

Adventureland

There is a distinction between living in a Fantasyland when practicing one's martial art and using fantasy to create a little adventure from which one can learn.

We learn either by doing or by experiencing what others have done. Books, videos, TV, movies, lectures, stories, etc. are methods of experiencing without actually doing. If you imagine something realistically enough, you will receive a great percentage of the advantages that doing it would impart. This is why professional and Olympic athletes “mentally rehearse” their performances. This is why you not only practice your kata before a kata competition or an exam, but also lie in bed the night before going through the movements. This is why you find yourself moving your arms and hips through an aiki technique unconsciously while sitting at the dinner table. Your body goes where your thoughts lead. You are not learning by doing or by experiencing what others have done, but something in between. It's neither a flight of mental fancy nor an actual experience; it is a simulated experience, like a ride in Adventureland.

In fact, much of traditional budo training is like taking a ride in Adventureland—it allows you to experience simulated dangers without feeling that you are truly in danger. Of course, in Adventureland you know that the greatest physical danger you will face is a surprise plastic hippo attack or a cold splash on your T-shirt. In traditional martial arts, the dangers are more real, but certainly not severe. Sure, your partner may judge distance incorrectly and make accidental contact instead of controlling the blow, or he may twist his *kote hineri* a half-inch too far, giving you a wrist that aches when you start your car, but generally he does not punch out your lights nor twist your wrist so that you'd have to shake hands upside down. It is not complete fantasy, nor a complete adventure, but it is a fantasy adventure.

In the traditional martial arts, we visit an Adventureland based on the teachings of the pioneers we learn about in Frontierland. Frontierland interests and entertains us by way of its history and legend, often more the latter than the former. We think of Shaolin monks, Okinawan karate masters, Japanese ju-jutsu *meijin* as tough hombres who walked in peace because their reputations preceded them. Sometimes this was true. Occasionally they were nasty buzzards, but more often, they were quiet, dedicated artist-athletes who wanted their arts to benefit their students. For these masters, fighting or having a rough-tough reputation was the last thing on their minds. But it is the legend of the ten-against-one fight or the swordsman's challenge that sticks in our minds. In other words, what we remember from Frontierland is the adventure.

Frontierland gives us a fantasy to which to aspire. Adventureland gives us a practice regimen that allows us to simulate what the pioneers before us might have gone through. All of this traveling through a dizzyland of traditional budo is an exercise in simulation-as-education. You might call that simulation fantasy or you might call it adventure.

If we journey carefully, we can pass through Fantasyland quickly on the way from Frontierland to Adventureland, and thus Tomorrowland will present itself at a logical time in a logical sequence. We have

fantasized about what are skills will be when we “arrive” first at black belt, then at mastery, but only gradually do those skills become real and, as they become real, they become less fantastic. We can easily accept our advanced skills because they are reasonable extensions of our training. Our Tomorrowland, which seemed more of a fantasy than Fantasyland when we were struggling beginners, now seems like the way it should be. And all because of a trip to Frontier-, Fantasy-, and Adventureland in a theme park called traditional martial arts.