

Maddog Unleashed

Knights-Errant Mayn't Complain of a Wound, Even From An F-Bomb

In short, he became so absorbed in his books that he spent his nights from sunset to sunrise, and his days from dawn to dark, poring over them; and what with little sleep and much reading his brains got so dry that he lost his wits. —Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Kitting up for a winter ride in Colorado, I sometimes feel like a knight-errant donning his armor in preparation for some epic struggle against titanic forces.

Instead of sheathing myself in mail, cuirass, greaves and gauntlets, I slip into long-sleeved jerseys, windbreaker, neoprene leggings and heavy gloves. My steed is an elderly mango Steelman Eurocross with tattered decals, balding Michelin Jets and streaks of mud that could have been gotten on the Campo de Montiel but in fact come from a trail near downtown Colorado Springs.

But that mud is old and powdery, and the chain dry as a bone. I have been more Sancho Panza than Don Quixote lately, munching deliberately and taking the occasional pull from the bota. And my Reynolds Rocinante spends its days lazing in the stable rather than rampant upon the field of honor, where once we tilted at windmills.

A Gentleman at Leisure. Anyone who knows me or reads me is aware that I complain of seasonal affective disorder in winter. This year I contracted a particularly virulent case, declining invitations to socialize, skipping group rides in favor of solo jogs, and generally hunkering down in the bunker, playing with pixels.

I retained some vestigial self-awareness, though, and around mid-month I realized that any stranger judging me by the photos on my Web site would conclude that some unrevealed physical or mental impairment prevented me from leaving the house. There were shots of the cats, of meals I had prepared, and of evil weather outdoors shot from indoors.

Then last night, while thumbing through William Least Heat Moon's latest book, "Roads to Quoz: An American Mosey," I stumbled across the following, a quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson, from a letter to his daughter Maria written over his concern for her mental health:

"I am convinced our own happiness requires that we should continue to mix with the world, and to keep pace with it as it goes; and that every person who retires from free communication with [the world] is severely punished afterward by the state of mind into which he gets, and which can only be prevented by feeding our sociable principles."

Pluck Strength Out of Weakness. So when a friend called today to suggest a ride, I agreed. I brushed the worst of the mud off Rocinante, found some lube for its chain, donned my Lycra armor and off we rode.

It was an enjoyable outing, for a cold January morning. The trail south was mostly free of ice, the sun was out and even the homeless guys who jungle up along Fountain Creek seemed in good spirits.

We talked about this and that during the 90-minute ride: absent friends, his kids, the fact that in three jerseys, bibs and neoprene leggings I looked not unlike a black-and-red-checked dirigible.

Then, on the way back, we saw another cyclist, an equally bundled-up woman on a mountain bike. She was headed south, and we north, and we did what we'd been doing all morning when encountering fellow travelers—gave her a wave and a hello. Her response: "F--k you." Astonished, we asked each other, "Did she say what I think she said?" then burst out laughing.

An aristocrat like Don Quixote surely would have had her head for that brusque remark. But I'm a democrat and a Jeffersonian, and thus she lives on, and so do I.