



At least twice a week, every week, I hear the loud and clear POP POP POP POP!! of gunfire as dozens of prison guards fire hundreds of rounds, often going on for well over an hour. The sound sometimes reminds me of the times I'd go to the shooting range in Ventura with my dad or one of my friends. I'm no "gun nut", barely even a gun guy, really, but I do enjoy shooting. I've never hunted animals, only pine cones and paper targets, and unless starvation was imminent, I'd never shoot another living creature (maybe not even then — would I kill my neighbor to save my life by eating his flesh? Please look back at my older posts on lab-grown meats and plant-based meat substitutes). The idea of killing out of "necessity" is uncomfortable enough, but killing for sport is totally unimaginable.

I was 4 years old when I first shot a real gun. It was a bolt-action sniper rifle from one of the two world wars, and I sat on my dad's thigh as he supported the weapon and took ~~the~~ stock against his own shoulder. I sighted the pine cones and pulled the trigger. I'll never forget the excitement of seeing one disappear when I finally hit it. I believe ~~he~~^{Dad} took me somewhere out in the Angeles National Forest that day, and I went shooting with him a few more times after that, along with two other friends, Aldo Quintana and Darrell Coleman, all at different times but at the same small range up in the hills of my hometown.

Over the years I've fired a few hundred ~~rounds from a handful of pistols and rifles~~ rounds from a handful of pistols and rifles, not to mention thousands of shots in my backyard and garage with air-powered BB guns, the goal always being to improve my accuracy. In all that time I can honestly say I never once imagined I was shooting at a person, though. Not ever. Guns, for me, are sports equipment, and I shot with a sportsman's aim of hitting inanimate targets, not living, breathing, bleeding bodies. I make the point so emphatically because I don't want to be misunderstood when I say I really do enjoy shooting, and I wish I'd taken more opportunities to fire high-powered automatic weapons. Throughout my childhood and adolescence we'd had around the house quite ~~an assortment~~^{an assortment} of guns, from that single shot rifle I first discharged as a late-stage toddler to ~~various~~ various pistols, a classic Luger, and even a Tec-9 and an Uzi made an appearance at one point. For the most part, though, I never shot any really exotic stuff, ~~and~~ and

I'd certainly have loved to.

People often say to me, when we have The Gun Talk, "No one needs an automatic rifle. Those are weapons of war." My usual response is, "Well, no one needs a ~~Ferrari~~ ^{Ferrari} either, but I wouldn't turn down the chance to drive one if you paid me." Ferraris, M-16's, AK-47's, Aston Martins... they all share an allure of power and performance, ~~and they tempt~~ ^{tempting} us with the challenge of controlling such tremendous forces, and I have no doubt that they would all be incredibly fun toys to play with. The word "toy" may strike some as offensively flippant, but in the hands of a well-intentioned operator with at least a modicum of meaningful experience and a healthy appreciation for the capacity of the hardware, that's exactly what these machines become - thrilling toys. I think there is no sin in admitting that we are all, to some extent, excited by things that go fast or go boom. That's just human nature, isn't it?

Back to the present issue, then. The sound of these guns here can bring all sorts of pleasant memories to mind for me, but only for a moment. See, the reality of that nostalgic noise is never quite lost on me, as I know all too well that the reports I hear are from ~~shots~~ ^{gunshots} fired by people who are envisioning a very different target from the pine cones and paper bullseyes of my youth; these assholes are practicing to shoot ME. Any temporary good feelings are soon shattered by the renewed awareness that I am, every day, surrounded by and largely at the mercy of people who are ready and willing, armed, and even sometimes eager to murder me with whatever minimal excuse will get them through a shooting review board. At that realization, the innocent reverie becomes a prolonged mental torture, cruel and unusual to the extreme, as no one should ever be forced, as we are here, to listen to the drills of people preparing to execute them if given half a chance. That's really pretty sick ~~when~~ ^{when} you think about it, no?

* Psst! Wanna write me some snail mail? Send it to:

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