



Thugs, Drugs, & Bugs

(The Chino Chronicles, Pt. 5)

5-20-26

1 of 4

To be clear, I wanted to go to Chino prison. I asked to be sent here. There are lots of reasons, including proximity to family and friends, better T.V. reception (important when you're locked in a cage for decades), and above all, the availability of single cells. I'm not in a single cell yet (i.e. housed by myself), but I'm working on it. Meanwhile, I've landed in a section of the prison many people consider the very worst part. It's old (but all of Chino is old), and it's largely decrepit (though I rather like the run-downness of older facilities), and it's dirty (again...whatever). But it's also kind of interesting.

The first thing I noticed on arriving here was — no surveillance cameras. NONE! Not anywhere! I realize this might seem as insignificant as better T.V. reception, but believe me, it's not. I'll write a post about just that one massive improvement alone later on. Anyway, one consequence of the lack of cameras is that people can get away with fighting here, and they do. It's a little bit thuggish, but don't misunderstand, this is not an exceptionally dangerous place, even if the particular building I'm in now is easily the most violent space I've seen since my level IV time a few years ago. But that's not an entirely bad thing, believe it or not. I'm actually pretty used to that... it feels familiar. The vibe I had in the first few days here was, "Ok, this reminds me of being on the mainline." I think a lot of that feeling is just because Soledad was my last mainline prison, and it was also old and looked a lot like this. Old prisons just run differently. Anyway, a lot of the violence isn't what you'd imagine. It's more like... physicality, not quite "violence" per se. People play rough here. They wrestle, they push, they slap with intent. You couldn't get away with any of those at Mule Creek — everything was seen (and told... heavy rat culture there), and everything was treated as a "fight" even when no one was hurt, no one was angry, and guys just wanted to vent some aggression in typically male ways. Again, I saw lots of that on the mainline, but very little for the past 15 years. I like it. It feels a lot more human. Plus, I enjoy a little roughhousing myself. That said, there are real fights too, but so far they've all seemed to me to be for acceptable reasons. Things like unpaid debts, attempts to hog/control the phones, and sundry forms of bullying are all met with an "Oh, no you don't!" mentality, which I can appreciate. It's fair and natural, I think.

The second thing I noticed here, rather less propitious, was drugs. As I've mentioned before, I'm about as straight-edge as anyone can be. I've done literally no drugs my entire life. Not the slightest experimentation, never even smoked a cigarette. But my attitude toward drugs is very laissez-faire. Do them, don't do them... I don't care. To each his own. Still though, there's a point where you just have to say... "really?" For example, the moment I stepped into this cell, the first thing I saw was my new cellmate curled up on the floor like a hobo. At first I thought he was just ideosyncratic. Again, to each his own. But I soon realized, no, he's high. Always. From the minute he wakes up until he crashes for the night. He nods and sways all day long like a drooling jack-in-the-box, and pretty quickly I realized he is FAR from alone. This place is

just swimming in drugs, especially "spice". I'm not sure what it is, but I sure see what it does. Half the people here are shuffling around all day like zombies. I've seen drugs everywhere I've been in prison, but never like this. The scale is obscene, like an opium den. Just last night I watched a guy get carried up the stairs, fireman style, because he couldn't navigate them on his own. It was lock-up time so the cops would soon see him, and though they generally turn a blind eye to this epidemic, they probably wouldn't ignore something that obvious. I had to evict one junkie from my cell after he mistook it for the local trap house, and I've even been told that I need to make sure my own spice-head cellmate is inside before the doors shut, but I made it very clear that that, and he, would NEVER be my responsibility. So, others handle it. The fireman guy, incidentally, he came to just as he was being carried past my cell, so I had a front row seat as this guy woke up and completely freaked out to find himself draped over another man's shoulders, squirming and thrashing until he was finally laid down, with a whole phalynx behind him screaming for him to "get his ass up!" Meanwhile, our near-O.D. was screaming himself, flat on his back and spread out like he was trying to make snow angels on the concrete, yelling "What the fuck! What the fuck!", over and over and over again. It was quite a scene. Entertaining, but only until the underlying tragedy of it all comes into focus.

Speaking of tragedies, the third major (and by far least delightful) thing I noticed here is, this place is absolutely crawling with something besides aggroes and addicts: It has bugs. Big mother-forkers. Cockroaches, yes, but not just. It's BAD. As my histrionics over a dead cockroach make pretty clear (see last post, "I Beat You, Bitch!", May 11th 2026), I have a major problem with bugs. Roaches and spiders are the two worst for me ... or so I thought. Then I saw something new. I don't even know what it was, only that it was enormous. Prehistoric. Disgusting on every level. It was a shiny black giant, not merely a "big bug", but seriously like the actual frickin' KING of giant-ass bugs. Now, please understand, I'm not naïve — I know there are wildly outsized insects around the world, Australia, Florida ... but this truly was the biggest one I've ever seen in person and not in the pages of a National Geographic. It was a nasty beast. It came when I was alone, laying here reading at sundown, the cell light still off because I enjoy the peaceful dimness of dusk. Some slight movement caught my attention. Oh my god. I was sure I was seeing things... I HOPED I was. It couldn't be real, not at that size. I put my glasses on, and oh, it was real alright. I had no idea what to do. It was crawling up the edge of the sink, at the back of the cell; I instantly took up position at the front near the door, never turning my back on this unfamiliar monster whose speediness I couldn't judge, for fear it would disappear into my things, into the gaps around the bed ... anywhere but out of the cell, and then out of my sight. That could not happen.

Normally if I see a big bug, one like the horrible live roach I encountered on my second morning here, I can find a way to remove it... Summon the strength to shoo it out with a towel or shirt

or something. I'm sure you're wondering, and no, emphatically NO, I could NOT just "squish" it. That's simply off the table for many reasons, the 2 main ones being my strong disinclination to hurt something that's truly minding its own business, and also my deep visceral revulsion at the idea of crushing a live body. I can't do it, I can't see it, and I can barely even think about it. Nope.

Well, with this bug... ok, so I grabbed an old, giant shirt, one with considerable reach and heft, which I wielded like both a floppy shield and sword at the same time. I expected I would have to assault this thing, then I realized to my utter horror — I could not. I couldn't even make myself approach the creature nearer than about 5 feet away. Any closer and I just crumbled. I stood there, cursing loudly and with almost palpable terror inside me, repeating something like, "I can't fucking do this! I can't fucking do this!", realizing more and more the awful truth of those words. There really was no way I could do it; it was FAR too big. Every time I got even a little closer, I retreated SO fast. I could just see SO MUCH DETAIL. It was completely nauseating. I wanted to puke, and also to run, but again, I couldn't let it out of my sight. But what would I even do if it Did move toward my boxes, toward my bed? I could envision no plausible scenario, no action apart from someone hearing my distress and coming to fix the problem.

Eventually, this thing — slow-moving by the grace of whatever metaphysical horror created it — crawled back down, into the sink, toward the drain. I saw my chance, IF I could manage to take it. The faucets here are very powerful, nothing at all like 90% of prison sinks that produce only the feeble little arc of a drinking fountain. This bitch SURGES, straight down, industrial style. So, once the menace continued south to investigate the drain (thank goodness it didn't head for the sides, where the powerful flow would've only launched it up and OUT of the sink!), I steel myself and hoped for the best, got within leg reach, and stomped on that water button hard and fast, watching with terror-drenched relief as the instantaneous flood pushed the creature down into the abyss, just as I'd hoped. Perhaps an "I beat you, Bitch!" would've been merited this time, but no such thought occurred to me as I stood pushing on that faucet for nearly a minute, afraid that any less might allow the thing to recuperate and reverse course back into my world. Also, my heart was racing and my mind a near blank by then... I really couldn't do anything BUT continue flushing that thing down and trying to recuperate a bit myself. I doubt my blood pressure was below 200 over 140. I'm not joking; I was in a bad state. After I finally released the water button and watched the pooled up sink drain completely, seeing nothing big, black, and beastly staring hatefully back at me, I decided I needed to flush it further still, but this time with boiling water, so I filled my hot pot and turned it on, my body shaking and my eyes all but locked on to that drain until I could put a plug in it while the water boiled. After the hot water, next I poured a full bottle of cleanser down the drain for good measure, then I plugged it up and left it closed until the next day.

I left the cell light on all that night, convinced the bug came in part because it was fairly dark inside,

and it wouldn't have visited otherwise. I don't know if that's true. I also decided it had to have come up from that drain. I see no other likely ingress. If it came in through the door, from the tier, surely there would've been similar sightings at some point. But no one has recognized the behemoth I described. And the toilet bowl just isn't realistic. The other areas, the cracks around the toilet, I had already sealed off tightly, because that's where the roaches got in. But realistically, that space was too small for this monster anyway. It had to be the drain.

Well, it wasn't long after all this, maybe the next afternoon, when I was still entering the cell with great trepidation, still scoping out every wall, every crevasse, before setting foot inside, still succumbing to fits of shivers every time I looked at the sink, all of which continued for over a week... it wasn't long before I began to spare a thought for what I had ACTUALLY done to that damn bug. The reflection does not sit well. I'm rather filled with guilt, in fact. My imagination is terribly vivid — this isn't a gift, it's a curse. I am deeply disgusted by things like giant bugs, and then I can't wipe their creepiness from my mind for days or weeks. Some particularly vivid images, not just of exceptionally nasty bugs but of many horrible things that I will not describe here, these may continue to haunt me for years. Many do. They are things I want desperately to forget or ignore, but cannot. I see them so clearly and they return with the slightest prompting, like now. You'd be shocked to see what's in my head right now. It's upsetting. Anyway, my guilt over the bug brought on an awful new image... I could clearly picture this poor thing, ugly as sin and deeply intimidating, but also surely just living its buggy little life with no malice at all... suddenly it's in a space with another creature, me, and still it just minds its own business. And then — WHOOSH. A wall of water at its back, forcing it down, forcing it past inexorable obstacles, the drain having various metal protrusions right near the top, and god knows what else just beyond the bend and out of my sight. I imagined it involuntarily accelerating through all of this, its appendages being broken and torn, its carapace ripped from its back. Then, though it was surely already dead and gone, that second flood of literally boiling water, cooking it alive, if it had lived. Then the chemical bath. What the fuck did I do? My cowardice, my "weak stomach", my lack of exposure to such animals early in life and my subsequent failure to reckon with their existence later on... I murdered that thing. Slaughtered it. Tortured it. No, not for fun, but still. This does not make me feel good... here I am, the guy who recently blogged about the need to treat even writhing worms humanely in my post about "The Birds and the Bees" (Dec. 13, 2024). I hold myself in contempt for what I did. And yet, I'd do it again; I don't know what else is possible. My dread feelings that day weren't illusions; I didn't exaggerate or even "indulge" them per se. I wanted an alternative, but my brain wouldn't allow my body to create any. This thought torments me almost as much as the thought of the bug itself, or its return.

Almost. And that's a critical "almost", isn't it?