

Maddog Unleashed

Happy To See Me, Or Is That Your Stimulus Package?

A fool and his money are soon parted.
—English proverb



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

I awakened this morning to find Uncle Sam rummaging through my pants pockets. “Gotcha,” he muttered as he found my wallet and began stripping it of bills. Then he went back to the pants for the loose change.

“What the hell?” I mumbled groggily, fumbling about on the nightstand for my glasses. “Not to worry,” replied Uncle. “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. The bankers are a little short and the Chinese are getting antsy. But it’s OK, they’re good for it.” Then he vanished in a thick cloud of green, greasy smoke, the kind you only get from burning currency in quantity.

Then I remembered the date. April 15. Judas Priest. What a day for an acid flashback. I should just load up on Tylenol PM and sleep right through the sonofabitch. But no, there are deadlines to meet, tasks to perform, chores to do.

Those pants, for starters. If Uncle’s been slobbering around in there with both hands and at least one cloven hoof, a thorough washing is indicated.

I Got Your Stimulus Package, Yo. I don’t know what it’s like around your shop, but in these parts money has been fluttering out the doors and windows like bats fleeing a belfry. Somebody’s getting stimulated, but it sure ain’t me.

And speaking of stimulus, under which holiday tree might I find my little package? I’ll even dress up like the Monopoly guy, if that’s what it takes, and I damn sure promise to spend it.

There are a ton of things that need doing around here, if some federale would just pop round with a big sack of cash. The roof is leaking again around the solar array. The deck is drier than a good martini. And I’m pounding out my little comedies on a computer that was new when our first black president—Bill Clinton—was in the White House.

Two Wheels Good, Four Wheels Better? I’ve thought about selling a few bikes to raise some walking-around money, but I don’t want to go into competition with any of the local retailers, whose inventories are even larger than my own. They have staffs to support; I just have habits.

Like road trips. Oh, could I ever do with one of those. I’d give a healthy organ—not one of mine, of course, but somebody’s—to get out of Dodge for a week. Alas, while gas is cheap, compared to this time last year, it’s still not as cheap as staying put.

And no editor I know is casually underwriting travel expenses for freelancers, especially the sort whose idea of a thoughtful analysis often resembles a flaming sack of dung laid at some advertiser’s doorway. Not in this economy. Some things just aren’t funny.

Fat Tires, Flat Wallet. So instead of selling bikes, or reporting on bikes, I ride bikes, fitfully, betwixt storms financial and meteorological. I even broke out the mountain bike the other day as a change of pace. That ol’ rocky trail of life is rough enough without tackling it bereft of suspension and fat rubber, I thought, rolling off toward Palmer Park for an escapist hour on the single-track.

And whom should I see there? Uncle Sam, in all his red-white-and-blue glory, flanked by a Wall Street type and some Chinese dude. All three of them astride next year’s carbon wonderbikes—shiny, big-hit double-boingers worth more than the car I can’t afford to drive. And Sam is looking a little sheepish.

“No sweat, bro, I told you they were good for it,” he mumbles. “Hey, you wouldn’t have an extra energy bar on you, would you? And maybe a couple bucks for some post-ride beers?”