

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Graphic Novel

It was early 2016, and 30-year-old Iana Kasbian was living the high life in West Hollywood with her fiancé.

They lived in a two-bedroom apartment together and had a baby on the way, any day now. Iana was from the Ukraine and came to America for better opportunities and a better life. When she met Blake Leibold, his family's wealth nearly guaranteed her a life of comfort and security.

Iana Kasbian didn't realize, though, the kinds of grotesque problems that often arise within families of such wealth and privilege.

Welcome to Sword and Scale Nightmares, true crime for bedtime, where nightmare begins now.

Iana and her fiancé, Blake Leibold, weren't struggling financially, because Blake was a trust fund baby with a wealthy Canadian family.

His maternal grandfather founded a plastics empire, and Blake's own father was an Olympian turned real estate developer in Toronto.

His brother Cody was said to be the youngest owner of not one, but two Ferrari Enzos, purchased in his early twenties.

Despite their comfortable financial situation, Iana Kasbian and Blake Leibold were struggling to find time to prepare for their new baby.

To fix that problem, Iana's mother Olga flew in from Ukraine in late April.

Iana rented a nearby apartment for her, bought her a phone, and set everything up for her arrival.

Mom would be nearby at all times in case Iana or the baby needed anything.

During this time, Blake was in the midst of divorcing his first wife, Amanda Braun, which was taking up a lot of time and money.

They had been married since 2011, and the divorce was finalized in late 2015.

Divorces can take an awful lot of time when there's money at stake.

He had picked up and left Amanda in the middle of that summer, when she was eight months pregnant with their second child.

Amanda was about to give birth to the baby when Blake met and fell in love with Iana.

He got Iana pregnant and proposed to her pretty quickly, leaving behind that first family that he didn't care about anymore.

By this point, Blake's mother had already passed away, leaving him a \$6 million inheritance, allowing him the freedom to pursue his career dreams.

He had participated in the production of Spaceballs, the animated series in 2008, alongside the legendary Mel Brooks, and a movie called Bald in the same year.

After finishing those two projects, he came up with a comic book called Syndrome.

This particular story idea was his pride and joy, and he wanted to have it adapted for television.

So anyway, in early 2016, Blake and Iana were living in West Hollywood, and Blake is pursuing this career as a writer-director.

They moved Olga into her own apartment, and Iana gives birth to their daughter in early May.

At first, Iana and the new baby stay at the apartment she shares with Blake, but just a few days after the birth, Iana takes the baby to her mother's apartment, essentially

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leaving her there to live with Grandma Olga.

Now, Iana stops by frequently to help with the baby, but she doesn't officially live there.

She's staying back at the apartment in West Hollywood.

So on the afternoon of May 24th, Iana and her mom are talking on the phone for a few minutes.

They had just gone on a shopping trip for a stroller the day before, so the conversation is brief, and they hang up.

The next day, Olga tries to call her daughter over and over, and she isn't getting a response.

She's got her daughter's baby here, so she needs to be able to contact her any time, any place.

At about 1.44 pm, Olga's had enough and decides to grab a friend and head over to Iana's apartment to look for her.

Olga sees her daughter's car parked in the complex's parking garage.

She walks to the front of the building and looks up at Iana's unit.

She sees that the sliding glass door to the balcony is hanging open, so she calls out from below.

Blake, open the door for me.

A few moments go by, and she sees Blake's silhouette and his hand on the door.

He's sliding it closed.

Olga immediately calls the police, and two L.A. County Sheriff's deputies show up at Iana's apartment to investigate.

They don't try very hard, though.

They see that the blinds on the balcony have been closed and they don't see any movement inside, so they decide to go knock on the door.

They get no response, so they ring the doorbell several times.

Again, no response.

They get close up and put their ears to the door to see if they can hear anyone moving inside, but they hear nothing.

So they get Iana's cell phone number, and they start calling her.

One call is placed at 4.20 p.m., and the next one is at 4.45.

They leave voicemails for her, letting her know it's urgent.

They need to speak with her, and they leave a phone number for her to call.

And that's it.

They're basically like, sorry, ma'am, she doesn't seem to be calling us back.

And we can't go into the apartment, so that's all we can do.

They get back in the cruiser and go on their way.

Late that night, Olga calls, texts, and sends chats through other platforms to her daughter.

One text at 3.00 a.m. says, Iana, answer me, are you alive, my dear daughter?

I called the police because he's holding you there.

I came over and knocked, answer me.

All of her texts go unanswered.

The next morning, Olga goes back to her daughter's apartment and calls 9-1-1 again.

A deputy arrives, and Olga is giving him the rundown.

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When they see a resident of the building walking through the halls, they stop him and question him about this particular unit.

He says he hasn't seen anyone coming or going for at least a few days now.

The deputy, again, knocks on Iana's door and calls her cell phone, ultimately leaving another voicemail.

At some point, the police officer gets a key to the apartment from someone, probably the landlord, and they finally unlock the door.

They turn the key and nothing.

The latch on the inside of the door is engaged.

Someone inside has got it dead-bolted, so at this point there's really nothing else they can do other than kick down the door.

So that's what they do.

Once the door debris is settled, they cautiously walk in, slowly clearing a pitch-black apartment.

They find no one in the living room.

The kitchen is also empty, and so is the dining room and the balcony.

That's strange.

Even weirder, the door to the hallway is locked.

They try to force it open, but there's something blocking it from the other side.

They push the door open just enough to see that it's a mattress, so they shove the mattress aside and gain access to the hallway.

Attached to the hallway is the guest bedroom and bathroom.

Police make their way into these rooms and find them empty.

Nobody's here.

Then one of the police officers says, wait, there's blood on the headboard.

Not a great sign, by the way.

Then they move over to the master bedroom where the door is also locked.

They kick in the door, and before entering, they yell, come out.

If anyone's inside, come out, a quiet male voice replies to them from the debris, explaining that he won't come out because he's afraid the police will beat him up.

They explain to Blake, no, we're just here to check on your girlfriend and ask where she is.

The man tells them that she's fine, and they can find her at Cedars Sinai Hospital, rattling off her room or bed number.

He also tells them that his father is going to be there soon, and he won't come out until his father is there.

In this instance, Blake was referring not to his biological father, but a man named Stephen Green, someone who both worked as Blake's accountant and acted as a mentor. Apparently, he called this guy his father, for some reason.

Anyway, Blake called this guy around noon and asked him to come to his apartment, but about a month before making this call, Stephen Green was having trouble getting in contact with Blake at all.

He had called, texted, left voicemails, and emailed him numerous times.

In one voicemail, Stephen showed quite a bit of concern, saying that he was really worried about Blake, and that he loved him, and wanted to help him with whatever was going on.

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So now it's a month later, and Stephen Green has been called by Blake to his apartment, only to be met there by numerous squad cars and deputies.

He identifies himself to the police, and they bring this guy in to talk to Blake, who was still crouched in the master bedroom.

Stephen and the one officer pass the phone back and forth, trying to convince Blake to come out.

And he finally does.

Blake walks out wearing nothing but white boxers, and as the cops are scrambling to find him something to wear, they find Blake's passport and \$4,000 cash in his pants.

They snatch the cell phone from Blake's hand, and someone who's already walked back into the master bedroom screams, she's on the bed.

On May 26, 2016, 30-year-old Iana Cassian was discovered dead in her apartment.

Her fiance, Blake Leibowl, was there with her, but he was alive, nervous and wearing only his underwear.

Iana's body was in the master bedroom lying naked on a clean sheet.

He had covered her with a Mickey Mouse blanket and a blue polka-dotted blanket, and placed her head on a pillow.

Upon closer inspection, there were dried bloodstains all over the mattress below the clean sheet.

Even more disturbing, Iana's scalp looked like it had been removed.

Iana was also missing a near.

As it unfolded, this crime scene became so gruesome it was unlike anything these deputies had ever seen, and they worked for LA County, so they had to have seen at least a few things.

When they began collecting evidence from around the room, investigators discovered bloodstains and chunks of human flesh behind the bed and on the wall near Iana's head.

Part of her eyebrow was also removed and on the floor, and a clump of hair and a bloodstained razor were found in the trash can.

Warm water was running in the bathtub, bloodstains and hair were visible in the tub, and a green paring knife was located in a drawer in the bathroom.

There was more blood found on towels, another mattress, a pillowcase, the floor, and the curtains in the guest bedroom.

When they sprayed luminol in the apartment, they could see evidence of blood having been cleaned in the dining room, hallway, guest bathroom, and both bedrooms.

Even the kitchen garbage disposal tested positive for blood.

Blake had done something horrendous to his fiance, something no one can ever come back from.

In the trash bin outside, investigators found more evidence, things Blake tried to dispose of in trash bags.

There was bloodstained bedding, towels, clothing, bath mats, placemats, a bed skirt with bloody hand prints on it, human tissue that looked like pieces of scalp with the hair still attached, oh, and Iana's ear.

Multiple areas of the apartment tested positive for both Blake and Iana's blood, and Iana's DNA was scraped out of the underneath of Blake's fingernails.

It didn't look like Daddy's money was going to get him out of this one.

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So the coroner and chief medical examiner get to give their assessments on Iana's body, and they confirmed that she was dead for at least 12 hours before she was found by authorities. Her cause of death is determined to be blood loss from head trauma that cut or tore several arteries and veins.

Less than half of Iana's blood remained in her body when she was found.

It's impossible to totally drain the blood from a corpse, but in this case it's clear someone tried and got pretty darn close to it.

They notice that Iana's entire scalp had been removed, from the eyebrows almost to the hairline of the nape of the neck.

A big chunk of skin on the right side of her face has also literally been cut off of her.

All the tissue over the top of her head is totally gone to the point where her skull bones are visible.

The medical examiner turns her head a bit and sees that Iana's ear has also been severed.

Someone, probably Blake, used a blade instrument to literally flay her head.

She cut and tore at her head, face, and neck using the blade, but also manually pulling and tearing the skin.

The medical examiner is looking at this with horror and makes the judgment that this amount of trauma, the complexity of it, the difficulty of cutting and tearing at human flesh, must have taken quite a while to inflict.

Even worse, he determines that Iana was alive while she sustained these injuries.

He sees inflamed tissue surrounding many of the wounds and notes that our skin doesn't start to show signs of inflammation to this degree until at least six hours after the injury and only if the body is alive and blood is flowing.

She was alive for all of it.

One final oddity the medical examiner notes is the lack of blood in Iana's body.

Her corpse is drained of blood.

More so than what's even possible from her injuries.

There was none in her heart, veins, or arteries.

The ME makes the determination that Iana was probably put into the bathtub alive with her head lower than her feet, allowing water to run over her scalped head and ear, which would also increase blood flow, that was essentially a disturbed form of bloodletting.

This process would have been lengthy and tedious, but would have prevented the blood from clotting and allowed it to flow easily out of her wounds.

The evidence showed that her corpse was then placed on a clean bedsheet.

Her fingertips were wrinkly from having just been submerged in water for so long.

This poor woman suffered for hours as her own fiancée literally tortured her.

Her body sported defensive wounds from her battle against her attacker.

By the end of it, little by little, Blake ripped and tore at her scalp while she was still alive until he had removed 80% of it.

When officials noticed the exsanguination of her body, they sent a professor on a mission.

Over a year and a half, this professor experimented with 70 donated cadavers to determine whether it was possible to exsanguinate a body to the extent Blake achieved.

She later testified that he never came close to the level of beyond his body.

The coroner's office made a statement about the horrifying nature of this crime.

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He said she lived for at least eight hours approximately after receiving the scalp injury and the bruise to her collarbone.

I have never seen this before and I doubt if hardly any forensic pathologists in this country or abroad have even seen this outside of perhaps wartime.

It's so extremely rare.

What on earth could have possessed Blake Lible to do something like this to the mother of his newborn child?

Where did he get these ideas?

And how could someone be so twisted as to carry them out?

As detectives continued to unpack this case, they were forced to return to Blake's graphic novel, Syndrome.

Back in the early 2000s, Blake Lible had a bunch of his parents' money and what he thought was a genius idea for a television show.

He approached these two guys, Robert Ryan and Daniel Quance.

He pitched them the idea and he told him that he'd done a ton of research on serial killers and that's what inspired him to create this concept.

His idea for the show was this.

He got a serial killer on death row.

He feels no remorse for his killings.

He's about to be executed.

Then you have this neuropathologist in charge of the execution, but he's gone kind of off the rails.

He decides that instead of executing this convicted serial killer, he's going to drug him, take him by van to a secret lab, and do tests on his brain to determine what causes this sort of human behavior.

So anyway, these guys, Daniel Quance and Robert Ryan, they don't like the idea of turning this thing into a TV show, it's not quite right, you know?

So they reject it.

Blake returns to them a few months later and pitches the idea again, but this time it's a graphic novel and it's called Syndrome, and both Daniel and Robert agree.

These two had quite a bit of experience with graphic novels and did most of the writing while another person did the illustrations.

But the whole thing was based on Blake's plotline.

He was the final stop for this piece of writing.

If he didn't like something in the writing or the art, they didn't use it.

That's simple.

The novel was pre-released at Comic-Con San Diego in 2010.

So this is how the story ends in the graphic novel.

After doing numerous experiments, this rogue doctor exclaims, I've discovered that a split second before we decide to act, before we think we are deciding to act, something deeper decides first.

Our conscious mind does not make decisions.

It justifies them, sells them to ourselves.

Evil is not some mysterious force operating out there in the universe.

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Evil is a syndrome.

And in the end, we all become monsters.

Hmm, sounds familiar.

So right off the bat, this story is based around removing the personal accountability from this serial killer, turning what many of us see as horrible decisions into something the killer has no control over.

The doctor tries to convince the reader that anyone with this evil syndrome is like a marionette, with the sickness sitting in the cockpit rather than our true consciousness.

So Blake, on some level, is trying to elicit sympathy for the serial killer character by describing as a syndrome something which sounds very much like histrionic personality disorder or schizophrenia.

Even more strange, this method in which the serial killer murders people is nearly identical to the way Blake tortured and killed his fiance, Iana.

Both the fictitious killer and Blake drained the blood of their victims.

The comic book even showing the image of a dead woman's body splayed across a bloody bed, just like Iana was found.

Even another thing, the cover of this comic book syndrome shows a baby doll with part of the skull removed, its brain exposed.

When Blake was pitching his initial idea to Daniel Quanson and Robert Ryan, they remembered that he was very adamant about including the blood draining element in the storyline.

He gesticulated wildly and described to them what it would look like to hang someone from the ceiling and drain their blood, and he made a whistling sound as if to indicate how quickly the blood would flow from a body in that position.

Did Blake use this comic book plot and its artwork as a blueprint for his own crimes?

Those and the media sure began to think so.

On June 20th, 2018, Blake Lible was charged with first-degree murder, mayhem, aggravated mayhem, and torture, oh, and some special circumstance allegations because of how heinous the crime was.

These special allegations made him eligible for the death penalty in the state of California, which is quite a feat.

Blake pleaded not guilty because, you know, he's kind of an arrogant prick.

So he took his case to trial, subjecting his fiancée, Iana, spirit, and loved ones to the humiliation of having her tortured body displayed to a full courtroom day after day.

The evidence was stacked against him.

His DNA was found mixed with hers all throughout the apartment.

The circumstantial evidence of the eerily similar graphic novel, the trash bags filled with bloody sheets and pieces of Iana in the dumpster down below, and the fact that Blake was found holed up in the apartment with her dead body.

It all looks really bad, to say the least.

It was obvious to everyone that he had done it.

Evidence showed that he had even ordered postmates a few times while Iana was dying between making trips to the trash chute down the hall to get rid of bloody evidence and Iana's body parts.

The passport and \$4,000 cash found in his clothing when police entered the apartment

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did seem to indicate that Blake had planned to flee.

On the last day of the testimony in Blake's trial, someone came up to his ex-wife Amanda Braun and served Amanda with a civil lawsuit.

It came from Olga Kassian, Iana's mother.

Amanda swatted at the papers and as they floated to the floor, she ran.

In the prosecutor's closing statement, she seemed to answer the question everyone was wondering, why?

Why would he do this to someone he was about to marry?

Someone Blake just had a baby with.

The answer that the state came up with was jealousy.

Blake was jealous of all the attention Iana was giving the new baby, attention that was usually reserved for him.

On June 20, 2018, Blake Leibl was found guilty of first-degree murder, torture, and aggravated mayhem.

Six days later, because prosecutors opted not to seek the death penalty after all, Blake was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

He is currently housed at the California Correctional Institution.

The intro to Blake's novel Syndrome starts with a quote, if you were gorgeous and running out of money, what would you do, if you spent your life mastering your craft and nothing else, what would you do?

If you loved hurting things, what would you do?

I want to say that I hope money and privilege don't get you very far in prison, but I don't know if that's actually the case.

At the very least, we can all be certain that Blake will never fully enjoy the spoils of his wealth again.

And let's hope this guy doesn't write any more graphic novels either.

If you enjoyed the show, please consider joining plus at [swordandscale.com](http://swordandscale.com) slash plus.

But if you can't, consider leaving us a positive review on your preferred listening platform.

Sweet dreams and good night.