FACT: FIVE OUT OF FIVE KIDS WHO KILL LOVE SLAYER

Roll over and die, Beethoven

BY MIKE SAGER

KIDS GROWING UP IN AMERICA TODAY are twice as likely as their parents were to be murdered before the age of eighteen, more than three times as likely to commit suicide. Every year, more than 3,500 teenagers die in drug- and alcohol-related traffic accidents. Thousands more are beaten, stabbed, shot, fired upon. Whether they live in the South Chicago neighborhood where a recent study found that one child in four has actually seen a murder victim, or in Sheridan, Arkansas, population 3,200, where in one recent twenty-four-hour period three teenagers committed suicide in unrelated incidents, terror, violence, and death are never far away. . . .

IN RED SMOKE AND CHAOS the demon appears, a spirit in black leather before a field of broken skulls and empty coffins, eyes gleaming, maniacal grin, hair a nimbus of floodlit hellfire. Sweat drips down his tattooed arm, splashes his bass guitar. He steps to the microphone, hocks a fat one center stage. The spots click green. He roars:

"Are you ready to diiiiiiiiiiiiiie!?"

A scream erupts, pandemonium, the primal cheer of six thousand lost young souls from the Heartland, the ticket holders who lined up five hours before showtime to see a concert that wasn't even advertised. (Why bother? None of them read a paper or listen to radio.) Ripped jeans and pimples, bustiers and black spandex minis, cigarettes dangling beneath peach fuzz, metal crosses kissing sweaty virgin skin, mall rats and jail bait and bedroom air guitarists, they are America's future, the fans of a band called Slayer, jammed now, pelvis to buttock, into this civic arena on a full-moon sabbath eve to take dark communion at the head-bangers ball.

The band explodes, a crunching engagement of chain-saw guitars, gutshot bass, primal drums, feedback thundering from amp stacks two stories high. The drummer beats from a platform in the rafters. Stage left, the rhythm guitarist wears a forearm sheath bristling with tenpenny nails. Stage right, the lead guitarist glares, rakes the strings. There's a hole in the crotch of his leather pants. The demon on the bass bangs his head against the air, furious, down and up, down and up, then switches to figure eights, pounding to the beat of the drum, throwing sweat and musk from his thick, wavy mane. He rolls his eyes back into his head. The spots click red. He sings, hoarse and throaty:

Propaganda death ensemble
Burial to be
Corpses rotting through the night
In blood-laced misery

Tom Araya, Dave Lombardo, Kerry King, Jeff Hanneman and (facing page) their hugest fan.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PATRICK HARBRON

Scorched earth the policy
The reason for the siege
The pendulum it shaves the blade
The strafing air blood raid

Beneath the stage, just past a buffer manned by bouncers, kids are crammed and jammed and smashed behind a chest-high wooden barricade. Elbows in windpipes, noses in armpits, ears ringing, hearts pounding, heads banging down and up, synapses frying endorphins and kilowatts, bathtub acid and homicidal dreams, fists thrusting toward the stage, index and pinkie fingers extended like horns, the sign of the master of darkness, Hail Satan!

The air hums and buzzes, and in the middle of the floor of this vast, round, seatless auditorium, something called the mosh pit begins to swarm. Shirtless boys and fearless girls—fourteen, sixteen, twenty years old, braces, tattoos, Charlie perfume, half-shaved heads—skip aggressively counterclockwise, cherubs in the inferno, gathering speed, shoulders cocked, elbows crooked like linemen, grinning, grimacing, laughing, crying, bouncing and ricocheting like agitated electrons, like pinballs trapped between bonus bumpers. Here and there one is borne aloft, passed toward the stage on a sea of palms, kicking and screaming and rolling back to front, dumped headfirst over the barricade, to be carried away by a bouncer.

Infiltration push reserves
Encircle the front lines
Supreme art of strategy
Playing on the minds
Bombard till submission
Take all to their graves
Indication of triumph
The number that are dead

Away from the mayhem, all along the perimeter of the arena, every fire door and exit is guarded by a rent-a-cop and two parents with flashlights. They patrol the grim scene with fearful eyes. Outside, near the entrance, a group of Teens for Christ urges leaflets and brimstone upon dopers and metal heads straggling late into the show. Later, two city cops on mountain bikes will ride up hard and adrenalized on a circle of autograph hounds, looking to make a bust. This is Sacramento, California, but it could be any town that Slayer has seen over the ten-week, forty-seven-date cross-country tour called Seasons in the Abyss.

As usual, the sight on the horizon of the four horsemen of Slayer had been cause for panic in cities like Tucson, Milwaukee, Grand Rapids, Poughkeepsie. Newspapers ran foreboding headlines: SLAYER: THEY'RE FROM THE BLOOD, DEATH, BEELZEBUB CAMP. WITH DEADLY LYRICS, SLAYER STALKS FANS. Insurance costs were quoted, editorials were written, past incidents were cited. In New York, fans tear out seat cushions and sail them onstage. In Philadelphia, they pull down the sprinkler system and flood the hall. In Hollywood, tickets sell out and two hundred thrashers riot; one of them is charged with trying to run over a cop with his van.

Everywhere Slayer went, city fathers and mothers slapped palms to foreheads, My Lord, what now? Since the plagues of AIDS and crack had risen up to smite the Me Decade, America had been tripping on guilt. Penitent, confused, afraid, people joined groups and clubs. They started going to church, reciting the pledge, curbing their appetites. They became religious fundamentalists, Meese commissioners, new conservatives, L. Ron Hubbarders, self-helpers, liquid dieters, right-to-lifers. Hollering warnings, they laid their bodies across every alternative exit on the highway of life, trying to detour choice. Reins were tightened. "Do your own thing" was scrapped for "Just say no." Control. Control. Control. That was the answer. Be a community watchdog. Join a health club. Accept the Lord. Eat yogurt instead of ice cream. Drink bubbles instead of beer. Wear a condom, close your eyes, never question authority

At least that's what grown-up America was thinking. The kids, meanwhile, were in their own world, listening to another kind of music. Called heavy metal, speed metal, death metal, thrash, its focus was devil fantasy, the occult, death, destruction, doom. The groups they idolized had names like Black Sabbath, Metallica, Anthrax, Suicidal Tendencies, Megadeth. Perverse, contrary, heavy metal was a new soundtrack of protest, a reaction against the reactionaries, a cracked mirror in the haunted house of the modern age. Parents began finding notebooks doodled with pentagrams. They barged through bedroom doors, stood horrified as the stereo blared and little Johnny banged his head against the air.

Soon, lawmakers and experts began their counterassault. A group of political wives led the way, decrying heavy metal for "exposing innocent children to themes of sadomasochism, rape, and suicide." A group called Back in Control demanded a ban on heavy metal concerts and said children who listen to thrash should be "depunked and demetaled before it's too late." William F. Buckley Jr. called for censorship.

Kids who listen to Slayer, said a Los Angeles psychologist, "are violent and heavy drug users, they have no positive orientation." Said a Tennessee psychologist: "The lyrics become their philosophy." An eighteen-year-old boy shoots himself in the head while heavy metal blasts from his car stereo. A fourteen-year-old girl stabs and then bludgeons her mother to death. Seven teens ransack a warehouse, paint SUICIDAL DEATH TRIBE on the wall, jam a dead rat through the plaster. A teenager pleads guilty to mutilating cats and using the blood to scrawl 666 on elementary school walls. Each of the five panel members on a Phil Donahue show titled "Kids Who Kill" name Slayer as their favorite band.

All of which has had a predictable effect on Slayer's popularity. Ten years ago they were playing in high school gyms. Five years ago they were on the road in a rental van and a Camaro. In 1990 the band's sixth album, *Seasons in the Abyss*, made *Billboard* magazine's Top-40 pop chart. In July of that year, Slayer came of age: The cover of the *Rolling Stone*.

Sport the war, war support
The sport is total war
When victory's a massacre
When victory is survival
When the end is a slaughter
The final swing is not a drill
It's how many people I can kill

Back in Sacramento, with "War Ensemble" nearing its final, deafening chords, a young thrasher pushes his way through the crowd, bouncing off bodies like a drunk sailor tacking through a blow. His eyes are bloodshot, one shoe is missing, his hair is matted to his pink forehead. His brand new Slayer concert T-shirt, black with a yellow death head ($22), is shredded. He reaches the cinderblock wall, leans there a moment, dazed.

Attention, Kmart shoppers: Slayer gives its fans what they want (top) at a record-store promotional appearance and (inset and bottom) in concert.

He stares upward, focusing vaguely on the ceiling, the stroboscopic colored lights, the smoke, the din. What's running though his mind? Maybe a photomontage, quick cuts like MTV, images collected in his brain. A soldier's arms shot away. Cops beating a man with batons. A psycho slicing skin from the back of an attractive blond corpse. An electric chair. A mushroom cloud. A Patriot missile. Burning crude. George Bush. Steven Seagal. Undercover narcs breaking down a door in a ghetto. Kurds rioting for food. A cow bloating in a rice paddy. Protesters smashing windows. Al Sharpton. Elvis. Christina Applegate. Freddy Krueger. A demon thrashing in a fiery quagmire. Whitney Houston singing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Suddenly, the kid stirs. His brows rise, his mouth contorts, his eyes blaze. He screams, loud, long, piercing. . .

"*Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!*"

Then he slams his head, once, hard, into the cinder-block wall.

"Killer, dude!" he says.

"CHECK THIS ONE OUT, DUDE," says Tom Araya, waving a piece of fan mail. He sets down the letter, takes a hit off a bong he rigged from a Bart Simpson drinking bottle, free from 7-Eleven when you buy a Big Gulp.

Tom is the demon on the bass, Slayer's leader, home now from the road, catching up on his mail.

He sits cross-legged on the sand-colored carpet in his newly acquired stucco rambler, white with baby-blue trim, the same color as his '85 Camaro. The house sits amid the vast sprawling suburbs of the San Fernando Valley. This exit off the 210 Freeway is Santa Anita, the town is Arcadia, though it really could be any exit on this grid-planned, fertile plain of minimalls, stoplights, [*continued on page 126*]

handsome in a roguish sort of way, with a good bit of Indian in his cheekbones, and light skin like his mother, a lay minister in the Catholic church, a hairdresser who wears her Slayer jacket to work. When she opened her own beauty shop, Tom and his six brothers and sisters tried to think up a cool name. They suggested the Harem or the Tease, but in the end she settled on her own choice, Cinderella.

"Whoa! Listen to this!" Tom exclaims. He flops down, elbow to carpet, palm to ear, legs stretched out with his shoes off. He reads:

"What's up? I am one of your most devoted fucking fans. You guys are gods in my eyes, I mean, fuck, I'm fucking obsessed with you guys. I'm a hardcore Satanist and I'm also into black magic. I read Tom's interview in the *L.A. Times*, and I don't believe you're a Catholic, I hope you were lying your ass off. I'm fifteen and your music is the only thing that has kept me from losing my mind. Most people go mad with anger and want to go out and kill someone after listening to Slayer. Not me. It soothes my brain."

Tom picks up his Bart pipe, loads a bud, a gift from a fan in Sacramento. The deader the town, it seems, the better the bud. Tom wonders if there's a correlation. He surveys the room, fires up the bowl. He was supposed to paint the living room today, but it's raining, he feels lazy. Maybe tomorrow. He picks up another letter.

"Your music takes me away to a far-off plain, where lies a faithless depth and Hades rapes in clouds. Tom, man, you're really cool. When you sing songs where you hit high notes, it gets me really hyper and glad I'm a head-banger." Two girls from Finland write: "A few days ago we bought Metal Hammer's poster book. There was a picture of you. Tom's balls were so grand (big dick, huge genital, massive gun, sharp sword, manly bar)."

Tom shakes his head and laughs. "This shit scares me sometimes," he says. "The way kids are into us, they way the adults hate us. *Nobody* gets it. It's amazing. Shit, dude! It's all right off TV."

Take "Mandatory Suicide." It's a song about being a soldier, about the draft. Substitute suicide for draft, he says. But it's not antiauthority. It's about informed choice. If you're going to join the army, then know that some general may possibly order your death. That's the duty of a soldier. "And thinking about death," Tom says, "I was wondering what it would be like to get shot. I've seen a lot of people shot in the movies, and I've had dreams where I was shot, so I have an idea, I know that it would burn like hell. I don't think the pain would be as bad as the burning sensation would be."

"Hallowed Point" is about owning guns. If you're gonna have one, it says, be prepared to make a hallowed point. Hallowed point comes from hollow point, as in the kind of bullet. Tom's not against guns. He's thinking of getting one. "Shooting somebody's a lot better than getting your head bashed in," he says.

"Blood Red" was inspired by news footage of a Chinese student playing cat and mouse with a tank in Tiananemen Square. "I read these little news clips about how things are fucked up here, fucked up there, everybody's got a civil war. And the way it goes down, the new guys are just as bad as the old," he says. "Dead Skin Mask" was inspired by mass murderer Ed Gein. "I can't tell you why I'm fascinated with mass murderers," Tom says. "It's like, there are actually all these people out there whose world is murder. They have to pretend to survive in this world with everybody else, but really they're living this hell. That really trips me out."

Tom wrote "War Ensemble" months before Iraq invaded Kuwait. It's not that he was prescient. It's just that he's fascinated with war, or anyway, with movies about war: *Full Metal Jacket*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Hamburger Hill*. To write the lyrics he consulted a military textbook.

"Living in the times we do," Tom says, "you don't *have* to make anything up. You got to admit, what goes on in the world is pretty fuckin' bizarre."

Tom pauses a moment, considering his words, reaching into the Baggie. He loads another bud into the Bart bong. He's proud of his pipe. With all the head shops gone, a good bong is hard come by, even though it's pretty easy to get drugs. He flicks his Bic, covers the rush hole he bored with his Swiss Army knife, moves the flame slowly toward the bowl, a salvaged piece from a very old pipe. He draws at the convenient plastic straw built into the top of the bottle, making the sound of bubbles.

Mid-hit, he freezes. He tilts his head, listens. "Shit!" he exclaims. "Light a cigarette!"

Tom jumps up from the floor, grabs the Bart bong, the Baggie, the papers, a few loose joints. He scrams into the bedroom.

A knock at the door. A pause. A key.

The door opens. In steps Dad. He looks around, sniffs. Behind him, side by side, are John and Ollie. Tom's younger brother and sister are one year apart, inseparable.

"The whole house smells like pot!" says Dad.

Ollie raises an eyebrow. John smirks.

Dad strolls toward Tom's bedroom. Ollie and John follow.

"Oh! Hey, dad!" says Tom, backing out of his closet.

Dad regards his son a moment. He frowns, shakes his head. "I thought you said you were painting today."

MOMMY, I like that one!" croons the little boy. He's wearing surf shorts and mirrored goggles on a sunny, big-sky day near Phoenix. "The white one, Mom!"

Another subdivision, six hours east on the 10 Freeway, the same minimalls and yogurt stores, but here the boulevards are wider, the stucco and neon set back from the road, sheep and horses grazing on backyard farms. It's the hometown of the Greenway High School Devils, the Desert Hills Evangelical Free Church, and Kerry King, Slayer's rhythm guitarist.

"I'll tell you," says Kerry, walking over to a white puppy turning excited circles in the last stall of the kennel. "If you're interested in this girl, you should get into showing."

"What does that consist of?" asks Mom, who has yet to convince Dad that the kids need a $1,500 pet. This is her umpteenth visit, but Kerry doesn't mind. He had to feed everybody anyway—twenty Akita sires and bitches and pups, some homebred, some from Illinois, a championship line. "Do you have to take them out of state?"

"The big guns do," says Kerry. "Like, I'm getting into the big-gun area myself."

"Do you show them?"

"I do, ah, I don't. I mean, I don't really have the look," says Kerry, the one who wears the sheath with the tenpenny nails onstage. "You've got to have a more contemporary look. I have a handler who shows them."

"Wouldn't that be discrimination?" asks Mom. "I mean, if your dog is—"

"You know how the world is, ma'am," says Kerry. "People have weird ideas."

Kerry's been living in Phoenix now for about eighteen months. He came here because he needed room to raise his dogs, chickens, and rats, the latter to feed his snakes. He has a collection of two hundred serpents, mostly boas. He also collects vintage Corvettes, horror videos, Slayer memorabilia, sports memorabilia. Kerry has always been a collector. You could say he collected Slayer.

It began in 1981, when he was fourteen. He and Jeff Hanneman met one day when both showed up to audition for a guitar slot in a band. Several days later, Dave Lombardo, a drummer, introduced himself when he was delivering a pizza to Kerry's neighborhood. He'd heard about the spoiled kid in the corner house with the collection of vintage guitars. Kerry was little and skinny then, pretty surfed out for someone who lived so far from the beach. His father was an aircraft-parts inspector who used to plunk "Red River Valley" on an acoustic. The Kings lived in a Mexican neighborhood; Kerry spent his youth running from cholos. After being caught and beaten a few times, he was forbidden by his parents to leave the backyard.

Having collected two guitarists and a drummer, Kerry called Tom for bass and vocals. Tom was working evenings as a respiratory therapist and was back in school to become a nurse. The four convened in Tom's garage. They jammed. Things clicked. They got themselves a manager, a friend trying to break into that side of the business.

And so a band was born. They called it Slayer, you know, like a murderer. Cool. They stole wood from construction sites and hammered together a drum riser and two guitar platforms, made a light frame with floods stolen from different apartment complexes in the neighborhood. Then they rented a high school gym and put on their first show. Tom's little brother John was the only roadie. He worked the lights and sound, and when a guitar string broke he'd run backstage and fix it. Soon they were on the road up and

down the West Coast. Tom, the only member over twenty-one, was in charge. The towns had names like Winnipeg, and the crowds were small, but the boys were living their dream, playing in a rock 'n' roll band.

In 1983, Tom and Kerry's father put up $3,000 to cut an album. *Show No Mercy* sold sixty thousand copies, staggering for a band that nobody had heard of. The *Los Angeles Times* would later say that it "codified the gruesome conventions of death metal and became one of the most imitated albums ever made."

The rest, as they say, is show-biz history. More albums, harder lyrics, higher sales for records titled *Hell Awaits, Reign in Blood, South of Heaven, Seasons in the Abyss, Decade of Aggression.*

Mom and her kids are gone, and Kerry is reclining on a patio chaise in his living room. Behind him, on a shelf, is a huge softball trophy. Kerry sponsored the championship team, the Vipers, for two seasons, played third base. Last season, he had to be away on Slayer's European tour, so he decided not to sponsor it again, though he did pay his fee to remain on the roster. He showed up at the fourth game. After warm-ups, Kerry went to take a leak. The team took the field. They never did let him play.

Kerry writes most of Slayer's devil songs: "Skeletons of Society," "Born of Fire," "Temptation." He is about to recite one called "Spirit in Black." In the corner of the room, a trophy of another kind, an exotic dancer from Denver, peddles an exercycle. He recites deadpan from the lyric sheet that comes with the *Seasons* CD, looking up now and again for effect:

Welcome to my world
Involve yourself within my dream
Experience a life
Just like your mind thought not to be
Take a look through time
At past or present worlds to be

I rule this inferno
Enthroned for eternity
Spirits damned to rot
Amidst the brimstone fireballs
Eyes of the dead
Watching from their living walls

Broken-glass reflections
Show your flesh eaten away
Listen closely to my voice
Feed me all your hatred
Empty all your thoughts to me
I can fill your emptiness
With immortality

"That one, *hmmmm*, let me see," says Kerry, tilting his head professorially, one finger to his lip. "Oh, yeah. I was at Blockbuster Video, and there was a video called . . . something about hell. It completely inspired me to write this song about a hell-like world and somebody being in charge of it. It's a fictitious story. It's like, welcome to my fantasy. Everybody would like to have his own world. Like, when you're in my place, you're in my rules, my boundaries, I can make anything happen that I want, 'cause it's my place. I'm the authority. Kind of like a man's home is his castle sort of thing.

"It's like, I try to write songs that are very visual. You can read the lyrics and see what's going on. Like that line, 'Eyes of the dead watching from their living halls.' I got that from *The Sword and the Sorcerer*, that part in the movie where they're conjuring up that guy, and he rises out of this casket of blood and there's this wall of faces, and once he comes to life all the faces come to life.

"That's where I get a lot of my images, from movies. And also stuff I imagine in my mind. Like in 'Spirit,' the first two verses sort of build you a picture of the place. 'Spirits damned to rot,' 'Broken-glass reflections'—you know, you're looking at yourself in a broken mirror or something. It's all visuals, things that are spooky, cool, stuff like that. See, if I had a choice to go to any kind of movie, it would be a horror movie. It's like, *Nightmare on Elm Street*. When that came out, it was just so unique, so well done, I was like, Oh, man, this, like, changes my whole life. *Friday the 13th, The First Power, Leviathan, Night Breed*. All those are really killer movies.

"I describe my songs as horror movies on music," he says. "It's a fantasy world. Tom likes war, serial killers, current-events stuff like that. But I don't know where people get this idea that I worship Satan. I'm not a satanic guy."

LATE AFTERNOON in the High Sierras. The land is flat; a snow-capped mountain rises in the distance. Two hours northeast of Los Angeles, the suburbs continue their migration toward the desert and Barstow, a new exit off the freeway, a new development of identical stuccos right next to a new mall. In a cul-de-sac, a family of Asians, Mom, Dad, two kids, stands at the edge of their new cement sidewalk, peering hopefully into manicured dirt, looking for signs of lawn.

"How y'all?!" yells Dave Lombardo, waving from across the street. He pulls a box out of the trunk of his car, a jacked-up Pontiac with a supercharger poked through the hood. "They got a housing committee out here," Dave whispers. "They like you to be friendly."

Dave and Theresa Lombardo have just moved into their first house, an upscale number with a vaulted foyer and neo-Victorian half-moon windows in the front, an expanse of dirt yard enclosed by nine-foot cinder-block walls in back. Dave heads up the sidewalk, checking for signs of his own lawn. He removes his shoes, backs through the front door, pads over the runner on the new white carpet.

"Where do you want this?" he hollers.

Theresa appears at the top of the stairs, floral stretch pants and big hair. She puts her finger to her lips.

"Don't shout!" she whispers. "You'll make the cake fall. Put that stuff in the kitchen. Tiptoe!"

Dave smiles, tiptoes, putting down the box, moving into the living room, where he begins alphabetizing his CD collection across the fireplace mantel. Theresa comes downstairs. They kiss. She goes to the powder room, busies herself arranging a new set of matching mauve bath accessories. She hums.

Dave and Theresa are at their best when they're together, and they're always together, kind of like Barbie and Ken, which is what the other members of Slayer have nicknamed them. During the hours before a concert, while the rest of the band sleeps, Dave and Theresa usually play tourist. In Sacramento they saw the Governor's Mansion, Dave in his long hair and Slayer cap, Theresa in her stretch pants, bobby socks, spike heels, and pancake makeup. As a souvenir they bought a magnet for the new fridge.

At the concerts, Theresa waits at the bottom of Dave's two-story platform. He plays a console of twelve custom-made drums and eight extra-thick cymbals, the largest of which he got because it makes the sound of two trucks colliding. His earliest memories of drums are Tarzan movies and Santeria ceremonies. His parents, who are from Havana, used to bring him. He played along on toy bongos. Now he has his very own roadie and a set worth $15,000.

When Dave plays, high above the crowd, chills run up and down his spine, he gets goosebumps. It's incredible, he's not good with words, but it's an incredible feeling, the energy, the electricity between him and the kids, it just blows him away. Used to be Slayer was playing and Dave would be watching the kids go crazy, watching them fly all over the room, and it looked like so much fun that he couldn't just sit there on his stool. He'd be like, "I'm gonna jump in too," and he'd climb down off his platform and dive right into the crowd. He'd free fall, and the kids would catch him, and then they'd just, like, hold him up, just, like, floating around, and then they'd throw him back onstage.

It was fun. He did it every show. Then kids started stealing his shoes, ripping his shirt, pulling out locks of hair. Then one night he got punched in the face by a bouncer. Never again, dude.

Now when he's finished, Theresa bundles him up in a robe and takes him around the waist, leads him to the showers. They started dating years ago, while she was a bookkeeper at Sears and he was a security guard at Kmart. These days, they don't really mix much with the band. Dave quit a while back because the guys gave Theresa so much shit, locker-room antics, dick jokes and such. He's back now because after he left, the band never got around to auditioning a new drummer.

Even with the hassles, Dave is thrilled to be in Slayer. Thanks to tours, he and Theresa have seen castles in Scotland, beer factories in Germany, the Imperial Gardens in Japan, a big, humongous church in Milano. They try to make the most of things as they are right now. They don't know how long stardom is gonna last. Nothing lasts forever. (Within nine months, in fact, Dave

and Theresa would split up.)

"It's still an incredible thing," says Dave, slotting a Slayer CD into the machine. "I can't believe this. Is this really happening? I still am a fan. I'm more of a fan than I am a player in the band. I'm just like the kids I play for, I guess. I mean, I enjoy listening to the music. I get into it so much. The energy. The energy. There's no weak point. It's just, the music, the way I feel it. When I play, I give it everything. I know every kid in that arena would love to be doing the exact same thing if they could. I'm just one of the lucky ones."

I'LL TELL YOU HONEST," Eddie is saying as the burgers are served in a greasy spoon on the Sunset Strip. "One time when Kerry called me, my phone went flying off the bed. It really did. You know, the cord was sticking straight up and the phone was, like, swinging around the room, and I'm just, like, sitting there watching my phone go crazy. I was totally straight. I didn't even know what drugs were about at the time. Finally, I caught the phone and I pulled it down and like, 'Hello?' And it was Kerry. He was like, 'What the hell are you doing?' "

Eddie's real name is Laura. She's the assistant to a regional sales rep for a large national firm. She's also Slayer's biggest fan. It started years ago in Houston, when she was in ninth grade, living in the suburbs with her parents. Her father was the manager of a dry-cleaning plant. Her mother, a former big-band singer, had been reborn as a strict Baptist.

Laura was going through a kind of rebellious stage when she found heavy metal. She learned about it from a guy named Venom at a concert given by a Christian band called the Ethereals. Venom listened to Iron Maiden and Motörhead. And he listened to Venom. That was his favorite band. Venom wore leather and chains and safety pins. He was very cute.

Laura started calling herself Eddie. She dyed her hair jet black, wore leather, metal studs, skull rings. She liked her new music, but kept thinking, *There's got to be something heavier.* Then she heard Slayer's song, "Chapel of Sin." There was this solo on it by Hanneman that made her feel like she was underwater and she couldn't catch her breath. She was just like, Oh, my God, this is incredible! And the words. She doesn't know why—*Harlots of hell/ Spread your wings as I penetrate your soul,* you wouldn't think she'd dig something like that—but damn, it was good. It just went right through her, just made her go *wooooooooow!* It was like, she could listen to it, and then she was in a really good mood. Hearing "Chapel of Sin," that was it. She vowed right then and there, Slayer was her band.

See, weird things had always happened in her life. Like her Mom would walk in and find her levitating near the ceiling. She'd call out *Laura!* and the girl would just drop down to the bed. And there were the visitors. They were hooded people, she doesn't know who. She called them the Council. The members of the Council never spoke, but they showed her things, pictures. To this day she'll see something, like a déjà vu, and remember that it was something they showed her. And one time, when she was seventeen or eighteen, she had troops marching through her house. Her dad was asleep on the couch. She was like, "Daddy, wake up, we got to get a priest in here." Daddy wouldn't wake up. She called her girlfriend. The friend asked, "What's all that rumbling in the background?"

Eddie joined the Doom Society, a kind of fan club that brought heavy metal bands to Houston. They got some press when they sacrificed a stack of Mötley Crüe albums to Slayer in an occult ceremony outside a radio station. It was a majorly outfreakish event, way cool. They drew a crowd. Eddie loved Slayer because they were fast, and there was just such power behind their music. It assaulted her. She could feel it. There was nothing like it. She got a buzz from it. She and her friends would have thrash sessions; they'd put on Slayer and pile on top of each other and just let it all out.

What were they letting out? She doesn't know exactly. Something about being a teenager. Something about living on this planet in these times. It's like, sometimes you want to scream, you know? It just feels great, great and free. They can put on an album and just slam into each other, just totally have fun in the privacy of their own rooms.

To Eddie's thinking, Slayer has become more and more popular because of what she calls "the slayerness of it all," the majorly fucked up state of the world. At home, at school, on television, one thing is clear: Life sucks. Slayer commiserates. The demon on the stage recites truths that the kids in the audience already know inside themselves. Only when someone else says it do they know they aren't alone. And once that sinks in, and they see how hopeless everything is, the music and the buzz and the head-banging and all the rest helps them let it out, purge, a joyous, unified, tearless, savage good cry.

"It's like that song, 'Temptation,' " says Eddie, dipping a french fry in ketchup. "It gets to me because it says, 'Have you ever wondered why it's evil you're attracted to?' You know, I do wonder why. There's just so many people out there that are supposed to be on the good side, but they're not for real. Politicians, teachers, parents, ministers, Christians, everybody. They're hypocrites. The whole society. All the adults. They're so phony."

Eddie pauses a moment, lets her emotions run past. She looks over toward the door. In profile, the bright California sunlight makes her hazel eyes look yellow.

"I get frustrated," she says. "I try to keep things fine and wonderful, but, shit, talk about an angry sleeper. I wake up and my blanket is ripped to shreds, and oh, my God, my head will be inside a hole in the blanket, strangling me. I don't know how I do these things. In my sleep. Strangling myself. Just a majorly outfreakish event. Weird, huh?"