

Notes from "The Pattern of Killers"

What it takes to murder another cannot be an intrinsic quality of humanity, for the murderer's acts are deviations from the norm. When a murder occurs, it is outside the accepted values of civilized society, not an event that is welcomed and understood. It is an aberration of behaviour, a distinct flaw in the nature of the personality, and yet not one so rare as to be unheard of. Murders happen all the time, there can be no denying it, but slayings of a certain kind spark in my mind a more sinister fear than that associated merely with the advent of death. It's one matter to be confronted with a crime of passion—one can almost understand (yet never condone) the deadly urge a jilted lover succumbs to when encountering his paramour's secret companion, or the passionate rage of a slandered or cheated merchant when faced with the source of his distress. These killings, in my studies, are followed by often overwhelming sensations of guilt and shame, as if the very mind of the murderer has grown ill with the soul it is attached to. Vengeance slayings too assuage my fears, for here the righteousness of the act mitigates the crime; the death, as regrettable as one person's end may be, only betters society as a whole.

No, what vexes and worries me are those who murder not from passion but from need—those who enjoy the act of killing and indeed seem to take an invigorating influx of spiritual verve from the act of ending another creature's life. The armies and mercenary bands of the world are rife with those who have tried to justify their bloodlust by hiding under the banner of a nation or company. They sate their destructive urges in a way sanctioned by a superior or at least in the guise of patriotism. In such cases, at least the urge to kill is tempered and even constrained by the chain of command or other laws and restrictions enforced by the army or company's leadership.

And that brings me to my central fear: that there exists a force, external to all known intellect or faith, holding parallel to the immortal soul but existing within its shadow, that compels a man or woman to kill. I call this force "the pattern."

The hallmarks of those who fall under the pattern's influence are as shocking in their similarity as they are subtle in their manifestations. To the untrained eye, the Mosswater Marauder, the Temple Hill Slasher, the Splatter Man, or Korvosa's own Key-Lock Killer may seem unrelated. Looking closer, however, we find something disturbing—these mass murderers, for all their disparities in temperament, location, and method, shared something fundamental. The Mosswater Marauder sought to rebuild his wife's skull by harvesting pieces from victims he bludgeoned to death. The Temple Hill Slasher murdered many in a frustrated search to find links among the souls of the recently slain. The Splatter Man tormented his victims with their own names before he murdered them, hoping to harvest power from an induced fear of their own identity. Finally, the Key-Lock Killer terrorized Korvosa by habitually infiltrating homes, murdering a single inhabitant, and then leaving with no trace other than the "unlocked" and mutilated corpse he left behind.

All of these murderers shared something in common—patterns. The Mosswater Marauder sought patterns in bone fragments. The Temple Hill Slasher sought patterns in souls. The Splatter Man sought patterns in names. And the Key-Lock Killer sought patterns in the locks he carved into the

flesh of his victims with sharpened keys. These are quite different patterns, true, but all were created by the same underlying master pattern I have come to believe lies within the damaged souls of all these murderers—predators of society that I have come to call “pattern killers.”

As I looked to other examples, I again and again found evidence of patterns. Killers who stalked only blonde elven women and kept locks of their hair as trophies. Killers who murdered during galas and banquets with poison delivered via a victim’s favourite drink. Killers who slaughtered only the firstborn sons of noble families. Killers who carved strange sigils in the flesh of their victims, or who left body parts strewn in complex arrangements on riverbanks, or who left their victims posed in faux-artistic displays in public squares. Always, at the core of their aberrance, was the pattern.

The notorious Skinsaw Cult knows of the pattern, yet its members misinterpret it as whispers from their god, Morgorber. In truth, I suspect even Morgorber is but a slave to the pattern. In teaching those who worship him in his incarnation as Father Skinsaw that those they slay shape the future, he is but following his own compulsions. The notion that the pattern can hold mortal and god alike fast in its clutches only speaks further to its awesome power.

Even in the work of the most notorious of all of Avistan’s pattern killers, the mass murderer Riktus Scroon, one sees the pattern lurking. Scroon confessed to the murder of 953 men, women, and children, and his pattern was particularly horrific—he sought out young victims freshly in love, abducted them, and tormented them for hours before leaving them in specially excavated pits to expire from their wounds. He separated his victims from each other physically, but not so far that they could ignore the others’ cries of pain as each died in anguish. It took 13 tries to execute him, but I believe that this is what Scroon sought. I believe that of all the killers who have plagued our land, he came closest to solving the pattern. They say Scroon did not die when he expired during that thirteenth execution, but transcended mortality to be born again in the Abyss as the Nightripper. Certainly, the debased few who worship the Nightripper today believe him to be Scroon reborn, and these worshipers have become pattern killers in their own right.

I come now to my own research in western Varisia. Here, the people of Sandpoint have recently endured the vile attentions of their own pattern killer, a man once known as Jervis Stoot but remembered now as Chopper. He slaughtered 26 people before he was caught and executed by a mob. As with every other pattern killer, he followed his own pattern. He collected the eyes and tongues of his victims. Some think he did so out of an obsession with carrion birds, but I have come to believe differently. The pattern sent him to collect his trophies, and—just as Scroon before him, just as the Skinsaw Cult now—I believe Stoot was on the verge of discovering the pattern’s solution. His home on an islet just outside of town has remained abandoned since his death, and I intend to investigate it. To search it. To take measurements with my tools to determine the psychic residue left within his home. With these methods, I believe I can detect traces of the pattern, measure it, and in so doing quantify it. I can solve it. And in solving it, I believe I can cure this world of its pattern killers. I shall deliver Avistan from the clutches of the parasite that has lingered in all of our souls. I shall master the pattern and unravel it from within!