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Pamela hit the nail on the head - I was cultivating my frighteningly extensive muscle memory. My basal ganglia had gone from an unicyclist to a motocross daredevil. That might sound cool right up until you find yourself in conversation with Wieslawa of House Živa while strapping on a pair of hip holstered Smith & Wesson Model 29s you can't even recall picking up in the armory.

"You are an American cowboy?" she asked as she gave the underside of my chin a sexy fingernail scrape.

"What?" I blinked. I looked down and, low and behold, I was packing two leg-irons, Joel McCrea-style. Historical shootists would never wear the kind of rig I had put on, much less real cowboys. Naomi came up.[www.Nov8Oworm.com](#)

"What are you doing?" she scolded me.

"This!" I declared. I drew and fired both guns, quick-draw/rapid-fire.

Had I torn out the head, or heart, of the target it would have been a slice of sweet for the bitter aftertaste in my mouth - you know, the 'doing a task without a clue what you are doing' feeling.

I did manage to hit the paper with eleven bullets, nine scored points and two were possibly fatal. Had I foregone my normal lethal accoutrements? No. My body was okay with lugging four pistols, a Personal Defense weapon and a combat shotgun around... Oh, four tomahawks and two knives as well. Yeah, anyone who knew me could tell something was wrong.

In a normal society, a man feeling it natural to carry enough hardware to equip a microscopic guerilla army gets committed. In urban Amazonia? How did I balance the weight? Could I swim with that ironmongery? They tossed me in the pool, and after a few seconds of indecision, I decided on dropping the UMP-40, struggled out of my body armor then retrieved the USAS-12 before it hit bottom. (With the 'US' in the name, it just had to be made in South Korea).

I did it because swimming with two 'bigger than a pistol' sized weapons is a real bitch, plus I had my armored jacket on, which turned swimming with weights on into trying to tread water in pudding. I was polite enough to admit that my downward progress when they dumped me off the diving board... the 7.5 meter one - they claimed to be looking for authenticity - was halted by hitting the bottom of the pool, not buoyancy.

Since that was so much fun, we - I mean the SD training staff - decided on a few more near suicidal tests to subject me to. I didn't die. After 37 straight hours of activity at home and Havenstone, I was back in New Jersey. The hospital's specialists had good news. My brain cyclones were developing definitive patterns.

To top that off, my 'me' brain patterns were increasing their activity. The experts hedged their bets, but did suggest that my brain was counter-acting some of the alternate neuro-electrical surges. Plus they now had both a baseline and advanced model to work with. The rest was bad. The 'good' was also 'bad'. The last thing my cerebellum need was an escalating brain race.

My 'native' activity increasing was heaping scorn on the basic neural activity that made me 'normal'. The other two patterns: worse news. They were organizing, re-mapping old areas and mapping new ones. My temperature was acceptably elevated, my brain wasn't oozing out of my ears and, due to general hygiene, I didn't have a zombie odor.

On the third day they stumbled upon a bizarreness to add to the menagerie at the top floor. There was a submerged fourth pattern they hadn't spotted before. How had this escaped their hawk-like scrutiny? Pattern four put sections of my brain to sleep. By using micro-regulation, it was tapping the hypothalamus to keep me cool as well.

To make sure no single pathway over-extended its chemical stockpiles, large sections shut down for short, but intense breaks and I kept cruising along okay. The down side being this fourth active agent could possible cause me to lose the ability to speak. Or shoot a gun, or even stand-up, walk, or crawl. Their best theory was that pattern four was finally emerging from the backfield for that very reason - it was figuring out what functions were necessary given certain stimuli.

So, if I lay down in a dark room and shut my eyes, in theory it would learn to shut down my optic and visual memory sections of the brain. They still wanted to cut open my head. I kept on refusing. Back to me and my pissed off driver; languages weren't the only things I was picking up.

My fighting styles were increasing in detail and depth. I wasn't going to make Pamela tap out anytime soon, but my knowledge of martial movements was increasing. I still couldn't pull off the moves, but my brain was screaming the directions and my muscles were trying - to remember things they'd never done before.[www.nov8worm.com](#)

I compared it to learning the foxtrot, then not putting a foot on the dance floor for thirty years. I was being called on to sway to the music once more and my body was struggling to meet the challenge it should have already mastered once. So, when the Amazon began winding up her kick, my brain began kicking into overdrive.[www.nov8worm.com](#)

Boxing really isn't the martial arts style for dealing with kicks. Brazilian jujutsu is good, but there are others that do it even better. Added to that, I had been working against the unique Amazon martial art for a while. Every factor, but one, was working against her. Her sole advantage was initiative and she threw that away at the start.

She looked furious at me and that meant only two things - a slap, or a kick. I couldn't stop her from kicking me. I could block it and launch my counterattack. My left leg came up, bent at the knee and leaned into the kick, stopping it before she could building up enough force to really hurt. My right hand lashed down, not out. Her arms were prepared to divert torso and head blows.

My hand gripped her raised, right thigh and used that to throw her to the ground with me on top. Amazon striking power was primarily in the legs. The arms were more for blocks, locks and diversions. Upper body strength became critical. She couldn't keep me at bay. I grappled, twisted her left arm behind her back then began beating her head against the hard packed dirt floor.

Situational awareness caused me to summersault off her, twisting back to my feet facing what had been coming up behind me - Caprica and two of her buddies. The woman I had just thrashed pushed up onto all fours, shaking her scattered wits into some cohesive instrument.

"What happened here?" Caprica menaced.

"We..."

"Shut up!" Caprica snarled at me. "I wasn't talking to you." The other woman didn't respond until she was back on her feet. Her forehead was bruised, but not bleeding.

"This jackalope climbed onto the hood of our jeep and stood there for nearly two minutes... while I was driving," her gaze travelled from her leader to me.[www.Nov8worm.com](#)

"Why?" Caprica was clearly addressing me. She'd already stolen her one honest answer for this trip. She shouldn't have been so greedy.

"It seemed like a fun thing to try," I grinned.

"You could have been badly injured, or killed," Caprica's eyes narrowed.

"That's what made it fun," I kept up the positive vibes. Pause.

"What you did was wrong," Caprica glared. Hierarchy versus democratic discourse. Had she behaved more like an impartial leader and less like a biased vice principle, I would have found it easier to kowtow.

"Why?" I beamed mischievous joy. "You didn't tell me not to do it. In fact, you've been about as useful as a stuffed moose head in a bazooka fight. Your pompous presumptiveness may resonate with the locals here, but we independent-minded women are less than impressed." That meant I was an Amazon, but not one that worked for her. Status: guest.

Had Caprica accepted my place - allowed me to explain my actions instead of jumping on the side of one of her own - she wouldn't be facing a showdown now. Had she ask me to pitch in; say 'take this 20 cm stick and go out and locate some landmines', off I would have gone. Amazons were team players.

I was an unassigned Amazon and it was her right as a higher ranking member to give me a task I had some chance of completing, no matter how slim the odds. The proper Amazon way was to ask who swung at who first. Since the driver and I were equals, she didn't have the right to discipline me. She attacked without good reason and I had defended myself.

I hadn't endangered her life, or that of her other passengers and none of them were complaining. No, the driver lashed out first because I was a guy. The leader backed her because I was a guy. Problem was, I didn't want to be treated as a guy. I wanted to be treated as an Amazon. Amazons do not walk around hitting other Amazons.

That way lies madness, as Caprica was about to figure out. Caprica putting her FN P90 aside so she and I could fight was not okay. I hadn't been charged with an infraction, given an opportunity to explain myself before Caprica rendered her judgment. In theory, I could appeal. That would have labeled me as a crybaby Jerk though.

The closest two 'Campies' joining in was a colossal mistake. It was the whole Amazon gang up thing and in their heart of hearts, they saw me as nothing but a male. Caprica should have come at me alone; that would have been acceptable. By ganging up on me, all bets were off. Three on one odds looked good to the Camp crowd. Three on two was a disaster.

Why? That loyalty bonding went both ways and I hadn't come alone. Pamela took pride in her role as an educator. She felt obliged to let Caprica get my measure as a warrior. But, if someone was going to get an embarrassing beat down, it wasn't going to be me. Pamela believed it to be so and hers was the mind that mattered most.

I was pretty sure the first back up dancer didn't even know what hit her. Pamela was very sneaky and silent. Caprica was busy matching me blow for counterblow; driving me back. She had more experience, was better trained, accustomed to the dry heat and used to fighting on rough, uneven surfaces. I was bigger and faster (by a smidge).