

Rule 10

By: Damon Matthews

It was 2 a.m. when they pulled into the maximum-security prison. With shackles clamped painfully around his wrists and ankles, Brian Kilgor peered aimlessly from the windows of the stuffy bus, eager to get into a cell and mattress after a miserable eight-hour ride. The cold, dark California desert matched the mood of the human cargo. Serving year twelve of a sixteen-year sentence for armed robbery, Brian prepared himself for the drama and hate that followed him from prison to prison like a sadistic show.

Before his arrest, Brian was a rebellious eighteen-year old gang member who enjoyed being one of the guys in his sunny, crime-riddled San Diego neighborhood. However, after his arrest he experienced a different dynamic amongst his rowdy homeboys. In jail, he learned that there was less of a laid-back camaraderie and more of a structured pecking order with consequences for rule breakers.

This really rubbed Brian the wrong way. He didn't appreciate having to answer to a fellow gang-member just because he was new to the jail system. He decided to do everything in his power to make a name for himself so he could be the one *giving* orders, not taking them. Being one of the guys was no longer enough.

Brian was convicted and shipped off to prison one year after his arrest. He knew ascending to the top of the gang food-chain required violence. Brian had that covered thanks in large part to a physically and sexually abusive father. However, the proper timing of his violent outburst is what set him apart. Attacking a guard in full view of influential gang bangers or inciting race riots "just because" were a couple tactics Brian employed. He even extorted weaker crews, taking their drugs under the pretext that he would pay for them, only to stiff them and distribute the dope to his own homeboys. These calculated, and often impulsive, acts made his name known on general population yards throughout the State. He became respected and admired by his clique, and feared and despised by rivals. Eight years into his sentence and Brian had achieved Alpha Dog status.

That was then. Today, Brian's rock star treatment is all but gone. Now, the thirty-year-old is considered a pariah. Previously, his arrival to a new yard prompted generous care packages from his homeboys. Now, he was lucky if he was afforded

basic respect. Worst of all, he's no longer worthy of the customary small handwritten note (often called a "kite"), listing all his friends and foes on the yard. As perks go, that was Brian's favorite. A man cannot become a top butcher without getting blood on his hands. Having that list kept him in the know as to who he may have to confront; so, arriving at the prison in the dead of night, without that kite to look forward to, left Brian in the dark, literally and figuratively. There were occasions when he didn't have to confront anyone; potential targets would voluntarily go into protective custody (PC) to avoid his wrath.

"What a difference four years make," Brian thought as he, and the rest of society's rejects, were herded off the bus like degenerate sheep. These days it's **him** entertaining the idea of going PC. Barely paying attention to the guards' profanity-laced orders to keep quiet and form a tight, straight line, Brian reminisced about the night when all his prison troubles began.

Four Years Earlier...

Relaxing in his cell watching television, Brian was enjoying a rarity in California's notoriously overcrowded prisons - a night in general population without a cellmate (aka "cellie"). His previous cellie paroled two nights prior, and with the State's prison population bursting at the seams, Brian was sure he'd get a new one the same night. Instead, the gods of solitude smiled down and allowed the "King" to have his broom closet-sized castle to himself for a second consecutive night.

Tipsy off inmate-made alcohol (pruno), and stoned thanks to a small amount of smuggled-in weed, Brian was in the middle of flubbing yet another "Wheel of Fortune" puzzle when the steel cell door rumbled open.

Brian quickly downed the bitter drink he was nursing - a precaution just in case a guard was approaching his cell. He got up to investigate. He wanted his gang tattoos on display just in case a new cellmate was coming, so he decided not to put on a shirt. He positioned his athletic six-foot-two frame at the threshold of the door to block the entrance, preparing to vet the potential new cellie. This posturing was done more out of obligation than defiance. Although gangs are similar in that they all have unwritten rules, in prison, a lot of gangs - including Brian's - have rules that are actually written. Often referred to as a "Constitution," these rules are numerous and very strict.

Along with the ubiquitous "No snitching" (Rule 1), and "No backing down from a fight" (Rule 8), there is also a laundry list of do's and don'ts regarding cell behavior. "Allowing someone mentally unstable to move into your cell" is also a no-no (Rule 12). These rules were established long before Brian came to prison. Now that he was a leader of his clique on that particular yard, not only did he have to follow them, he also had to punish those who didn't. The punishment could range from mandatory exercise, to being stabbed.

To those on the outside looking in, some of these rules may seem petty and odd - "No hanging your feet from the top bunk while your cellie is on the lower bunk" (Rule 15) - but in the volatile world of maximum security prisons, these Constitutions are effective at keeping violence down.

The last thing Brian wanted was a buzz-killing confirmation. He looked out of the cell hoping to see one of his homeboys. What he saw instead was a dud he didn't know heading his way carrying a bed roll. Brian sized up the guy - slim, fir, maybe six feet tall and no visible tattoos. "I can take him," he thought to himself. Gangbangers put out a certain aggressive energy when meeting other gang members for the first time. Brian did not detect that energy in this guy.

With guards watching from their posts and inmates looking on from their cells, the unit fell silent with anticipation. Brian was fully prepared to put on yet another violent show if the situation called for it. The guy walked up to the shirtless gangbanger, smiled, and extended his right hand for Brian to shake. Still blocking the entrance, Brian shook the guy's hand and asked two of the most commonly asked questions prisoners pose to one another upon meeting. The first being, "What do they call you?" Most convicts have monikers, and asking a guy "What's your name?" comes off as narc-like. He told Brian he went by the name "D2."

Brian's follow-up question was, "Where are you from?" This seemingly innocent query is often considered challenging or threatening because if the person being asked answers by naming a rival neighborhood, he may have a fight on his hands ... or worse. In the streets, sometimes punches are thrown, or bullets start flying if the guy even hesitates to answer. So, the "Where are you from?" question automatically puts a guy on the defensive; gangbangers hate that. Brian knew this but he didn't care. He was in full intimidation mode.

D2 didn't seem to notice. He told Brian he was from Fairfield, a small city in Northern California not known for crime. Brian found it weird that they guy was sporting a goofy smile. Chalking it up to nervousness, he allowed the man to move in with no objections, prompting the guards to relax and the other inmates to go back to whatever they were doing in their cells; there would be no show tonight.

Once D2 unpacked and settled in, Brian courteously offered him some weed and pruno. D2 was more than willing to indulge. The two spent the next couple of hours getting loaded and talking about their backgrounds. Brian learned that D2 was four years older, loved reading and watching movies set in medieval times. Brian also learned that his new cellie never came across a drug he didn't try at least twice.

D2 had a naïve, child-like fascination with the gang lifestyle. This amused Brian. D2 reminded him of the nerdy character Carlton Banks from the sit-com "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." Brian found it refreshing to be in a cell with a "square" for a change. He didn't have to be hyper-vigilant, worrying about constant rules. D2 surprised Brian when he produced some much more potent weed for them to enjoy. For the first time in a long while, Brian didn't mind having a cellie.

Days passed and Brian noticed something different about his new cellie. Brian was used to being around cutthroats and hardened criminals - D2 was the polar opposite. He was an average working-class citizen in society who got caught up in California's draconian Three Strikes Law. Done in by one-too-many drug convictions, D2 was a fish out of water doing 25-to-life instead of a much-needed rehab stint. But it was something about D2's mannerisms and the way he spoke that struck Brian as ... odd. He couldn't quite put his finger on it.

In prison, as one might imagine, there is plenty of idle time. Inmates spend a lot of that time reading. Whether fiction, non-fiction, law, or religious text, prisoners read it all. However, no matter how many spiritual awakenings take place as a result of the voracious reading, at the end of the day porn is still king. With no women around to scratch the itch, inmates clamor for nudie magazines.

Brian was no different. He had a small stash of "smut" that he thoroughly enjoyed - especially when he had no cellie. Brian was a star football player in high school, and this made him a

bit of a ladies man. Although girls were all over him, Brian, like a lot of other teenagers, was heavy into pleasuring himself to girly mags. Of course, he hid this shameful habit, convinced that he was the only one doing it regularly.

Somewhere along the way there came a point when imagining naked women wasn't enough. Taboo thoughts started to invade his fantasies - thoughts his peers wouldn't accept or tolerate. This only added to his shame. Around that time in his life Brian became more short-tempered, rebellious, and a little less comfortable in his own skin.

One day after he and D2 finished off a joint, Brian prepared to head out to the prison exercise yard on a cold rainy morning. Prison guards in the gun towers must have a clear line of sight to quell acts of violence with their mini-14 rifles; so the yard offered no overhead protection from the rain. Brian was guaranteed to come back to the cell soaked.

Bewildered, D2 asked, "why are you going out there when it's raining like that?" Brian told him that under his gang's Constitution it was "Mandatory that all homeboys go to the yard, rain, sleet, or snow" (Rule 4). H explained how even during a time of peace, a riot could happen over something as small as a misinterpreted look; so, all available hands had to be on deck. On his way out the door, Brian gave his cellie permission to look at his porn collection while he was gone, a common courtesy convicts show each other when they get along. A couple of hours later, Brian returned drenched from the rain. D2 made no mention of the porno magazines.

Days later, on his way to a dental appointment at the prison infirmary, D2 gave Brian a fat joint and gave him permission to look at his stack of smut as well. Feigning anger, Brian chided D2 for not offering him a look sooner. D2 laughed it off.

"Your collection is so" vanilla," I figured you wouldn't know what to do with my stack," D2 stated with a sly smile.

The term "vanilla" went over Brian's head, but he was too self-conscious to ask D2 what he meant by it. After D2 headed out to see the dentist, Brian sparked up the joint and began eagerly flipping through the large stack of skin magazines. A few pages into the first magazine it began to dawn on Brian what D2 meant when he called his small collection of porn "vanilla."

Brian was accustomed to the standard "Penthouse" fare, but what he was looking at now was ... different. Better. Maybe the weed was making it more intense. Yes, there was the usual content Brian favored (i.e. naughty nurses, Far East geishas and black women with shapely derrieres), all of which are popular in prison. However, as he sat there gawking at large-breasted women engaging in various sex acts with men and women, Brian noticed something. Some of the women performing those lewd acts weren't women at all. They were dudes!

"What the fuck?!" He muttered out loud. Shocked, yet transfixed, Brian continued to flip through page after page. He loved women - slept with plenty of them prior to his incarceration, but Brian could not deny it; he found those triple X images hot. In fact, he couldn't recall ever being that excited. Once again, just as it was when he was a teenager, Brian was alone - pleasuring himself.

Minutes after his marijuana-enhanced climax, Brian's euphoria was replaced by guilt and shame. He also felt conflicted. Brian knew he had to get a new cellie as soon as possible. D2 was a cool dude, and Brian really didn't want to kick him out, but the Constitution clearly states: "no gay cellmates and absolutely no homosexual acts of any kind" (Rule 10).

Questions raced through his mind. "Do I really have to switch cellies?" "No straight person would be into this kind of shit right?" "Then what the hell does that make me?"

When D2 returned from the dentist that day, Brian was feeling unsettled and awkward. He could not stop thinking about those magazines. He wanted to grill D2 about the smut, but he couldn't do so with conviction after what he had just done.

Brian felt bamboozled. Had D2 been a transsexual or someone noticeably gay, Brian would have invoked Rule 10 immediately, even if it meant being thrown in "The Hole" for refusing a cellmate. Even though Brian enforced his gang's Constitution regularly, the truth is he resented Rule 10. He always did. He saw how other cliques went as far as allowing sexual contact, with the caveat being the act had to be deemed "manly." They subscribed to the twisted prison logic that performing fellatio on someone makes you gay, while being on the receiving end does not. To them, penetrating a willing transsexual or raping a vulnerable inmate is manly and something you brag about without

being labeled a queer, but if you voluntarily allow another man to penetrate you, you're the "F" word.

Brian was simply curious. He kept his taboo desires to himself for years, even while sleeping with all of the football groupies and bad boy chasing girls in high school. He didn't feel like a chick trapped in a dude's body or anything weird like that. Nor did he want a same-sex relationship; the thought repulsed him. Although his urges were strictly physical, Brian never sought out, or even met, anyone who made him want to explore that side of his sexuality. He didn't have a type. Oddly enough, that all changed when he got busted and saw something he had never seen before.

It happened while sitting in a crowded, musty holding tank in San Diego County Jail. Brian looked across a hallway to an adjacent holding tank, also packed with inmates waiting to be cuffed and bussed to their court appearances. As he scanned the miserable faces, something caught his eye. In the midst of the thugs, mentally deranged and unkempt drug-addicts, sat a beautiful Latina with fire engine red hair and perky breasts, dressed in jail house scrubs like the male inmates. He wondered why she wasn't in the holding tank down the hall with the female inmates. She smiled seductively when she noticed Brian staring. He waved and returned the smile, thinking to himself, "I still got it." Confused and a little concerned for the chick's safety, Brian asked the guys next to him why the guards put that "bad bitch" in a holding tank with murderers and rapists. The tank erupted in laughter. The guys had to explain to the clueless Brian that the "woman" he was making goo-goo eyes at was a "punk," a term Cali prisoners use when referring to transsexuals.

Brian was mocked mercilessly by the other inmates that day. And although he was embarrassed, he was also mesmerized. From that day forward he became obsessed with the idea of being with one of them. He now had a type.

In prison, transsexuals are regularly victimized by other inmates, so they are often placed in protective custody. However, there were occasions when Brian would see them on general population yards. They'd give themselves female names, soften their voices and walk around the yard wearing make-up and altered clothing in an effort to look like women. Brian found the spectacle of it all distracting. It was bad enough the prison had real females (nurses, counselors, C/O's etc.) walking around that he lusted after but couldn't have. Now there he was

doing the same thing with the transsexuals. This frustrated him to no end because he had to do so covertly.

The last thing he needed was for his homeboys to notice him ogling punks. After all, he had a reputation to establish. So he kept a safe distance and merely watched as other hard up prisoners propositioned the punks by offering food, money, and protection in exchange for agreeing to move in with them.

D2 was not a transsexual, but Brian now found himself in a cell with a guy who may very well be into dudes. All of D2's idiosyncrasies began to pop up in Brian's mind. The way D2's natural baritone went up a few octaves when he would ask for something. The odd hand gestures and the frequent compliments - all of these things were more pronounced whenever they smoked pot - and thanks to D2, they smoked a lot. Brian initially chalked it up to being around a square for the first time. Now, with a slightly paranoid perspective, he saw D2's behavior as ... effeminate, maybe? Then he thought, "Is that why the muthafucka was smiling at me when he moved in?!?"

Every street-smart instinct in Brian implored him to kick D2 to the curb immediately. He just couldn't bring himself to do it. He kept finding excuses as to why there was no need. For starters, he genuinely liked D2 as a person. Plus, there was still a possibility that the guy was straight.

A week after his initial solo tryst with the smut, the two of them had just finished getting high and Brian couldn't hold his tongue any longer. He needed answers. "So what's with the punk magazines?" he asked.

D2 laughed. Brian wasn't sure why, but he just waited. D2 made no apologies. "They're not punk magazines; as you can see I'm into all kinds of porn. I draw the line at animals and kid shit, but everything else is fair game."

"Are you gay?" Brian asked.

"I wouldn't label myself that. Matter of fact I wouldn't label myself at all," D2 stated bluntly. Brian fell silent. D2 went on, candidly admitting to sleeping with both men and women during his drug-fueled past. He explained, "a person cannot prevent their bodies from being attracted or responding to someone, whether male or female." He caught Brian off guard when he told him he was attracted to masculine men, not the "garden

variety penitentiary punk." Brian knew right then that D2 was interested in him.

Ignoring his inner censor, Brian, for the first time ever, confided in another human being and spoke about his secret attraction. "If I were to fuck around it would have to be with someone who looked like a bitch." He and D2 didn't have the same friends so Brian figured it was safe to tell him. Although D2 didn't share the same attraction - he found transsexuals "ridiculous" - he made it a point not to judge.

While Brian struggled to suppress his urges, and tried to train himself to keep his eyes off of the women wannabe's on the yard, his cellie had no worries. Throughout his prison stint, D2 had to be careful with whom he shared his sexual history. Convicts are not known for their tolerance, especially gangbangers. He had plenty of cellies that never knew about his porn stash. Over time, however, he became intuitive enough to discern who would be accepting of his sexual fluidity. To that point, he sized up Brian immediately.

Weeks before moving in, D2 spotted Brian standing in the weight pile clandestinely checking out the backside of a gaggle of punks walking by. Brian had no idea that he was also being watched and admired. He didn't know D2 counted himself lucky when he serendipitously moved into Brian's cell. Brian had no clue that his new cellmate gave him access to his magazines more for strategic reasons than for mere jailhouse courtesy. He employed the same tactic with his seemingly endless supply of marijuana. Having been around drugs long enough, D2 understood their un-inhibiting effects. Brian lowered his guard and unloaded his secrets, not suspecting he was being wooed. This, along with D2's low key disposition led Brian to give into temptation. And although he kept the act "manly," the fact of the matter was that he broke Rule 10.

Back to present day.

The booming voice of a guard brought Brian back from his trip down memory lane. Two and a half hours had passed since disembarking from the bus and now they were being assigned cells in the intake building. New arriving inmates are placed on orientation for a couple of weeks, during which time they are segregated from the general population, interviewed, classified, and given the opportunity to go PC. This is done for legal

reasons. Contrary to popular belief, the State doesn't just throw inmates to the wolves without the prisoner's consent.

Brian was grateful to be housed with an elderly gentleman who knew nothing about his past. This allowed Brian to sleep easier, something he finds difficult since being crushed by a television during his slumber by one of his cellies who was scared, but obligated to do so.

The following morning, Brian caught another break. He learned that all orientation inmates are fed in their cells rather than in the cafeteria. This allowed him to gather intel while remaining unseen by potential enemies. The hunted needs every advantage possible - stealth was Brian's friend. Brian found out that his former homeboy "Eddie G," a guy he did dirt with years ago, was now calling shots on the yard. Brian knew Eddie G was fair and reasonable, and he felt he actually had a chance to last for more than a few weeks on this yard without an attempt on his life. He also knew from experience how strong pressure is on leaders to punish rule-breakers and earn stripes in front of their crew. Far too often peer pressure trumps fairness and reasoning.

Brian woke up early and went to the sink to wash up. He stared at his reflection in the mirror as his old cellie slept quietly a few feet away. Brian studied the once-flawless tattoo on his chest. The name of his gang was printed in bold letters above his left pectoral muscle. Now, thanks to an attack from an assailant armed with a knife fashioned crudely out of scrap metal, part of one of the O's in the word "Blood" was gone - replaced by ugly scar tissue.

Brian rubbed the two-year-old scar, thinking about the failed attempt on his life. The fingered a different scar on the back of his neck - the result of a razor attack a year later. Receiving battle scars from his own homies was the last thing Brian expected when he became Alpha Dog. Looking back, he also never imagined breaking one of the rules he swore to enforce.

Every time he paused to reflect on his time in the cell with D2, the more bitter he became. Oddly enough, he wasn't mad at his former homeboys for the repeated attacks. "Rules are rules," he thought. Nor did he blame himself. Brian directed his anger squarely at one person: D2.

Brian felt used and taken advantage of; a real blow to his manhood. However, that's not why he was bitter. He willingly

satisfied his curiosity, and enjoyed it too. No, Brian was bitter because D2 exposed him. Brian wasn't sure who he told, or why. At first he theorized that D2 blabbed to a friend whom he mistakenly trusted with the secret. But not so deep down, Brian believed D2 did it with malicious intent because Brian was only interested in one thing, while D2 wanted more. Days after experiencing that one thing, Brian moved out of their cell and into a cell with one of his homeboys, pissing off D2 in the process.

The homeboy he moved in with got wind of the egregious rule violation and ended up being the guy who tried to crush his skull with a television as he slept. Prison yards are like small towns - no secrets are safe.

Brian realizes that it wasn't worth it. He still had to wait a few more years before his parole date, and he considered going PC during his orientation interview. Not only would he escape the attacks, but he'd also be able to live in a cell with whomever he pleased. However, in spite of his misstep, Brian still considered himself a badass. Going PC would feel like a bitch move and Brian wasn't ready to give up on being rebellious. Yes, he was at war with his homeboys, but he's won some of the battles. The guy who busted him over the head with the TV had to have eye socket surgery. The guy who sliced his neck lost a tooth before his back-up ran over and finished Brian off.

Happy and more than a little nervous to be off orientation, Brian prepared for the yard. Fear of yet another beat-down, along with salacious thoughts of hooking up with a punk, urged Brian to go PC, but he couldn't bring himself to do it. So, he decided to man-up and do what he'd been doing for the past four years. He made himself a knife and headed out to general population - ready to put on a show.