You probably don’t know this, but I am a martial arts and exercise fanatic. One of the most important tenets of my life is mastery of the body and adeptness in the art of physical combat. I have drawn fear and resentment with this pursuit. I have been accused of violence, barbarianism, and even regression in the chain of human evolution. Such taunts and ludicrous accusations I have briskly shrugged away, attributing their source to some misplaced sense of righteousness or intrinsic insecurities. I do feel however, a need to justify my absolute fixation with this seemingly primal pastime. It is not a brutal assertion of physical power that gives rise to violence and animalistic madness within, but rather the opposite – it is the means by which I find purchase in the frenzied turbulence of life, the pursuit that soothes my raging fears and affords me tranquility in an era of turmoil.

The world we live in is one of chaos and uncertainty, where all notions of comfort and security are mere illusions, ready to be wiped away at the stroke of a single calamity. And though such thoughts may not stand at the forefront of our minds, there is an inescapable awareness of this fact within the subconscious. We build networks of people and hone skills and collect accomplishments upon which we base our self-worth, things intangible to fall upon when disaster strikes. We invent monsters, masters of carnage as cruel as they are inhuman, to console ourselves from the fact that everyone and anyone is capable of doing vicious and terrible things.

For at the pinnacle of the sinister possibilities which lie at back of our minds is the threat of human brutality. We would rather meet our end in a chasm of earth than at the blade of a knife. We might dread disease, but we fear violence. Of the infinite sources of devastation that await us, our minds react most revoltingly to that of our fellow selves. Earthquakes and hurricanes elicit sadness and sympathy; shootings and stabbings invoke terror and hopelessness. The fear of people reigns supreme above any other.

And thus originates my fascination, and perhaps obsession, with physical training and the martial arts. Fighting and honing the body to its fullest possible extent may be an act I love and practice simply for its worth, but this love stems from the sense of control it provides in a world that otherwise offers none. It is a defense mechanism at its finest, both a psychological reassurance and a literal, physical adaptation of the word. I sleep sounder knowing that if I wake to an intruder entering the room, I am adequately prepared for a ferocious confrontation. I walk bolder, breathe easier knowing that a thug with a knife does not necessarily hold my life in his hands. And though the exertion and time I invest in this art may be far disproportionate to the amount of danger it alleviates, the peace of mind, the sensation of power and control makes every second of training well worth its weight.