

Bound to die

James Lutz was killed during a macabre sexual ritual called 'mummification.' Lutz's death should have been enough to make S&M groups like the Brotherhood of Pain stop. It wasn't.

by Alex Colvin

In the fading light of a westering sun on Wednesday, July 25, 1990, the corner of a weed-choked lot at Pacific and Stanford in Montrose was crowded with eager media people. Photographers and reporters from around the city shot and scribbled, while camera crews from the local TV stations aimed their lenses at the row of two-story townhomes across the street.

There, beyond yards of stretched yellow crime scene tape, two uniformed Houston Police officers provided tight sentry at the doorway of one of the townhomes: 703 Pacific. It was nearing 5 p.m., and all that had been learned by the press since 2 p.m. was that a casket containing a decomposed body had been found in a bedroom.

A next door neighbor had made the discovery after he'd gone in to borrow a few hand tools. Instead, he'd followed the stench inside which led him upstairs to its gruesome source.

By 10 p.m. nearly every TV station was airing the first scraps of a bizarre story: Partially decomposed human remains had been found in a coffin. The corpse was wrapped in plastic sheets, the feet bound in electrical duct tape. The investigator from the medical examiner's office speculated the body was that of a male and that it had been decaying for at least a week.

Police said the room where the coffin was found had been outfitted with a bizarre array of sadomasochistic devices, including an iron cage, a hoist and various heavy chains, all hung from the ceiling. Authorities seized several bags of homemade video tapes and a number of photo albums for evidence.

In the days that followed, it was learned that the townhome's owner was Ted Lenz, owner of Chutes, a gay leather bar at 1732 Westheimer. Chutes had been targeted for closure by the local neighborhood association, which considered it a nuisance.

At the time of the macabre discovery, Lenz was recovering from brain surgery (to remove a tumor) at the Veterans Administration hospital. He had been admitted July 22, complaining of migraines.

By July 26, Lenz was refusing interviews left and right.

In the meantime, homosexual mummification for weird fun and pleasure became the hot new topic of scrutiny. In the Houston Post's July 27 edition, staff reporter S.K. Bardwell wrote that several unnamed sources had telephoned the Post, claiming mummification was a popular fad among gay men, and quoted HPD spokesman Ralph Gonzales as saying Lenz had placed ads in the local gay weekly, *The Montrose Voice*, seeking subjects to wrap.

The hustler in the coffin

On Aug. 3, HPD threw a press conference and the mummy story took on a darker hue. The cause of the victim's death still hadn't been determined, Gonzales told reporters, but the body had been identified as 24-year-old James Robert Lutz, a Texas Department of Corrections parolee. He was known to have worked as a prostitute in the Montrose area and had been seen at Chutes several times in the weeks before his death.

Lutz had been arrested in July of 1988 for possession of cocaine and was paroled the following February. But by May of 1990, he was

being sought by police for violating his parole.

Gonzales told reporters that yes, sources had contacted police claiming Lutz had died in a mummification ritual, but that such accounts were hard to verify since police were "pretty naive" about such practices. Investigating this case, he admitted, was providing police with an education, but few hard facts.

By the following week, HPD had ruled the case a homicide: the long-awaited autopsy report showed Lutz had died of suffocation.



The casket in which James Lutz's body was found is removed from the townhome on Pacific Street.

However, he hadn't struggled. In fact, there was no physical evidence to suggest that Lutz had been victimized in the usual sense of the term. But then, this wasn't a usual case.

And just when the story began hatching some of its most intriguing aspects, all journalistic interest in the issue dissipated. Poof. Consequently, Houstonians never learned that police had considered Ted Lenz their primary suspect in the homicide from the beginning (to date, no one has been charged in the case). Or that among the items removed from his townhome had been a 55-gallon drum, which homicide detectives believe may have been earmarked for Lutz' remains.

Lenz retained counsel the same day Lutz's body was discovered and refused to answer questions about what was found in his house. Lenz would only tell officers that he had no idea how the rotting body of a male prostitute got into his home. Lenz did, however, order Chutes closed permanently the day Lutz's remains were found.

Although the July 26 discovery was ruled a homicide, police say they've been unable to determine whether Lutz's death was accidental or premeditated, the role the so-called mummification played in it, and the extent, if any, to which Lenz was involved. In the meantime, the practice of sadomasochistic mummification continues in torture chambers.

The Brotherhood of Pain

To members of a small, clandestine group of gay men, identified by the large star-shaped patch that reads "The Brotherhood of Pain," worn on the back of their leather vests, there's nothing mysterious about mummification. For them, the practice has become an eerie specialty, providing a peculiar sexual gratification.

Such sessions take place at any one of three secretly located dungeons in Houston, each

People were shooting up; some people were snorting. However they wanted to do the drugs, they could do them.

PN: Tell me about the cocaine. How was it presented?

Joe: It was just in a mound on the table, along with the crystal meth. They had a table set up for drugs: marijuana in one pile, crystal meth in another, and coke in another.

PN: What was this room like? Was it a living room, a kitchen?

Joe: Um...it was a den, like an entertainment room — T.V., stereo, couch, chairs. We went right through the living room into this room; it was a backroom; there was no windows. There were bookshelves, like a den. The lighting was real dim (and) you couldn't make out faces unless you were real close to somebody. We were there for about half an hour.

Then the last two people arrived. When they did, the person who was going to be mummified was one of them. That's what everyone had been waiting for.

PN: How was the guy who was going to be mummified being treated then?

Joe: Actually, very nicely. There were no problems with how he was being treated, except that he was being served a lot of drugs, which he wasn't refusing.

PN: So, he was doing coke.

Joe: He was doing everything: Meth, pot, alcohol.

PN: So everybody was taking drugs?

Joe: Except me and two others. There was myself, there was [name deleted] who drove me there, and there was [name deleted]. But [name deleted] and [name deleted] would be doing the mummification, so they were abstaining so they wouldn't screw up. But everybody else was fucked up.

PN: When did the mummification get started?

Joe: By the time we moved from the den, and they moved all the drugs and that table into a third room, it was about 11:30. All the drugs were moved in there. It was a spare bedroom and all that was in there was two tables; there was one set up for the drugs and the other had stuff for the mummification.

PN: Can you describe the materials on the other table?

Joe: There were four or five boxes of plaster of Paris, a bucket of water, and a bunch of rolls of stuff they use to make casts in a hospital, scissors; they had a [saw] used to take a cast off, and then they had a couple of sexual items, but I couldn't tell what they were until they were used.

PN: What did they consist of?

Joe: There was a rod about eight to nine inches long and there was a black box — there was a wire connecting the two.

PN: How do you mean, "a rod"?

Joe: It was small, skinny; it almost look like something you stick in meat, like a thermometer.

PN: So, everyone was in the room with drugs and the sexual paraphernalia, and that's where they planned to mummify the subject?

Joe: Yes.

PN: What did they do next?

Joe: Well first, [name deleted] and [name deleted] undid all of [Greg's] clothes, jeans and a t-shirt.

PN: Can you describe him?

Joe: Sure. He had blond hair, brown eyes. He was about five-six, five-seven; stocky build. He looked a little scruffy, like he hadn't taken a shower in a couple of days. He acted real arrogant, just arrogant.

stockpiled with custom-made sadomasochistic devices and equipment. The sessions, as far as can be determined, invariably involve a willing subject, usually a male prostitute.

Since the discovery of James Lutz's body, the Brotherhood has engaged in mummifications routinely. On the evening of Saturday, Dec. 1, an estimated 15 members gathered at one member's southwest Houston home, where they mummified a Montrose prostitute called Greg.

Though not a Brotherhood member, "Joe," who spoke on condition that his real name be withheld, attended that session. He also requested that the location of the session and members' names be withheld since he fears retribution. He says he was invited by and driven to the location by the same Brotherhood member.

Here is what Joe had to say about that session:

PN: On December 1, you were driven to a home in southwest Houston to attend a mummification "party." Can you describe what you saw when you arrived?

Joe: We arrived there and there were already some people there — about 15 people total. When we got there we made 13 — the last two hadn't arrived yet. But everybody there was already drinking and doing drugs, except for two other people and myself. [The others] were drinking hard liquor: whiskey, scotch, a couple of people were drinking wine, but [they] were few and far between. As far as the drugs went, there was crystal meth, cocaine, marijuana.

PN: Did it seem that he knew what was going on, why he was there, or was that explained after he arrived?

Joe: I think he knew. I think they told him on the way to the house.

PN: Why so?

Joe: Because he didn't seem at all scared of what was going on; he didn't seem alarmed at all. He was really fucked up, but not alarmed.

PN: How do you mean "fucked up"? Was he staggering?

Joe: No, his speech was slurred, his pupils were dilated, that kind of thing. But he was definitely sexually aroused. He knew what was going on and he wanted to do it.

PN: You heard him agree to be mummified?

Joe: No. The only way I knew he'd agreed to it was the fact that he wasn't struggling. I was about two feet away.

PN: Let's talk about the mummification. How was it started?

Joe: Once [Greg] was undressed, they laid him [onto his back] down on the floor... onto this Indian mat thing, and they started. They got the water and plaster of Paris. And one person started at the head and [name deleted] started on the feet, and they worked toward the middle.

PN: Were they wrapping the gauze around him? How were they doing that?

Joe: They were wrapping the gauze [dipped in] plaster of Paris. They rolled him. [Name deleted] lifted [Greg's] legs to get around them, and [name deleted] lifted his head. It was a team effort. They were turning [Greg] onto his side each time to get beneath him. They'd say, "ready... flip, ready... flip." It went real fast; they met in the middle, it took about an hour. It was a little sloppy but it was sufficient.

PN: Did the guys applying the cast seem skilled, like they'd had practice at it?

Joe: Oh, yes! They seemed like they'd done it before. They had no problems. It seemed, too, that by the time they were done, Greg was a little disagreeing with it. He seemed like he was starting to struggle a little bit.

PN: How do you mean?



Brotherhood of Pain members indulge their dangerous kick during a secret mummification that took place in October.

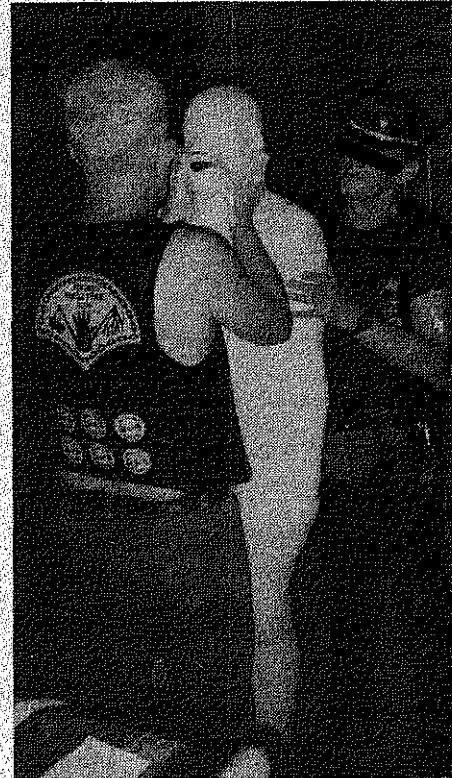
Joe: He just wiggled around some.

PN: Did they leave holes for him to breathe?

Joe: They left a hole for his mouth so he could breathe; a fair-sized hole for his ass, and a softball-sized hole for his [genitals] to hang out. Other than that, there wasn't any more holes. The arms were [encased] next to his body.

PN: How much of the material did they use?

Joe: Oh, God, they went through 20 to 25 rolls of [gauze] and several boxes of plaster of



paris. The cast was probably an inch to an inch-and-a-half thick.

PN: So, there was one hole for his mouth and two others, and the rest of him was completely...

Joe: Mummified. He could not see, he could not hear. He did not know what was going on. Once [name deleted] finished covering [Greg's] head, he did not know what was happening. The only way he could tell [what was happening] was by feel.

PN: What happened next?

Joe: Well, that was about 12:30 (a.m.). And during this whole time, the rest of us had remained silent. We were about four feet away [gathered] in a circle. And we had just watched. Well, everybody was wearing their leather chaps and vest, and I was the only one dressed, and I was told that it made the members feel uncomfortable. I had to get undressed.

PN: So everyone is standing around admiring the mummy in their leather and you're nude...

Joe: Yes. [laughs]

PN: What happened next?

Joe: From there, another guy stepped in. They'd stood the mummy up. Well, the guy takes the prong and shoved that sucker up Greg's ass up to the hilt. And he left it [embedded].

PN: The prong connected by wires to the black box?

Joe: Yes. It had a toggle switch. I was told it was a low-voltage box, that it didn't give off much current. The idea behind it, supposedly, was that the prod thingy electrically shocked the subject's prostate gland, which would in turn forced the subject to get erect — which it did, right away. [Greg] had no choice about it. And when he became aroused, so did everyone else.

PN: And there was no way to control the voltage rate, like a knob would?

Joe: No. [The voltage] was pre-set.

PN: How many times did he flip the switch?

Joe: That part went on for like, an hour; there was a lot of switch flipping.

PN: And how long would [name deleted] leave the switch engaged each time?

Joe: It varied. Sometimes for a few seconds, sometimes for 15 seconds.

PN: And the rest of the group? What did they do?

Joe: For the first half-hour everybody just stood and watched. They were aroused, but nobody touched their sexual organs. But toward

Continued on next page

the second half-hour everyone drew closer to the mummy. When they finished switching the switch, Greg had climaxed twice, and almost on cue, everybody climaxed onto the mummy. Afterwards, we backed off, standing there. A few minutes later, the mummy was placed on his stomach and two other members of the Brotherhood [sodomized] him one at a time. It was about 2:45 then. And we just stood there, looking at the mummy. Then [name deleted] and [name deleted] cut the cast along its sides, and took it off.

PN: How did Greg appear when they removed the cast?

Joe: Disoriented. Really disoriented.

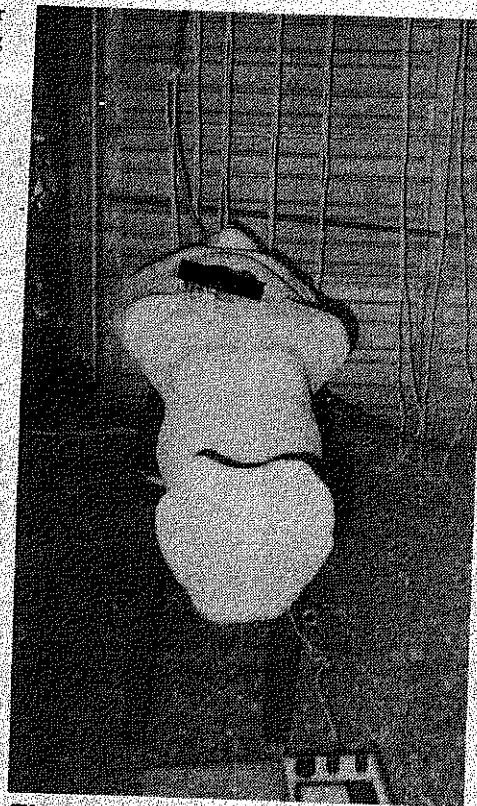
PN: How so?

Joe: Well, two of the people had to help him stand up, he couldn't walk. He acted like he'd been burned alive. He was really disoriented. He couldn't figure out where he was. So they helped him into the bathroom—it was right off that room—and they got him cleaned up. And the rest of us, we just sort of stood around. People were still doing their drugs. Then, Greg came back out. Apparently he had to have help in the shower, because the two that went with him were wet, too, when they came back. Then Greg got dressed, then I got dressed. I noticed Greg got paid—it looked like about \$200.

PN: Who paid him?

Joe: The guy switching the switch. Money changed several hands, as if others were pitching in. Then [name deleted] got dressed and offered me a ride home.

Following the interview, Johnson was shown two sets of photos obtained by PN from another source. One set an individual being mummified during what is believed to be a session in October. In one shot, the mummy is shown completed, wrapped entirely in what appears to be a plaster of paris cast. Only his genitals are exposed. And to them is attached a wire leading to a small, electrical box featuring knobs. Joe identified the cast-like covering as being



The subject mummified. The box in the foreground is connected to an electric prod that has been inserted in the subject's rectum.

identical to that used to encase Greg on Dec. 1. The people in these photos wear leather vests, each bearing the Brotherhood of Pain insignia. Joe identified one man in those photos as having participated in the Dec. 1 session.

The second set of photos, shot at what is

believed to be one of the group's three dungeons, shows several members bound by chains and straps: one photo shows an individual spread-eagle, with clamps attached to fishing weights clipped in tight rows to the underside of both arms, while several more are clamped to his genitals. Next to him stands a middle-aged man dressed in leather vest and chaps, posing with his quarry for the camera. Joe identified the youngest of that pair as a Brotherhood member who also attended the Dec. 1 session, having operated the black electrical box.

Shown the same set of photos, police also say the same man pointed out by Joe appears on at least one of the homemade video tapes seized from Ted Lenz's townhome. Although Lutz's death has been ruled a homicide by virtue of the fact that he suffocated, police say his death may have been the result of a terrible accident arising from hardcore sadomasochistic behavior.

The view from the morgue

The Dec. 1 mummification session was described to Dr. Aurelio Espinola of Harris County Medical Examiner's Office, who performed the autopsy on James Lutz. Espinola said that even with air holes left for the subject to breathe, such mummifications can easily kill.

"That's deadly. I'm surprised he (Greg) didn't die, since it was a form-fitting cast and the lungs couldn't expand," Espinola said.

Using such casts, Espinola warned, a person could easily suffocate within four to five minutes, particularly since "a person in (Greg's) state would have difficulty respirating.

As for the introduction of drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine to a person's system prior to their being mummified, Espinola warned that such drugs could cause a heart attack brought on by arrhythmia (an irregular heartbeat), since such drugs produce a

depressing effect on the bodies respiratory and circulatory functions.

Informed that Greg had also been sodomized with an electrical prod, Espinola considered Greg lucky not to have been electrocuted. "I know of cases where a person has suffered a lethal shock from that activity. It's very dangerous," he said.

Like Greg, Espinola said, Lutz's head had also been completely covered—in Lutz's case, with duct tape. According to the autopsy report, however, Lutz had consumed no drugs and only minor amounts of alcohol. His suffocation had been brought about by being locked in the coffin and left.

"I had to use the key to open it," Espinola said, adding that he had determined that Lutz was alive and willing when he entered the casket. However, once it was locked and sealed with duct tape, Lutz ran out of air and could not escape.

Investigators are still scratching their heads over the lurid death of James Lutz. They admit they aren't any closer to an arrest than they were the day Lutz was found dead. They also admit that if anyone is arrested, homicide may be tough to prove.

Said HPD homicide Sgt. Hub Mayer: "These people are strange, granted, but it may be that something just went wrong. It may be just negligent homicide we're looking at. Just some freak thing happened and they left the body."

But until better evidence becomes available to shed light on what actually happened in Lutz's death, mummifications, with all their deadly potential, remain a suspect activity for investigators.

After his interview with PN, Joe was invited to a second Brotherhood of Pain mummification session, scheduled for Saturday night, Dec. 21. He was invited this time to be mummified himself. He declined the offer.