

The barn wasn't too bad, all things considered. Well, at least not nearly as bad as it could have been. And why would I have high hopes for a barn? I knew it wasn't going to be glamorous. At best, I hoped it would provide me at least a modicum of my human dignity, even after the virus had taken its course. And in my initial opinion, that was to be the case.

It was large enough to house 50 or more animals over an indefinite period. I could tell it was recently renovated, down to the still dripping paint on the walls. No doubt it had been abandoned for the foreseeable future, but when the need arose, someone dumped a ton of money into it. I had to admit, I was glad. I would be fucked without places like this.

The walls and ceiling were airtight with not a sliver of sunlight filtering in, save through the massive picture windows at either end. Everything from the mechanical door to the feed and milking machines to the showers on one end was automated. Fans lined the ceilings, enough to keep the occupants cool and free of pesky biting flies. Hell, there was even a series of TVs set up along each of the stalls with floor-bound remotes for the stall occupants to use if needed. Everything a dumb *beast* could ask for. A beast like I was soon to be.

Still, despite all the fans and air fresheners, the scent of a barn was unmistakable. Body odor, sweat, urine, and feces were nearly impossible to remove even in the most modern of barns. It helped that the residents were intelligent enough to clean up after themselves as best they could, but there was always the chance that some of them lacked the cognizance, or the willpower, to take care of their bodily functions in a manner befitting someone with once-higher stature. It was hard to imagine living that way, but I'd only just been here a day. How would the weeks and months affect my self-respect?

The barn's proper care and maintenance were made more difficult by the fact that it lacked cleaning staff. Apparently, a few caretakers in hazmat suits would occasionally come in to clean up the worst of it as well as run maintenance on the machines. Due to the insidious infectious nature of the virus, any unlucky caretakers were liable to end up as new occupants. This was a fate that even the most well-paid farm hands would prefer to avoid, given that they couldn't exactly do their jobs with hooves. It was only safe if none of the current occupants were infectious, and I would be so for at least a month or two. This left us to have to live in the conditions that our new bodies dictated. It was better than nothing, but oh boy, was it ever not going to be pleasant.

It's hard sometimes for me to believe that back in January, the world was going about its business oblivious to the eventual plague that would sweep the globe and change life as we knew it forever. Pandemics move fast, especially in a world ill-equipped to handle them, and soon enough, we found ourselves overrun.

This one, dubbed the novel zoomorphic virus, was beyond the scope even the most prepared governments could handle. The risk of mortality of this particular virus was low. It was one thing for the infected to become sick, needing urgent hospital care as they fought for their lives. A very different thing was to prepare for those who showed secondary symptoms that led to them becoming animals. I honestly say, as mad as I am, I can't blame them. It was a small mercy when the chance existed that you might start sprouting fur or flippers as the first sign of losing your humanity as opposed to dying outright.

For even 1% of the infected population to show those secondary effects was an astronomical number to think about. The risk of others becoming infected and suffering the final result was enough to shut down life as we knew it. Anyone in the initial stages of the virus showed flu-like symptoms: cough, headache, the works. I know how much of a stupid umbrella term that can seem these days. 'Flu-like symptoms'. Everything can be considered fucking flu-like symptoms! How the hell are we supposed to tell what ends up being the zoomorphic virus from the annual flu?

The idea of even one aspect of the body you grew up with changing into a new form was daunting enough. It was far different than losing a limb or finding one of your senses impaired. Those elements were SUPPOSED to be there. No human was meant to have a tail, or animal ears, or fur or scales, and that was only the first sign of the eventual secondary effects of infection.

Maybe some could live with just that, freaks to be sure but still able to function in human society. Maybe even I could. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case for most that showed symptoms. The effects came in bursts, changing one aspect almost entirely before slowing down for days or weeks. If it became active again, it was almost a guarantee that over a few short weeks or months, the unfortunate soul would find themselves losing their entire physical form to that of an existing animal species.

The whole world should have been on lockdown for a few months to allow the least amount of people to be infected, thus lowering the chance of that secondary transformation kicking in. Fact is, no one was prepared to have their life uprooted in such a way. People were restless, unemployed, and pissed off. Small businesses were going bankrupt. Some people had no source of income and were forced to wait for government aid with the threat of eviction over their heads. People had nothing else to do but sit at home and watch the bad news continue to pour in. I was one of the lucky ones that remained busy, but I did listen to friends and people in transit who were constantly bitching.

Naturally, there was a huge push to return to a sense of normalcy, so much so that misinformation ran rampant. Phrases like, “It’s not that bad” or “it’s a government hoax” and even “It will all go away” were thrown around so much that even those willing to follow the rules had their doubts. In truth, we could have opened up more safely had we used a few extra weeks to put preventative measures in place but no. In a rush to resume everyday lives, people disregarded safety precautions. Maybe if they hadn’t, I would be in this barn right now. I had a right to be bitter.

The population was torn in half between those wanting to follow precautions and those declaring them an infringement on human rights. No amount of fiction could have prepared us for the reality that people would turn a global pandemic into a political issue. Add that one to the list of tropes that’ll show up in fiction for the next decade or so.

Of course, the ones who suffered most were those that showed symptoms. Not only were they living with the reality of becoming an animal, but the virus continued to shed from its host until the change was complete. Those infected people were ostracized from society, seen as pariahs and disease vectors. Even basic rights were denied to those infected. They were forced to deal with the reality that they were losing their ability to live as humans. Many were even abandoned by their families and friends for risk that they, too, would become infected. I couldn’t have imagined that happening to me a month ago, but here I am.

The idea of long-term care facilities for those impacted was a relatively new initiative from the government. Most of the victims would be essentially disabled, living like an animal with little autonomy and the threat of only needing basic care. They would require permanent relocation to facilities that could tend to the needs of their new bodies and lifestyles.

Most opposed the idea of taking up residence with other animals of their new kind due to the dehumanizing nature of that treatment. A select few were lucky that their families owned land or facilities that could care for their changed kin and had the heart to do so. Others were fortunate that their family members had become something domesticated enough that they could continue living at home. These souls were, unfortunately, in the minority. I was not one of them.

With so many people needing such drastic levels of care, the conditions of anyone undergoing change was... less than ideal. Things like old barns, abandoned zoos, and kennels supposed to be ‘temporary’ homes ended up being the permanent ones. In defense of that, the cost of facilities to house animals of human intelligence, to give them a semblance of humane life, was astronomical. In a world where seniors and the mentally ill were locked away with hardly humane treatment, how is one to expect to give human-minded animals better conditions

than what their naturally born brethren receive? The world was far more focused on preventing more cases, not on building a utopia for animal people amid a pandemic. Again, I couldn't really blame them. Even if I was one of those people who needed care.

I was diagnosed positive about a month and a half ago. I was a fast-food worker moonlighting as a freelance journalist. I hoped to eventually make enough to live on writing alone, but in the meantime... there were bills to pay. It barely covered the cost of living for my tiny bachelor. I was diligent, hopeful that my progress towards my dream career was coming along just steadily enough that it kept me motivated.

That was before the onset of the pandemic and my exposure to the virus. I didn't pay it too much attention at first. Of course, no one took it seriously at first. It was halfway around the world and I had no money for travel even if I'd wanted to. Even when stores and businesses started closing, I wasn't concerned. After all, in the restaurant business, things were only closed long enough to figure out a way to bypass safety regulations. They would go out of business otherwise!

I wasn't even home long enough to qualify for assistance before I returned to working full time. Thankfully, with the ability of contactless delivery and online ordering, the restaurant where I worked was back in full swing. There were so few people leaving their homes around that time, and people were ordering out left, right, and center. The tips were pretty good, I recall. Not that it matters anymore. What can I do with the extra money now?

At first, it was a little intimidating, going to work every day with warnings of a pandemic running rampant. The initial case rate was high, and a few people in the city even started showing signs of changing. It was scary, but I had to get up and go to work every day or risk losing my apartment.

As time went on, I didn't even think about the pandemic. I still kept my protective gear on when I was told, of course. I washed my hands as much as I remembered. It's just... after a few months, with things starting to improve, it became harder and harder to keep up the strict measures. I like to think it wasn't my fault, but I don't have anyone else to blame. I wish I did.

I think I contracted it on the bus to work one day. I'm not entirely sure. There was another outbreak recently, but things weren't set up to have proper contact tracing, not like now. Even if I did catch it on the bus, it's impossible to say who else was on that route, and I just as easily could have been infected it on one of several rides I took that week. I didn't even recall

what my work schedule was or what times I was on various bus routes, and maybe I caught it at the transfer depo or even at work itself. There were too many possibilities.

Regardless, I caught the flu, and I stayed home and asked for a test. It lasted well over a week, and, if I'm being honest, it was the worst flu I've ever had. I couldn't even get out of bed for a few days, and anytime I did, I was confined to the bathroom. I was lucky that I had everything I needed at home, and some of my coworkers had even dropped by with supplies. Even after I recovered, I still suffered intense migraines, and I was bloated and stiff even after the other symptoms had abated.

I hadn't been thinking about exhibiting secondary symptoms, especially with the reality of my current financial situation. I didn't have any insurance, so I was praying that my application for compensation went through. In short, I was more worried that I would lose my apartment rather than lose my humanity.

Even after I seemed to fully recover, the headaches would not go away. They were more intense than the worst migraines that I could ever imagine, and with each day, they only seemed to grow worse. It felt like something was drilling through my skull from the inside, leaving me blinded some days from the agony.

It didn't take a genius to realize that, in tandem with the continued positive tests for viral shedding, I was starting to exhibit symptoms of secondary infection. For me, the first changes were a pair of bovine horns. Fetching, right? Yeah, you try waking up screaming so loud you're sure the homeless guy across the street can hear you. As a side note, I'm assuming I infected him too since he always got a little too close when asking for change. I hadn't seen him there since about a week after I'd first caught the virus myself. Hope he's doing well.

I was hopeful that the process would stop there. Given the irony that I worked in a restaurant, becoming part burger meat myself would be a hilarious running joke on the line. Besides, the horns looked kind of cool, aesthetically. I mean, once I got over everything else they meant. Which I didn't and haven't. They were a little too heavy for my head, likely forcing me into a neck brace for the rest of my life. I could have lived with that. I could have gotten them trimmed, decorated! Birds could light on them, maybe make a little nest! Endless possibilities!

That's not where the transformation ended, of course. I was warned that it seldom ended with such a cosmetic thing and to not get my hopes up. Even with how big my ears became, or how fat my neck grew, there was always this slim bit of hope in the back of my mind that I wouldn't undergo a second major change. Nope, I was pretty sure I was damned the

moment I felt the insistent ache in my tailbone that just wouldn't go away no matter how I sat on my chair. It was no surprise when I spent a night hunched over in pain as my new bull's tail inched its way out above my ass. It didn't stop me from bitching about it, though! Man, my journaling blog viewership skyrocketed after that! The ad revenue was incredible! Shame, I wouldn't have hands much longer to keep them updated!

Life after that secondary bout of change was... shitty. Each day I forced myself into the same routine, keeping the thoughts of the horrors of my future at bay. Some days I just broke down in tears for no reason. Others I took my frustrations on anyone who came within earshot, feeling immense shame afterward. I won't get into it much beyond that. I lamented a future that had already come, and now I had to adapt to fit in with others who had experienced the same thing.

Honestly, it was a blur of paperwork and phone calls and diagnoses. Telling my family was hard. Hadn't been in too much contact with them in recent years. They seemed to treat it as a death sentence. And, truth be told, it was, in some sense. Wish they gave a fuck about me before when I needed rent money. Not that it mattered anymore.

By now, I had a confirmed diagnosis that I was turning into a bull. It was some domestic breed but all things considered, I didn't really give a shit about which one. There were lots of talks about what I would do after the change progressed. I was hesitant to look into assisted living facilities for those becoming domestic farm animals. It wasn't the most desirable prospect. But living on a farm outside my parents' little hick town? No thanks!

I stopped paying attention to the world after that. For all I cared it could go fuck itself. It had fucked me over enough. The cases were surging as things were opening, and more people were likely going to end up in the barn with me. Sucks for them. I wasn't going to get a penny from my job or the government, and I couldn't even spend it if I wanted to. I had enough for food and necessities, and that was it. I was surprised they didn't turn off my electricity or water; I hadn't paid them in months.

I kept busy on the projects that I'd wanted to finish before I transformed too much. There were some ideas that I'd put off for a while, short stories, and the like. But I mostly wrote for my journaling blog documenting the changes. I wanted to keep my writing output high while I still had the hands to do so. Plus, it kept my mind off shit.

It was the third major change that did me in. The stiffness in my feet was a telltale sign. Though I'd been growing fur, leathery skin, and a distinct sweaty bovine odor, things hadn't been too bad. Soon, though, my toes were all but impossible to move. Two had

grown thick, their tips were swollen and bloated. Every morning they seemed a little larger, while the two at the ends became small and immobile and I didn't even fucking have big toes anymore! After a night of pain-induced weeping, the changes started to finalize. The bones within thickened while that merciless solid keratin crawled over them. My heels were pulled up painfully far, the bone underneath torn apart and reshaped in ways that should have killed me or made it impossible to walk again. By the time it was over, I had hooves, cattle hooves. Perfect for walking on all fours with a cattle's hips. Useless for me.

I knew there was no way I was going to remain bipedal after this. There was no way to balance on hooves with my human legs. I could barely get to the bed or bathroom like this, which was humiliating enough. I didn't have anyone to care for me at home. Like I could have afforded it to begin with.

So, I was relocated into one of the newly set up barns outside the city, used to house victims such as myself. There were a few dozen or so in my area, but this was the only one with vacant stalls. Yeah, you read that right. Stalls. Not rooms. Stalls for the fat bull I was gonna live out the rest of my life as. It wouldn't cost anything for me to be there, but I had the option to donate my worldly possessions to get in. Which amounted to a sum total of fuck all. All my physical belongings, limited as though they were, would either be given to my family or donated to pay the rent money the government wasn't going to give me. At least I'd be given a stipend to fund my new digs, but what was it going to do? Buy me flavored hay? Pay for the latest hoof-shoe fashions? Money meant so little to a bull. That was abundantly obvious.

There were worse places. Regular farms, shit holes that didn't even care that their occupants were once human. That might have been worse than a death sentence. Sure, some of them were actually killed for meat (yes, there apparently WAS a black market for that,) but I think it was worse living like a fucking animal, watching those around you going to the slaughterhouse, knowing you might get "mixed up" and sent one day with them.

Even more drastic was that some people just took off for the woods to make the best of their situation. In some ways, that freedom might have been tempting, given the state of the world. But in the wilds? Dealing with parasites, the elements, rabies, and predators? That was no fantasy escape. It was a shorter life expectancy, existing as a simple beast. For some, those who may have lost their minds, it might have been for the best. I'm personally sad for the ones who had no other option. Fucking American dream indeed.

I've been requested to write a little journal about my first night here. Seems one of the people who got me set up at this barn had been a follower of my journaling. I figured

what the hell. One last story before I lose my hands. My “one song, before the virus takes hold,” as it were. Sue me, I’m a sucker for musicals.

So far, it's been my personal hell. Yes, I know, I was optimistic at first, what with the fans and the automation and the TV, but that was just concerning what my fate COULD have otherwise been. I didn't expect any different, so I’m mostly staying quiet on the subject. Well, OK, so this next part is probably going to consist ENTIRELY of my bitching, but it is what it is.

After the initial tour, I was assigned my own personal stall and provided with plenty of fruits and veggies to get me through the next little while. These were given to all the residences at regular intervals, in addition to plenty of hay and clean water. For anyone who could, or wanted to stomach it, there was a field full of grass outside. We could come and go freely between the barn and the adjacent field, but it was fenced in and inescapable even with human-level intellect. Not that there was anywhere else to go or anyone who would have us.

I mentioned about 50 stalls, and about 19 of them are full from a headcount. They had 4 fully formed horses, 2 bulls, 3 rams, a donkey, a goat, and 4 pigs. Mostly guys, though three of the pigs and the goat were once women. Most of them were from the initial waves of infection and were relocated here from other facilities once this had been erected. Each one of them retained their human intelligence, which was a small blessing. I wasn't sure how much of a common occurrence that was, for the changing to lose their minds fully to an animal. I hadn't once seen it directly.

There were about 4 of us, however, who had not finished our changes. It made the other once-human animals irritable, knowing that their daily routine of being cleaned and cared for was interrupted by the introduction of more people who were still infectious, but they had no say in the matter.

Of the more recent arrivals, one woman was turning into a ewe and another becoming a jenny. She, the jenny, was kept in a private stall for even in this new world of animal transformation, a woman's risk of rape was still high. It was a small mercy to keep them protected or segregated from all of the stallions and jacks, who had nothing more to lose. I couldn't blame her. The ewe-woman, however, seemed eager to get fucked once she'd changed enough. For some, losing themselves in mindless sex meant at least they were choosing to lose their minds. At least, I guessed she was allowing it from her demeanor and her response to the interested rams in the facility. Fucking sheep musk stank up the place even worse.

One guy, Ted, was the only one I really conversed with. He was turning into a pig, though it didn't seem to bother him. He could still talk, which he considered a mixed



blessing. The donkey-woman could as well, but she wasn't keen on exiting her private stall to do so. So, on that first day, I shot the shit with Ted.

He was an engineer, overworked, single, and driven. Yet, when he'd lost his hands, his first change, he found it... strangely liberating. He was free from all the insane expectations that were thrust upon him all his life and could literally just BE for the first time. He even had some romantic prospects in his future; one of the pigs had gotten quite insistent with him, and after talking it out (one-sided, of course), they figured they might try mating. Ted wasn't down to do it until he had changed fully, which I found understandable and respectable. Even if they were human once, the idea of... doing it with a total animal was repulsive, for now, at least.

He'd been here about a week before me and had an interesting perspective on life in this barn. It made great material for this paper, so I listened intently. Used it in tandem with my own experience that first night to write this. As much as it scared me to think of what life might be like as a bull in this barn, I needed to know.

Most of the residences spent their days outside in the fresh air, congregating much as their fully animal counterparts might. Given the conditions here, it was hard not to slip into animalistic patterns of behavior. I think it was easier just to mindlessly graze, walking out into the fields for fresh air and generally living the lives of the beasts we'd become.

I envied the horses. I spent the first day watching them, running in the fields together like a herd, enjoying their powerful bodies. I didn't appreciate the smell of their sweaty hides when they came back to the barn at night, but I was starting to smell just as bad, so I wasn't at liberty to complain.

As the sun went down, everyone started making their way back into the barn. Mostly they stayed in their assigned stalls and started grazing on hay. Some busied themselves with TV, but usually just to watch the evening news or sitcoms. They seemed to tire of it rather quickly.

It did make me feel worried about how much the residents acted like animals, but all their intelligence tests came back as cognizant. Was it simply that boring for them to watch TV, or was it better to let the human thoughts sink down while the animal ones took over? I didn't have any answers, and I was afraid to ask.

After a while of TV watching, all the animals were soon snoring, most standing up straight in their stalls. The lights didn't even turn off, sadly. I would have preferred it for

sleeping. The TVs turned off automatically after a while, likely to save power. A few of the animals still stirred, but with so little to do, I guess there was nothing better to do but sleep as much of their lives away as possible.

I didn't get any sleep that night. I'd been trying to get myself ready for it all week, but I'd never lived in a barn before. It really was an entirely different world. Fuck. It was a combination of factors, really. The first was the smell, and I don't just mean the aroma of sweaty bodies, which was bad on its own. Farm animals were extremely... flatulent, to say the least. Even the fans didn't waft away the digesting smell of plant matter being digested by animals that spent most of their waking hours eating. I'm sure it was something that they all got used to, and maybe it didn't stink so bad to them. But even in my changed state, it bothered the fuck out of me.

The fans did nothing to stop the pungent smell of piss, either. Naturally, the residences were pretty lax with their bladders. I don't think they really had much say in the matter, which made me a little anxious. Still, the audible splash of urine on concrete or hay was a regular occurrence. In tandem with the smell, it kept me pretty distracted.

There were worse sounds. I heard some of the horses alleviate some... urges that night, slapping their cocks on their bellies. All five were stallions, though maybe at least a couple were willing to help each other out. I think I pretty much got confirmation as the night went on. Pretty sure the donkey had a thing with one or several of the stallions. The brays were distinctive, and the sounds of slick bodies rubbing each other were impossible to confuse. I didn't much feel like looking up to see. I mean, I can't say I blamed them. They were adults, and what else did they do to pass the time, regardless of what their preferences might have been before the infection?

My wakeful state left me some time to do some musings, get some things off my mind while I document this first day. Private thoughts, but what good would they do in my head? None of the bovines were cows, which gave me some mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was going to be really difficult to wank when I didn't have hands. I knew the horses could do it, but I hadn't heard any of the bulls doing the same. Maybe they weren't as horny? I hadn't bothered to introduce myself yet. I'd taken a stall away from the animals for now. I'd have the chance to get one closer if I wanted, but did I want to? Would I have any inclination to have a relationship with a cow-woman if one did show up? Would I be interested in any of the bulls, or they in me? I'd always considered myself at least a little curious about the same sex. I'd never wanted it to come to this, with no other choice or outlet for any sexual frustrations. Just another thing lost to me.

As bad as the night was, I hated the morning even more. I'd managed to get some sleep, though it was scattered, and nightmares kept plaguing my thoughts. The stench woke me up first of all, before even the sounds of chewing and stomping of hooves. Seemed like all the former humans were regular, at least. Probably usual for farm animals, whose digestive tracts required them to void their bowels more often than I was either used to or comfortable with.

The lavatory situation was less than ideal. There was a series of grates on the floor for us to piss or take a dump. Thankfully they remained at one corner of the barn and separate from the stalls. Naturally, given the nature of their bodies and diets, not all the animals got there in time. Or maybe, some of them didn't even care. Animals in barns didn't care about modesty, and some were more inclined to act like it than others. I, for one, didn't fancy the idea of taking a dump in my stall for the rest of my life.

There were shower facilities that could activate simply by stepping in the right spot. Some sprinkled water from above, with an option of some soap to clean off sweaty bodies, and ones sprayed from the floor, better for cleaning off genitals and asses. Still, the showers could only do so much. Some of the residents didn't seem to use them as much as was sanitary, preferring not to care as did the animals they now resembled. Without someone to regularly tend to and care for their needs, most of them were left dirty, no better than regular animals on a farm. This shit, quite literally, was going to be their lives.

After their morning routines, the residences took their places in the fields to begin the day anew. And that's it. That's the life of a human-turned beast. Maybe I'll write some more details later on when I receive some inspiration. I think I've painted a pretty good picture for anyone that wants to bother reading it.

I know it's not a hopeful entry, but it's the truth. As someone who once wanted to do this for a living? The truth is what I'm after, as horrible as it is. This is going to be my life now, living as a bull. Walking will be hard, but so long as I can crawl, I can still get around, and even if I can't, everything I need is in the stall. The food isn't so bad; I'd already switched to a veggie lifestyle when my species was diagnosed. I'm tempted to try hay, but I doubt it will be very tasty yet.

From the current rate of change, I'll likely take at least a month to become a total bull. The thought of that terrifies me. Still, at least, the more I *do think about it*, the easier my life here will be. Barns aren't really meant for people to live in.

Maybe, someday, there'll be a cure, and we'll be able to return to our human forms. There's really not much hope of that, but it helps retain sanity to keep up on current

events. We do at least get access to the news though it's hard to sift through all the bullshit. Pun intended. The one thing I'm not going to lose is my bad sense of humor and shitty puns. For now, at least, it's something.

That's it for me. Thanks for reading this installment on Bullshit: The Zoomorphic Virus and one Horned Journalist's Take. I'll miss the old life, but this is all I have. If I have one take away? Wash your damn hands and wear a fucking mask! If you don't... maybe I'll see you on the farm?