

Pruritus

Every year in the United States, the government files an average of 90,000 criminal cases with the federal courts system. In a majority, the defendants accept a plea bargain or otherwise settle the matter through alternative means, sparing judges from a deluge of arguments over relatively minor offenses.

However, among these “terminated” proceedings, a microscopic minority is never formally recorded on a court’s docket. No aggregation service such as Westlaw or LexisNexis will catalogue it, and no judicial archive or annual statistics will acknowledge its outcome. The reasons vary, from clerical oversight to the sheer brevity of litigation, but some determinants exist at the shadowy fringes of the legal system: powerful figures hoping to extinguish what little light is shed on their transgressions, or justice which touches on volatile state secrets conducted under cover of plausible deniability.

And then there are cases like that of *State v. Eckbaum*.

At 11:05 P.M., Eastern Standard Time, on March 29, 2013, Emergency Services in Midtown Manhattan, New York received a call from the cell phone of William Eckbaum, age eighteen. Eckbaum was crying and out-of-breath, but eventually provided the operator with the address of an apartment on the Upper East Side, before hanging up.

Police officers and paramedics arrived on the scene at 11:22 P.M., where they discovered the bodies of Carla Epps, age nineteen, and Anthony Cutler, age eighteen, in the property’s bedroom. Epps and Cutler wore only their underwear and were lying face-down in pools of blood (Epps on the bed, perpendicular to the mattress, and Cutler on the floor). The teens’ bodies were covered from head to toe in dozens of two- to three-inch-long slashes, with a gash at one end approximately an eighth of an inch in circumference.

The premises showed no signs of forced entry or exit. Upon subsequent questioning of neighbors in the building, several on the third, fourth, and fifth floors indicated that a young man consistent with Eckbaum’s description had knocked on their doors the previous afternoon and told them he would be shooting a “stunt” video the next day and that, as one woman recalled it, “[he’d] try to keep it down, but if you hear any shouting, screaming, whatever, don’t panic.”

An eight-inch-long, serrated kitchen knife was found in the blood near the bodies and bore Eckbaum’s fingerprints, as did a Panasonic v250 camcorder retrieved from beneath a radiator against the bedroom’s northern wall. The camcorder was damaged such that the internal screen was inoperable, and the memory card slot bent shut. This prevented any viewing or copying of the data inside until proper technical support could be secured, several weeks into the investigation. A tripod compatible with the camcorder was located in the kitchen, while Epps’ and Cutlers’ clothes were located in a pile behind Eckbaum’s bed.

After two calls back to his phone went unanswered, Emergency Services dispatchers traced Eckbaum’s cell signal to the alley of a convenience store six blocks northeast. Although he enthusiastically accompanied authorities upon their arrival, he became hostile when questioned, especially after learning that a preliminary forensic sweep of his apartment had

not found any “bugs.” He repeatedly requested that the building be evacuated, and unsuccessfully attempted to flee the precinct station. When the aforementioned evidence was documented and forwarded to authorities, Eckbaum was placed under arrest on suspicion of a double homicide. Eckbaum’s parents, Joseph and Naomi Eckbaum, were notified, and remained cooperative throughout the arraignment and discovery proceedings.

Eckbaum retained his parents’ attorney, Christopher S. Alvarez, as legal counsel. In a memorandum supporting a motion to dismiss the charges against Eckbaum, Alvarez argued that the forensic evidence relied upon by the prosecution was inconclusive and purely circumstantial. As an additional and alternative argument, he forwarded that an as-yet unidentified assailant was responsible for Epps’ and Cutler’s deaths.

In preparation for a trial before the District Court for the Southern District of New York, the defense produced three key pieces of evidence:

#1 - Audio recording of the 911 call [Transcript]

Operator: 911, what is your emergency?

Eckbaum: [Sobbing] They’re bleeding! There’s things everywhere, it’s... oh my God, it’s all my fault...

Operator: Sir, who’s bleeding?

Eckbaum: My friends, Ant[hony], Carla, they’re in my room, I’m on the street, I’m...

Operator: Two people are bleeding?

Eckbaum: Yes! Please, please help!

Operator: Where are they bleeding from? Are they still breathing?

Eckbaum: Everywhere! It was coming out of their chests and faces and legs and... Jesus, they’re dead. [Heavy breathing] I’m... sorry, I’ve got to... I’m running. Have... to get out of here or they’ll get me.

Operator: Sir, who is “they”? Did somebody attack your friends? Is somebody else still in the building?

Eckbaum: Something! Some *things*! Big [unintelligible] ...and they made this noise, and, and crawling everywhere, it was like... [unintelligible; Eckbaum’s subsequent testimony indicated that he had run under a bridge at this point, interfering with his phone’s reception]

Operator: Sir, if you are not in any immediate danger, I need you stay where you are, otherwise I can’t guarantee—

Eckbaum: It’s ■■■■ off Third Avenue, number 407. Tell their parents I’m sorry... I can’t go back up there.

#2 – Deposition of William Eckbaum, dated July 13, 2013 [Transcript]

VIDEOGRAPHER: We are now on record in the matter of State versus Eckbaum, criminal case in the District Court for the Southern District of New York, Case No. ■■■■■. Today's date is July the 13th, 2013, and the time is approximately 2:00 P.M. This video deposition of William Eckbaum is being taken at the office of Attorney Chris Alvarez, New York. My name is Caroline Strauss. I am the videographer. At this time, would the attorneys please identify themselves and the party they represent, beginning with the party noticing the proceedings.

...

[Eckbaum's deposition spanned over one hundred pages; what follows are the most relevant excerpts.]

EXAMINATION BY ELLEN DERMOT FOR THE STATE

Q: Good afternoon, William.

A: Yeah. Good afternoon.

Q: Is this your first time having your deposition taken?

A: Yes.

Q: So, now, you understand that you have sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

A: Yes.

[Eckbaum is wearing a plain white t-shirt and khakis. He continually scratches himself throughout the deposition, and the skin over most of his neck, face, and forearms is reddened and covered in thin scars. A physical examination, requested by the State, later confirmed that these abrasions—as well as others covering his torso, limbs, and upper back—were self-inflicted, the result of extensive scratching.]

...

Q: Tell me a bit about your school.

A: Well, uh, I went to The Dalton School—it's a private college prep place. So for undergrad, I was applying all over the city. Hoped to get into Columbia, study engineering, but... yeah.

Q: Did you receive any acceptance or rejection letters from any universities to which you'd applied?

A: Not then, no, I'd barely started. Just all rejections now, though. Must've heard about all this.

Q: Okay. Tell me a bit about your employment history.

A: I worked part-time at the Best Buy off Lexington and 86th last summer, did some volunteer work during the school year at the neighborhood coalition shelter around there, and... that's about it.

Q: Were you working at the time the deaths occurred?

A: I... no. I was just finishing my senior year.

Q: Are your parents your main source of income?

A: Yes.

Q: How often do you see your parents?

A: Pretty frequently now, I'd say. But back then, just like once or twice a month. They were working a lot.

Q: How would you describe your relationship with your parents around the time the deaths occurred?

A: We got along fine, still do, under the circumstances. I do love them, if that's what you're wondering. And I owe them a lot—if my dad didn't close deals like he does, I could never dream of an apartment like I got. Had.

Q: And your friends, Anthony and Carla, how long had you known them?

A: I knew Anthony since freshman year of high school, and we started hanging out with Carla junior year.

Q: And how would you describe your relationship with them?

A: Best friends. The 'share a lunch table together and see each-other every weekend' kind.

Q: Would you say that you and Carla were ever romantically involved?

Alvarez: Objection. Will, you don't have to answer that.

A: No. We, I guess, tried something for a while. And, it didn't work. But she was cool about it. She said there was always... there would always some other lazy afternoon. [Eckbaum covers his mouth. His shoulders buck.]

Q: Were Carla and Anthony ever romantically involved?

A: [Eckbaum closes his eyes.] No. Next question.

[An authorized review of Eckbaum's and Epps' Facebook data confirmed that the pair casually dated for approximately three weeks in January 2013. Neither the tone nor the content of their private messages, posts, or comments suggested animosity between the two after that period. A similar search of Cutler's Facebook account, however, was inconclusive.]

...

Q: Have you ever had any medical condition, or been on any kind of medication, which you believe would affect or impact your judgment or memory?

A: I'll take Tylenol every now and then, just for headaches, and... caffeine? Starbucks and Red Bull, Monster, stuff like that. I was on Adderall for a couple months, but that was in middle school.

Q: I'll repeat the question. Do you believe that would affect or impact your judgment or memory?

A: No, I don't 'believe' it would.

Q: Okay. Now, did you have access to video editing or manipulation software while working on the "FactBlasters" video series?

A: Yes, I've got Adobe Premiere and iMovie on my Mac. I'm no expert, though. I can do backgrounds and some basic overlay effects, but that's about it.

Q: Do you remember the last time you inserted or removed the memory card from that camcorder?

A: Yeah, I just stuck it in there, maybe, half an hour before filming.

Q: Did you ever take the memory card out after that, or rewind or modify the recording in any way?

A: No, never. That was just the... the raw footage.

Q: Did you throw the camcorder on the ground before leaving your apartment?

A: Yes. I know I should've held onto it, but I... panicked. I had it on me, so I threw it.

Q: What did you do with the knife which was also found by the bodies?

Alvarez: Objection.

Q: [Clears throat] Do you know how that knife came to rest near the bodies?

A: Yes, I threw it—also threw that. I guess that's out of frame on the video. I didn't think it would do anything, though—I mean, not crush something, like the camera. But like I said, it was all just... panic. Blind impulse.

Q: What were you doing with the knife prior to entering the bedroom?

A: Making a sandwich. [Scoffs] You... you saw the video, right? [To Alvarez] Did she see the video? I know you did.

...

#3 - Final video recording saved on the memory card in Eckbaum's camcorder, dated March 29, 2013 [Transcript]

The video recording transcribed below appears to have been filmed as an intended installment in a YouTube channel series titled "FactBlasters," posted to <https://www.youtube.com/factblasters> from August 17, 2012 to March 25, 2013 from Eckbaum's ISP address. The channel and all comments media associated with it were

administratively removed from YouTube at some point between March 31, 2013 and April 2, 2013 for violating the website's terms of service. Legal and technical support services at YouTube, Inc., corroborated that they could find no record of a complaint being filed, however, and were unable to produce any server-side metadata associated with the channel. The page now displays only a "404 Not Found" error message.

A search warrant executed for Eckbaum's personal computer uncovered digital copies of previous episodes of FactBlasters. Subpoenaed witnesses who had saved mirrors of the channel's pages were also able to confirm several relevant details. The channel's description read: "Two geek guys, one geek girl, and a million geek's [sic] questions. Tune in every Friday as we put science to the test and trash the rest!" The series took the form of short "episodes" (ten to twelve minutes) filmed on a high-definition camcorder in and around Eckbaum's or the decedents' apartments. Episodes centered on educational skits and experiments performed by Eckbaum, Epps, and/or Cutler, in which they would "blast" (debunk or clarify) popular assumptions or misconceptions involving basic chemistry, human anatomy, and natural phenomena. Scenes were generally accentuated with humor and informational or stylistic overlays added with digital film-editing software.

Past episodes included "CAN You Sneeze With Your Eyes Open?," "3 COOL Cures for an *Ice Cream* Headache," and "<Microwave THIS!>" Before its removal, the channel had only roughly two hundred subscribers, mostly friends and family of Eckbaum, Epps, and Cutler within the five boroughs.

10:30 A.M.

[A young man wearing a plain blue shirt is visible from the chest down, adjusting the camera's lens. He steps back, revealing himself to be William Eckbaum. Behind him is a polished wooden table and three chairs. The table has several short stacks of paper, books, and chemistry supplies upon it, and behind the chairs is a large "green screen" panel (this space was later identified as a stretch of wall in Eckbaum's living room). He sits down at the table and folds his hands.]

Eckbaum: [To the right] Alright!

[Two other people enter the frame from the right: a young woman with close-cropped blond hair and thick-rimmed glasses in a snug, bright red t-shirt (identified as Carla Epps), and a young man with tousled black hair and a short goatee in a fraying, dark green t-shirt (identified as Anthony Cutler). They sit down next to Eckbaum.]

Epps: [To Eckbaum] Are we good?

Eckbaum: We're good.

Cutler: Let's do this!

Epps: Hello, interwebs!

Cutler: And welcome to...

Eckbaum: FactBlasters, the show where we put science to the test and trash the rest! And you know, over the last dozen episodes... [Epps and Cutler mime scratching their heads.] You've suggested a lot of real head-scratchers for us to run through those tests. So, we figured we'd give everybody a little break, and do something that requires no scratching at all! Therefore, today's fact is... "Why You Don't Need to Itch!"

[Throughout this scene and those which follow it, Eckbaum intermittently pauses to make several broad hand gestures. These apparently represent moments where he intended to later digitally insert text or special effects.]

Eckbaum: How was that?

Cutler: Works for me, man.

[Epps nods and makes an "OK" gesture.]

Eckbaum: Sweet!

[Eckbaum gets up and approaches the camera.]

10:37 A.M.

[The camera is facing Eckbaum at eye level, standing beside a curtained window, in front of a television set by a pair of bookshelves. He points at the blank space of the curtains to his side.]

Eckbaum: The "fact," people say, is that itching is an automatic reaction to dozens of external and internal stimuli, one which satisfies the pleasure center of the brain when scratched.

[The camera, apparently on a tripod, quickly rotates ninety degrees, to where Epps is sitting in a recliner with her legs crossed.]

Epps: But the truth is, itching is a vestigial bodily function, like sweaty palms or carsickness. Oh, sure, there are "legitimate" reasons for itching, like chicken pox, bug bites, and some spinal disorders. But most of the time, our beautifully complicated human brain is just getting its wires crossed, and it overreacts to nothing at all!

[The camera rotates once more to Cutler, at close range.]

Cutler: As far as the nervous system cares, the signals for itchiness are like those for pain. But while pain indicates that your body's in danger, the discomfort from an itch is almost totally psychological. Still, it's estimated that the average person itches themselves hundreds of times a day, sometimes just at the thought of being itchy.

[The camera rotates 180 degrees, back around to Eckbaum.]

Eckbaum: Therefore, on today's episode of FactBlasters, Anthony and Carla are going to take on a challenge we believe is unprecedented: Not itch themselves for twelve hours straight!

10:43 A.M.

[The camera is facing Eckbaum from above and to his left. Part of the kitchen's Formica countertop is visible behind him.]

Eckbaum: Now, we recognize that it's impossible to completely stop itching yourself for that long—the friction of your feet on the floor or your limbs moving against each-other will sort of constitute a 'scratch.' So, if it helps, think of this more as "itch yourself as little as possible for twelve hours straight!"

Cutler: [Off-camera] Oh yeah, that makes our goal very clear.

Epps: [Off-camera] Um, guys, I think we should cut that part out.

Eckbaum: Yeah, I know, but we gotta acknowledge it or the comments section will never let up.

10:45 A.M.

[The camera is focused on a one-hundred-dollar bill sticking out of a wallet, held above a carpeted floor.]

Eckbaum: And just to sweeten the deal, we have agreed that whoever lasts the longest will win this sweet cash right here!

Cutler: [Off-camera] And Chipotle for a month!

Eckbaum: Yes, that too.

10:59 A.M.

[Eckbaum is sitting on a couch with a cell phone in his hand; the "Clock" app is open on the screen. Cutler sits to his right, and then Epps, leaning towards the camera.]

Epps: We know even the internet doesn't want to watch twelve hours of two people not scratching themselves, so Will is going to film in quick bits over that time and string it all together, mm'kay?

Eckbaum: That means we'll be running on the honor policy! So, it's fifteen seconds until Eleven A.M., Eastern Standard Time... anything you want to get ready before we begin?

Cutler: Bare feet, light 'n loose-fitting clothes and shorts—I'm good.

Epps: Me too.

Eckbaum: Alright... five, four, three, two... Go!

[Cutler scratches his armpit like an ape.]

Eckbaum: [Laughs] Alright, let's start over!

11:02 A.M.

[Eckbaum lounges next to Epps and Cutler, who are sitting with their legs slightly apart and hands gently resting by their thighs. The scene is otherwise identical.]

Eckbaum: [Looking at his phone] Alright... go!

[Cutler and Epps remain motionless for five seconds. Cutler's face twitches.]

Cutler: Oh, there's the first one. Left eyebrow.

Epps: Dangit, you made me think of it. Now I've got that and my toe.

Cutler: Argh! [Contorts his face, smiling] New pact: we don't mention it out loud, 'kay?

Eckbaum: [Laughs] I'll be right back.

11:33 A.M.

[Eckbaum is holding the camera, pointed at arm's length towards his face and the living room behind him.]

Eckbaum: Okay, it's been half an hour now that Anthony and Carla are itch-free! Let's check in...

[The camera follows Eckbaum into the living room, where Cutler and Epps stand in front of the television, swiveling in place and making anxious jerking motions.]

Eckbaum: How's it going, guys?

Epps: It's everywhere! I didn't—ah, ooh—even know I still had this much leg hair to get tangled. That's some of what it is, right? Tangled hairs? [Her foot flinches.] Ah, that one actually kinda stung a little.

Eckbaum: How about you, Anthony, any stinging?

Cutler: [Balancing on one foot] Oh, y'know, here and there.

Eckbaum: Well, I bet you could use a distraction. I know! Let's watch a movie! [Eckbaum raises a Blu-Ray case for "Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back" from somewhere below the frame.]

11:43 A.M.

[The camera is tightly focused on the television, as the opening crawl of the film scrolls up the screen and the main theme loudly plays.]

Eckbaum: [Off-camera] I'll go make lunch. Ant, you want grilled cheese?

1:05 P.M.

[The camera is angled down at the television and couch, where Epps and Cutler sit, fidgeting.]

Eckbaum: Status report, guys?

Cutler: [Points at screen] Well, I'm feeling pretty envious of Luke's ex-hand. What's a lightsaber go for these days, you think?

Eckbaum: [Laughs] Does it still sting?

Cutler: Nah, it's funny, it's kinda just a, a... dull hum now, y'know? Maybe I'm gettin' a second wind.

Eckbaum: Ah, Carla, no shimmying!

Epps: [Stands up from the couch] I'm gonna go jog around the block.

Eckbaum: Nope, gotta stick to the apartment.

Epps: [Dragged-out] No fun...

Eckbaum: I know—board games next!

2:15 P.M.

[The camera is at ground level. The coffee table previously in front of the couch is gone, replaced with the board and pieces for the game "Monopoly." Cutler and Epps are resting on their haunches, while Eckbaum, sitting cross-legged facing the camera, rolls the dice.]

Eckbaum: Community Chest!

Epps: [Arches her back] Ah, don't remind me.

Cutler: You can always take your shirt off!

Epps: Hey, uh... no.

Cutler: I said shirt, not bra...

Epps: I gotta piss. [Stands up]

Cutler: Carla, c'mon, I was just—

[Eckbaum glares at Cutler and walks around the board to turn off the camera.]

4:30 P.M.

[Cutler is walking towards the camera and away from Eckbaum's front door, which is closing behind him, and drops three envelopes on a table by the entryway.]

Cutler: Mail's here!

Eckbaum: [Behind camera] Oh hey, thanks!

Cutler: [Flaps his arms several times] Ah, dammit... do you think a shower counts as scratching?

Eckbaum: If it's rubbing against your skin, it's scratching. Besides, since when do you shower?

Cutler: [Shrugs] You got me. [Looks around] Where's Carla?

Eckbaum: Oh, she's in the bathroom. Said she was feeling kinda nauseous. I think it's...
[Whispering] You know. Talk about timing.

Cutler: [Walks past Eckbaum; the camera follows him as he grabs a drinking glass from a shelf and begins to fill it from a pitcher in the refrigerator.] I'm gettin' some of that too, actually. Probably just the cheese. [Drinks] That's a little better. Whoa, talk about thirsty.

Eckbaum: Wait here, I'm gonna go check on her. Carla?

7:45 P.M.

[The camera is facing the couch and television again. Carla and Eckbaum are playing a videogame. Cutler walks out of the kitchen, looking at his phone, and sits in the recliner.]

Eckbaum: Ah, come on! Nice shot.

Epps: [Visibly uncomfortable] Yeah, sure.

Eckbaum: [Turning to her] What's wrong?

Epps: Well, uh, I haven't itched myself in like eight hours, so there's that.

Eckbaum: Just think, though—a hundred bucks!

Epps: [Chuckles] Goodbye, student debt!

[Cutler chuckles as well. A few seconds later, he does so again.]

Eckbaum: [To Cutler] What is it?

Cutler: My girlfriend. She's in Midtown again and said she's 'itching to see me.' Mind if I send her up?

Eckbaum: Yeah, maybe not tonight. Sorry, but we've kinda got to keep a controlled environment here. [To the camera] Because science!

[Epps doubles over and lets out a short cry of pain.]

Cutler: [Half-rising out of his seat] Whoa, you okay?

Epps: [Shakes her head] Yeah, I'm... I'm good. There was just a real sharp one for a second in my stomach, but it went away.

Cutler: [Grunts] No kidding. I just got one on my forearm. That was weird.

Eckbaum: [Reaching out to camera] Like I said, the nervous system treats itching very similar to pain, but the key difference is—

Epps: Can we talk about something else? Please?

9:22 P.M.

[Cutler's back is to the camera, his height just barely fitting in the frame. The room has darkened considerably; moonlight and streetlights are the only illumination, obscuring most of the furniture. He stands, looking out the window, in silhouette.]

Cutler: All those people, living all those lives. Ever wonder if they're filming their own shows?

Eckbaum: Wait, what?

Cutler: [Turns around] Sorry, man, just... tryin' to distract myself again.

Eckbaum: Okay, but why'd you turn the lights out?

Cutler: I think the light is... just... a little itchy. Making it worse.

Eckbaum: [Stepping forwards] Hey, man, have you been... you know? [There is a sound like Eckbaum inhaling deeply through his teeth.]

Cutler: Nah, man, not... recently. But I do want that Chipotle.

Eckbaum: That's the spirit!

[Rapid footsteps come from behind the camera.]

Epps: [Off-camera, audibly disturbed] Okay, something on me just moved.

[The camera spins around.]

Eckbaum: What?

Cutler: [Off-camera] Huh?

Epps: I was looking in the mirror and something in my shoulder and cheek moved.

Cutler: For real?

Eckbaum: 'Moved' or twitched?

Epps: Bulged!

Cutler: You sure she hasn't been on somethin'?

Eckbaum: Guys, guys... it's just a muscle spasm. [Pointing the camera at himself] Those can happen all the time, no matter how much you itch, and they're usually nothing to worry about! However, if you are worried, light stretching and drinking lots of water should clear that right up.

Epps: [Off-camera] Will, I've been drinking water all night! I think I wore out your filter, even.

Cutler: [Off-camera] Uh, me too.

Eckbaum: Look, if it was anything serious, you'd have itched yourselves by now, right?

10:00 P.M.

[The camera is moving back and forth erratically around the middle of the apartment. Cutler is waving his arms deliriously, twitching and shaking as if having a fit.]

Eckbaum: Okay, uh, ha! It is officially ten o'clock, and Anthony and Carla are... powering through the home stretch!

Epps: Ahh... shut up, shut up, just stop talking, stop everything.

Cutler: Shit, it literally feels like someone's stabbing me, now. It's like little knives. Ah! Son of a bitch!

Epps: I'm gonna wait out the rest of it in the bedroom. Keep the camera out of this. [She sniffs; in the light through the windows, she appears to be tearing up.]

Cutler: Ditto.

[The two move towards the bedroom door with short, jarring steps.]

Eckbaum: Wait, but... no, c'mon!

Epps: [Through labored breathing] Got any... good books lately, Will?

Eckbaum: [Sighs] Yeah, top shelf by the sock drawer. Don't lick your thumb when you turn the pages!

[As Cutler disappears through the doorway, he appears to begin removing his shirt.]

10:52 P.M.

[Eckbaum is in the kitchen, standing in front of the camera at eye level, and holding a long knife.]

Eckbaum: [Whispering] Late-night snack. [He turns the camera, revealing jars of peanut butter and grape jelly, and two pieces of wheat bread on a ceramic plate, resting on the countertop. He looks over his shoulder.] Hey, either of you guys want a sandwich?

[There is no response, but a pair of voices breathing heavily, cursing, and possibly whimpering can be heard in the background.]

Eckbaum: Eh, more for me.

[Eckbaum reaches behind the camera.]

10:59 P.M.

[Eckbaum is holding the camera up close to his face.]

Eckbaum: So, as a bonus video for tonight, I'm going to show you how to make a great gluten-free dessert shake. Step one—

[A deep, loud scream erupts from somewhere. Eckbaum swings the camera towards the bedroom door.]

Eckbaum: Anthony? ...Hey, Anthony, you okay in there?

[There is another scream. It continues, and is overlapped by a string of even more loud, sustained, high-pitched screams.]

Eckbaum: Anthony? Anthony! Carla!

[Eckbaum sprints out of the kitchen towards the bedroom door and swings it open. He reaches into the room with the hand holding the knife and turns on the lights.]

Eckbaum: What the—

[Cutler is sprawled on his stomach in the middle of the hardwood floor in boxer shorts. Epps is lying on her side on the bed, facing the doorway, in a bra and panties. The exposed skin on both of their motionless bodies is completely covered in short, narrow slices which are gushing blood. Fifteen to twenty objects resembling thin, finger-length black and orange banded centipedes, with whip-like tails, appear to be resting on or emerging from the wounds on each body.]

Eckbaum: Oh my God, oh my fucking—

[A hissing noise can be heard, and the shapes appear to begin converging on Eckbaum. The view shoots towards the floor between the two bodies, repeatedly flipping and distorting, until it comes to rest facing the doorway. There is a metallic thud and, through smears of blood, Eckbaum's legs can be seen fleeing the frame, his panicked sobbing drowned out by the rising hiss. The last image, before the camcorder apparently succumbs to structural failure, is a series of wriggling black shapes blotting out the lens.]

...

Q: Just for the record, William, could you state in full what it is that you believe was responsible for the deaths of Carla Epps and Anthony Cutler?

A: [Sighs] I don't know... Christ, I don't know. I told you already. They're some kind of... a bug. An insect, or parasite, or something.

Q: Had you experienced any problems with insects in your apartment building in the past?

A: No, you don't understand, it wasn't an... external thing! It's not like, when you get a fly on your windowsill, or a spider in your bathroom! It came from inside of them!

Q: Okay. Do you know if Carla and Anthony had ingested anything or taken any legal or illegal drugs which might—

A: [Shouting] It's inside us! Those things are inside all of us! Don't you get it? That's what itching is, when there's nothing on you—it's what keeps them down!

Q: If... what you were saying were true, then wouldn't people who were unable to scratch themselves for... I'm paraphrasing Carla's words here... 'legitimate' reasons, be similarly affected? Say, infants, or coma patients, or even simply people sleeping for long stretches of time?

Q: Shit, I don't know! I'm not a scientist! Maybe it's some kind of, of... uh, physical feedback response, a symbiotic thing that doesn't start until we get older. Maybe they sleep when we do, communicate with pheromones, camouflage... look, this isn't hearsay or something crazy conspiracy theory scribbled on a wall! I've got video and audio! My best friends are dead! What more do you want from me?

A: [Clears throat] William, this deposition is designed to gather evidence in preparation for your trial in the event that—

A: You know what, screw you! [To off-camera] This isn't about you finding out the truth; it's about moving me through the system, through the motions. You already got the evidence you want, and charged me, and set up your whole case, so this is just... faster. It's about getting me to... itch, isn't it? Itch, itch, itch until I scratch. Well, I can do that.

[Eckbaum jumps out of his seat and begins aggressively clawing at his skin and clothes, drawing blood.]

Alvarez: Will!

Q: You try it! You sit there and see how long you last!

[Eckbaum lunges at Dermot. A uniformed NYPD officer rushes into frame and grabs him from behind.]

Q: Oh my God!

A: Do it! The camera's right there! We've got time!

[As Eckbaum and the officer struggle, Dermot exits her chair and backs up against the opposing wall.]

Alvarez: [Stands up] My client is suffering from serious psychological trauma. If you injure him, in my firm—

[The officer cuffs Eckbaum and ushers him out of frame.]

VIDEOGRAPHER: This deposition is hereby suspended. Going off at 3:05 P.M.

Eckbaum's hearing was originally docketed for April 5, 2014. However, the State moved to prevent the actual footage of Eckbaum's video from being admitted as evidence, claiming it would be unduly prejudicial and confuse a jury under Federal Rule of Evidence 403. Furthermore, a subsequent psychological examination determined that Eckbaum was suffering from a combination of post-traumatic stress disorder, excoriation disorder, and delusional parasitosis, and was therefore mentally unfit to stand trial.

With these considerations combined, Eckbaum agreed to plead guilty to reduced charges of involuntary manslaughter, obstruction of justice, and resisting arrest, and waived his right to a jury trial. After prolonged settlement negotiations with the prosecution and state authorities, he agreed to a transfer to the Manhattan Psychiatric Center.

The remaining evidence was confiscated upon a warrant from an undisclosed federal agency, including autopsy results which suggested that Cutler's and Epps' wounds were consistent with minor compound fractures or burst inflammation, as opposed to external lacerations. Still, no single source of ruptures in the cardiovascular, muscular, or nervous systems could account for the wounds' unique composition, although Alvarez has requested that the bodies be exhumed for further posthumous study.

The initial police investigation was closed as a murder-suicide between Epps and Cutler, with the involvement of illegal substance abuse left open to further investigation. However, a wrongful death action from the parents of Epps and Cutler is currently pending, as is a tort claim for assault from Ellen Dermot.

No trace of the organisms Eckbaum claims to have seen and recorded has ever been found.