

## Sam Sulek in Epigenetics and The Biology of Intent

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Sam Sulek enters a laboratory inside a tall but nondescript high-rise office building; that is as black as night, with mirrored walls making up its exterior. The walls inside are white from an abundance of incandescent light being emitted from tiles on the ceiling. She sees brown doors of faux wood, with steel balls as handles. Little white plaques with cursive black lettering describe foreign-sounding names of what would only be medical doctors. The floor is lined with white tiles and black grout; matching the opaque walls and popcorn ceiling. A thick black line, like a Roman road, runs down the middle of the tile, in the hallway. The temperature is a drastic chill from the humidity of the conditions outside the building. This is the regional office of Unit 61398, Harmonic division, ERI (Epigenetic Research Initiative) headquartered in the business district of the New Metro populous region of New Orleans, a city in the former state of Louisiana of the post-capitalist nation known as the United State of America.

The density of office buildings in this metro region is suffocating in the manner in which they were thrown together. Lacking any for sight, they were shoved at one another; as if pushed back in a corner, to fight. While the mirrored texture of Unit 61398 was unique, making it stand out among the masses; you get the feeling that its black walls were trying to conceal a deep state government secret. It does not help that one has to go through a rigorous background investigation by the Department of Defense's Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency, which works with FBI agents to meet and interview your family and friends; as the National Security Agency

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does a complete check on the large data models containing your internet footprint. Yes, it is a Top Secret /

SCI compound, within this facility; due to its funding being derived from the ERI black budget.

Next door to the black building is a smaller cement high-rise, housing a small coffee shop, Seattle's Best. There was a single lonely tree, perched between the two, in a pile of dismally maintained black dirt. A flying rat, of the Pigeon variety, rested on its barely breathing branches. It smelled of rain, and Sam had forgotten her black umbrella. Ms. Sulek should have stopped for an Americana because it would have helped her focus on the coming exam. Looking back now, in the last few months, she was the epitome of good luck. Not a single acquaintance or distant relative made a faux pas in the answers they gave to the DCSA or the FBI. She was all but assured the investigation would be a success, if only the NSA could be trusted to not find a thing. She had a few skeletons in her closet, that were an undisclosed reality. But she knew she could be trusted; she only sought to prove her fidelity to the nation's artificial intelligence faction Automaton.

Her need to excel was only surpassed by the enticement of the gifts offered by the Harmonics division. Ever since growing up on that large, dilapidated plantation near the French Quarter, she dreamed of the skills she would attain. Running in those sparse fields, among the dead and wilted cotton bushes; she'd climb up the living oaks, seeking the heights for that view of all from above. She knew she was special, with her fiery red hair, freckled face, and green eyes. Like those early years, she kept up with that spirit of running; she'd race across the black asphalt, between people and buildings. While slight in size and sort of short, her symmetrical facial features made up for any demureness in character.

Her parents lavished her with any gift a child could dream of. But even though she wanted very

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little, something was missing. Growing up, her mind held an itch that nothing would scratch. She'd seek to fit in, but would not find any other with the piece she was missing. But do not be mistaken, wealth held its privileges. In between cruises into the Caribbean, vacations at Mexican hotel resorts, and spending time on the beaches of the Gulf; she found that she cried. Maybe it was because of the torturous things she did when she was alone.

She had a secret. One that she knew that, if her parents found out, would never be forgiven. Each week, she would make that trek into the pinewood and live oak hammocks, near what swamps were left of the former state of Louisiana deltas'. She would have only one thing on her mind, a thing that she thought filled that hole she could not scratch inside her head. And it involved small animals. She started with various reptiles and amphibians, finding whatever she could catch. She moved up to using a net, on birds. Furthermore, she would pull the legs off the lizards at the start; watching as they bled. And slowly cutting off their head. The frogs were simply cut in half, for her amusement. Using a knife, she stole from the local grocer, she'd dismember the birds, one by one. Into her later adolescence, she moved up to small mammals. But no matter how many little animal lives were snuffed out; that itch never went away.

These days, she had very little time for such childish games; she did still carry that knife. On a little leather strap; pressed firmly against the small of her back. It gave her a calm sense of control; knowing she was armed against such a violent and impersonal world. She was ready to tackle the next stage in her life, the Unit was hers and later the whole ERI. All that was left to do was for her to keep her word to herself, and execute on completing these entrance examinations for the Harmonics division. They were going to be multitiered and tailored to her genetically, but she had a gift in both body and mind; both

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of which were ready to accept the gifts and hard-won skill set bestowed on Harmonics candidates. In the end, she knew that if she put up on the front lines against The Gollum Chinese faction or the BRICS Russian member state; she would serve to the best of her ability.

The steps involved in the examination were going to be long and drawn out. She had a battery of tests and examinations. From the standard intelligence quota to methods of testing her aptitude for spatial memory and short-term memory recall. Then there were the emotional susceptibility quizzes, which numbered in the dozens; each focusing on a particular feeling and reaction. Her attention will be examined for its scale, listing minimum and maximum values; while determining her abilities to concentrate on multiple things at once. These are values placed on the minimum amounts your ability can express. While the program is designed to increase all of these values; it is a cost-benefit analysis for if a candidate is worth the time and money for investment. Next, are the genetic tests; weeding out unworthy individuals who have undesirable phenotypes. The Harmonics division has more stringent requirements than the general admissions to the epigenetic program. Things like testing of the senses and psychic ability are a must for those who reach this level of the admission process.

Ms. Sulek dreamed of the skill set she would acquire after the admission process was complete. The training would be intense both mentally and physically, and require a trial of spirit and a night of the soul. She would handle it; she knew the juice was worth the squeeze. While she was not psychic; she was not interested in the ERI's gifts for that ability. I mean, who wants to be a telepath with a psychic battery; a slave to some sort of psychic firewall? And she was a day late for the main methods of epigenetic research. Too much of a masculine nature for her. While her parents could have afforded her emission

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into that program; would she have wanted the sniper's long eye, with a job as an assassin, or maybe the enhanced peripheral nervous system; with its digital surgeries and faster reflexes? No, she did not want to be some sort of government research lab rat; doing experiments for money. Her future lay in Harmonics, specifically the System of Control. She knows she's trading in free will for fate, fuelled by this sort of perverted karmic system of faction credits. She knows she will start simple, as maybe a package delivery agent; programmed for a mission with no thoughts involved. Likewise, she will gain more skills that her ambition will fuel through karma; creating her very own fate. That or she'll buy neuroplasticity and become some spooks' asset.

As she concludes her daydreams of advanced harmonic abilities; she is drawn into present-day conflict. If it is not the looming regional war in the South China Sea or the economic warfare between the European Union, China, the African Union, and the State over resources and power; it'll be the advancement in artificial general intelligence used in hacking the various nation state's large language models. Will the battlefield be on a rice farm in rural China, using neural uplinks to control mechanized weapons, or possibly in secret missions of black ops done in Russian wastelands? All she knows is her fate will be sealed by the System of Control, as soon as she has enough karma to pay off that dream job for that three-letter alphabet agency.

Sam steps carefully down the black path, looking for door A11. Mumbling to herself, "You got this, buddy." She liked to keep her chin held high, with optimistic self-talk. But, before she could knock on the door or turn its handle, she heard a gruff voice; the door swung open. A burly man, sporting a neatly trimmed brown beard, stood in the doorway and said,

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“Are you going to stand there all day and continue to waste my time?” His white lab coat was impeccably pressed with military creases down the back; he exuded authority.

Sam, stepping back for a moment,

said, “No, sir, I’m Sam Sulek. I’m here for the admissions process. Is this the correct room?” The man glares down at her,

“Your paperwork did say Unit 61398 door A11, correct?” As he said this, he leaned forward; almost menacingly.

Sam, with more purpose, lifted her chin (already held high) and

said, “Then I have the right room, and I am on time. Would you like to introduce yourself before we start?” The man, visibly surprised at her turn in posture,

said, “I am Michael. Project Lead for Unit 61398. Glad you made it.”

She pushed past him with the most respect she could muster; then she turned around.

“Where should I sit?” She asked.

He moved out of the way,

And said, “Any desk but the black one up front is fine. We are waiting for other candidates.”

She walked to a desk in the front and placed her leather book bag next to the chair.

Saying, “Fine, I’ll sit here.” Micheal flexed, in an attempt to relieve his anxiety.

“Front-row seat, are you some sort of teacher's pet?” He asked.

Sam, not phased, replied, “No, I like being able to take notes well.”

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At that moment, a man, shorter than Micheal, stepped through the door.

He stated in a low voice, "I'm Joseph. ERI candidate. Mind if I sit down?"

He did not have a bag, only a notebook and pencil. Micheal turned to him, motioning for him to sit.

"Sure, how about next to Sam." He said.

Sam turned in her chair, and said, "Joseph: what is the one gift that the ERI, psychics, or harmonics can give you, that you want most?"

Joseph, unperturbed, said without missing a beat, "The one that gives me the most power over other people."

Sam faces forward as if to snub Joseph.

"What do all men with power want? More power." She said.

Joseph slowly folds up the corners of a piece of paper into a triangle,

"Oh, is that what all men want?" He asked. She tilts her head to the right as if hearing a tone.

Without looking back, she says, "Well, that and sex."

At that moment, Joseph launched his paper triangle football at the side of Sam's head, striking her directly in the right ear. Sam, totally perturbed now, brushes her right ear with her left hand, mumbling "Jerk."

Joseph, not missing a beat, says "I'm sure a human mind has more on it than only two things... I



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am sure you know that the ERI requires you to be able to hold multiple thoughts in your mind at once; just for admission.”

Sam, trying not to look as if she were taken by surprise, “I knew that! I can hold six at one time... How many can YOU hold?” She replied.

Joseph, in a show of deference, said simply “Not that many.”

Micheal does not look disappointed in the candidate's conversation, and says, “We are only waiting on one more.” An athletic woman in black trousers and a white dress shirt crosses the doorway, into the room. She has black hair and is wearing it in a ponytail. She motions for everyone to remain seated and introduces herself.

“I am Annet, and I do believe we may start.” She said.

Micheal starts to explain the ERI, Harmonics division, the psychics, and Unit 61398 specifically. Each candidate is assigned to a specific branch within the unit: Joseph to the ERI, Annet for the psychics, leaving Ms. Sulek for the Harmonics division. He goes over the tests and exams, administering them one by one; the day drags on. Each candidate is given various blood tests for use in their labs. As time ticks by, the results of the testing slowly trickle back to Micheal and the Unit. Joseph, Annet, and Sam all pass their written examinations with flying colors; Micheal lets them know. All three passed the blood laboratory tests as well.

Micheal taps his balled-up fist against the desk, letting the candidates know it's time to quiet down.

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Sam pipes up, "What's next, Doc?"

Micheal, with a gleam in his eye, says, "You'll have to guess."

Joseph pumps his fist, "It can only be one thing..."

Annet exclaims, "It's the strength and agility practical exam."

Micheal says, "All of you go change into your athletic gear and meet back here in fifteen minutes."

The three of them file out of the office room, and off to the locker room. They don their gray shirts emblazoned with the letters ERI, navy-blue diver shorts, and new balances that your grandfather would wear. They took a short ride in a government van to the confidence course.

Micheal leads them to the warfare confidence course, stopping first at the calisthenics area.

Micheal explains there will be a series of strength training exercises for an athletic score, used for fitness checks.

He ends the lecture with these words, "You'll be doing sit-ups, pull-ups, dips, & push-ups... The higher the number of combined repetitions, the better the score."

He then says, "We'll end with a 1.5-mile run and the warfare course."

Sam, well-rested and ready to go, exclaims,

And says, "We all got this!"

But Annet, not one for false hope, says, "Have you seen that confidence course? I hear there are

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traps in it!”

Joseph, getting excited (he loves combat sports), practically yells, “They use live rounds for effect.”

Sam, shaken up a little at that thought, whispers to herself, “I’m sure they use blanks.”

Annet, as if smelling weakness, “No, they use federally issued live rounds... shot overhead.”

Sam thought to herself, Father said I should keep my head down.

Each of them was built differently, both in their physiology and psychological makeup. This is why each of them was entering different programs. But their scores on the athletic examination come from years of physical training, focusing on different areas. Joseph was muscular because of his short stature and low body fat, with a slight V-taper. He excelled at the pull-ups because of his strong back, which he focused a large percentage of his strength conditioning on. He was able to complete a staggering twenty-eight unweighted pull-ups, weighing in at one hundred and sixty-five pounds. His push-up score was well above average, too, due to his conditioning. He completed eighty-five perfect-form push-ups in the time allotted. While not breaking the ERI record; which was one hundred and twenty-three (from an enhanced individual), he did set a personal record. His sit-ups and dip scores suffered because he's a bit top-heavy, and the extra weight of never skipping leg training (his second favorite muscle group).

The women fared differently but did equally well. While Annet was more

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cardiovascularly fit than Ms. Sulek, leading to better performance at the 1.5-mile run, Annet was not as muscular overall as Sam. Annet excelled at the pull-ups, outperforming Sam, but not Joseph, of course. This was because she's smaller than Sam, and weighs less. She achieved a total of eighteen repetitions, which is an accomplishment for those non-enhanced. Her lightness benefitted her the most, along with her well-defined trapezoids, in the dips; which she trained exclusively. Her personal best was twenty-five repetitions with an extra twenty-five pounds on her weight belt. Not only that, but her final score on dips was a total of sixty, boosting her total score substantially. If only her arms were better defined; she could have had a much better score on the push-ups. She was an avid runner, but never trained abdominals; other than doing heavy squats a few times a week. This led to her lacking in the sit-ups portion of the exam. Overall, she did very well for a female candidate; would fitness be the main focus of the psychic program?

Sam Sulek came prepared; her optimism leading her down the path of setting the necessary goals for success in the ERI. She had done her research in OSINT (open-source intelligence); which was difficult for something that is classified as top secret, and is a secure-compartmentalized intelligence program. Through her research into governmental leaks of black budget projects; she had determined a list of SCI code words for the various projects in which she had the desire to become involved. This gave her insight into areas of focus required in her strength conditioning and psychological preparations. Her main target was the SOC, or System of Control, a Harmonics subdivision; with a large budget and plenty of upward mobility. But

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there were steps needed before she became an attractive candidate worthy of the SOC. Particular features and skills had to be achieved first, gifts, to use the term of the ERI, had to be earned rather than received.

In her research, she identified two muscle groups to be targeted for strength conditioning, tested for in the strength and agility practical exam. They were the core group (upper & lower abdominals & obliques) and the quadriceps. These two are tested by the sit-ups and 1.5-mile run. She planned to excel most at these two test portions; because her plan was trifold. She had found the code phrases for the SCI programs of the Harmonics division on the dark web, leaked by various hacktivists, in the hopes of helping their biohacker brethren. Sam hoped to achieve access to these programs by legitimate means, through the proper channels of the ERI. What she found was these three operations: muscle memory, digital heart, & digital digestion. She was sure that the digital ones were of harmonic origin, but could not determine if the memory feature was a genetic gift of the ERI or could be achieved with the Division. But she knew through critical thinking that if she used deductive reasoning; she would be able to achieve the two gifts which her heart desired most: perfect recall & metabolic conditioning.

She had trained her mind through Zen meditation, increasing the white brain tissue through the art of non-thinking; promoting growth in the central nervous system, and helping neuroplasticity. This has led to an improvement in the mind-body/gut-mind connections, of the peripheral nerves, needed for her future goals. But, what she was focused on now, was the mind-

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muscle connection, of the peripheral nervous system. She uses her meditation practices to calm her beating heart; while box breathing techniques to fuel her with oxygenated blood.

Sam quickly counts to four in her head, breathing in, “I can, and I will” The words she mouths, as she counts again to four and exhales. She feels each contraction of the muscles in her core, as she executes the exercise. Her repetitions fly by, as she simultaneously counts in fours on one hemisphere of her brain and in tens on the other.

Micheal barks, “That’s forty... let's go!”

She bangs out ten more reps, in quick succession. One, two, three, four... She exhales.

She is not even winded.

The Doc says, “What’s your personal best?”

Sam replies, “ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY.” Annet gasps...

But it is Joseph that says, “Righteous!”

Sam breathes in deeply, as the doctor's count goes past ninety-five. One... Two...

Three... Four...

Ms. Sulek almost screams, “One hundred twenty-five.”

Micheal says, “You aren’t done yet! Keep going.”

She stops at one hundred twenty-seven. Breaking her record and, according to Micheal, setting the new ERI record for most sit-ups done by a non-enhanced female candidate.

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Sam Sulek had some fears, but she knew that with an ERI athletic record; she would have open doors, at least into the digital digestion program. While she was the first to admit that it was not the most glamorous of projects; it did serve a purpose. A stepping stone into that of metabolic conditioning, a much more useful skill. She knew she had a high intelligence quota, as her parents had her tested as a child. This is why she passed the ERI exams easily. But neuroplasticity requires discipline. She had spent decades meditating, specifically, with a Zen Buddhist monk. Focusing and expanding her mind's focus and concentration; hoping to achieve that spiritual growth of white brain matter. She would beg her dad for a Magnetic Resonance Imaging scan for her records. The reason is that she needed the data for entrance into the SOC and would be paid in karma credits for each scan. Plus, she was curious to see her white matter grow.

One of her life's long-term goals was the metabolic conditioning program. She had begun laying the groundwork for this by practicing yoga and developing her vagus nerve. She would practice non-thinking after doing her breathing exercise; the latter one to focus her inner eye, and the former to expand concentration into the central nervous system. Not only that, but she would then refocus her inner eye along that nerve, using the peripheral nerves through the practice of yoga (and controlling her abdominal muscles) to strengthen the brain-gut connection. By coupling this with an extensive core workout routine, she had practically done the Harmonic divisions work for them. All the muscle fibers and nerves were in the correct place, with nothing

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but their secret software and hardware left to be added. She knew there were risks, but it's who dares wins in her book. One was constipation and irritable bowels due to the misconfiguration of the software and signal-to-noise interference. But at least she wouldn't have to worry about colon cancer, right? And nothing tastes as good as skinny feels; with zero effort for the rest of her life.

Micheal had the candidates follow him past the calisthenics gymnasium; onto the oval track. Finally, Annet seems to be excited. Leaning over toward Sam, she inclines her head and then says,

“No way you'll score better than me on this course... I can run a mile in six minutes flat!”.

Joseph overheard Annet, and piped up his opinion, “My money is on Annet, despite your big thighs, Sam.”

Sam seemed self-conscious of Joseph's attention to her legs, but she had faith in her conditioning; because she knew the end goal. It was as if her fate were already sealed by the SOC; she was that dedicated.

Sam said, “I'll show you both!” Joseph, as the only male candidate, took on an air of superiority.

Joseph announced, “I won't make you two look that bad; I promise.”

Before the race started, Sam thought of something. Would her sprinting ability be enough to give her the advantage in the run; because that training was the most difficult? She spent the last year doing high-impact interval training; building up those fast-twitch muscle fibers in her



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quads, to supplement her lower body strength conditioning routine. It was satisfying knowing

Joseph noticed the outcome of both her leg routines. But she had ulterior motives. She was

laying the groundwork for the Perfect Recall program. It was her number one goal and would be

a major life achievement; to be enrolled and receive this gift from Harmonics. Her rationale for

these actions was selfish because deep down, she knew that itch of hers had to be scratched. She

desired the ability to look back into her childhood; to determine why she had this deviant

behavior of maiming and murdering animals. Her only hope was that this would make that itch

go away, and lead to her soul being saved.

Micheal motioned for the candidates to get in order on the starting line; he communicated a lot with his hands, gesturing here and there. It was an odd habit.

He said, “Ladies first, gentleman. “

He indicated for Annet and Sam to move to the front of the line, close to the inner part of the track, leaving Joseph to take the outside path.

“Now I am going to give you the standard count, and then you all take off,” Micheal said.

Sam was a glass-half-full lady, but her Zen training left her knowing that the glass started empty.

There was a loud crack from the starting gun, as Micheal pulled the trigger. Joseph leaped into motion, holding nothing in reserve.

He yells, “COME ON, LADIES!”

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Annet takes off a little less quickly but seems to be controlling her breathing. Sam takes a different approach, counting... one...two...three...four. She starts with a constant pace and rhythmic box breathing, slowing her heart rate through long controlled breaths. Then, as if she were a fighter jet using her afterburners, she sprints to catch up to Joseph. She begins to hum, as she counts her breath...one...two... three...four. She feels the lactic acid begin to rise in her massive quads. But she is beating Annet, which she attributes to her faith in her training.

Sam came prepared for this race, in that she built up both type-I slow-twitch and type-II fast-twitch muscle fibers in her quads, hamstrings, and calves. She accomplished this with two main styles of training: HIIT cardiovascular exercises and high-volume resistance training. She was ever-increasing her musculature by creating more adenosine triphosphate in the mitochondria, through performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs); which she stopped taking a month before the exams. Likewise, she would also increase her glycogen storage with creatine (and eating a high carbohydrate diet). This led to the development of larger legs from the growth of both types of muscle fibers; which was a desired trait for the muscle memory gift from the Division.

To understand muscle memory and, subsequently, perfect recall, one has to consider the fallacies of yesterday's understanding of neurology. Before the discoveries in neuroplasticity, it was commonly believed that memories were stored in the various regions of the brain. However, with the advent of neural networks and neuroplasticity, the wetware needed for enhanced

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memories was invented. For those gifted with neuroplasticity from birth, there exists a “great divide”, between the hemispheres of the brain. Ms. Sulek was not gifted with this feature, but had a defect that led to a similar outcome. You see, as a child she suffered from grand mal seizures. Her parents could afford the best medications and doctors of all specialties, but nothing would stop them. Their last resort was surgeries. Little Sam Sulek had her corpus callosum cut straight down the middle.

This is when her troubles started; her fascination with death. The seizures stopped, and so did the hearts of many neighborhood pets. But as she ran towards Joseph, she did not let these troublesome childhood thoughts bother her. Instead, she used them as fuel. As her blood circulated the lactic acid out of her muscle cells, her breath coming in counts of four; she slowed her pace a bit, and Annet gained on her. She prepared mentally for her next sprint, in the hopes of catching Joseph.

Annet exclaimed: “I got you!”

Sam replied, “Not a chance!”

Sam hit the throttle and blasted toward Joseph... as if she would surpass a male candidate and set his record for the ERI.

But Sam held high hopes, for she knew the features of the System of Control (SOC) would solve all her troubles...if only she could amass enough karmic credits. Having developed her physique; she knew that if she set two records, both of these things would make her an ideal

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candidate. Her quads could be programmed to store her childhood memories through muscle memory, she only had to work hard, and the SOC would use her peripheral nervous system to build the necessary neural networks. This would allow her to use perfect recall to see past the seizures of her childhood, seeing the memories as they were; not some abstract feeling left in her shadow.

If she set a running record and the sit-ups, she would be admitted to the Harmonics division. Her brain surgery made her an idle candidate for the SOC, her mental and physical training made it likely she would get both muscle memory and digital digestion. It was left up to her to figure out how best to achieve metabolic conditioning and perfect recall. But she knew that with these four gifts, she could stand a great chance to become an operative with the digital heart rate feature, allowing for an increased life span, a worthy mission for one's life.

Joseph jumped ahead, pulling from reserves that the women did not know he had.

He yelled, "Hell yeah!", as he crossed the finish line.

To his surprise, Sam was three paces behind him. She was hardly winded, but her left leg hurt.

She says to Joseph, "Almost got you... Did you see my sprints?"

He said, without missing a beat, "No, I was trying to win, and I did."

Sam, in a show of humility, said, "Well you did." As they waited, Annet came strolling in.

Annet, looking angrily at both of them, says "Well Sam, that must be some kind of record... you

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almost beat Joseph... A MALE.”

Sam, at that moment, felt sorry for Annet; almost to the point of apologizing, but she could not force the words out of her mouth.

Sam, in a polite tone, said, “Maybe we should work out together? Anything is possible with difficult training.”

Sam knew this was the first memory, provided she passed the combat course, she would partition the SOC to put in her muscle memory. To be able to use perfect recall to relive this event would be marvelous.

You see, perfect recall was a complicated endeavor of both mind and body; utilizing both the central and peripheral nervous system to build the neural networks needed to accept the digital wetware. Through neuroplasticity and neural networks, with enough processing power; one can store memories within muscle fibers, thus expanding the carrying capacity of the human mind. Provided you have collected the prerequisite data needed to compute the algorithm and paid for the cloud processing with the needed karma/credits, you are only limited by your physiology. But you see, Sam prepared her mind and body for this feature. She desires to have a PCD (Personal Control Device) issued to her by the SOC. This will allow her wetware to be programmed harmonically, in a digital manner, and dynamically.

Her perfect recall would be executed like this; due to her not being gifted it at birth. She expanded her mind by increasing nerve density throughout the central nervous system (through

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spiritual practices & meditation); allowing for the development of neuroplasticity. She has also used PEDs (performance-enhancing drugs), in this case: psilocybin and psilocin. Both of these have been shown to increase nerve development and plasticity. The plasticity of the nerves within the central nervous system allows for the creation of the patterns needed to develop the neural networks needed to further expand, and thus control the mind. This network of nerve bundles opens up a world of programmatic features available to Harmonic candidates within the SOC program.

However, perfect recall is not solely dependent on neuroplasticity; as indicated previously, it is dependent on muscle memory. Through the expansion of muscle tissue, the carrying capacity for memory allocation is increased. This is directly due to an increase in peripheral nerve bundles and cellular formation. While memories are not stored in muscle cells, per se, the mind-body/muscle connection promotes more patterns used in neural networks. By developing neuroplasticity, with the expansion of the peripheral nerves, the brain's storage may be increased. The main method of developing an increase in PNS patterns, available for use in neural networks, is through repetitive low-impact training of the muscles. While the formation of fast-twitch and slow-twitch muscle fibers is an admirable goal; the memories are not stored there. The key is developing the PNS into the muscle, by developing that mind-muscle connection.

Sam meant what she said, training with Annet would be fun.

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“You know, Annet, doing the strength & cardiovascular training needed for admission as an ERI candidate, is boring when done alone.” She said.

Annet, not taking a moment's rest, snaps, “Why would I want to train with you?”

She was upset for not beating Sam at the run. Sam, ever the friendly one, piped up, “I know a little about the various programs within the ERI and their tedious conditioning requirements. I could teach you...” She said.

Joseph's ears perked up, “Oh yeah, what program are you referring to?”

He wasn't versed in Sam's OSINT skills; despite being a hacker in his off time. Annet seemed to lighten up,

“Yeah, what requirements?” She asked.

Sam, basking in the limelight, said, “Well, I know about the top secret ERI's Harmonic division SCI program, lovingly titled System of Control.”

She saw both their eyes light up, “It's called SOC for short.” She continued.

Joseph, always a skeptic, replied, “Sounds like bullshit.”

He leans back on the cement wall, stretching out his legs.

Annet says, “Well that sounds interesting, what is a SOC?”

Sam, knowing it was her time to shine, deeply wanted to impress Micheal with her insider knowledge.

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“Well, it is an apparatus of control for the general populace; to include citizens, ranging from lowly corporate workers to highly trained military personnel. A systematic accountability method of dishing out jobs to individuals involved with the government, at various levels.” She said.

Joseph, losing interest, replies, “Sounds bureaucratic in the utmost.”

Sam is perched next to Joseph, on the wall, dying to elaborate more about the SOC.

Annet, ever the realist, says,

“But what does this have to do with training?”

Sam, stammers for a moment, almost at a loss for words. “Well, the SOC works on a very particular skill set.” She said.

Annet motions for Sam to continue,

“Like martial arts and combat sports; repetition of movement patterns is key; because this leads to predictability of control, and defined reflexes. In martial arts, one does differ stances followed by attacks and blocks, in a controlled manner; for numerous repetitions.” She said.

Joseph, getting bored, states, “Get to the point.”

Sam continues, “Well, with the SOC, one should conduct a precise conditioning routine for admission into the program. One designed to limit thought and promote controlled action; designed to create the perfect Automaton.”



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Annet tilts her head to the side, then says, “I’ve heard of Automaton from the US Space Force; isn’t that some sort of joint space exploration project.”

Sam says, “Well, it could be used for that; it’s just a project code word.” She goes on to explain, “The training program for SOC is simple: You overtrain with low weight high repetition, as many times as possible, while keeping the same order of exercises and movements/form.”

Annet seemed disappointed,

“That’s it? Overtraining?” She asked.

Sam, disappointed by her reaction, said, “There is more to it, like programming with various things like sound, temperature, etcetera.”

Joseph, never one to hold his tongue, voices it now, saying “That program sounds terrible, why would I want to complete some mission like a thoughtless robot?”

Sam, ever the optimist, says, “Because the chances of error or being hurt are minimized; not to mention they wipe your memory after mission completion.”

Annet says. “Guess that’s better than signing a non-disclosure agreement or dealing with a need to know.”

Micheal, having not said a word this entire time, concludes his observations with this statement; “Let’s see how that training conditioning helps with this combat course.”

Sam feels like she could not be more prepared; as if a system engineer had designed a

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SOC package just for this combat course. She knew in her heart of hearts that could not be the case, as she wasn't in that program yet, but her intuition made her feel that way. Lost in her thoughts, she barely noticed when Micheal motioned for all three of them to get ready. Micheal begins to bark orders & safety instructions at them,

“All right folks, this will be a tough one... The fight of your life! Don't raise your head too high, as you're likely to receive a bullet to the dome. Live rounds! Other than that, the course is simple; do keep in mind that there are numerous traps.” He said.

Joseph knew he would excel at the combat course because he had his grandfather shoot blanks at him when he ran the confidence course at the local police academy. He felt his experience as a law enforcement officer would give him a tactical advantage. He now knew that Sam had that SOC home-grown training, but he felt that wasn't a match for his hard-won experience. The only outlier was Annet, neither Sam nor Joseph knew exactly what she brought to the table, against the combat course.

Micheal, having instructed them on all safety measures, indicated that they should prepare themselves. As a group, they collectively donned their Kevlar helmets & neon vests, webbed belts & canteens. This was going to be difficult. Along with this gear, they were given a choice between three additional items, being only allowed to select one: a staff/walking stick, a knife, or a large rope. Joseph quickly grabbed the knife, and Sam snatched the long wooden staff, leaving Annet with the rope. It was up to them to figure out how to traverse the course and its

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traps; using the tools they had.

Micheal lifted his head and gave Joseph, Sam, and Annet a salute.

Micheal said, "I hope you all survive. The ERI hasn't seen the level of skill in a group of candidates in a long time."

Joseph returned the salute, "See you all on the other side!" He said.

Annet turned to Sam, saying, "Hope you make it; I'm going to take you up on that training program..."

Sam nervously looked out on the course ahead; attempting to identify the deadly traps she knew the course contained. Micheal loaded the starting gun and pointed it in the air.

Sam yelled, "Mess with the best, die like the rest."

In some sort of foreshadowing, she knew she would make it. This test was one of survival; making and breaking candidates. In this spirit, there was no difference in scoring for male or female candidates; the first across the finish line determined their admittance into their unit of choice.

Micheal proceeded to pull the trigger; launching Joseph, Annet, and Sam across the start line, like the bullets now flying overhead. Sam, quickly out of contempt, jammed the blunt end of her staff between Joseph's feet; tripping him before he could get to the monkey bar obstacle.

Joseph yelped in pain as he tumbled into the mud. Sam laughed, shouting, "Take that." Annet ran

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past both of them; jumping onto the monkey bars, just then noticing the razors hanging from fishing lines on each of the bars. As Annet leaped ahead, shimmying horizontally to avoid the razors, Sam grabbed onto the first bar; which was free of razors. She swung backward with all her might and extended her muscular legs towards Annet. Sam said, "Now your turn." Hitting her squarely in the back with both of her feet, Annet was sent sprawling; cutting her face with a razor as she headed toward the mud.

Sam dexterously maneuvered between each rung of the monkey bar; not giving a crap about the razors that did manage to cut her. As she was stepping off the end of the obstacle, Joseph; like a raging bull, came barrelling through the hanging razors, caring even less. Sam dove to the left; barely missing Joseph's backward attack.

Joseph bellows, "I KNEW YOU WERE DIRTY!"

Sam smiled at him and said, "I don't have a speck of mud on me yet."

Joseph extended his knife, menacingly, at her. Sam jumped back, again.

"I just tripped you, and you're going to stab me?" She asked.

Joseph huffed, "You're hardly the best, and all's fair in love and war." He pushes past her.

Annet, taking their conversation to catch back up, jumps up to the middle of the bars; then somersaults to the knee-high bar at the end of the obstacle. She runs past Sam, daftly jumping over Sam's attempt at tripping her with the staff. Sam looks up, at the next obstacle; it is the wall climb. And there is no robe and very little chance that each candidate can rely on one

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another for help, though that would make things vastly more simple. Joseph, clear on how to

accomplish this mission, drives his knife in between the wood planks; halfway up the obstacle.

He jumps up, with his feet on the knife, and grasps the board at the top. He pulls himself up onto

the top; leans over and grabs the knife, firmly removing it. Furthermore,

he quips, “Good luck ladies...”

Annet, seeing a chance to put her rope to skilled use, ties a knot on one end of it.

Swinging the knotted end around like a windmill, she deftly launches it at the top of the wall,

aiming to wedge it between the wooden planks. She misses, but five attempts later; she is pulling

herself up the wall. However, Joseph was having none of this; for he remained perched at the

top.

He says to Annet, “Sorry, love. But today isn’t looking good for you.”

He straddles the top of the wall, moving in her direction. Annet knows what comes next.

He reaches for the rope and begins to cut it with his knife. But Annet starts to push up on the

rope with her feet, as she climbs up it, increasing her speed.

Annet whispers to herself, “No, you don’t.”

As she reaches the top, Joseph awkwardly swings the knife at her; off-balanced because

he is top-heavy. Annet dexterously grabs his wrist at a pressure point; causing him to lose his

grip, and then drops the knife.

He mumbles “Dammit.”

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Joseph seems angry and disadvantaged. Annet is now sitting atop the wall next to him, while Sam is on her third try at using the staff to vault jump onto the wall. She is seeing very little success. Both Annet and Joseph take a moment to share a laugh at Sam's expense.

Annet takes the moment of levity to say, "Serves you right, Sam, you're an unfair sport."

Sam's rebuttal, "If you aren't cheating, you're not trying hard enough."

Just then, Joseph knew what he must do. And that was to take out an opponent, Sam style. He gave Annet the side eye and slyly calculated his next move. As Annet was about to take the lead, jumping down the other side of the wall, Joseph dove at her. His head down; he drove it into her back; directly where Sam's feet hit her prior. He was hoping for some sort of damage due to his superior weight. But, as if luck and not only fate were on his side; a quirk in circumstance played into his favor. Annet flew, like a cannonball shot directly at the ground, onto what turned out to be the first trap. An old-style trap, cunning in its effectiveness. A simple hole in the ground, covered over with leaves, concealing sharpened bamboo spikes. Annet looked as if she would have her fall broken by hard ground, with a heavy Joseph landing directly on her back.

But the reality of the situation was much worse. She flew into the pile of leaves, doing a small sort of backflip; while Joseph rolled into a ball, then tumbled to the side. Annet let out a blood-curdling scream, as she descended into the pit. Her back against the pit's far wall left her with a moment of respite; because as she stared ahead blankly, she noticed her left thigh was

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impaled by the wooden shaft. At that very moment, Sam came flying over the wooden wall, over the pit; and onto Joseph, in one go. She heard Annet's pitiful moans for help. As Joseph and Sam disentangled themselves, awkwardly, Sam crawled to the edge of the pit. In a loud voice, she tried to instill hope,

“I’ll call you a medic.” She said.

She tossed down her tourniquet from her med pack, saying “Here, use this and tie off your wound, can’t have you bleed out before them getting here.” Annet moaned again, feeling her chances as a candidate dry up.

Sam thought of her fourth and final gift; that she desired to achieve with the Harmonic division. It would help in Annet's situation, provided she could get past the pitfalls (no pun intended) of the feature. This gift was most useful with cardiovascular health and metabolic conditioning gifts. It had to do with the heart, specifically its beating of it. The project title was Digital Heart Rate, but it was available in levels too; depending on how advanced the candidate's PNS was developed, and in turn their circulatory system. The program features were multi-tiered to include: limb-based blood pressure, CNS brain vessel control, PNS vessel & capillaries movement, heart rate controlled by PCD, and even stopping of the heart completely. Public anecdotal evidence from a longitudinal study published on the dark web showed images of PNS neural networks repositioning blood vessels & capillaries in such a manner as to show the Great Divide between brain hemispheres; played out upon the stomach of an unnamed research asset.

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The experiment utilized the visualization of peripheral nerves in the abdomen to move only the capillaries on the right side into a web-like pattern on the surface of the stomach; viewed through the relaxation of the nerves by exposure to hot water.

In layman's terminology, Sam read a study about the ERI and Harmonics division's joint digital heart control project that showed direct evidence: pictures of a man's belly, after exposure to a hot shower, where only the capillaries of the right side of the abdomen were visible; direct proof of them being controlled by nerves of the PNS in neural networks of the body. If Annet had this gift from birth, she'd have been able to use her mind's eye to decrease blood pressure in her left leg or slow her heart rate down to decrease blood loss. All others would have had to have their wetware dynamically updated by their PCD, for this to be achieved.

Before all her dreams could come true, Sam had to do something about Joseph. Joseph had jumped up immediately after Sam called a medic, and took off running. Sam still had her stick, and Joseph was unarmed. She thought she could bonk him over the head, but she was sure that another concussion wouldn't stop him. She took off after him, running around the bend into a small oak hammock. At its center, there was a massive dead tree with branches spewing forth like arms reaching up from hell. On the large bent trunk, stood Joseph, as if beckoning Sam to attack him.

Sam yelled, "OH, I GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU."

Joseph taunted her, "What do you have? An empty med-pack?"



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Sam yelled again, "I'm going to hit you with this stick; you just wait and see..."

Joseph was not threatened in the slightest, he said, "You'll have to catch me."

In the time it took for Joseph to hop down on the far side of the tree, Sam noticed a break in the shots being fired over their head. Joseph ran toward the next obstacle, not knowing his fate, and with Sam close on his heels. There were two rows of around twenty black rubber tires lined up along the path. Joseph, known for his footwork, starts hopping between each; placing a foot in each hole. Sam follows, doing the same. With a loud clap, the bullets started flying again. Sam immediately drops to a crouch, looking for cover or concealment. She looks up, in amazement, as blood splatters on her face; entering her mouth. As she tastes copper; she sees a bullet exit the right side of Joseph's throat. He staggers to the side; tripping on the black rubber tire. He tumbles to the ground; holding each side of his neck, one hand on each side. His eyes are wide with shock.

Sam drops to the ground and crawls to his side, grabbing his and her med pack. She feels nothing but contempt at being grandfathered into the unit of her choice, as she quickly withdraws gauze from both of their packs. She tries to hide the emotion creeping slowly into her voice, as she tells Joseph,

"You're going to make it, brother, I've pushed the panic button. The medics are on the way." First, she grasped both his hands, which at this point, were dark red in oxygenated blood and slick. She tells him to apply pressure, as she pushes both of them against the left side of his

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neck. She grabs his gauze and holds it to the entry wound, attempting to stymie the bleeding. Not

only that, but she then pushes the remaining gauze into his hands; while placing her hand over

his two. She can feel them growing weak, and slipping, while she tries to press harder.

Sam screams, "MEDIC! WHERE THE FUCK ARE THE MEDICS!"

His eyelids slowly shuffled down, as she, covered in his dark blood;

kept yelling "MEDIC!" He died right there, in her arms, next to that black rubber tire.