

TORONTO

11 min

Crystal palace

Doing Tina is so much fun, everything else is a pain

By Shaun Proulx

Nov 24, 2004, 7:00 PM EST

You can snort bumps of it as powder, or put little shards of it in a glass pipe, heat it and smoke the vapours. Or you can dissolve a few crystals in water and inject the fluid up your butt. You can put a little dab of it on a moist finger and bootie-bump it – if you don't mind burning the inside of your ass. There are oh-so many ways to ingest crystal methamphetamine.

It's been 45 minutes since I snorted my first bump, which shot up my nose with such a forceful burning sting my right eye welled a massive tear; I abruptly stood up from my chair to do a little epileptic dance. But I'm fine a couple minutes later. Fast forward to right now: as I type this a nice warm rush is fluid in my body.

On my desk is a yellow jewellery envelope filled with about a dozen tiny crystals you'd need tweezers to pick up, and one larger chunk. For sixty bucks it doesn't look like much, but a little goes a long way, baby. I'm starting to feel high; before my bump I felt totally knackered. Now: Motherfuck.

* * *

In the party boys' world, a little something called crystal meth is currently reigning supreme. If gay men are known for promiscuity, then crystal is the quintessential gay drug: finished with one cock, you crave another and another and another; crystal lets users have the most mind-blowing sex of their lives, even with men they'd never normally be attracted to.

Step into the world of crystal meth – also known as Tina, hydro, crank or ice – and enjoy boundless energy, increased sensation, horniness, killer confidence and



IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF

Crystal gives you a sexy high, and a crash that can leave you doubting your self-worth.

Credit: Tony Fong

zero sexual inhibitions. The problem is that outside crystal meth land, reality can end up seeming so inhospitable you just want to retreat back into Tina's version, where it's okay not to eat or otherwise take care of yourself. Crystal meth is the perfect party and play (P 'n' P) drug – except that the meth men I talked to have a tough time maintaining a use that's purely recreational.

"I could do Tina all the time, easy," says Tom, 39 (all of the users and ex-users I talked for this piece asked that I not use their real names). "I don't have a lot of sex, but when I go into a horny phase and I'm in the mood, I start thinking about Tina."

Tom works for himself. Though he tries to limit his use to every other month, if he has spare time in his schedule he can find

himself doing back-to-back weekend binges.

"I go to the baths usually, wherever I think there will be wild sex," Tom says. "I love to jerk off on Tina. I can't keep my hands off my dick. For me it's all about the cock, and on Tina you outlast everyone at the baths. But eventually you get so horny you'll pick from the slimmest of pickings, even if it's someone I'd never fuck. Drop that towel and show me a big dick and you're in. The bigger the better."

The super-charge, the intensity, the buzz surpassing coke's, E's and the other usual suspects', have earned Tina her enthusiastic reception since arriving in gay Toronto several years ago. Crystal meth: the number-one seller for three out of three busy gay-oriented downtown drug dealers I spoke with.

"I can have sex without it," says 50-something Mitch, who uses crystal meth each weekend. "But when you're hooking up with guys looking to play off the 'net or even the phone lines, 99 percent of the time P 'n' P is part of the package." Forget asking about stats or sexual preferences – what's the point in learning all that info only to find out the guy isn't into enhancing the experience with drugs?

Just like Cher, Tina's endless world tour extends well beyond Toronto. The World Health Organization estimates 34 million people around the globe use meth daily. Tina gigs in unexpected places. Witness a recent documentary on road workers in Alberta who can't get enough, or

the headlines not long ago in mainstream media of abundant use by British Columbia teenagers. But partly because of her sexual attributes, she's found an extraordinary fan base with gay men.

"Oh, the things gay men do in pursuit of great sex," smiles Rod, 35, an ex-meth user who's been off the drug for more than a year, not counting a couple of slips. "Sex is gonna be crazy and twisted and sick and perverted when you do Tina, and you know that when you do it."

"I know that Tina very well," adds Simon, 36, who uses it about once a month. "You have this incredible 14-hour fucking session that's so unbelievably hot and raunchy one weekend, so that when the next one rolls around, it's like, 'It's the weekend again – let's get some more.'"

* * *

I'm upbeat and all's right with the world. I feel glad, like Christmastime was upon us. I shake out a couple of small crystals, sandwich them between two business cards and roll a paperweight over it to crush it to fine powder. Just a moment of effort but in it I feel impatience: just fix the bump already. I draw the powder into a tiny little lump, take a small straw. Toot!

A little like someone's hit my fast-forward button, I am on the go. I don't like stopping a shag to search for something, so before the fun begins I am hyper-organizing: two bottles of water on either side of the bed, fresh poppers from the freezer, toys, lube. Roll a few joints. My eyes suddenly feel sensitive to the light so I turn off my lamps and light candles in the bathroom, bedroom and in the living room, where raunchy porn plays, sound muted. I crave dick.

My playmate for the night is chilling, wearing only a jockstrap and boots. He reaches for a glass pipe and lights a flame beneath it. After taking a big puff he passes the pipe to me. We kiss and I pass smoke from my mouth to his. He is so sexy to me and my mind is on overdrive with everything I know we'll do together and I am entirely in the moment, focussed on nothing but.

I need some gum, he informs me, and then I notice I'm grinding my jaw incessantly, a common crystal side effect. I grab chewing gum for both of us, as I'm not the only one. I look in a mirror. By now we've dosed a fair amount. My pupils are so dilated my eyes are black.

* * *

South of the border, the use of crystal meth in gay communities has been called a crisis, with Los Angeles, then San Francisco and Seattle crying out about the self-destruction of gay communities. In New York, federal prosecutors just unveiled posters featuring the names and mug shots of alleged crystal meth dealers in order to raise awareness about the drug.

Tina is said by ex-users to be brutally addictive. The United Foundation For AIDS estimates that 42 percent of first-time users report the desire to use meth again, with an estimated 84 percent of second-time users beginning a pattern of use.

Rod, 44, an ex-user, tried the drug overseas in 1994, and soon found himself spending \$1,000 each weekend on it here in Toronto, financed by a well-paying job he eventually lost. Two -full-day sessions at bathhouses were the norm.

"I would be high, but dehydrated and hungry and I'd do nothing to take care of myself. I would have sex with people I normally never

would. I was focussed on uninhibited pig sex and nothing else."

Rod now deliberately keeps his weekends packed with social plans so that he's always too busy to be tempted. Friday and Saturday nights remain big triggers.

"I take sleeping pills so I can just go to bed and sleep," says Rod. "Every morning I wake up, I congratulate myself on not going out and doing Tina."

For Rod, the days between his meth use became more and more messy. He often couldn't put himself back together for work Monday morning.

"I was rendered soulless. I lost hope. Nothing matters, nothing phases you. I wouldn't stay in touch with my family, I didn't make rent, I went for days with very little water and I would skip taking my HIV meds. There isn't one person I care about that I didn't let down in some way. I was AWOL from my own life."

Crystal meth gets its foothold in the party scene almost furtively. Ecstasy is often laced with Tina; E users often get their first dose of meth that way. According to the AIDS Committee Of Toronto (ACT), a recent laboratory analysis of 94 pills in Vancouver indicated that 47 percent of them contained methamphetamine. A drug can affect or addict any person. But Tina's special relationship with gay men, a population where HIV issues remain paramount, raises questions about its effect on sexual behaviour.

In fact, many health agencies south of the border blame Tina for increases in HIV rates among gay men. Ads in bus shelters in the heart of Chelsea in New York

read: "Huge Sale! Buy crystal, get HIV free." New York's queer-focussed Callen-Lorde Community Health Centre claims two-thirds of clients testing positive since June 2003 say crystal meth was a component in their becoming positive.

Last month, San Francisco's Department Of Public Health's HIV Prevention Program launched a confrontational media campaign entitled Crystal Mess, aimed at educating gay men about HIV infections associated with crystal. The campaign claims that gay men who use crystal are 400 percent more likely to become infected with HIV than nonusers. "I buy that," says Simon, 36, who is HIV-positive himself. "Whatever it has taken you to stay sexually active and HIV-negative for up to 20 years, crystal meth takes all that away immediately and makes your priorities cock and cum. At least that's what happened to me. Safe sex wasn't the least bit important as much as getting raw cock up my ass. The desire for that is beyond comprehension until you're on Tina."

ACT hasn't yet sounded alarm bells around crystal, but has been researching to see if there is a connection between barebacking and Tina.

"We do not know how prevalent the current use of methamphetamine is in Toronto," says Nick Boyce, ACT's Gay Men's Harm Reduction Coordinator. "It is being used, but to what extent we are unsure."

ACT is however hosting a forum on crystal meth on Mon, Nov 29 and has partnered with GayGuideToronto.com (an on-line magazine I publish) to create InterACTion, an anonymous on-line forum to discuss hot button issues such as crystal meth.

Following a year of constant use, Mark, 29 and HIV-negative, stopped using meth two years ago.

"I knew it was a volatile drug not to mess around with," says Mark. "I had tried it once before, at a bathhouse in Vancouver. But I got crystal dick, and as a top, that didn't work very well."

Crystal dick is first cousin to coke dick. Both Tina and blow are known to impair erections. In fact, some strict tops find themselves becoming bottoms not just from the Tina-inflamed desire to get fucked, but because being a top can be impossible after a significant amount of Tina is ingested. Some men pop a Viagra when they use Tina – there's little research on the effects of this combo – or inject a triple mix of three erectile drugs directly into their cocks.

Clearly Tina is full of contradictions. She makes you feel sexual, but impairs your sexual ability, turns tops into bottoms and can affect judgment. But it can be hard to predict how she'll affect a particular person. For example, Mark didn't feel he took any more sexual risks on crystal.

"My brain always edits, no matter how high I get," he says. "I would never have unsafe sex; although it dawned on me a few times I could have been raped. What I did when I was on crystal was pedestrian, sexually. I was too high to care about sex anymore."

But it's not just a possible higher risk of contracting HIV that has health authorities worried. Seattle's NEON (Needle And Sex Education Outreach Network) is among the many publishers of materials who cite that, amongst other perceived problems, crystal causes serious damage in your mouth, shrinking blood vessels so that they can't carry enough blood to feed your teeth and gums

properly, resulting in tooth decay, which can be compounded by the dry mouth it also causes.

Some studies, including the first high-resolution brain mapping of Tina addicts at the University Of California, Los Angeles, claim that crystal meth completely destroys brain cells involved in reward, mood, emotion and making new memories. Other claims about the dangers of meth, cited by organizations such as United Foundation For AIDS, include the risk of coma, respiratory illness, violent episodes, stroke, paranoia, psychotic episodes and suicidal tendencies.

* * *

My play pal and I have been at it for I don't know how long, taking turns fucking each other anywhere and everywhere. Over the toilet, the bathtub, the couch, on the floor, on the bed, on the table. Popping Viagra and wearing cockrings when crystal dick threatens. When and if we try to rest for a bit we are both – within moments – seized by the need to keep fucking and so we do, despite breathlessness as though we've run a marathon. I won't notice until much later, but the two large bottles of water I so diligently put out for us to drink remain untouched. When I happen to look up as we screw in the living room, I see outside the light changing. It's dawn, even though it feels like we only just got started. But we continue to fuck like whores short on rent at month-end. Neither of us have cum.

* * *

Mark finally stopped using Tina after a binge that left him without sleep for three nights. "I went to school, looking like hell, feeling I couldn't do anything. And the crash. One of the worst times of my life." Simon agrees that when Tina leaves, life can look pretty bleak.

"I have to remind myself before I take Tina that when it's over, I will be all right. When I run out, I don't buy more because I don't have a lot of cash for it. But the fact that it's over starts a depression and the fact that I haven't eaten in more than 24 hours or had any sleep, sometimes for two full nights, just makes it worse." Simon finds even putting food in his mouth for a couple of days after a trip on Tina to be a tough thing, and often takes a sleeping pill to override still being high.

"I don't care about sleep when I'm high and certainly don't feel like I want to. As for food, I can't eat any even if I want to and if I force myself to even have a smoothie I find it tastes like I'm drinking shit. My whole comedown is like that. It's too awful to describe, you just have to experience it."

* * *

Tina has left the building and so has my fuckbuddy. Our virtually nonstop cumless sex session lasted 17 hours. A few hours ago we had to have showers because the chemical body odour we were both producing was getting revolting; my face was oily and gross-looking, too. Plus I had to take my dogs out and couldn't go out in public looking the way I did and reeking of sex. I was paranoid

about running into neighbours. I felt like my entire body was trembling, although it was not.

I'm still wired, I could still fuck, but my body is aching. I'm stiff and my lips are raw and chapped, I have a rash and my jaw kills from grinding and grinding all night long. My eyes are severely stinging, too. Having spent the whole night awake, they are begging to shut, can't take any light anymore. I lie on my bed, close my eyes, hyper alert. I touch my dick. It's totally limp, red, raw and sore as hell from mega-usage.

The next day I don't want to get out of bed, so don't. I jerk off because I can now and the release is incredible. I am in this state for days, during which time I conclude nothing in my life matters. No one would miss me if I was gone, what I'm doing with my life has no meaning. It takes everything I have to remind myself that this is only a comedown. But it takes until the next week for me to wake up beginning to feel happy, normal.

* * *

"Being off crystal I've learned different things. I've learned to cum," says Rod. "I never could on that drug. But when I go out to have sex at the tubs, I still have to say to myself: you don't have to

have sex with 10 guys; you can go home just after one guy. When I was on Tina, it was all about getting as much cock as I could. One would never have satisfied me. But if you think every day without Tina gets better or easier, you're wrong. It doesn't. I'd take some now if you offered."

Despite the drastic steps he has taken, which also include weekly therapy and plenty of self-analysis, Rod says he's conscious of his desire for Tina all the time, and even has fantasies of escaping to Berlin or Amsterdam or Palm Springs for a dirty crystal-meth fuelled weekend where nobody knows him.

"And I think one day I probably will. I just can't say never. But for the time being, at least I feel like I'm living a real life."

Shaun Proulx can be reached at shaunproulx@hotmail.com

Original hyperlink:
<https://www.dailyxtra.com/crystal-palace-3-40611>