



## THE FINAL RECKONING OF THE STANFORD PRISON SAGA

### PART 2: DAVID ESHLEMAN'S DEEPPAKE

--- Hugo Meijers ---

In part 1 — [The Aftermath of The Lifespan of a Lie](#) — I outlined what happened after Ben Blum and Thibault Le Texier tried to topple a science travesty without success. After Zimbardo wrote a response to the criticism, the flood of fulminations quickly died out. Despite revealing the Stanford Prison Experiment is severely flawed, it still stands solid as a famous and notorious study. I decided to delve into the story leaving no stone unturned.

In part 2, David Eshleman takes center stage. He is the tyrannical actor nicknamed John Wayne in the lead guard role. The Stanford Prison Saga revolves around his brutal character. He was the quintessence of how a good person can turn evil in the wrong place. Except, the notorious guard was not who we were led to believe.

The reckoning continues with unraveling the pivotal role John Wayne played. Was he tyrannical as reported and escalating his brutality? Did no one tell him to knock it off? Were the prisoners ordered to perform simulated sodomy? Was he controlled by someone who turned him into an instrument of evil? And what on earth happened on Wednesday night? Daunting questions that demand disclosure.

#### Introducing the actor

Dave Eshleman, the son of a Stanford engineering professor, was at the time an 18-year-old student at Chapman University. Although young, he had taken acting classes and starred in many [junior high](#)



[and high school plays](#). Well versed in method acting techniques, Eshleman knew how to use substitution to immerse himself entirely into an adopted character's personality before playing the role. Invaluable experience that he put to great use in authentically portraying the legendary John Wayne.

Eshleman first sparked my interest with his contribution to [The Menace Within](#) in Stanford Magazine — a 2011 feature article in the alumni magazine of Stanford University to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the prison experiment. The article contains reflections of some of the key players on their role and how those six memorable days changed their lives.

In the article, Eshleman reiterates in straightforward terms that he put on an act. He used his acting experience to pattern his John Wayne character after the Captain, the cruel warden in the 1967 movie *Cool Hand Luke*. This Hollywood blockbuster is a prison farm drama loaded with physical punishment and psychological torment, starring Paul Newman and Strother Martin.

Looking for a summer job and easy money, Eshleman professed he deliberately took on the persona of an insensitive psycho and cruel sadist before stepping out on the basement stage. What came over him was not an accident. He planned and prepared the legendary role he enacted.

Further, he purposefully turned on the heat to force the action. In his mind, doing nothing in a science study was not done. He wanted to ensure the researchers had something to work with. After all, what could they possibly [learn from guys sitting around](#) like it was a country club?

Strikingly, Eshleman revealed that he ran a little secret experiment of his own. He wanted to know how far he could push the involved before someone would say knock it off. But no guard, prisoner, or staff member ever tried to stop him. Indeed, because the prisoners didn't know him, he had free reign and could pull off his act. Otherwise, the prisoners would have immediately seen through his pretense.

### Silence starts to speak up

Knowing Douglas Korpi shocked so many by broadcasting he faked to Ben Blum, I looked for the shockwave this similar revelation must have caused. In my view, Eshleman's admission of pretense play would surely obliterate the validity of the simulation. But I found nothing. No uproar or flood of fulminations. Not a single word of discontent.

I was confused. Eshleman's admittance felt like a straw in the wind. Does it not stand to reason that when the most abusive character goes on record he faked that reporters would eagerly jump on the breaking news? They did after Blum published his exposé. But ominously, the disclosure in 2011 met deafening silence.

Zimbardo also contributed to *The Menace Within*. After reading what some of the others had remembered, he felt compelled to react with a [letter to the editor](#). With the letter, he tried to correct what he calls some factual mistakes and other errors due to the failing memory of participants in reconstructing what they think they did.

The letter appeared in the next issue of the Stanford Magazine. It emphatically opens with that the study did not start on August 17 but Sunday, August 14. After I checked various calendars, they all assured me that Saturday was the 14<sup>th</sup>, not Sunday. Saturday was the day that the guards got their



instructive introduction. I guess this incorrect correction is also a matter of failing memory, probably not for the first time.

More to the point, Zimbardo goes to great lengths to set the record straight on what guard John Mark and prisoner Richard Yacco (#1037) disclosed in the feature article. Yet not a single word on Eshleman professing he playacted. Zero, zip, zilch. How odd. Is Zimbardo deliberately diverting attention away from a potential smoking gun by not giving it any heed?

Regardless, not contending Eshleman's pretend play simply smelled terribly off. Zimbardo's lack of response was a clear warning sign and my first major red flag. An ominous omen that there is more to Eshleman's playact than we know.

Zimbardo finished his letter with getting at the truth in our Pirandellian prison requires the detached perspective provided by examining all available material. Taking his expert advice to heart, I took note to do precisely as he suggested.

## Change of heart

Alerted by my red flag, I went back in time to see what else I could find on Eshleman. I discovered two intriguing interviews he gave in 2004 after something sinister had happened. Late April 2004, the atrocious images of the prisoner abuse in Baghdad's notorious Abu Ghraib prison appalled the world. From that moment, Zimbardo appeared everywhere in the media as the evil expert, and the hits on his [prison experiment website](#) exploded.

[Sara James](#) was the first to interview Eshleman and Zimbardo. She approached them to get some insight into the cause of inexcusable behavior. In the interview, Eshleman does not rap about playacting. He explained his decision to see how far they could go before being stopped. Because he got away with his sadistic abuse, John Wayne was encouraged to take it to the next level. In effect blaming the docile prisoners and observing staff for his escalating behavior.

A few months later, [Alan Zarembo](#) interviewed them both. Eshleman is forthcoming about playing a role in helping Zimbardo get his desired results. He divulged that, on the first night, he was struck that everybody treated the study like summer camp. Dismayed, he decided it would be good to push things to show the evils inherent in a prison-type environment.

Moreover, Eshleman discloses that he got his abusive ideas from the hazing he underwent the previous year. He further explains how he prepared himself. John Wayne stood in front of a bathroom mirror before each eight-hour shift to get into the role. In his mind, not his most favorite part, but probably his most famous.

In other words, Eshleman told pretty much the same as in [The Menace Within](#). The way he got into the act reminded me of Winston Churchill, who prepped his memorable speeches addressing the nation in front of the mirror. Great and authentic actors mentally prepare the transition into the persona they are portraying. Professionals do not play a character but transform into the character by total immersion into the role, just as Eshleman has been tenaciously professing.

Anyway, the two interviews in 2004 illustrate that Eshleman had a change of heart in those two decisive months between the interviews. A theater major, he felt somehow offended enough to speak out and change his story. What caused him to come out of the woodwork?



It wasn't Zimbardo basking in the limelight that annoyed him. Zimbardo propagated everywhere that Eshleman's transformation into the sadistic guard John Wayne happened naturally and beyond his control. The power setting forced his identity conversion. Even so, Eshleman was confident the situation had not gotten hold of his faculties. Like any actor, he felt in complete control of his character transformation.

Eshleman apparently got fed up with being the object of Zimbardo's core message: the caution that a prison structure of powerful guards and powerless inmates can transform ordinary people into evil instruments.

Something snapped in him when Zimbardo took advantage of the overwhelming media attention by stealing the show with, in his eyes, a false version of the Stanford Prison findings. The disparate treatment in the press was the tipping point, and seems to have started the seeping process for the infamous John Wayne to come clean.

### Spawning red herrings

Moving on with what I could find on Eshleman, I stumbled on an unbosoming exchange in Jon Ronson's *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*. In his 2015 book, Ronson incorporated an interview where Eshleman admitted that he planned his act just like he did in 2004 and 2011. Eshleman mapped his character out and did everything deliberately to give the psychologists their money worth. He thought he was doing something good for science.

By now, this was the third reference I had found on John Wayne doing the researchers a favor to prevent the simulation from turning into a happy hunky-dory summer camp. I verified who else remarked something along similar lines. Curiously, Zimbardo, Haney and Jaffe separately have noted their fear that the costly simulation would end up in marshmallow roasting and guitar playing around a campfire. Did Eshleman get the idea from them?

Furthermore, Eshleman reveals that his act was not a simple case of putting him in a bad situation and that he, by some miracle, turned evil. [He faked it](#). He took his guard shifts as a kind of improv exercise in which his acting experience came in handy.

Ronson thought he was holding a smoking gun. So he contacted Steve Reicher and Alan Haslam — two researchers who have been flies in the experiments' ointment from the start — with the transcript of his interview with Dave Eshleman. To Ronson's amazement, they were unimpressed. Haslam called the acting a red herring. When on the receiving end of brutality, it doesn't matter if the abuser acted or not. The question is why we behave in a particular way. Critical is believing you are doing something good.

Ronson instantly realized that the actual smoking gun was Eshleman's self-imposed belief that he did the right thing. That forced his hand, not a contagious situation or a power setting. And if his belief caused his behavior, it would radically alter the conclusion Zimbardo has been evangelizing.

Then things get extremely interesting. Ronson also sent Eshleman's quotes to Zimbardo to get his take on the John Wayne fake. Fact-check, so to speak, that Eshleman was deliberately trying to be helpful. It would be the first reaction by Zimbardo I found to the conscious playacting.



Zimbardo dismissed Ronson offhand. He told Ronson he should suspend his naivety. In his view, Eshleman pushed the envelope, but the prisoners never rebelled while his degrading abuses escalated every night. It was Eshleman who created the brutal environment that crushed the minds of the powerless prisoners. Zimbardo depicted him as a sob that internalized an evil role to turn into a tyrant out of control.

Slowly, I started to sympathize with Eshleman's predicament. Although all the students were pawns in a prison reform game, sacrificial lamb Eshleman was bearing the brunt.

## The wheel starts to turn

Zimbardo blamed the passive prisoners for the escalating abuse, just as Eshleman did, thereby suggesting the prisoners should have pushed back. More critically, according to Zimbardo, Eshleman created the prisoner environment.

Does that not imply he did so deliberately? Creating is hard to reconcile with some mysterious situational pressure that miraculously forced Eshleman to lash out at the prisoners. The idea that Zimbardo is painting an Escherian picture popped to mind. The creator is created while creating, which seems a handy Gordian knot. Is this a classic case of Zimbardo having his cake and eating it too?

Without question, Eshleman was part of the situation of the prisoners. But the critical question is who created Eshleman's environment? What forced him into a brutal character? Sadly, Ronson did not ask. If he had, he might have found out more.

The answer is, of course, the researching staff. The psychologists designed the mock prison and came up with the physical layout, the outfits, the rules, and the daily schedule. They also scripted every major scene.

For instance, take the staged grand opening scene with the Sunday arrests. The Paolo Alto police got the instruction to duplicate an exact arrest. Students were picked up from their housing, frisked, charged with a serious crime, handcuffed, and driven to the police station. There they were booked and fingerprinted. Then they were blindfolded and led into the basement prison. Inside, the prisoners had to strip and stand naked while being deloused with a spray. After delousing, the guards forced them to put on a prison gown with a number identifier. Henceforth, each prisoner was only referred to by number. Their right ankle was chained to remind the students day and night that they were in prison and unable to escape. Each prisoner was then placed in their respective cell and told to sit in absolute silence. [The humiliation had begun.](#)

The staff entirely scripted the arrest scene. In the dramatized opening, the student guards were no more than extras looking on and following instructions. Besides designing the prison simulation and staging the script, the psychologists staffed the top of the prison administration. The guards were the lowest rung of the ladder. At the bottom, these foot soldiers wielded no real power. Even warden Jaffe, head of the guards and staff member, saw himself as [low on the totem pole.](#)

Therefore leaving Eshleman's environment unanswered is crucial, particularly since the controversial prison study pivots around his eerie metamorphosis into an abusive guard. But what did the staff do to pressure Eshleman into his evil role? Nothing if we have to believe Zimbardo, who has always



been adamant the students acted on their own accord. His unyielding line of defense is Eshleman internalized his adopted character and afterward rationalized his abusive behavior. Did he?

### Making sense of some nonsense

The guards worked 8-hour shifts. In-between playacting for pay, the students were elsewhere. Outside the mock prison, they were normal boys drinking, smoking, studying, and fooling around with their girlfriends. By that logic, the loss of self-sense by any student seems unrealistic.

Not only did Eshleman leave the basement and the prison behind. The night shift started at 6 p.m. Following [the daily schedule](#), the guards organized dinner, work period, bathroom run, and a prisoner count. With lights out around 9.30 p.m., at least half the time Eshleman sat around chitchatting with his companions till released at 2 a.m. by the morning shift.

Additionally, Christina Maslach — the whistleblower and Zimbardo's fiancée — corroborated that Eshleman was himself outside the prison yard. On Thursday night, she met notorious John Wayne waiting to begin his shift around 6 p.m. [According to Maslach](#), he was charming, polite, and friendly. A really nice guy. When she purportedly saw him in action later, he had transformed into the brutal guard.

Did walking into the prison yard spontaneously alter Eshleman's identity? A difficult question to answer without corroboration. Luckily, I bumped into another participant who not that long ago stepped out of the darkness. Chuck Burton, the unsung sidekick who worked closest with Eshleman, broke the code of silence. [He revealed what went on](#) during the night shift.

Burton shared that Eshleman told him what he was trying to do on the first evening. Eshleman chose a persona and subsumed himself completely, the way any successful actor or actress does. However, not Burton. He made a conscious choice to follow suit. To him, the mental and verbal abuse was purely an act. Playing guard was a job assignment. And when the prisoners were asleep, they had personal conversations and shared zeitgeist stuff. Just two ordinary college guys hanging out and passing the time.

Without a doubt, Eshleman did not lose himself in his role. Moreover, Burton explains that the experimenters "set us up" into believing that the guards had the responsibility of creating a genuine prison ambiance without any threat of real physical violence. It opened the door to [unspeakable mental violence](#).

Burton's experience explains how the shorter, slighter person intentionally slipped so readily into his sidekick role. It also confirms what we already knew. Eshleman never internalized his abusive guard character to lose his grip on what he was doing. He would not be able to snap out of his act so readily when the prisoners went to sleep. After all, he was still in the same setting.

### No guard lost perspective

Eshleman and Burton were not the only guards playacting. [Guard John Loftus](#) told Zimbardo a year after the ending that he thought most of the time it was an experiment, "I got to do this thing, or else the experiment won't come off right."



Guard Terry Barnett, leader of the day shift, took a firm but fair stand. Unsurprisingly, many prisoners regarded him as the best guard. From the archives, it has become clear that Terry Barnett acted. He [wrote that he pretended](#) in a letter to Zimbardo three months after the experiment.

Guard [John Mark told warden Jaffe](#) he participated in some 20 psychology studies that were all pretty similar, so he knew from firsthand experience what was required. He never got into the act.

Guard Andre Cerovina on the morning shift highlights in a report that he took care to make sure he met expectations and feared that any niceness would eliminate him from the experiment. Since he was in it for the money, he damn well made [sure he met expectations](#) to stay in. And the list goes on. Every guard kept the perspective of being part of an experiment. They never lost sight of the act they were paid to perform.

Why then is Zimbardo relentlessly trying to sell that Eshleman lost himself when he took on an alter-ego? The reason for the internalizing ruse is not hard to fathom. The implausibility casts extreme doubt on Zimbardo dramatically getting lost in his role while running the mock prison. For that story to stick, he needs the scapegoat to take the fall. But whether the researchers and foremost Zimbardo got overpowered by the prison environment remains to be seen.

So was Eshleman the only one going haywire? Truthfully, we will never know for sure. Even if he lost himself in his role, the conclusion of good turning evil would never hold on his transformation alone. Ten other students playing guard resisted the seductive power of the situation.

### Spiraling out of... what exactly?

The opinion impasse between Zimbardo and Eshleman bickering about internalization and rationalization was leading me nowhere. I had hit a dead-end. Investigating voiced opinions had sprung the Korpi-hearsay trap. Following a line of inquiry about what infamous John Wayne has let out over the years and Zimbardo's reactions was what I vouched not to do.

With eyes wide open, I had fallen into the unverifiable anecdotal pitfall. I needed to find a new way forward by going back to [Zimbardo's response](#). Back to square one and fact-check key statements. What exactly did Zimbardo write about John Wayne? He wrote that one guard was intentionally playacting his role. I knew that was imprecise — every student playacted in some way or another. Every guard pretended to be Mr. Correction Officer.

Zimbardo went on to talk about an out-of-control Wild West cowboy. With each passing night, John Wayne became more creatively evil. On the scent — understanding the relevance of the reported brutality running out of control for the premature ending — I decided to focus on the escalation. What did despotic John Wayne do to those poor, suffering prisoners? Did he apply Prisoner of War torture tactics or CIA interrogation techniques? Was the Stanford psychology basement a house of horror?

I went through the available online videotapes in the [Stanford archive](#) to see all those awful deeds with my own eyes. Watching hours of footage revealed something astounding. There was no evil at all. No atrocities, let alone behavior remotely psychopathological. The recordings contain boring imagery of petty pranking, tedious physical exercises, and pedantic sing-alongs.



Only one guard consistently engages in dilettantish taunts, tooting corny lines and giving silly orders to which the prisoners generally giggly complied. And that was John Wayne.

The recorded interactions show a remarkable resemblance to hell week hazing. What I witnessed reminded me of my introduction and initiation period at the Royal Dutch Naval academy. For weeks on end, I was drilled and dehumanized by fellow cadets and Marines. They made me do hundreds of push-ups, wall-sits, and jumping jacks every day. Any refusal, rebuttal, or witty remark was instantly greeted with demeaning reprimands and the order to drop and give twenty. Punishment everyone welcomed with a smile since we knew it was just a phase to test our resolve and character.

What the guards did, including the night shift, is nothing compared to what bullies are up to on school grounds. I saw no evidence of extreme behavior, let alone that evil escalated. And I knew I was not wrong. Even [Eshleman recalls](#) that most of the stuff he had the prisoners do was pretty harmless, “You line people up, shout at them, get them to get down and do 20 push-ups, have one prisoner turn to another and shout out ‘I LOVE YOU!’ or something that would embarrass them.”

Eshleman claimed he did no more than [re-enact the hazing](#) he had endured the previous year. He got [his abusive ideas](#) from what upperclassmen had inflicted on him when he rushed Lambda Phi Alpha. To him, the prison study was a recorded imitation of the humiliation he suffered as pleb in a test of character to prove his fraternity worth.

Tim Bruinsma, who played the lawyer on Friday, confirmed the fraternity-like pranking in a letter to Zimbardo dated August 29, 1971. In the letter, he attested, “The harassment of your prisoners seemed to me more akin to fraternity or camp behavior than what I would expect to find in most prisons.”

## Camera rolling, and action

Zimbardo further highlights in his response that the night shift was not alone in excessively brutalizing the prisoners. Several guards on the other two shifts also regularly engaged in acts designed to humiliate the prisoners.

However, there were no other guards acting out. The only person starring in a humiliating role was Eshleman. According to the statistical results, his ‘tough and cruel’ shift was by far the most obnoxious, holding the prisoners under the gun using far more deprecation-insults toward the prisoners.

The picture of evil guards is [only one man](#) — Dave Eshleman. Richard Yacco (#1037) confirms this, “Eshleman seemed to be the one that was, well, at [some times sadistic](#).” Eshleman was handing out commands to his fellow guards and [ordering the prisoners around](#). The shorter sidekick, Chuck Burton, diligently executed his commands. He followed suit and emulated Eshleman, while the third guard Geoff Loftus remained very passive and silently loitered around. Loftus often just sat legs-crossed in the background at the end of the hall, in front of the entrance door, quietly observing.

Not only did Eshleman lead. Throughout the experiment, he was hamming it up for the researchers. He attested this during his [final evaluation to David Jaffe](#). The hamming is apparent in the video footage. Eshleman’s famous southern accent sounds phony, and the action feels artificial.



I was not the only one who thought that the staged play captured on video looked a bit hammy. Jon Ronson couldn't help thinking everybody was hamming it up. So he asked Zimbardo, who reacted firmly, "[Oh no, not at all.](#)"

Well, Eshleman was hamming, and he told [The New York Post why](#). He knew the staff was taking photos and filmed the prison yard. So he gave them a show for posterity. And his performance was well appreciated. At one point, Zimbardo came over and told him he was [doing a great job](#). No wonder Eshleman remembered that he thinks he might have felt a [desire to do an excellent job](#) for the boss.

## Action fizzled out

With each passing day, the guards behaved more relaxed. Glenn Gee (#3401) confirms this [during his debriefing](#). He professed that each day got easier. The guards became more pleasant and easy-going with every shift. Wednesday was relaxed. The guards were playing cards and didn't care what the prisoners did. On the question of what he would do if the staff switched the roles and whether he would be a brutal guard, Gee laughs, "The guards were not brutal but a pain in the ass."

Gee's experience — he was released on Wednesday — confirmed my suspicion. According to the study slideshow narration, the guards fell into their job more easily with each passing day. At times things were boring and at times interesting. By Thursday, [prison life was a matter of fact](#). Everyone slid into the daily routines, which they steadily grew more accustomed to, till [nothing out of the ordinary](#) happened anymore.

Clearly, the simulation was no more than boys horsing around to kill time, which follows logically [from the rules](#). Zimbardo gave the guards four directives during the guard orientation. There was to be no physical violence and no acts of racism. Further, it was strictly forbidden to enforce homosexuality or lock a prisoner up in solitary confinement indefinitely. The maximum allowed time in the Hole was one hour.

These guard rules foiled any brutality. Several prisoners confirmed in their evaluations that the guard threats were idle without the possibility of carrying them through. Understanding the guards bluffed when intimidating the prisoners made the situation benign. The non-violence rule was brutal on the reality of the simulation.

For sure, some guards broke the directives. One guard used his Billy club to smack a prisoner on the chin. The night shift locked Ramsey up in the Hole for more than one hour. But all in all, the guards were not harsh. They were foremost obnoxious. That is what you get when boys are confined to remain in a basement and have nothing to do.

Understandably, the guards got creative to amuse themselves. One example was the escalating duration of the prisoner counts. The initial perfunctory 10 minutes gradually changed into a [seemingly unending several hours](#). Now how do you reconcile being bored with doing evil? Perhaps by taking the notion of killing time too literally.

Why then did Zimbardo proclaim that the guards were thinking of more cruel and horrendous things each day? The reason is simple. Zimbardo needed the idea that the guards intensified their



aggressive behavior for the prison's sensational plotline. This way, he could easily justify terminating the simulation prematurely after six days because things got out of control.

But the evidence shows that the guard's misbehavior never spiraled out of control. Zimbardo did. "What we saw was frightening," he told the congressional hearing two months after the ending. "In less than a week, human values were suspended and the ugliest, most base, pathological side of human nature surfaced. We were horrified because we saw boys treat other boys as if they were despicable animals, taking pleasure in cruelty." What a vivid imagination.

## Phantasm of humping camels

Having seen how Zimbardo willingly makes things up, I wondered if he had a habit of taking creative liberties with the truth. [Rereading his response](#) on the issue of John Wayne playacting, I was dumbstruck by what he wrote. Zimbardo stressed that Eshleman began to think of himself as a puppeteer. In an extreme act of perversion, he ordered the prisoners to simulate sodomy. The seven prisoners were to think of themselves as female and male camels. Those designated as female had to bend over while the guards told the male camels to hump them doggy style. A video recording would prove the vile episode lasted nearly ten minutes, with all three guards shouting epithets and laughing hysterically.

Sodomy is not only shocking. In many countries, it is a criminal act, and in some even a capital offense. Undeniably, this had to be the most offensive scene of the study, a mere few hours before Zimbardo pulled the plug. However, by this time, I had gone through most of the online study files. Never did I notice anything remotely homoerotic.

Therefore, for me out of the blue, Zimbardo pulled enforced simulated camel humping on the last night out of the hat. How could I have missed something so appalling? Moreover, one of the few directives the guards received during guard orientation was [no homosexual acts](#). Imagine how confounded I was to read the guards infringed with the staff onlooking.

I went back on my tracks and rechecked everything I could find on the chaotic last night. I first verified the three papers published back in 1973. They contain nothing of any sexual nature. Indeed, the papers stress that homoeroticism was strictly against one of the few formal guard rules.

The [slideshow narration](#) is silent on the subject, too, just as warden [Jaffe's log and reflections](#). There is no mention of any sordid acts in the [video notes](#) of that last night. I could not find any footage of photos of camel humping in the publicly available files. Craig Haney's [video analysis](#) reports no camel humping. Simulated sexual acts were not a scoring category in the results. So what is going on here?

None the wiser, I knew I had to get to the bottom of the buggery. The earliest reference to sodomy I dug up was [Zarembo's 2004 article](#). However, he gave a radically different account. He wrote that John Wayne asked two inmates to simulate sodomy, although he gave up when they refused. The other guards said nothing.

Predictably, the topic of Stanford sodomy surfaced around the same time the U.S. guards ordered Iraqi prisoners to perform simulated fellatio and buggery in the Abu Ghraib prison. Is this an attempt to artificially connect a mock prison with shocking worldly events? Is Zimbardo trying to take full advantage of astounding occurrences for the sake of a more thrilling telling of his tale?



Notwithstanding, Zaremba's account is totally different. Therefore I searched for verification. In Jon Ronson's 2015 interview on the question of whether Eshleman tried to do something good, Zimbardo replied that everything he created was really off the charts. He forced the prisoners to simulate sodomy, "[Bend over. You're a camel. Hump him.](#)"

Baffled that I missed this the first time round, I looked up the scene in Zimbardo's 2007 book [The Lucifer Effect](#). Zimbardo dramatically details that John Wayne, after a brief consultation with his sidekick, devised a new sexual game. Three prisoners will be female camels and the other two males, who have to stand behind the female camels and hump them. Although their bodies never touch, the helpless prisoners are simulating sodomy by making thrusting motions of humping.

So there it was — a clear description of simulated sodomy. Still, I just knew the sex nightmare had to be dreamed up. The determining discrepancy between Zimbardo's response and his book is the number of prisoners. By Thursday night, there were only five prisoners left. The staff had released five and brought in Ramsey (#416) on Wednesday night. Yet, Ramsey spent most of the evening in the Hole. Therefore, with only four prisoners in the prison yard, there could never have been five, let alone the seven Zimbardo mentioned in his response, engaged in anything.

Critically, what took place on Thursday night? There is a video recording where Eshleman and sidekick Burton pedantically pressure Ramsey (#416) to eat his sausages. Besides bullying Ramsey, the video shows four prisoners willingly engage in leapfrog and having fun. After a few pitiful hops, two prisoners are ordered to do it right. Burton quickly ends the game because they were having too much fun and making a nuisance. The leapfrog spectacle is a pathetic charade and nothing like simulated sodomy with hysterical guards shouting on. [Watch it yourself](#).

I also went over the [video transcript](#). It does contain sexual insinuations. The transcribers added the comment that the leapfrog looked homoerotic. Further, when Ramsey refused to eat his sausages, Eshleman threatens to cram them up his ass.

Eshleman also refers to how dogs do it. He asked a prisoner, why do you not make like a dog? The prisoner replied that it would be obscene and refused. I guess this is where the order Zimbardo mentioned in his response to do it doggy style comes from. Except Zimbardo got the facts conveniently mixed up. Or perhaps this is also a case of fading memory.

Notwithstanding, it is plain that no prisoner was forced to play a sexual game from the available files. It appears Zimbardo's latched on live events when the opportunity knocked to introduce simulated sodomy into the Stanford Prison narrative. He also did not shy from making preposterous statements, like the terrible things my guards did to their prisoners were comparable to [the horrors inflicted on the Iraqi detainees](#).

### Dreadful video doctoring

Knowing he made up the simulated sodomy scene, I wondered if Zimbardo had concocted other shocking events to spice his study of prison life story. Although I found this idea reprehensible at first, given that fabricating data is a cardinal sin in science, someone who makes up camel humping would not shy away from producing other fictional drama to gain attention.



Not only Zimbardo's sodomy fabrication bugged me. The video transcribers made unfounded inferences that innocent leapfrogs looked homoerotic. Why did they insinuate profanity and refrain from reporting the facts? How often had they strayed from the verbatim? It was a clear warning to fact-check the origin of every shocking statement.

That brought me back to figure out what on earth occurred on Wednesday night. Remember, I mentioned before that nothing happened during the night shift because, strangely enough, I still hadn't found anything. No matter how hard I looked, I could not dig up separate files for Wednesday. All the online accessible files combine days 4 and 5.

In truth, there is a [day 4 log](#) that is password protected. The access is restricted. At first, I found the limited access a little odd but paid little note. That quickly changed when I scrutinized the combined transcripts and video recordings to determine what stunts the night shift pulled on Wednesday.

Going through the combined day 4 and 5 transcript, I could not distinguish between the two days. It was impossible to determine what happened on Wednesday and what on Thursday. I drew a blank. Then I returned to the day four video recordings. [Reel #26](#) contains the footage.

Fast-forward to the relevant part. On the floor sits prisoner Paul Baran (#5704) with a towel around his head, and six prisoners are standing. This is clearly footage from Wednesday night. You can hear Eshleman ordering Baran to sing Amazing Grace. The audio appears to continue till suddenly, at minute 16.15, the video image transposes and blurs. A split second later, the picture clears with five prisoners standing. Baran is without a towel.

I was stunned to see the sudden break, expecting to be looking at authentic imagery. But I was watching an orchestrated remastering. So I checked the days 4 and 5 video notes.<sup>i</sup> There is no mention of a break. Unmistakably, video and audio of Wednesday night are mixed in with Thursday night. The researchers doctored the Wednesday night-shift recording and matched the accompanying notes with the imagery.

Why were Thursday's recordings intermixed with Wednesday's this way? A bodged job seems out of the question. The only reason for the overt editing that makes some sense is that nothing noteworthy occurred on relaxing Wednesday. And this had to be masked not to harm the narrative.

Furthermore, the remastering even threw Zimbardo off balance. Incomprehensibly, he labeled chapter six in *The Lucifer Effect*: Wednesday is spiraling out of control. This chapter contains the scenes with the everything Ramsey (#416) endured, and visiting hours. Except that these events took place on Thursday!

More importantly, how many of the transcripts and recordings are contentious? I had no clue when I uncovered the forgery, but I grasped that I had to double-check everything. Realizing the potential implications, I began to comprehend the mammoth task ahead to get to the bottom. And I was just getting started.

## The puppet master confesses

The remastered video set me on the trail of films fudging the truth. I stumbled on the compilation of crucial cut scenes called [The Stanford Prison Experience](#). Late November 1971, NBC aired the 19-minute advert in the TV show Chronolog to promote the experiment.



In the video, Eshleman reveals that he was doing a little experiment to see what kind of verbal abuse people would take before they say, “Hey, knock it off?” To his surprise, no one objected or said anything to stop him. It shocked him nobody questioned his authority at all.

In 2019, Zimbardo did a [podcast with Guy Kawasaki](#), who asked him about his Stanford Prison Experiment. After opening with trivialities, Zimbardo stammers. He flusteredly admits that he ran a particular little experiment on the side to see what kind of verbal abuse people can take before they start lashing back. To his surprise, nobody said anything to stop the abusers.

Instantly, I recognized the telltale sign. Zimbardo had put his foot in his mouth. In nearly the exact wording, he restates Eshleman in the NBC video. Except now, it was his secret experiment, not Eshleman’s. And no, this is not a little slip of the tongue or a harmless fib. Confessing the covert investigation to the limits of the abuse people will endure is pivotal to Zimbardo's control of Eshleman.

So here is the cruncher. Eshleman playacted by proxy!

Finally, the cat is out of the bag.

Zimbardo and Eshleman colluded in claiming to have a little secret experiment. They ran a diabolical plan to assert that John Wayne attempted to push the poor prisoners to their limits. Eshleman was an instrument under the control of master puppeteer Zimbardo, hired as the lead actor to promote the brutal prison pretense. He hammed in front of the camera to provide his principal with the dramatic scenes needed to sell the full impact in the NBC video production.

Claiming to run a covert experiment together sheds blinding light. It explains why Eshleman knew that the camera was recording his performance for future generations. That is why he hammed his act. Moreover, it also explains why Zimbardo could maintain that events spiraled out of control to go out with a bang. He used Eshleman to create a credible storyline by proclaiming that John Wayne pushed the envelope without anyone stopping him. The key to Eshleman’s role was to assist in preaching the Zimbardian gospel, forging the case of how good turns evil.

## Receiving pushbacks every shift

I needed to verify one last thing to substantiate my proxy claim. While running the secret experiment, Eshleman has been resolute that he never met resistance when he pushed the prisoners to see who would snap. Yet is this true? Did nobody tell him to knock it off?

Undoubtedly, the staff never stopped him. [Warden Jaffe revealed](#) the researchers only intervened once. Curt Banks got Ramsey (#416) out of the Hole late Thursday night. I had already found no evidence of any guard raising objections. Burton readily followed his lead.

How about the prisoners? Did they tell him to knock it off? Not according to Eshleman. But let’s put his assertion to the test. Since nothing noteworthy happened on the first night, let me skip to Monday night. From the moment Eshleman started his shift, Douglas Korpi confronted him and his fellow guards. Korpi told Eshleman several times to fuck off. He was not putting up with his shit. Eshleman even admitted in his debrief that he had a big problem with Korpi treating him with disrespect.



On Tuesday, the night shift started with dinner. After dinner, parents and friends came around 7 p.m. for visiting hours. Although the setting was tendentious for Zimbardo's transformation into the superintendent, the night shift played second fiddle. Around 9 p.m., everyone fled to the fifth floor, where the guards played cards till midnight. When they returned to the basement around 12.30 a.m., Eshleman had a beef with two prisoners. They had handcuffed themselves together and hid the key in the vent of Cell #1. Despite applying pressure, the night shift could not get the prisoners to reveal the key's whereabouts. In the end, the staff called the Stanford police to remove the cuffs.

What else occurred on Tuesday? Stuart Levin (#819) told Eshleman to get lost. Informer David Gorchoff (#8612-2) also played a defiant role. Although he was supposed to spy on the prisoners, he acted as a rebel with a cause. He gave the guards a run for their money and told them to fuck off several times. But most of the time, when he was about to say to a guard to get lost, they backed down.

On Wednesday, nothing out of the ordinary took place between Eshleman and the prisoners. The remastered tape attests to an uneventful evening. This brings me to the climax on Thursday. At dinner, Eshleman desperately tried to force [Clay Ramsey \(#416\) to eat his sausages](#). Ramsey kept on refusing. He was on a hunger strike.

No matter what Eshleman and his sidekick threatened to do, Ramsey did not budge. Deeply frustrated, Eshleman locked him up in solitary confinement for refusing to obey. And Ramsey was not the only prisoner to resist Eshleman. Eshleman ordered Sarge Williams (#2093) to do it like a dog. Williams replied that it would be obscene. Eshleman countered that his face is also a bit obscene.

A few minutes later, Eshleman ordered Williams to tell Ramsey in the Hole that he will kick his ass. Williams refused to use profane words toward another human being. Eshleman tried to coerce Williams to comply, but Williams remained steadfast and refused. Next, Eshleman wanted to make him say the word bastard. Williams again politely declined. He cannot say it.

Eshleman then had another go at Williams, "What if I told you to come over here and hit your friend #5704 in the face as hard as you could?" Williams once more stands his ground, "I am afraid I would [be unable to do that](#), Mr. Correctional Officer."

Eshleman fails the test. His claim that he never got pushed back is bunk. John Wayne encountered plenty of rebuffs, especially when he attempted to cross the line. The list of rebuttals only pales in comparison to the absence of escalating brutality. In reality, the tyranny ebbed away.

## Logic in remission

Bit by bit, the pieces of the meandering prison mystery are at long last beginning to fall into place. That all started when Eshleman shared his intentional playacting with the world back in 2004. Zimbardo had to spin a plausible explanation. One that a casual recipient would accept from an authority. He came up with rationalizing after the fact — a subterfuge to cloak his personal involvement in running a secret experiment and pulling Eshleman's string as puppet master.

Scrutinizing the facts revealed that David Eshleman planned and prepared the stage act he willfully immersed himself in and treated the guard shifts as improv theater. His brutality did not spiral out of control, rather the reverse. In fact, Wednesday was so dull that video recordings and transcripts were



doctored to mask the dreariness. The remastering even confused Zimbardo, who attributed Thursday's events to Wednesday in his book *The Lucifer Effect*.

John Wayne was only hamming a hazing imitation for posterity. On numerous occasions, prisoners refused his orders or outright told him to get lost. Most notably, Eshleman did not force the prisoners to engage in simulated sodomy. Zimbardo made up the camel humping around the time the U.S guards forced Iraqi prisoners to simulate sodomy in the Abu Ghraib prison.

The journey into the unfolding landscape continues to get the definitive answer to what went on in the mock prison. Next to take the stage is John Mark. He was David Eshleman's counterpart. Mark played arguably the kindest guard who refused to get into the action. Part 3 of *The Final Reckoning of the Stanford Prison Saga* zooms in on what Mark revealed to open everyone's eyes. Did you like what scrutinizing Eshleman's role brought to the surface thus far? Then you will love what is coming next. You can read it all in *John Mark's insubordination*.

If you want to read more of my articles, feel free to visit [GraspYourself](http://www.contraview.com) on [www.contraview.com](http://www.contraview.com).

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<sup>i</sup> Video notes, tapes 5 and 6. Page 9 onwards. <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/spe/catalog/jv084yp2030>