

Grappling Hooked

by Cory Bickmore

I began taking jujitsu lessons a while ago, which means I pay a man to kick the crap out of me every Tuesday and Thursday night.

Learning a martial art had always been a distinctly nebulous goal of mine, though I did little about it, if by “little” I mean “absolutely nothing”. That attitude changed last year when, in a rather disconcerting development, I discovered I could no longer traverse the distance between the refrigerator and the TV without collapsing in a heap of quivering flesh. It seems my heart suddenly decided it was in fact the Starship Enterprise and needed to reach Warp Factor 9 RIGHT NOW to make up for all that lost time being an ordinary heart. As I lay face down on the sweat-sodden carpet weeping like a little girl, the thought dawned on me: I am one handsome fox in need of love. I went on to wonder if it was indeed time to take up exercising.

Being incredibly easy and totally free, jogging was far and away the clear choice. Accordingly, I promptly signed up for several thousand dollars worth of jujitsu classes. Jujitsu would be my new hobby. New hobbies are good, I reasoned. Everyone should get a couple. They say precious few people develop new hobbies after age 21, to which I respond: Who the heck are these ‘they’ people anyway? Just why do ‘they’ seem to know so much? I mean, are ‘they’ on a secret government payroll or something? Are ‘they’ salaried at six figures? Do ‘they’ accept resumes?

In case you don’t know, jujitsu is the ancient art of Japanese combat grappling. This differs from the regular variety of wrestling practiced by sweaty high school boys and a few state senators. In regular wrestling, one wins simply by pinning the opponent’s shoulders to the mat. One prevails in jujitsu, on the other hand, via techniques designed to inflict severe bodily damage until your adversary taps out, essentially hoping he says “uncle” before you snap his tibia. Another

interesting difference: wrestlers only compete against those of like weight, while jujitsu permits gigantic people to crush us fragile skeleton-folk under their enormous frames. My sensei (Japanese for “cruel laughing one”) often says grappling with bigger people is good for me. As you can imagine, I hate him.

Don’t mistake jujitsu for karate either. A person trained in karate will put a fist through your nose, whereas the disciple of jujitsu will simply hug you to death.

Currently, I hold the rank of yellow belt, the patron belt of sissy-cowards. Yellow ranks one step up from beginner white. This means if an attacker jumped me in a dark alley, I would last approximately 0.43 seconds longer than, say, you. Once I settle into a fighting stance, my mugger would no doubt flee for his life — or have his buddies kill me, one of the two. (“I observe you possess a knowledge of the martial arts,” my assailant would say. “Wonderful! Allow me then to introduce seventeen of my fellow Dark Alley associates. In fact, here comes thirty-four of their fists right now.”)

I wonder if my sensei (Japanese for “inflictor of creative torments”) would react negatively to my inevitable flubbing of such an encounter. Perhaps he would strip away both my yellow and white belts and force me to wear the lowly pink belt, the jujitsu rank of Wimpy Shame. He would relegate me to sweeping up the immense clots of woman-hair from the practice mats (seriously ladies, do you just rip the stuff out?) and licking up the sweat of my betters. And deserve it I would, having stained the dojo with a deep dishonor. Then again, my sensei (Japanese for “man of smiling death”) may decide in my favor, especially if I brought jelly donuts along to my next lesson.

Now I’ll let you in on a little secret. If this jujitsu hobby does not pan out, I intend to develop my own martial arts discipline. Isn’t that grand? I shall call it “Hah-Noi-Yu”. This discipline will teach students to exasperate opponents through carefully selected antics until they run away, thus achieving glorious victory.

Say somebody attacks me. Using the techniques of Ha-Noi-Yu, I would run clockwise around my adversary screaming “whoop-whoop” at the top of my lungs. “Whoop-whoop nikky wit, nikky wit!” I would say. “Freenoodle!” I might add. He would feel the wrath of a good Three Stooges eye poke, followed by a nose tweak, cheek slap and a different ‘cheek’ slap (if you catch my drift) until finally my enemy’s annoyance boils over, making the fatal error of leaving himself open to the deadly squirting flower hidden in my uniform. As you can tell, this new discipline is still in the planning stages.

Until that day, I will slog away at this jujitsu thing. My sensei (Japanese for “warm hands, cold heart”) claims I am improving, but this is the same person who as we wrestle, regularly ties me up with his uniform belt, or even more humiliatingly, my own belt. Nothing says “novice” like being trussed up like a rodeo calf. All I can do in these situations is take comfort in the fact my belt is not pink, at least, not yet.