

Some inmates in Alaska's prisons kept perpetually drugged in 'protective custody'

by Joseph James

By virtue of legislation enacted in response to the notorious *Meach* case, there are currently seven "guilty but mentally ill" prisoners within the Alaska prison system.

One in the Fairbanks Correctional Center is doing his entire sentence in "Protective Custody," which is simply the official name for the "hole."

His day begins with losing the struggle to stay asleep; for to awaken is to surrender to the sensory bondage of neon lights, cold hard cement, scratchy orange coveralls, and the neverending echo of his own heartbeat assailing him from walls so close he can almost touch all four at once.

He momentarily hovers between competing realities; one of the dark time, full of foul entities lusting after his soul, blurring into short episodes of a soft, smiling voice.

The "Breakfast" entity has already passed through his consciousness, now remembered only dimly between the dark and the light. Before him now, arrayed in full authoritarian battle-garb is the "Medication" entity.

"Time for your medicine," it murmurs.

First, the malodorous liquid, "Thoro-something," then comes the bitter, grub-white "Mellorel." He remembers once having resisted the "Medication" entity, but then came the "twist and pain" creatures. He had been forced into a small ball, his jaws were pried open, and he choked into the open air his body's final resistance to such an invasion.

After that, there was no more resistance; he simply yielded to the brute force implied in that memory.

He looks around, rolling his eyes without moving his head, his jaw slack. He can feel the sweat oozing between his skin and coveralls. "A dream," he thinks, "it is only a dream."

The dark time and light time were overlapping too much now. How long has he lived in doubt, trying to separate them? He knew he was in prison; they sent him there to be punished. He had been "bad." He remembered the "Judge" entity, and how he had looked so far away. That was a trick his eyes played on him: things near enough to touch appeared so far away. Sounds were like that, too; so far away, like a ship's horn rolling out of the fog.

His back ached. It had been so long since he had slept on a mattress. The "Guard" entity had taken it away.

It is almost inconceivable that any man should be subjected to such torment in our own backyard. Were this man confined in Russia or wartime Germany, we could believe, and sympathize with the suffering of his tortured soul. But he is here, in Alaska.

So we put him, and others like him, out of our minds. We do not raise our voices in protest. It is too unreal, too hard to imagine our own countrymen treating a fellow human in that way.

Besides, what are we to do with such as him? Is he not a "lawbreaker?" Prison isn't supposed to be a "nice" place. He's only getting what's coming to him, isn't he?

And should a few speak up, unable to resist their natural revulsion at such things, and protest, they will be told that our prisons are really very humane. That there's really nothing that can be done for those fellows, unfortunate though they may be. And besides, he doesn't feel a thing... the medication sees to that.

Then those who dared to protest will be satisfied; they will go on about their business, content with the knowledge that nothing more could be done.