

Why I Dislike Surprises 2

As civilian martial artists we train to react to sudden single attacks, many of which could be sneaky, egregious, nasty actions meant to debilitate us by catching us unaware. So shouldn't I be able to deal with surprises by now?

Yes, I should be able to deal with surprises better now than when I was a fledgling martial artist, but that doesn't mean I *like* them, any more than the 10-year-old me liked model gas stations that were meant for kids two years younger (and do not come with the hidden volumes of Poe or Stevenson that I would have preferred).

If a new *Star Wars* movie suddenly manifested in the local theatre without so much as a single day of advertising preceding it, I would be surprised but certainly would not dislike it. However, I might be annoyed if the surprise release of a movie I'd love to see would be in theatres only one weekend, thus forcing me to hurriedly revamp my schedule in order to see it. So, to be more accurate, I don't dislike *all* surprises—just the ones that require me to respond unprepared or those that make me feel helpless. In my humble opinion, if a surprise is *meant* to make the recipient feel helpless, it verges on being an attack.

Consider the parallels between a surprise that is meant to please both the recipient and the surpiser, and an attack that is clearly meant to serve the surpiser at the expense of the unprepared recipient (i.e. target). When a person is surprised with something he likes, he is partially relieved that the intent is positive, and that he does not have to pretend to be thrilled with his second model of a gas station in as many years. If pleased, he giggles and the givers are pleased at the laughter (which they interpret as pleasure rather than relief). But okay, no harm done.

On the other hand, when a person is attacked, he must martial his resources immediately without preparation and without fully understanding what is happening. He must immediately go into a mental state that he has seldom practiced in order to adequately handle the sensory input and respond suitably. Should he put on his hate-helmet or only a light coating of perspiration? Should he batter the creepazoid who attacked him in the way that Model Mugging students batter their golem-like attacker, or should he simply let him slip by with a stroke of off-balancing so that he trips into a nearby real-life hydrant?

Consider the two most offensive attacks in American history: Pearl Harbor and 9/11. Their guileful nature contributed to their horror. Even the more destructive attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both during times of war in which attacks were to be expected, were preceded by warnings. It's the sneak attack especially during times of peace that feels uniquely repugnant. A synonym for "sneak" is "surprise".

In discussing all these examples of surprises, large and small, I by no means wish to conflate the enormity of a Pearl Harbor with insignificance of an unwanted model gas station. Physical attacks, no matter the size, are always of more consequence than annoying surprises that require the recipient to respond. But this is a huge difference in size and only a small difference in kind. Genus: surprise. Kind: negative. Type: size of. But in either case, Class: inconsiderate.

Self-defense oriented martial artists have to be ready to deal with the sudden single attack, but that is nonetheless mentally and emotionally taxing. Why don't I like surprises? Because I am a martial artist and don't appreciate being taken advantage of. I don't appreciate being made to feel even momentarily helpless. In other words, even though I train to handle unexpected aggression, I don't like to be attacked.