

SEDGWICK

Dramaturgical Packet

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Setting

“Sedgwick” takes place in modern day Chicago, amidst the same historical and political climate that we ourselves live within. From the outside, Chicago is viewed as a spectacle of architecture and culture...but also mocked for the drugs and violence that have plagued the city for decades.

But from the inside, most of the city’s residents live their lives blissfully unaffected by the problems which give it such an infamous reputation. They do what most people in a city do – enjoy themselves, avoid certain neighborhoods, and chalk it up to “part of city life.”

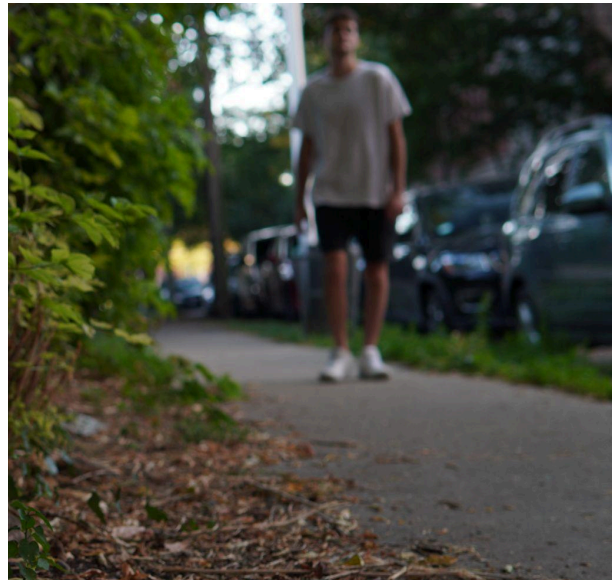
The most self-aware Chicagoans feel twin guilts – the guilt of living free from this violence, and the guilty pleasure of being enthralled by it. No figure inspires more feelings like these than Lester.

Who is Lester?

Lester is a ghoul – an haunting, physical entity. Though he looks human, he isn’t. He is supernatural, non-living, and completely invulnerable.

It is tempting to accept the movie trope that “anything supernatural can be defeated by supernatural means.” All that’s needed is to find the one spell, or potion, to exploit the ghoul’s weakness.

Respectfully, I reject this. If something truly *supernatural* existed, humans, as *natural* beings, would have no idea how to defeat it. And as with everything that we don’t know how to defeat (gun violence, income inequality, drug addiction), even the supernatural would become normal.



That’s the case with Lester. He is the one observable supernatural being on Earth. *Yet he is boring.* He is boring in the way that construction sites and lead pipes are boring – yes, they are dangerous, and they kill lots of people...but have they ever killed anyone *you knew*?

I believe it’s most illuminating to understand this nuance by comparing Lester to other monsters/creatures in cinema – and specifically to monsters which *appear in cities*.

What is the monster’s relationship to the city?

Most movie monsters aren’t actually *from* the city; they *end up* there through different means:

- King Kong is brought to New York against its will from its native home
- Godzilla attacks several cities in Japan only after being awakened from its deep-sea slumber and attacked by humans
- The *Cloverfield* monster stumbles, confused, into New York, after being either awakened from its deep-sea slumber by oil drilling or landing on Earth via space capsule
- The *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs are brought to San Diego from their island preserve

In contrast, Lester is *native* to Chicago. Though he appeared only a few years ago, he has figuratively always been there, and cannot be moved or extracted from the city. He is as constant of a presence as the river, trains, and buildings.

In some sense this makes Lester similar to the creature from *The Host*, which is native to Seoul, or to more humanoid city-dwelling monsters like Candyman, Mr. Hyde, or more generic vampires and werewolves. But they differ in other respects explored below.

What does the monster do in the city?

Cities in monster movies are almost always interchangeable, and their presence in a movie is to elevate the stakes of a rampaging monster. For that reason, the monsters often appear in the city (or largest city) during the final act:

- King Kong escapes his chains and rampages around New York in the last act
- Godzilla attacks his final target, Tokyo, in the last act
- The *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs escape onto the streets of San Diego in the last act

Even monsters which arrive in the city earlier tend to begin with a massive, destructive attack:

- The *Cloverfield* monster immediately collapses entire buildings in Manhattan
- *The Host* creature immediately attacks dozens of pedestrians alongside the Han River

Humanoid monsters tend to *hide* in a city, or at least *hide in plain sight*:

- Candyman is an urban legend known mostly to Black residents of Chicago, and can only be invoked by having his name spoken in a mirror 5 times
- Vampires hunt only at night and otherwise pretend to be normal humans in order to avoid detection
- Werewolves live as normal humans, only transforming during a full moon
- Dr. Jekyll transforms into Mr. Hyde to indulge in vices, then back to evade punishment

By comparison, Lester doesn't hide in Chicago, nor does he rampage around it killing indiscriminately. He walks around it, completely visible. People approach and photograph him the way you might photograph a boa constrictor that got loose from the zoo.

Because of course a boa constrictor can kill you...but *come on*. They only eat every couple of weeks. And as long as I don't get too close...

What does the creature symbolize?

Often monsters, especially those which destroy cities, symbolize mankind's reach exceeding their grasp:

- King Kong represents our prideful attempts to coral the primal forces of nature
- Godzilla represents our fumbling experimentation with the atom bomb
- Jurassic Park represents our attempts to literally create life, "playing God"
- The creatures from *Cloverfield* and *The Host* represents our exploitation of the planet

Humanoid monsters, appropriately, symbolize more human struggles:

- Candyman represents the brutalities and trauma of Black Americans
- Dr. Jekyll represents addiction and other destructive urges

So...what does Lester represent?

What does Lester represent?

Lester represents the complacency of American cities, using Chicago as its use case.

Anyone who has lived in a city knows there's a lot of suffering we wave away as "just part of life" – violence, drug overdoses, homelessness, *lead pipes*.

When he appeared suddenly in Chicago six years ago, there was the expected alarm – an indestructible killer, walking the streets? Unable to be restrained? Completely impervious to police bullets? For a couple weeks it was *the* national story. Would the city empty out? Would the military be deployed? 24/7 networks *feasted* on the Lester story.

But eventually, the national fascination dwindled. Lester wasn't rampaging around Chicago, killing at will. He simply limped around peacefully for weeks at a time, attacking once every 30-40 days. In his first year Lester killed 9 – just a fraction of the 800 or so *other* homicides in the city.

In a city of 2 million, and a country of 350 million, Lester's hold over people's attention faltered. His profile fell from a national specter to a local topic of debate. Some Chicago residents feared him enough to flee for the suburbs, then mourned the loss of late-night restaurants. Others expressed



frustration at the city government for failing to “keep him under control.” But others took a lighter tack: they joked about the ghoul keeping rent prices low. A fraction even crowned themselves fans, following Lester and recording him for social media.

Lester became one more inconvenient source of suffering thrown on top of a largely-ignored pile, until his presence was routine enough to become embedded in city life.

What is the importance of the Brown Line train?

The Chicago “L” train system is one of the most iconic parts of the city. Elevated tracks are as integral to the skyline as any building, and riding the “L” is a daily occurrence for hundreds of thousands of residents.

These trains are a consistent reminder of class and suffering. Each line has a certain “reputation” based on the parts of the city it visits. Some lines even seem to purposely dip below ground to spare riders the sight of struggling neighborhoods.

The Brown Line itself has a rather “upper-class” reputation. It spans over 11 miles of some of the richest neighborhoods in the city, from the downtown Loop, to the shopping district of Southport, to the cozy northern neighborhood of Lincoln Square. Every inch of it is above ground, and why not? There’s a lot to show off.

The fact that Lester makes his home just underneath the Brown Line is purposeful. Every day thousands of the richest inhabitants of the city commute to well-paying jobs, passing directly over a location of incredible fear and suffering. And while that will be grimly horrifying for a bit, over time they won’t think about it at all. After all, how often do you really think about your commute?



Timeline

2018, June 2

A dead body is discovered underneath the Brown Line elevated train tracks on North Orleans Street, just a block away from the Sedgwick station. The victim is identified as Matthew Perkins, a mentally ill unhoused man known in the neighborhood. Bruises are observed on his right arm and scarring on his back, indicating he was grabbed and dragged along the ground.

2018, June 3

In early morning, an unidentified male breaks through the temporary gates placed around the crime scene. Chicago police officers Steven Branstetter and Macy Garza are dispatched to the scene and observe the man sitting, unresponsive, in the undergrowth where Perkins's body was found.

The officers attempt to coax the man from the undergrowth, but fail. Officer Branstetter enters and attempts to pull the man to his feet, at which time he is violently seized and thrown against the steel girders of the elevated train tracks. Branstetter's spine is severed and he dies within moments.

Officer Garza alerts dispatch and waits until three CPD units reach the location. For several hours the officers attempt solutions to subdue the man from a distance: tear gas and other chemical sprays, rubber bullets, and acoustic weapons. None of these methods invoke signs of response or duress from the man.

Eventually Officer Brian DePue ventures close enough to use a taser. Upon being hit with the barbed darts, the man lurches forward to grasp DePue's arm and pulls him into the undergrowth, where he disembowels the officer with his hands. Officers respond by shooting weapons with lethal intent, to no effect. DePue dies at the scene.

For the next two days, officers follow the man as he walks through several Chicago neighborhoods, waiting for him to sleep or become otherwise incapacitated. He does neither.

2018, June 5

The Governor of Illinois deploys the National Guard to assist the Chicago police.

2018, June 7

The National Guard attempts several containment solutions. Two National Guardsmen die.

2018, June 8

An unidentified high school student in Hutto, Texas, uses social media to note that the man bears a strong resemblance to "Lester Arturo," a man who died in rural Indiana in 2005. The theory that the man is Arturo quickly gains traction online.

2018, June 13

Two men are arrested while attempting to exhume the gravesite of Lester Arturo in Reynolds, Indiana. In response, the Chicago Police Department releases a statement indicating that the Arturo theory was investigated and disproven on the basis of extensive photographic evidence.

2018, June 15

City council announces that the Chicago Police Department and National Guard will partner on surveilling Lester (as he has come to be called). Four-man teams escort him at a safe distance while ensuring civilians do not approach.

2018, July 28

A YouTube personality named Mark Riotta, convinced of the Arturo theory, uses an accomplice to distract Lester's escort. His goal is to fetch a DNA sample from Lester by plucking several hairs from his head. As he does, Lester grasps him by the wrist and begins to drag him away. Riotta struggles but fails to free himself. The National Guard escort also fail to stop him with non-lethal and lethal weapons.

Riotta is dragged 6 miles along residential sidewalks from Irving Park to the Brown Line location on North Orleans Street where the first body was discovered. There he is pulled into the overgrowth and disemboweled. Lester and Riotta's body remain there for three days.

2018, October 14

After another death similar to Riotta's, it is speculated that Lester uses the Brown Line location at North Orleans Street as a "home location" at which to feed and rest (though he does not appear to need either). The Chicago Department of Transportation installs a semi-permanent fencing structure there, and the National Guard commandeer the roof of a nearby storage facility to use as a watchpost.

2019, February 3

A Defense Department report is posted to WikiLeaks, in which it is reported that Lester "does not exhibit symptoms of metabolic life." He does not generate body heat, breathe, or demonstrate reliable response to stimulus.

2019, September 1

Lester kills Ethan D'Anna, a stock trader at the Citadel hedge fund who was in the midst of a sexual misconduct investigation. A significant group of people on social media applaud the death, jokingly declaring Lester "the people's hero."

Amazon, which had previously blocked sellers from hawking merchandise featuring Lester, cave to public pressure.

2019, October 31

“Lester” is the most popular Halloween costume in the United States.

2020, April 5

After 3 more deaths, each occurring in circumstances similar to Riotta’s, the Chicago Police Department and National Guard announce that Lester will no longer be followed by 24/7 escort, but the National Guard will continue to safeguard “The Pit” from their roof watchpost.

2021

Lester kills 8 residents of Chicago. The city pays to have “The Pit” covered with a semi-permanent yellow tarp, so as to obscure the sight of Lester’s victims from riders of the Brown Line train.

A city council memo is leaked, stating “the city government has moved on from Lester to more urgent matters.”

2022

Lester kills 11 residents of Chicago. The first “Lester Murders Tour” service is listed on TripAdvisor. It is massively successful and spawns multiple duplicates.

2023

Lester kills 9 residents of Chicago. The yellow tarp becomes ripped by debris falling from the train. While repairing it, a workman falls into “The Pit” and is killed by Lester. In response, all Chicago trade unions refuse to conduct non-critical maintenance of the Brown Line on that section of the line.

2024

Lester kills 9 residents of Chicago.

Characters

The pilot episode of “Sedgwick” features a core cast of four characters, who represent archetypes of the four types of Chicago residents.

Devon

Devon was born and raised in Chicago. He grew up in a middle-class home, but attended an underfunded public school with many low-income students. During field trips and sporting events, Devon would hear the condescending, sneering comments of kids from the suburbs. “Oh, those kids? They’re from the *city*.” This took its toll, and when Devon reached high school he decided to leave Chicago for college.

But away from home, the comments continued. Surrounded by people from a different part of the country, Devon found himself defending the city that once embarrassed him. He grew deeply resentful of the way people’s eyes widened: “You grew up *in* Chicago? Have you ever been to *Englewood*?” Over time he learned to not take this personally, but grew to miss his hometown.

A few years after college, Devon met his girlfriend Abby. After dating for a year or so, he convinced her to move back to Chicago with him.

But he’d forgotten those kids from his childhood. While he’s home for the first time in years, Devon is surrounded by transplants to the city who look down on those who’ve always lived there. Lester is a frequent target – a paragon of the city’s violence and inability to control it. Devon hates Lester for this, and the casual nature by which some people treat him.

Abby

Abby is a newcomer to Chicago. She grew up in a small Midwestern town, and went to college in a city not much bigger. On her occasional visits to cities – always staying in a hotel in a bustling downtown – she’d found them exciting, but ultimately loud and overwhelming. It was only with hesitance that she agreed to follow Devon to Chicago.

But now, in a quiet residential neighborhood, Abby finally understands “city charm.” The plethora of architectural styles, culturally distinct neighborhoods, and endless restaurants have worked their magic on her. In this honeymoon phase, even the L trains retain their shine.

And while she recognizes it as distasteful, Abby can’t help but be fascinated by her new city’s unofficial mascot. *What is Lester? Where did he come from? Can I...go see him?*

Abby knows that Devon would hate it. But there is nothing like Lester where she comes from. She can’t help but be interested.

Raj

Raj is an old college friend of Devon's, who moved to Chicago a few years ago for a well-paying tech job. He's from a cozy, rich, medium-sized city – someplace like Scottsdale or Overland Park.

Like many of those who come to Chicago in the medical or tech field, Raj has lived in only one or two wealthy, desirable neighborhoods, and visits only a couple more. The rest of the city holds no interest for him, and is in fact a subject of frequent derision.

Raj doesn't really *fear* the violence in the city, but he enjoys making fun of it. He joined a softball league near Cabrini-Green, and joked about the dugout being full of shell casings. For his birthday one year, he booked an "Al Capone crime tour" for him and his friends.

Raj knows how defensive Devon is over the city, but thinks his friend is taking things too seriously. After all, they're both Chicagoans now, living with their respective partners in a safe, popular neighborhood which everyone wants to move into.

Vic

Vic grew up in the suburbs around Chicago, and moved into the city for college. To her friends back home, Vic laments how dangerous the city is. How often they've heard gunshots just blocks away. How many brazen carjackings there were last summer. How often a prospective burglar appears on her Ring doorbell camera.

It's all theatrics. Vic and Raj live together in the safest of neighborhoods, and have never been witness to the kind of violence that affects other parts of the city. But Vic craves the kind of intrigue that comes from being "in danger." They love to introduce themselves as "from Chicago" because it garners the kind of respect white people crave when they grow up in the suburbs.

But that small prize isn't enough to keep Vic here. Though they have been in Chicago for nearly a decade at this point, Vic is itching to leave. They used to trawl Nextdoor for entertainment; now it's genuine disgust. "Broken car windows on Oakley and Charleston, same as last week! Where is CPD?!"

So far Vic hasn't convinced Raj to move to the suburbs. Until then, they're slowly withdrawing more and more into a person who lives in a city, but isn't really a "city person." To Vic, Lester is exactly the type of morbid anecdote to bring up to the family after Thanksgiving dinner, giddily awaiting the day they can say, "Can you believe I used to live around *that*?"