

## Fantasyland

“It’s a small world after all.” If you keep hearing it droning throughout the ride, you will end up chanting it after you exit for Frontierland, regardless of its effects on your little digestive system. It is a huge world of martial arts, Mr. Disney, but when it comes to fantasy, most martial artists tend to fool themselves in their own little world.

Most TKD martial artists along with Kyukushinkai karate-ka, assured that the kick is a more powerful weapon than the punch (because a well-placed round kick to the head will cold-cock any opponent), assume that they will have superior power in self-defense. But self-defense is not free sparring. They may not find themselves at a distance or an angle to employ their powerful weaponry.

Many tournament fighters figure they can handle themselves in a “fight” because they assume that fighting is sparring. But a real fight might go to the ground, therefore, most MMA students (not the professional competitors but the students) figure that, because they have stand-up and groundwork covered, they will be unassailable should someone attempt to assail them. They sail right past the truism that self-defense does not happen head-on, nor does it necessarily occur in one-on-one situations, nor always with a bell, a ref, a cage, wearing gloves, or without weapons (which may be the nearest solid object).

If you think that this leads me to the conclusion that traditional martial artists who supposedly train for self-defense (among other things) are ahead of the game when it comes to a sudden single attack, a group attack, or a weapon attack, you and they (that means most of us) are sadly mistaken. Traditional martial artists are among the most frequent travelers to Fantasyland. Now, I don’t mind that they travel once in a while as tourists, but when fantasies become died-in-the-gi beliefs, they just might be doing themselves a disservice.

I can’t tell you how many kempo people believe that when the bad guy attacks with Lower Tongue Lashes the Bamboo Arch, the only appropriate defense is The Dance of the Five Pink Titillations: problem presented, problem solved. Solved that is, if only the attacker had been a former member of the class!

How many Shotokan students, their techniques well focused and their reactions rapid, depend on their attacker to face them in a front stance?

I could go on, but I am sure you see the pattern. Does this mean that the only hope for effective self-defense is to take up a street style, some mélange of Combat JKD and Model Mugging? I don’t think so. I do think, however, that when practicing an art, one must be conscious that formal practice (the art must have a form, after all) is not identical to informal application. One studies the art to challenge oneself by perfecting one’s performance of the art, not by wailing on one’s training partner in order to test one’s potential intensity in a self-defense situation. Therefore, in normal traditional training, one aspires to an aesthetic ideal. That aesthetic is rooted in self-defense, but cannot itself determine successful self-defense.

Remember that the art grew out of a martial practice. The frontiersmen of the martial arts were not artists first, but tough (self-controlled, principled, but tough) dudes. We have inherited their practices but with

the spirit of the art that their practices evolved into. That means that to make the training relative to self-defense, one must first change one's spirit. With that new self-defense mind-set, one can revisit one's art, modifying the ideal forms to adapt to any situation one can image.

It is not necessary to practice every class as if one were going to war, but it is necessary to see one's practice as battle if one is to manifest it as self-defense. That personal change (with a little help from like-thinking instructors) can make your Tomorrowland not only a larger world of martial arts (an Adventureland, if you will), but also one that leaves Fantasyland to the very young.

*Next week: "Adventureland"*