

## Shooter Pair Mixed Fantasy, Reality

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They hated jocks, admired Nazis and scorned normalcy. They fancied themselves devotees of the Gothic subculture, even though they thrilled to the violence denounced by much of that fantasy world. They were white supremacists, but loved music by anti-racist rock bands.



Shooting suspect Eric Harris relaxes in the Columbine High School cafeteria in an undated yearbook photo. (Reuters)

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were bright young men who became social outcasts at their suburban Denver high school, and then built their own internal society by plucking strands from the pop whirlwind of cyberspace and fantasy games, the soundtrack of American youth, and a netherworld that glamorizes Nazi symbols and terrorist violence.

In the aftermath of a tragedy that demands explanation, Harris and Klebold-the two Columbine High School juniors who killed 12 classmates and a teacher before killing themselves-appear in death to have been anything but consistent. They were confused, angry young men drowning in a sea of lurid imagery and frightening violence.

Like many in a generation that has grown up online, they sprinkled bits of make-believe and reality all over the Internet-a line drawing of a gun-toting attacker here, a self-portrait as marauding avenger there, lyrics from German rockers laced throughout. And amid it all, a page on Harris's Web site appears with detailed plans for constructing bombs.

An initial sketch of Harris and Klebold and the Trenchcoat Mafia to which they claimed membership emerged yesterday from interviews with friends, fellow students and neighbors, and from police and school officials. If the boys left behind any detailed explanation of their horrific final cries, no one has found it yet.

Their peers thought them weird, and the boys made no effort to hide their obsessions. They wrote death poetry-for their English class. They made a video about their new guns-for a class at school. They shouted murderous slogans-and posted them on America Online. They loved explosives and guns-and talked about it to anyone who might listen.

In recent days, the pair seemed even odder than before-at least in retrospect, students said. "You would see them sort of marching down the hall together with their berets,

dark glasses, their boots and their makeup or whatever it was," said Michael Staver, a 17-year-old junior. "They would make those sharp military turns and knock into anyone in their way. To me, I thought it was a big sign of trouble."

But Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone saw no clear indication that the pair was headed for disaster. "Their behavior was unusual," he said. "They were being picked on by other kids because of their behavior, and their garb was unusual . . . but I don't want to put a lot into that because a lot of kids wear dark clothing and Doc Martens." Stone said he knew of no motive for the massacre other than "anger."

Nineteen days before they were to graduate, Harris and Klebold seemed inseparable and troublesome. In Columbine's hallways, they spoke broken German and referred often to "4-20," Hitler's birthday and the day they chose for their assault.

Last year, they were arrested on a felony count of breaking into a car; a juvenile court sent them to a school counseling program. Eric Veik, a junior who was in a video class with Harris and Klebold, said he heard the duo talking recently about how "since there were only a few days left of school, 'maybe we should give the school something to remember.' But no one figured they meant this. People just thought it'd be another senior prank, and those are usually real small."

Harris, 18, rarely thought small. His online ramblings demonstrate a grand view of life and self.

"Man has ruled this world as a stumbling, demented child king long enough," Harris wrote in his "personal quote" on his America Online member profile. "As his empire crumbles, my precious black widow shall rise as his most fitting successor." Online, he called himself "Darkness."

In the writings he left behind, Harris in particular left a large, varied electronic trail. His Web pages were dotted with images of fire and skulls, devils and weapons. In oversized lettering, he quoted from KMFDM, a German rock band whose song "Waste" includes these lyrics: "What I don't say I don't do. What I don't do I don't like. What I don't like I waste."

Harris's Web pages-some of which included a code automatically inserted by the Microsoft Word program listing the computer's owner as Wayne N. Harris, Eric's father-included recipes for and sketches of what appear to be pipe bombs.

Next to a drawing of a long pipe with a fuse coming out of one end, Harris wrote "spe will cz exp. bef. main chrg," an apparent reference to something that will happen before a bomb fully explodes.

Another drawing of what looks like a pipe bomb is accompanied by the phrase "w/ shrap." Many of the students injured Tuesday were struck by shrapnel from pipe bombs that exploded in the school.

Harris's Web site included a lengthy document on how to make bombs. It began, "Pipe bombs are the easiest and deadliest ways to kill a group of people or destroy a few things." Later, it said: "Shrapnel is very important if you want to kill and injure a lot of people."

A lean, baby-faced boy who lived with his parents in a suburban cul-de-sac, Harris was the son of Catherine and Wayne Harris, who retired from the Air Force in 1993 with the rank of major. An older brother is a student at the University of Colorado. The Harrises moved frequently, apparently because of the father's military career. They bought their current home in 1996 for \$180,000, records show.

Both the Klebold and Harris families issued separate statements yesterday, expressing their sense of sorrow and grief over the massacre. The Harris family asked people to "please say a prayer for everyone touched by these tragic events."

"Like the rest of the country," the Klebolds' statement said, "we are struggling to understand why this happened."

Sheriff Stone said authorities are still seeking several students associated with the Trenchcoat Mafia, under the assumption that there were too many bombs in the school for Harris and Klebold to have made and planted them all. But if others were involved, it was Harris and Klebold who students said seemed the tightest, who stood apart from the rest of their clique. While the Mafia last year counted about a dozen students among its members, this year the group was much smaller, perhaps counting no more than five.

Harris and Klebold had a way of pushing other kids away from them, said senior Nick Baumgart, who was a Cub Scout with Klebold and has known Harris since seventh grade. Although there was a consistent and sometimes bitter rivalry between the trench coat group and the school's jocks, "It wasn't really the students casting out [the Mafia]," Baumgart said. "It was kind of them pushing themselves away."

Sophomore Tara Zobjack and other students describe the trench coat group as socially maladapted students who occasionally, but not constantly, were picked on. But like other students, Zobjack recalled a disturbing encounter.

Last year, she said, she and Klebold were in a coed gym class. She said Klebold had a habit of shoving girls to the ground, even tackling them, during flag-football games. Finally, she yelled at him to knock it off, and he turned on her.

"He was like a loner in that class," she said. "Nobody liked him. And he hated me, because I yelled at him. And then he started bothering me, calling me a bitch and basically yelling at me and stuff."

Another classmate, Kim Colton, said he recalled Klebold and Harris recruiting some of their Trenchcoat Mafia friends to appear with them in a video advertising themselves as a protection service for "little freshmen" who were afraid of being picked on by "jocks." Colton said they appeared in the video with guns, whether real or fake was not clear.

Away from school, in the private world they shared online, Harris and Klebold lived in a dark, dangerous place.

A fan of the original shoot-em-up game Doom, Harris was not merely a player. Using special software, he created new levels filled with monsters for players to blast their way through. He distributed his new Doom worlds on the Internet using an AOL Web site that has since been turned off.

In one level, called "U.A.C. LABS," he describes an all-out war between humans and demons on the planet Phobos. The goal of the game, he says, is for the player—a lone U.S. Marine—to blast his way to the planet's teleporter.

"The platoon guarding the teleporter out is VERY large, so beware," Harris wrote. "Good luck marine, and don't forget, KILL 'EM AAAAALLLL!!!!!"

Harris's site also included a pencil drawing of a large young man firing two big guns at a cowering figure. Blood spurts from the victim's arms. The page also includes a drawing of an automatic weapon and a devil-like figure with large horns.

Some Columbine students said the violent side of Harris and Klebold became more obvious in recent months. They became obsessively interested in World War II, Nazi imagery, Adolf Hitler.

John House, 17, a Columbine senior, told reporters that when he went bowling with Klebold, "when he would do something good, he would shout 'Heil Hitler' and throw up his hand. It just made everyone mad."

Although several students portrayed Harris as the leader in friendship so tight that the two boys linked their home computers into a mini-network, Klebold was widely seen as volatile.

Klebold, six-foot-four and blond, was, like Harris, technically gifted. He ran the lighting for a school theatrical production. He knew computers well.

Klebold's parents, Thomas and Susan, lived in a sprawling, secluded house on a dirt road. Real estate records indicate they bought their 10-acre plot in 1990 for \$65,000.

Klebold, who attended the senior prom Saturday night, spent a lot of time playing Internet war games like Doom, but serious fans of Doom in the Denver suburbs say they had never heard of either of the Littleton shooters.

Similarly, although many students describe Harris and Klebold as "Goths," and report that the boys considered themselves part of the Gothic subculture, local Gothic groups knew nothing of the pair.

Harris and Klebold were dabblers, skimming through the fringes of the culture, searching, tasting, shouting and, in the end, finding nothing that could make them whole.

*Duggan reported from Littleton; Shear and Fisher from Washington. Staff writers Rene Sanchez in Littleton, and Richard Leiby, Joel Achenbach, John Schwartz and Steve Vogel in Washington and researchers Mary Lou White, Margot Williams and Nathan Abse contributed to this report.*