Executioner

The Night Stalker

The Death Sculptor

One by One

An Evil Mind

**I AM
DEATH**

CHRIS CARTER

I AM DEATH



SIMON &
SCHUSTER

London • New York • Sydney • Toronto • New Delhi

A CBS COMPANY

First published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2015

A CBS company

Copyright © Chris Carter, 2015

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.

No reproduction without permission.

® and © 1997 Simon & Schuster, Inc. All rights reserved.

The right of Chris Carter to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd

1st Floor

222 Gray's Inn Road

London WC1X 8HB

www.simonandschuster.co.uk

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney

Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN: 978-1-47113-223-0

Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-1-47113-224-7

eBook ISBN: 978-1-47113-226-1

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Typeset in the UK by Hewer Text UK Ltd, Edinburgh

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



Simon & Schuster UK Ltd are committed to sourcing paper that is made from wood grown in sustainable forests and supports the Forest Stewardship Council, the leading international forest certification organisation. Our books displaying the FSC logo are printed on FSC certified paper.

In all of my novels, I have always tried my hardest to use factual locations in and around the city of Los Angeles. For that reason, I feel the need to apologize. To better suit the plot in *I Am Death*, I have taken the liberty of creating a couple of fictitious establishments and localities.

Contents

[One](#)

[Two](#)

[Three](#)

[Four](#)

[Five](#)

[Six](#)

[Seven](#)

[Eight](#)

[Nine](#)

[Ten](#)

[Eleven](#)

[Twelve](#)

[Thirteen](#)

[Fourteen](#)

[Fifteen](#)

[Sixteen](#)

[Seventeen](#)

[Eighteen](#)

[Nineteen](#)

[Twenty](#)

Twenty-One

Twenty-Two

Twenty-Three

Twenty-Four

Twenty-Five

Twenty-Six

Twenty-Seven

Twenty-Eight

Twenty-Nine

Thirty

Thirty-One

Thirty-Two

Thirty-Three

Thirty-Four

Thirty-Five

Thirty-Six

Thirty-Seven

Thirty-Eight

Thirty-Nine

Forty

Forty-One

Forty-Two

Forty-Three

Forty-Four

Forty-Five

Forty-Six

Forty-Seven

Forty-Eight

Forty-Nine

Fifty

Fifty-One

Fifty-Two

Fifty-Three

Fifty-Four

Fifty-Five

Fifty-Six

Fifty-Seven

Fifty-Eight

Fifty-Nine

Sixty

Sixty-One

Sixty-Two

Sixty-Three

Sixty-Four

Sixty-Five

Sixty-Six

Sixty-Seven

Sixty-Eight

Sixty-Nine

Seventy

Seventy-One

Seventy-Two

Seventy-Three

Seventy-Four

Seventy-Five

Seventy-Six

Seventy-Seven

Seventy-Eight

Seventy-Nine

Eighty

Eighty-One

Eighty-Two

Eighty-Three

Eighty-Four

Eighty-Five

Eighty-Six

Eighty-Seven

Eighty-Eight

Eighty-Nine

Ninety

Ninety-One

Ninety-Two

One

‘Oh, thank you so much for coming in at such short notice, Nicole,’ Audrey Bennett said, opening the front door to her white-fronted, two-storey house in Upper Laurel Canyon, a very affluent neighborhood located in the Hollywood Hills region of Los Angeles.

Nicole gave Audrey a bright smile.

‘It’s no problem at all, Ms. Bennett.’

Born and raised in Evansville, Indiana, Nicole Wilson carried a very distinctive Midwestern accent. She wasn’t very tall; about five foot three, and her looks weren’t exactly what fashion magazines would call striking, but she was charming and had a disarming smile.

‘Come in, come in,’ Audrey said, ushering Nicole inside with a hand gesture, seemingly in a hurry.

‘Sorry I’m a little late,’ Nicole said, stepping inside as she consulted her watch. It was just past 8:30 in the evening.

Audrey chuckled. ‘You’ve got to be the only person in the whole of Los Angeles who considers anything under “ten minutes” as being late, Nicole. Everyone else I know calls it “fashionably on time”.’

Nicole smiled, but despite the comment, she still looked a little embarrassed. She prided herself on being a very punctual person.

‘That’s a beautiful dress, Ms. Bennett. Are you going anywhere special tonight?’

Audrey pursed her lips and twisted them to one side. ‘Dinner party at a judge’s house.’ She leaned forward toward Nicole and her next words came out as a whisper. ‘They are sooooo boring.’

Nicole giggled.

‘Hello, Nicole,’ Audrey’s husband said, coming down the arched staircase that led to the house’s second floor. James Bennett wore an elegant dark-blue suit with a silk striped tie and a matching silk handkerchief just peeking out of his jacket pocket. His butterscotch-blond hair was combed back, and as always, not a strand seemed to be out of place.

‘Are you ready, honey?’ he asked his wife before quickly checking his Patek Philippe watch. ‘We’ve got to go.’

‘Yes, I know, I’ll be right there, James,’ Audrey replied before turning to face Nicole again. ‘Josh’s already asleep,’ she explained. ‘He’s been playing and running around all day, which was great, because by eight o’clock he was so exhausted he was dozing off in front of the TV. We took him to bed and he crashed out before his head hit the pillow.’

‘Oh, bless him,’ Nicole commented.

‘From the amount of running the little devil did today,’ James Bennett said, as he approached Audrey and Nicole, ‘he should sleep right through to the morning. You should have an easy night.’ He grabbed Audrey’s coat from the leather armchair to his right and helped his wife into it. ‘We’ve really got to go, honey,’ he whispered into her ear before kissing her neck.

‘I know, I know,’ Audrey said as she nodded toward the door just past the river-rock fireplace on the east wall of their large living room. ‘Help yourself to anything you like from the kitchen. You know where everything is, right?’

Nicole nodded once.

‘If Josh wakes up and asks for any more chocolate cake, do not give it to him. The last thing he needs is another sugar rush in the middle of the night.’

‘OK,’ Nicole replied, renewing her smile.

‘We might be quite late tonight,’ Audrey continued. ‘But I’ll call you later just to check everything is all right.’

‘Enjoy your night,’ Nicole said, accompanying them to the door.

As Audrey took the few steps down from her front porch, she looked back at Nicole and mouthed the word ‘boring’.

After closing the door, Nicole went upstairs and tiptoed up to Josh’s room. The three-year-old boy was sleeping like an angel, his arms wrapped around a stuffed

toy creature with huge eyes and ears. From the bedroom door, Nicole stared at him for a long while. He looked so adorable with his blond flock of curly hair and rosy cheeks that she felt like cuddling up to him, but she wouldn't dare wake him up now. Instead, she blew him a kiss from the door and returned downstairs.

In the TV room, Nicole sat and watched about an hour of some old comedy film before her stomach started making noises. Only then she remembered that Audrey Bennett had said something about a chocolate cake. She looked at her watch. It was definitely time for a snack, and a slice of chocolate cake sounded just perfect. She exited the room and went back upstairs to check on Josh again. He was in such a deep sleep, he hadn't even moved positions. Returning downstairs, Nicole crossed to the other side of the living room and casually opened the kitchen door, stepping inside.

'Whoa!' she yelled in a fright, jumping back.

'Whoa!' the man sitting at the breakfast table, having a sandwich, yelled a millisecond after Nicole. Instinctively, and also in a fright, he dropped the sandwich and kicked back from the table, standing up immediately and knocking over his glass of milk. His chair tipped over behind him.

'Who the hell are you?' Nicole asked in an anxious voice, taking a defensive step back.

The man gazed at her for a couple of seconds, confused, as if trying to figure out what was happening. 'I'm Mark,' he finally responded, using both hands to point at himself.

They stared at each other for a moment longer, and Mark quickly realized that his name meant absolutely nothing to the woman.

'Mark?' he repeated, turning every sentence into a question, as if Nicole should've known all this. 'Audrey's cousin from Texas? I'm here for a couple of days for a job interview? I'm staying in the apartment above the garage in the back?' He used his thumb to point over his right shoulder.

Nicole's questioning stare intensified.

'Audrey and James told you about me, didn't they?'

'No.' She shook her head.

‘Oh!’ Mark looked even more confused now. ‘Umm, as I’ve said, I’m Mark, Audrey’s cousin. You must be Nicole, the babysitter, right? They said you’d be coming. And I’m sorry, I really didn’t mean to scare you, though I guess you’ve already paid me back in kind.’ He placed his right hand over his chest, tapping his fingers over his heart a few times. ‘I almost had a heart attack just now.’

Nicole’s stare relaxed a fraction.

‘I flew in this morning for a big job interview downtown this afternoon,’ Mark explained.

He was dressed in what looked to be a brand new suit, very elegant. He also looked quite attractive.

‘I just got back from it about ten minutes ago,’ he continued. ‘And suddenly my stomach reminded me that I hadn’t had any food all day.’ He tilted his head to one side. ‘I can’t really eat when I get nervous. So I just came in for a quick sandwich and a glass of milk.’ His eyes moved to where he was sitting and he chuckled. ‘Which is now all over the table and starting to drip on to the floor.’

He picked up his chair and looked around for something to clean up the mess. He found a roll of paper towels next to a large fruit bowl on the kitchen counter.

‘I’m a little surprised that Audrey forgot to tell you I was staying over,’ Mark said as he began mopping up the milk from the floor.

‘Well, they were in a bit of a hurry,’ Nicole conceded, her posture not as tense as moments ago. ‘Ms. Bennett asked me if I could get here for eight o’clock, but the earliest I could make it was eight-thirty.’

‘Oh, OK. Is Josh still awake? I’d like to say goodnight if I could.’

Nicole shook her head. ‘No. He’s out like a light.’

‘He’s a great kid,’ Mark said, as he bundled up all the soaked paper towels and dumped them in the trashcan.

Nicole kept her full attention on him. ‘You know,’ she said, ‘you look a little familiar. Have I met you before?’

‘No,’ Mark replied. ‘This is actually my first ever visit to LA. But it’s probably from the photographs in the TV room and in James’ study. I’m in two of them. Plus, Audrey and I have the same eyes.’

‘Oh . . . the photographs. That must be it,’ Nicole said, a hazy memory playing at the edge of her mind, but not quite materializing.

A distant cellphone ringtone broke the awkward silence that had followed.

‘Is that your phone?’ Mark asked.

Nicole nodded.

‘That’s probably Audrey calling to say that she forgot to tell you about me.’ He shrugged and smiled. ‘Too late.’

Nicole smiled back. ‘Let me go get that.’ She exited the kitchen and returned to the living room, where she retrieved her cellphone from her bag. The call was indeed from Audrey Bennett.

‘Hi Ms. Bennett, how’s the dinner party?’

‘Even more boring than I expected, Nicole. This is going to be a long night. Anyway, I’m just calling to check that everything is all right.’

‘Yes, everything is fine,’ Nicole replied.

‘Has Josh woken up at all?’

‘No, no. I just checked on him again a moment ago. He looks like he’s out for the count.’

‘Oh, that’s great.’

‘By the way, I just met Mark in the kitchen.’

There was some loud background noise coming from Audrey’s side.

‘Sorry, Nicole, what did you say?’

‘That I just met Mark, your cousin from Texas, who’s staying in the garage apartment. I walked in on him having a sandwich in the kitchen, and we scared the hell out of each other.’ She giggled.

There was a couple of seconds’ delay before Audrey replied.

‘Nicole, where’s he? Has he gone up to Josh’s room?’

‘No, he’s still in the kitchen.’

‘OK, Nicole, listen to me.’ Audrey’s voice was serious, but shaky at the same time. ‘As quietly and as quickly as you can, go get Josh and get out of the house. I’m calling the police right now.’

‘What?’

‘Nicole, I don’t have a cousin named Mark from Texas. We don’t have anyone staying in the garage apartment. Get out of the house . . . *now*. Do you underst—’

CLUNK.

‘Nicole?’

‘NICOLE?’

The line went dead.

Two

Detective Robert Hunter of the LAPD Robbery Homicide Division pushed open the door to his small office on the fifth floor of the famous Police Administration Building in Downtown Los Angeles and stepped inside. The clock on the wall showed 2:43 p.m.

Hunter looked around the room slowly. It'd been exactly two weeks since he last entered his office, and he had been hoping to come back to it relaxed and with a golden tan, but instead he felt totally exhausted and he was sure that he'd never looked as pale as he did now.

Hunter was supposed to have gone on his first vacation in nearly seven years. His captain had demanded that he and his partner take a two-week break after their last investigation ended sixteen days ago. Hunter had planned to go to Hawaii, a place that he'd always wanted to visit, but on the day he was supposed to fly out, his close friend, Adrian Kennedy, who was also the director of the FBI's National Center for the Analyses of Violent Crime, asked Hunter for his help in interviewing an apprehended suspect in a double homicide investigation. Hunter had found himself unable to say no, so instead of flying to Hawaii he ended up in Quantico, Virginia.

The interview was meant to take no more than just a couple of days, but Hunter had got sucked into an investigation that changed his life for ever.

He and the FBI had finally closed the case less than twenty-four hours ago. With the investigation concluded, Kennedy had tried one more time to convince the once prodigy kid to join the Bureau.

Hunter grew up as an only child to working-class parents in Compton, an underprivileged neighborhood of South Los Angeles. His mother lost her battle with

cancer when he was only seven. His father never remarried and had to take on two jobs to cope with the demands of raising a child on his own.

From a very early age it was obvious to everyone that Hunter was different. He could figure things out faster than most. School bored and frustrated him. He'd finished all of his sixth-grade work in less than two months and, just for something to do, he sped through seventh-, eighth- and even ninth-grade books.

It was then that his principal decided to get in contact with the Los Angeles Board of Education. After a battery of exams and tests, at the age of twelve Hunter was given a scholarship to the Mirmam School for the Gifted.

By the age of fourteen he'd glided through Mirmam's high school English, History, Math, Biology and Chemistry curriculums. Four years of high school were condensed into two and at fifteen he'd graduated with honors. With recommendations from all of his teachers, Hunter was accepted as a 'special circumstances' student at Stanford University.

By the age of nineteen Hunter had already graduated in Psychology – *summa cum laude* – and at twenty-three he received his Ph.D. in Criminal Behavior Analysis and Biopsychology. That was when Kennedy tried to recruit him into the FBI for the first time.

Hunter's Ph.D. thesis paper, titled 'An Advanced Psychological Study in Criminal Conduct', ended up on Kennedy's desk. The paper had impressed Kennedy and the then FBI Director so much that it had become mandatory reading at the NCAVC. Since then and over the years, Kennedy had tried several times to recruit Hunter into his team. In Kennedy's mind, it made no sense that Hunter would rather be a detective with a local police force than join the most advanced serial-killer tracking task force in the USA, arguably in the world. But Hunter had never shown even an ounce of interest in becoming a federal agent, and had declined every offer made to him by Kennedy and his superiors.

Hunter sat at his desk but didn't turn on his computer. He found it funny how everything about his office looked exactly the same, and totally different at the same time. Exactly the same because nothing had been moved or touched. Totally

different because something was missing. Actually, not something, someone – his partner of six years, Detective Carlos Garcia.

Their last investigation together, before the enforced two-week break, had put Hunter and Garcia in pursuit of an extremely sadistic serial killer, who chose to broadcast his murders live over the Internet. The investigation had taken them both to the brink of sanity, almost claiming Hunter's life, and placing Garcia and his family in a situation he swore he would never allow to happen again.

Just before their break, Garcia had revealed to Hunter that upon his return he wasn't sure if he would come back to work at the Robbery Homicide Division and the Homicide Special Section. His priorities had changed. His family had to come first, no matter what.

Hunter didn't have a family. He wasn't married. He had no kids. But he fully understood his partner's concern, and he was sure that whatever decision Garcia came to, it would be the right one for him.

The Homicide Special Section of the LAPD was an elite unit created to deal solely with serial, high-profile murders and homicide cases requiring extensive investigative time and expertise. Due to Hunter's background in criminal behavior psychology, he headed up an even more specialized group within the Special Section. All homicides where overwhelming brutality and/or sadism had been used by the perpetrator were tagged by the department as 'UV Crimes (Ultra-Violent). Hunter and Garcia were the LAPD's UV Unit, and Garcia was the best partner and friend Hunter had ever had.

Hunter finally leaned forward and reached for the button to power up his computer, but before he'd managed to press it the door to his office was pushed open again and Garcia stepped inside.

'Oh!' Garcia said, looking a little surprised as he checked the wall clock. 'You're earlier than usual, Robert.'

Hunter's eyes flicked to the clock – 2:51 p.m. – then back to his partner. Garcia's longish brown hair was tied back in a slick ponytail, still wet from a morning shower, but his eyes looked tired and full of worry.

'Yeah, a little bit,' Hunter replied.