

the modern world varies member by member.

They keep cell phones and active social media accounts. Flipping through Facebook on his phone at Townshend's, James gets a kick out of seeing that someone moments ago posted a photo of him in full armor crossing the street this morning.

Herzog and James hold down day jobs. James says he's known as "the knight of the kitchen" behind the supermarket deli counter where he works.

The Order occasionally ventures out sans armor to see a movie or play video games.

Holy writ is Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Melville's *Moby Dick*. Ahab's sui-homicidal cosmic revenge quest makes perfect sense to them.

"Ahab is the hero of that story," Studenroth says.

They exalt also the unyielding 14th-century mercenary poet Gottfried von Berlichingen, known as "Götz of the Iron Arm" for having commissioned an articulate prosthetic appendage, designed to grasp both shield and quill pen, after being limbed by cannonade in the siege of Landshut.

Coming to terms with The Order's zeal, you have to wonder if these dudes are dangerous to have around.

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When, months ago, drunks in the Whiteaker harassed members of The Order outside Old Nick's Pub, The Order stopped walking long enough for Herzog to ask the unruly belligerents "How do you think this will end?"

When UO frat jocks cruise downtown for easy prey, they sometimes mock The Order. It's enough just to ignore them, Studenroth says, adding: "They are cowards. They don't really want to fight."

Besides, there's really no honor in sending unarmed inebriates to hell early, Herzog explains.

The key is to "never flinch," Studenroth says.

When he says "never flinch," he's talking about more than muscling through the instinct to wince when a samurai in black armor swings a steel blade in his direction.

It's a question of "how much blood you bring" to what you are doing, Studenroth adds. "I bring all my blood to this. I will give more blood."

Never flinch is The Order's backbone. Without it, they're just guys with swords.

Think of a thousand deaths, Studenroth says, before quoting the 18th-century Japanese text, the *Hagakure*.

"Every day when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate upon being ripped apart by arrows, rifles, spears and swords. Being carried away by surging waves. Being thrown into the midst of a great fire. Being struck by lightning, being shaken to death by a great earthquake. Falling from thousand-foot cliffs, dying of disease or committing seppuku at the death of one's master. And every day, without fail, one should consider himself as dead."

Mortal ideation is the essence of the samurai way.

This, too, is the substance of The Order of Steel. ■

