

Scola Metallorum Rapier Training Manual

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Introduction: Drills and Information, What We Forgot to Tell You

No matter how experienced... to believe oneself knowledgeable is an error. -- *Qwa Ja Nim Larry Hampton*

Drills for very simple basics are the obvious place for you and/or your group to begin your training. But even in a single class session, they are not enough to promote and develop expertise. We have developed a training regimen based on the "layered exercise".

We often take a particular moment or series of events that we have experienced in a duel or melee and take it apart. Each element is then trained; which is a simplified and admittedly artificial approach in some ways, as it does not mimic the fluid nature of combat. It does have some advantages though.

1. Things happen too fast in actual fighting for deep analysis.
2. There often isn't time to retrace your steps at that moment, and master the techniques you pulled out to save your ass.
3. Programming what you did fast and sloppy so that it's available next time must be done in a slower and, above all, controlled format.
4. This allows the same techniques to not only be available at a later date, but you will be able to perform them in a more controlled, efficient and effective manner.
5. As each layer is added the fighter can assess their skill level. If the next variation is beyond their capabilities, they can drop down to the last one with a clearer understanding of how they're doing at that particular skill. *Honest* self-assessment is also one of our core principles.

It is vitally important that you not rush through the drills. Don't let ego drive you beyond the level you should be training at, just because you want to fulfill a fantasy image. Spend enough time on each segment to feel some sense of mastery. If you advance too quickly to another layer, you defeat the purpose of drills and layering as a concept. It's also fun and useful to return to a drill after some time has passed and see how much your skills have developed--if you've really made progress you will see real improvement in your skill level execution and speed.

It takes practice and familiarity for the layered concept to show results. Students must be brought into the regime gradually. If you try to do too complex, advanced or lengthy a drill, you're finished before you started. Remember, old hands can always use remedial training and review; that's part of your responsibility as the instructor. However, after a couple of years doing layered exercises, some truly amazing and intricate drills can be attempted with satisfactory results. The first exercise given in the drills section has additional, expanded information to show you how the same drill can be practiced by novices and advanced fighters simultaneously. After awhile, advanced fighters will automatically assess, advance and attempt variations on the basic drills that tax their capabilities; and do it without disrupting the novice or the basic intent of the lesson.

Allow this creativity to develop but always maintain control and discipline. Both you and your students will be amply rewarded.

Add this to your training notebooks or personal journals and look it over periodically.

Your <Obedient Servant,
RTM

But if he is the sort for whom fighting is a means -- to respect, to rank, to power -- or to whom fighting is a chance to indulge his cruelty, his pride or compensate for his imagined failings, then by all means he should fight. -- *The Screwtape Letters*

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Mission Statement and Philosophy

Everybody wants to win, but thinking too much about winning has a negative effect. You can make many foolish mistakes and overlook some obvious good moves if you are obsessed with winning. Better than thinking about winning is thinking about playing well... Try to be a gracious winner and graceful loser. Everybody wins some and loses some, so being too happy about winning or unhappy about losing is shortsighted, as is envy: you don't know who's got the best deal until the very end of the show.

-- *Learn to Play Go, Volume III: The Dragon Style, by Janice Kim (1 dan) and Jeong Soo-hyun (9 dan)*

This manual is dedicated to enriching individuals interested in SCA Style Rapier Combat.

We will focus on basic principles that we have found lead to successfully killing your opponent without getting killed. We will give our philosophy about dueling, our approach to training, our mindset for combat and the positive results gleaned from the field (meaning we're *alive* and they are *dead!*).

Some of this book is based on facts: physics, anatomy, testing, and pure mathematical modeling.

Some of this book is based on our experiences (which are subjective, true) but probably factual: in other martial arts, during real fights/combat, on the field within the SCA parameters.

Some of this book is based on our beliefs and opinions. But even these have been built upon some kind of knowledge base: how people (including ourselves) react to stress/pain/fear, world views we've found in ourselves, met in other fighters, dogmas/faiths (that are not supported by facts as we've found them to be), etc. Every martial art creates its own myths. Rules and conventions wall off exploration and creativity. Soon you have dancing instead of fighting and everyone who puts on the pretty uniforms and belts believes it's real, because they've worked very hard to make it so.

This is not a scientific treatise. Although between us, we can boast (which, we admit is generally a bad thing) of two undergraduate and two postgraduate degrees, this is not an academic exercise. We're not writing a thesis. Any stilted, academic styling you read will quickly disappear after this initial introduction and definition stage. We are passionate about this game, make no mistake. We have devoted many hours to perfecting our understanding, our field craft, our teaching methods, our students... but we don't wear funny clothes. We don't give a hoot about style for style's sake. We aren't here to recreate historically accurate *anything*. Read your history. Fencing teachers have, in the past, been a very disreputable bunch; barely better than common street hoods and assassins. We've taken some of that philosophy to heart. The SCA gave us the rules and the tools. Within that framework we're determined to become the very best sword fighters on the planet (as if our lives were at stake). Within our philosophy, Conventions and Chivalry must stand on the shoulders of superior skill and technique: not substitute for them.

The idol at which we worship is "excellence" (or arete, a Greek word for all-around competence). Our ultimate litmus test has always been: "Does it work?" on the field, against someone whose sole purpose in being there is to guarantee that *it*, whatever *it* is, doesn't work. Our approach is also colored by the "what if it were real" deadly consequences of sword fighting that haunts this game.

We try to face, as much as is theoretically possible, what might happen to us if we ever had to do it with sharpened steel. We recognize that conjecture and opinion will fog up the landscape, until we can "take the tips off" and cast our lives where our mouths have led. We are always thinking about it. Our experience (my intimate, long-term experience with people really trying to kill each other) suggests that this "sport" is about as close to the "real thing" as one can get. The fact that tips break off and people die every once in a while, leads us to believe we can get (reasonably) close if we keep that central principle firmly in mind: Today I'm playing a game, tomorrow it could mean my life!

We've found that many historical figures that wrote manuals of fencing covered all the bases. The period masters advocate analyzing an opponent, channeling their initial attack, blocking and countering (mostly with stop thrusts that follow so closely on the attack that an opponent is essentially paralyzed and motionless) to lethal targets that end the bout instantly.

What's confusing is (beyond the archaic language) the fairly insurmountable task of committing a dynamic, flowing, interactive physical activity to a format as stilted and fixed as the written word. Martial artists from every culture have had to face this problem. Some Asian martial arts have turned their back on the issue and returned to the "one teacher-one student" system that is basically an oral/physical tradition. This is an indispensable corner stone of any martial system; you can't really learn from a book. Practical training and drill are definitely part of the picture. However, working with one person or one school or one system introduces weaknesses, too. Things like: Dogmatism, holes in the system, focus that leads to only one optimal body type, reliance on "secret, never-fail techniques," and simple familiarity with how another person moves and their best moves can give any martial artist a false sense of security. If you've ever fought someone new who pulls out a totally different combination, timing or technique and eaten a blade before you got your mind in gear, you know what I'm talking about. Nobody knows it all,

nobody has all the answers (including us), and anything, including a perfectly executed move, can get you killed.

Which brings me (finally!) to the central point. There are generalizations, guidelines and "rules of thumb" that can greatly improve your fencing. Not one of them is new. Many others have written principles of combat. If you're serious about the Warrior's Path, you'll read everything available from every art about fighting that's ever been written (and translated into English). We've provided a generous reading list/bibliography at the end of this manual, so start reading (editors note: this is on its way). Maybe you can't learn any one martial art from any one book, but more knowledge from other martial artists/sources can't hurt.

So.

This is not a limited "do this, do that" book, this is a Sun Tzu (if you don't know who he is, refer to the previous paragraph), "fundamental principles" book.

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The Theory: Successful Offense and Defense

Kill with a borrowed knife. -- *The Secret Art of War: The 36 Stratagems*

Pretend you're looking down on two fencers who are dueling. Not like that, Oh Arrogant One, I mean actually watching the fight from a bird's eye view.

If you've watched enough humans do this, you can see all the possible ways they can move their feet, their head, body, arms. You can actually see (if you've spent enough time observing yourself and others while fencing) the targets they can defend and the targets they can't, at any one moment. I've heard observers around me comment, "His head is wide open." or "Use the leg sweep!" How do experienced fighters come to know these things?

Some of it is fairly simple. Having only two legs means I have many balance problems. If *this* foot is in the air then *that* foot is carrying the weight. It's not going anywhere. The knee only bends one direction; for so many degrees. Once the leg is straight, it's up to the pivoting potential of the hip and ankle to provide any additional movements. The body twists. The head bobs. The elbow bends in one direction and not in the other. The shoulder rotates, so...

Essentially there are a finite number of movements that qualify for use at any one moment in combat. What is physically possible, efficient (read fast), and effective?

Offense

Theory of Attack

To successfully defeat an opponent you must accomplish three things:

1. Have your weapon free, oriented correctly, and on a clear path to the target.
2. Defeat the Outer Circle tools, the Inner Circle evasions/movements and strike the target.
3. Retrieve the weapon, avoiding entanglements, and recover an effective defensive posture.

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Strategic Principles

1. Attack on the 45-degree angle as often as you do in the straight line: This includes: behind the shoulder blade, kidney, hamstring, back of the knee, Achilles tendon. From in front: the face, throat, diaphragm, groin, quadriceps, knee, and ankle, arch of the foot. All your weight is centered in a column running from the top of your head down through your groin. Moving your center from one fixed point is difficult because it tends to be slow: slow to get started, slow to stop. If an attack is made there, 50% of your body must move to get (completely) out of the way (if you get an attack slightly off the center and you move your torso the wrong direction, you have even farther to go). Angled attacks are harder to block than straight-line attacks. If you attempt to block, the attacking tool must clear your body (a thin slice, that almost missed, can open you up like a zip-lock bag, i.e., completely).
2. Attack an exterior target before finishing: Attacking the limbs reduces your opponent's ability to defend themselves. There is more risk because it requires more skill to hit these (relatively) smaller, moving targets and more time, which increases the risk of something happening to you. To defeat an opponent with greater reach, this strategy is indispensable.
3. Observe your opponent's defenses and attack a target that is unguarded. Always be aware that an opening can be an invitation/trick. Make allowances for that possibility any time you attack. (keep 60% of your concentration on defense even as you make an attack. Never fully commit your strength/weight to an attack.) A good attack should be light, fast and a bit of a surprise (Wow, that got through!).
4. Diagnose you opponent's focus/concentration and attack when they are "asleep."

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Defense

Don't be afraid when you play with a stronger player. Fear is [your opponent's] strongest ally. --
Learn to Play Go, Volume III: The Dragon Style, by Janice Kim (1 dan) and Jeong Soo-hyun (9 dan)

Theory of Defense

To successfully protect yourself, you must accomplish three things:

1. Develop an awareness/experience of correct distance so that you know if an opponent can reach you (even if they need to hop, step or lunge).
2. Develop footwork, falls, rolls and body evasions which allow you to avoid being hit, causes your opponent to miss, or puts you beyond their reach (while maintaining/recovering your balance).
3. Develop the timing, judgement, strength and skill to use every available blocking tool including: every part of the sword, your hands, arms, shoulders, feet and legs.

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Chaining/Training

The best way to make your offense and defense work at peak efficiency is to chain the moves together; eventually causing them to overlap and combine in a single fluid motion.

One of the best lines to riposte (your attack directly on the heels of their attack) is the one your opponent just attacked on. Chances are their weapon is extended, so it cannot defend properly. Their defensive tools are probably moved out of the way to clear the physical apparatus so it can perform the mechanics of the attack. The idea here, is to shave your defense down to the point where the attack just barely misses. You counter-attack on (almost, there is some leeway here.) the same line, at the moment their attack is spent. This prevents a last minute draw cut from getting you and, if done correctly, you get that nice "hover effect" where your opponent is frozen in time.

You should train the components separately over time. Then bring them together until they become an automatic overlapping combination of moves. Here's an example:

- Your training partner feeds you a slow lunge to your chest.
- Begin by pivoting away from the attack and letting it go by, under your armpit. Make this motion smaller and smaller until your partner's point just misses you (it's important for your partner to do exactly the same attack every time. Don't let them start to "track you" because they know where you are going to go. That's counter productive at this stage. Later on, you can add the tracking as a spur to your off hand defense, which will be taking a greater roll in actual combat.)
- Add your left hand (or whatever secondary defensive tool you want) defense; we'll use palm block down, for convenience. At first, it's just there as an added safety. The technique won't hit you anyway, because you've already pivoted off the line.
- Begin to add your riposte, very slowly at first. Just get an idea of what it takes to reach your partner. It'll probably only take a thrust. As their lunge will be bringing them to you, a simple stop thrust should do the job.
- Get lazy with your evasive footwork. Begin your pivot later and later in the sequence, to where you **have to** block with the off hand to prevent yourself from getting skewered. Begin combining your riposte with the block until they happen almost simultaneously (try to run the shot back along their attacking arm, using the theory described above: most likely line open is the one they're using to attack with).

This may take several fighter practices and many repetitions to bear fruit, but it's worth it. After a while you will see this attack and simply react, getting the touch before you know you've done it. To build sophistication and control, try this at varying distances and angles. Try it with various opponents, of varying heights, reach, and skill levels (read speed).

Once you've gotten that variable under control, think about directing your riposte toward other targets that are available (to add these layers, you may need to slow the tempo to beginner level, and ask your partner to feed you specific attacks again). Eventually, you should be able to **decide** (as the sequence is happening) to thrust at another target or even abort the riposte entirely; say, if your opponent has charged in too close and a stop thrust would injure them or your equipment (hard to straighten out a 16 inch bend in your epee. Best to pull the shot and save your gear). I like to fold my arm in across my body and tuck the sword under the opposite armpit. This still gives me a reasonable amount blocking surface, with my forearm across my belly, ready to sweep up to protect my head or down to protect my groin. It's not perfect but it will serve, even if I only get a partial block or deflection. I'm not keen on moving my blade out and away from my side (although I've done it). It exposes too much of my chest and face to feel comfortable.

If you've gotten all that under control (takes about six months) you can think about using a draw cut across (from your left to right, if you're right handed) their body, legs or arm as your sword is now perfectly chambered to do so (mind your furniture as you begin. You may need to widen the gap between you two before starting the cut, for safety's sake).

Our *Theory Of Combat* presupposes this: It's safest to believe that our opponents know as much, are as fast, and train as hard as we do. We know from experience that we must defeat the outer tools (the blades, bucklers, scabbards and cloaks we face). We then must defeat the inner tools (in the form of wrists, forearms, elbows and shoulders) and then the bodily evasions (in the form of twists, leaning, ducking, skipping and other footwork) that may prevent us from stabbing or cutting our opponents.

To accomplish this we have a number of tools at our disposal:

- We can use our own footwork to bring us to a place and time where they do not expect us.
- We can attack their weapons themselves: disarm, manage, trap, lock and bind. This gives us control and knowledge of where their weapons are and what they can (and more importantly cannot) do.
- We can use their own body mechanics, balance, limbs against them; to protect us, camouflage our attack or intentions. We can use our own body mechanics for the same purposes.
- We can use our weapons in all their aspects to cut, thrust, bind and block, allowing us to attack where we want, when we want.
- We can use our minds to analyze our opponents for mental blind spots, technical weaknesses and physical limitations. We can formulate strategies and tactics to defeat them.

After we have made the touch, we want to get in the habit of maintaining our defense, staying on guard, until the danger from a last minute attack has passed. Nothing spells "embarrassed" like getting nailed by an opponent you thought you got; who either ignores or was unaware of the technique you felt was good, and should have gotten them. This is our theory in a nutshell (a very large, ungainly, wordy nutshell, to be sure. But it's the best we can do given the circumstances.)

Treat each section as a single focus seminar on that topic. It's obvious to every sword fighter that these topics are intertwined. They overlap and many events occur simultaneously. The actuality of a duel is very different from the printed word, or even the drills and training we offer. Synthesis will come, but examination must begin with isolation.

We are going to isolate aspects of sword fighting and examine them in a seminar setting. Each section tries to concentrate on one aspect of sword fighting. We want to highlight principles and processes that we have found successful. We are going to attempt to clarify principles we have discovered through experience. All of this effort will fail; will fail **absolutely**, without the reader going out and gaining their own practical experience and knowledge base.

If you read a section and apply it diligently to your training, it may still take you years to reach that point where a little light bulb goes on over your mask and you say to yourself, "Oh, I get it. That's what that means!" After all, it took us years and lots of familiarity to get to the point where we felt we could even articulate this stuff. How much time will it take for you to comprehend? Nobody knows, including you.

Take each section as an independent entity. Build a composite picture as you go. Much of this information is abstract, not concrete. To spend time on nuts and bolts like: "This is a sword, here's where you block. Here is a block, do it like this. Here is a thrust, bend your knee..." is going to bog us down until we drown in a sea of minutia.

Fundamentals are universal in concept, and unique in practice. Your body, arms, legs, prior injuries, etc. all impact how you do your fundamentals. This is how different styles of Karate were developed. Big guys do it this way. Little guys do it that way. Style is about an individual interpretation of an art that becomes institutionalized (mostly by a particular master's students after they, the living master, has died,) and develops adherents. That's all it is, too. There is no **one way** to do any martial art including sword fighting. The only litmus we ask you to apply is this: Is this effective for me? If the answer is yes, develop it and add it to your own personal style. If the answer is no, discard it, but only after you've thoroughly tested it for merit and found none.

Enough, let's move on to some of these hated basics; the nuts and bolts I said we wouldn't pursue (you gotta start somewhere. We've found some misconceptions that are rooted all the way down in fundamental practice, so we're going to have to give you some, just to let you know where we are coming from).

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Summary of Fencing Basics

Footwork and Stances

Footwork First! -- *Lord Randal the Malcontent*

Sloppy stances make sloppy technique! -- *Qwa Ja Nim Larry Hampton*

Introduction

We will do a quick review of classical fencing footwork, but we want to concentrate on footwork that is more advanced (our source happened to be Aikido, but there are several period sources that mention the same techniques).

Before we begin, we wish to preach/teach/nag a little footwork. If distance is critical to success in fencing (read: staying alive) then footwork is the most important fundamental to learn, practice and improve.

As much as we admire classical footwork (which we do. The classical community's commitment to basics; their use of extensive and long-term drill; these are good things. It can only be helpful to streamline all of your footwork until it has reached its utmost efficiency). It has severe limitations when fencing off the strip and in the round. Terrain is much more of a factor when you fence outdoors. Weather can also be a factor. The point is, in-line footwork is only one set of the techniques you will need to ingrain at the instinctive level to become a good fencer.

This is boring... dull... like watching grass grow, but completely necessary. Training a movement so that your muscles are fooled into thinking "this is normal and correct," takes many weeks. Making it as natural as breathing takes about a year. Making it automatic, so that your body just does it when you're tired, afraid, being attacked, etc. takes about two years.

I'm not kidding.

If I have any complaint about the rapier fighting I've seen in the SCA it is this: We, as a community, do too much fighting and not enough training. Many of the fighters I face have weak fundamentals (I just spent four years training my own fundamentals in this art before feeling confident that I have them down. This process cannot be rushed.) that make them poor fighters with poor control and poor technique. I have the bruises to prove it. To get results from what we are going to show you will take a long-term commitment of three times a week, minimal half hour sessions, of at least 1-2 years to see results; results that include your becoming the baddest, most lethal, most beautiful fencer on the field. This stuff not only works, it's really pretty to watch. I'm talking 60-year-old-Kung-Fu-Master beautiful. O.K, enough infomercial, here's the deal.

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Basics

When a beginner learns the game, the first things he should learn are the fundamental skills. When he advances to the point where he begins to think of himself as a strong player, the thing he needs to do to become even stronger is to go back and study the fundamentals once more. -- *Lessons in the Fundamentals of Go, by Toshiro Kageyama (7 dan)*

Classical Stance

Stand with heels touching at a 90 degree angle. Pick a direction one of your feet is pointed in (in this case we'll use the right foot) and advance that foot to shoulder width plus about 3 inches. Bend your knees (not so much that you can't see your toes out there), keep your back straight, suck in that gut, and look out over your right shoulder. Hold your right hand, palm up, out there over that knee. Relax a bit...and hold that position for 10 seconds. Shake it out. Repeat for years and years.

Classical Advance

Assume a classical stance, right foot forward. Lift your right foot and move it forward (heel placed first, then toe) about 3 inches. Follow with the left foot. Do not drag or scuffle. Keep as thin a target profile toward your opponent as you can; exposing only your shoulder and knee to your opponent. Hide as much of your arm as possible behind the bell of your sword. Repeat.

Classical Retreat

Assume a classical stance, right foot forward. Lift your left foot and move it backward (ball of the foot placed first, then heel) about 3 inches. Follow with the right foot. Do not drag or scuffle. Keep as thin a target profile toward your opponent as you can; exposing only your shoulder and knee to your opponent. Hide as much of your arm as possible behind the bell of your sword. Repeat.

Single Combat Stance (SCS)

Feet shoulder width apart, facing directly forward in parallel (called the Horse Stance in Asian styles), draw a straight line between and through both your heels. Now from each heel to toe, draw two lines that run from your heels out through your big toe(s) and beyond on the floor for another foot. These lines should be on a 90 degree angle from the heel to heel line you first drew. Turn your feet 45 degrees toward the heel to heel line (in this case, we'll turn toward the right). Keep your shoulders lined up with your heels, don't roll them forward and "square up." Hold up your hands like a boxer, right hand forward. Open your left hand and prepare it for slap defense and grappling. Drop your right hand a bit and point your finger/sword point at your imaginary opponent's throat. Pop your rear (left) heel off the floor a little. Bend your knees. Keep your back straight and hold for 10 seconds. Relax and shake it out.

If you feel like a boxer more than a fencer, congratulations, you're correct. Period fencing was much more like a boxing match (with swords) than a formal dance with both fighters sliding their backs along a brick wall. Slipping "the punch," cross-stepping, voiding the body, skipping (yes, just like a little kid) and pivoting were all normal footwork for rapier fighting. We've isolated some of these elements into various steps and drills to help

expand the footwork we employ in a single duel. These get a bit smudged during combat, of course, but here's a way to train each element until it's natural.

The Pivot

Right foot forward, assume the SCS. Drive an imaginary nail through the top of your right foot and into the floor. Pivot your left foot, hips, shoulders, etc, 90 degrees. Always turn in the direction of your spine. Turn counter-clock-wise until you've faced all "four walls." This should take four distinct turns and you should end up facing in the direction you started. Switch feet and repeat (going clock-wise this time). Defense starts with footwork, remember? So, let's get the most out of our footwork by voiding our body/face from a potential thrust to our front (it's not like, we're never gonna see this attack, right?). This defense has more to recommend it than may be apparent at first glance.

- You get the cool "vacuum effect" of them missing you and getting sucked into a committed position (you and I know there's a draw cut danger possible here, but very often, your opponent is too crossed up mentally to think of it before you have gotten off the counter). Since you didn't use either hand to defend yourself they are both available for attack. If you split the attack the chances are very good that one or both techniques will get through and stick 'em.
- It's minimal/subtle; your opponent may not see it as a defense and fall asleep mentally.
- It adds distance between your precious skin and the point of your opponent's sword without giving up critical distance for your own attacking stuff (including cuts which are much harder to defend than in-line attacks).
- It can be combined with another defensive tool like your arm, hand, furniture or blade in a way that gives you: additional time, greater distance, more acute angles for an opponent to overcome.
- It puts you on the 45 degree angle for an attack which stresses your opponent's defense even more than a simple in-line shot can.

Step-Through-Pivot

Right foot forward, assume the SCS. Step all the way through with the left foot (some period masters call this a slope pace/step. Other martial arts call it a V step.) Now drive that imaginary nail through the top of your left foot and into the floor. Pivot your right foot, hips, shoulders, etc, 90 degrees in the direction of your spine (clock-wise in this case). If you started facing North, you stepped North and now you're pivoting until you end up facing East. Always remember to do mirrored versions of this by switching feet and repeating the steps (going counter-clock-wise this time).

This defense is primarily used against cuts to your leading neck, shoulder, ribs, flanks and legs (beware the Coupe De Jarnac!). It's difficult to block attacks to your back/lateral line when engaged in the round. A plain outside block (number six if you like the French numbering system and are keeping score at home) or outside parry is often inadequate the more the angle swings to the outside of your elbow. Here's some additional strengths of this footwork.

- Start this footwork soon enough and they may miss you entirely. It expands the distance between you and the tip of the incoming sword. Since you didn't use either hand to defend yourself they are both available for sealing off the inevitable back swing and making a strong counter attack.
- It helps diffuse the incoming energy if you can't quite get away. Think of it this way: a truck that is going 45 mph hits your car. If you're just sitting there you eat all the incoming force. If you're traveling in the same direction at 30 mph, the impact is a lot less. If your sword is between you and the incoming cut, it can get blasted back into you if you're just stand there. If you're sliding away in the same direction as the incoming cut, it will probably just smack into your sword and deflect off.
- If you can cut the angle tightly enough, you end up standing next to your opponent and facing the same direction they are. Again your opponent may not see it as a defense and be confused mentally. If you've done everything right, your sword is now inside theirs (I mean close to or against your bodies, with his blade outside yours.) Guess who gets to play the part of Tom Turkey?
- It closes the distance between you and your opponent at the very moment they begin their attack. The best way to defeat your opponent is to catch them in offensive mode when they need to be thinking in defensive mode (then you take them out using Depeche Mode). Call this one, "passive-aggressive" if you like. Seriously, if you get strong enough at reading tells you can take control of their sword/attack, cross-step inside and cut them up, using either hand (whether you have two weapons or one, there are things to do once you get next to your opponent. Trust me on this.), and slide away behind them safely and cleanly.
- It puts you in position to do some major grappling/joint cracking if you learn the next step and glom onto their sword wrist/hand. If you've seen Aikido, here's where opponents have to do flips to keep their arm from imitating certain breakfast cereals. Although we (in the SCA) are not allowed to complete that next step, we *can* bind someone up who's out of control; and do it in such a way that they feel lots and lots of pain but sustain minimal damage. This is a good thing to know of you ever need it.

Skip Forward/Skip Back

Right foot forward, assume the SCS. Step up with your left foot and put it where your right foot just was (It's already moving forward). Move your right foot forward on that imaginary line you drew through your heels back at the beginning. Always move on the 45 degree angle. Never go straight forward or straight back.

Here are some strengths of this footwork.

- Skipping forward with your back foot changes the distance between you and your opponent rather dramatically. This can be a good thing when you are facing someone who is very tall and has a long reach or step. This helps chase down a Runner as well.

- If at all possible, your first instinctive defense should be "getting out of the way" of an attack. This skipping back thing can be very helpful if you were "caught napping" and your opponent is about to gut you. Skipping back at a shallow angle away from the incoming attack can even allow it to miss you completely. This is yet another version of the "vacuum effect" mentioned earlier. If your opponent is at maximum extension, a little teeny block can push them completely off balance. Repeated experience has shown us that skipping covers lots of distance while allowing you to recover balance quickly. With training, a stop thrust combined with a backward skip can suck your opponent into running onto your point. Very cool. Skipping is geared to give you that additional "safety time" and "safety distance" (not to mention, you can gibber with fear for a while without dying over it).
- Moving in the same direction as the incoming technique can diffuse much of it's energy (see Step-Through-Pivot). This footwork adds distance between your precious skin and the point of your opponent's sword. You should not do this in a straight line. Always change the angle, even if it's just a little bit, so you're no longer in-line with their point.
- It can put you on the 45 degree angle for a counter attack which stresses your opponent's defense even more than a simple in-line shot can.

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Conclusion

One of the things I don't like about the Classical Advance is it's susceptibility to the foot sweep (if you're using an epee, the classic "Torn-off Car Antenna Used As A Sword Sweep." Boy, does that one sting). When you pick up your lead foot and move it forward, your weight has been committed before your support is in place. This is kind of like driving onto a bridge and hoping it'll be finished by the time you reach the end. AHHHHHHH, thump! Not a great idea. So you're thinking, "Hell, that fool's out there at swords-length. How can I get hurt stepping forward?" (Isn't it eerie how I can read your mind from here? Spooky, huh? All part of M-Cubed: My Master's gone Mental) I'm not all that worried about the fighter you face, it's the ground you're standing on that has me concerned. All of your balance operates from point to point. If your foot misses a step, you fall down and go boom (and right after that your chest goes gurgle, gurgle, gurgle..). Any time you're weight is committed without actually having the foot solidly planted is inherently more risky than a step you've already completed. There's also the problem of sneaky guys like me who will attack you when we see that front foot lifting (cause we know you're standing on one foot right now and probably can't handle the gift we're about to give you without a major balance adjustment). You can advance the rear foot and abort the skip without your opponent (me) seeing it. You can get half way through a skip and change directions, spin away, flop backwards or even kick with that foot that's hanging there. Like I said, sneaky, that's me.

Here's a way at looking at combining all of your footwork, both Classical and Advanced. This is something you should do anyway. Use Advanced footwork for when you need to cover ground

or have figured out what's coming. Use Classical footwork for micro-adjusting your distance during a lull or when you're on the line in a melee. You can:

- **Creep** into range in a sneaky manner.
- **Skip** over a larger distances than you can step.
- **Slope Step** from the off-hand forward position.
- **Lunge** at an odd angle or timing.
- **Charge** bravely into the guns (worst choice).

To accomplish this task **you must drill your footwork**. Please try doing this without a sword. It can be very helpful (I can focus on my feet better without a blade). Just remember to include a variety of obstacles, terrain, distances to be covered and timings(speed of execution) to be effective. It must be smooth, oh so smooth.

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Four types of Basic Attacks

Single Shot

a clean in-line attack or a circular attack that stands alone without feint or additional accompaniment. A single note if you will. There are four zones so there are four in-line attacks and eight circular attacks (palm up or palm down) for a total of twelve.

Multiple Attacks

a series of attacks chained together into one, continuous, flowing, motion. There can be as few as two (a simple thrust followed by the fillip or tip cut), or as many as you can throw (up to eight or even ten continuous attacks can be thrown by a master). On average it takes two-three attacks to displace an opponent's defensive tools to get the last shot to go through clean and unopposed.

Attack On Riposte

This is the classic fencing technique whereby a block is executed and the counter attack follows on the same line, or nearly the same line. It can also be executed off the block to another line or zone and be effective. It presupposes a number of things: That the opponent will attack (some are one dimensional counter punchers themselves and wouldn't dream of attacking you first). That you will have a block ready. That you will execute the block cleanly and correctly. That you will have "thought ahead" and prepared the counter shot. That you will execute the counter correctly and cleanly. In many ways it is the most difficult and "mature" of the four types to achieve.

Attack On Voiding

An attack that follows closely on a footwork or body evasion technique. This is also requires a maturity and ability to think ahead. As your opponent attacks (and it needs to be a fairly committed attack and you must recognize it as such, i.e., not a feint) you void or move the target out of the line of fire, combined with a counter attack of your own. Two examples are: the *passata soto* (voiding the body under the incoming thrust and executing the stop thrust in one motion), *stoccata* (a pivot off the lead foot while raising the hand above the head and thrusting downward into the opponent. Essentially, a rising block in four combined with a stop thrust).

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Defense against the four types of attack (in order of my personal philosophy and preference)

To Defend Against The Single Thrust

Execute a void

Get out of the way. This can be as simple as shifting back three inches as a charger gears up to make their attack. Way too many beginners start with a block. After all they're holding a sword and they've seen a movie fight, right? This can limit a fighter drastically in their later strategic thinking. Always, always, always start with the simplest defense: get out of the way! (This applies to the hand and arm as well. I see too many beginners paralyzed by an attack to their hand. If that's the furthest an attacker can reach, they need only move the hand around to defeat the attacker's purpose. Sadly, this rarely happens.)

Execute a block

This must also be gauged based on the strength and seriousness of the attack. It's very hard to block a thrust combined with a step-through. It's too powerful for your arm to cope with. A feint to your hand can be defeated by lowering it two inches. This response requires training and experience.

Block with a secondary

I place this block in a separate category because it requires more thinking. The secondary must be used correctly. It must not impede or strike the weapon making the counter strike. It must continue to be used effectively should the counter fail. This requires split focus, and lots of training to work smoothly and effectively.

Block with a Riposte

The best way to defeat the attack is to give your opponent something else to do, mainly block. Switching mentally from offence to defense takes time (less as the fencer progresses in skill) and a fighter that is primarily defending against you is less of a threat than one that is constantly on the attack. Eventually this becomes a single motion, block flowing into attack. But many fencers are not that proficient yet and you can catch them "between modes" of thought. This also presupposes that your defense has been polished and perfected to the point where you can think about the counter and not focus totally on the blocking motions needed to save you. There's nothing more embarrassing than getting killed during the blocking phase of this technique. You always look like you jumped onto their blade and ran yourself through "seppuku" style.

Change the Timing

If you get involved in a pattern of Block/Thrust, Block/Thrust where you and your opponent are exchanging single shots, one after another, change the timing of your counter attack: either slower (so their block goes past the target too early) or faster (where the block gets there a little too late).

To Defend Against Multiple Attacks

Change the distance

Get to another range. Whether you're starting at sword point or bell to bell, go someplace else.

Change the orientation between the fighters

If you're standing behind their shoulder blade the number of attacks they can successfully execute is severely limited by the construction of the elbow and shoulder joint groups.

This knowledge can be developed through training/practice with a partner.

Control their tools

Bind or trap their weapons with their own secondaries or yours. This involves more risk, because You'll have to "stay home" at critical distance making one or more blocks until you discern or disrupt the pattern of attacks. Success depends on knowing what attacks are possible from what the hand, wrist, elbow and shoulder can achieve through range of motion, combined with experience of that particular fighters moves.

Change the Timing

Same as number 5 in Single Attacks.

To Defend Against Attack On Riposte

1. Prepare and acknowledge that your opponent will not "start the conversation."
2. Make your first attack secure in the knowledge that they will have to block and execute some kind of counter attack. This gives you a lot of control: of the timing of the initial engagement, the location of your first attack, and the most likely response that your opponent will have to give to defend. With all these advantages, you should defeat them.
3. Execute your attack with a pre planned defense in mind.
4. Execute your defense correctly.
5. Continue with any of the basic attacks you believe will lead to your success.

You can change timing and execute one clean shot. You can chain your initial attack into a multiple series and, by keeping the pressure on, maneuver their defense around until they are open to your final killing shot. You can channel their initial riposte and void while stop thrusting.

To Defend Against Attack On Void

Give the shot that leads to the void you know that they favor.

Let them see what they want, so you can get the fight started. Always have the backup plans ready to go once they do what comes naturally. Predictable moves should always result in the early demise of the fighter that uses them. Ruts aren't just bad form, they're starter graves for the fighter that stays in one. Redirect a straight thrust from an initial feint into another zone based on that void. If they pivot, redirect into their torso or groin. If they skip back while picking your hand, offer the hand while watching them closely. Void it two inches to the side as they attack. Close on them with a leg attack, etc. The combinations and permutations are endless and may only become self evident at the moment they are used on the field.

Give multiple feints.

Voids only work against a committed attack. If you present two or three attacks without full intention, you can often get the committed void and then redirect your attack as they attempt to recover their center.

Attack their source of mobility, the legs.

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Targeting and Advanced Defense

Voiding and Blocking

Trimming down the size of these moves (both slipping and blocking) is at the heart of good fencing technique. I frequently wait until the last possible second to begin a pivot or slip, just to see how close I can cut it. During Fighter Practice, I'll allow many touches in that are within 1 to 2 inches of missing me entirely. I'll even take shots to the mask at angles I know would have missed my face or head, as part of paring/honing down that technique. I do this for three reasons.

- The transition between defense and offence is where most duels are won. If I can get my shot off before my opponent has recovered his defense (mentally or physically) I'm running through an (essentially) helpless fighter. If I have a good idea of this fighter's repertoire, I want to see certain attacks from them because I have counters primed and ready. If I don't know this fencer well, I want to respond to their very first attack with something so fast and automatic and clean and precise, that they're dead even before I know what's happened. This can only be done if I've made my blocks and evasions as "tight" as possible.
- During a duel, my adrenaline kicks in and many of my techniques get "bigger." I will overreact to certain things (although observers tell me this is a purely mental reaction, they don't see a huge physical reaction or twitch.) and "add a little bit" to my moves. There's a zone here where I want the added "panic induced safety margin," but I don't want to get so flinchy that I'm out of balance, position or giving a "tell".
- I never want to over protect any particular target on my body. This includes the face and groin. To overcome my natural tendencies, I force myself (during drills) to commit no more special attention to these targets than I do to any other. I'm especially concerned, because they are both so well protected by a cup and the mask. Remember what happened to period fencers who relied on "conventions of courtesy" and lost an eye? Never rely on social or conventional armor for defense. Pretend you're completely naked or get some boffer stuff and a partner who has good control and fight without any protection at all. If you're lazy (and you never heard this from me) train without SCA requirements in a non-SCA venue with your normal blades. Note your reaction to a "close call." Try to minimize that reaction as much as possible.

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From The Armpit To The Bird Blunt

Although we are primarily concerned in this section with defense of the arm and it's uses in defending the rest of the body, we will spend a few moments describing targets on the arm and some of the attacks you're most likely to see.

Disabling the arm is a primary tactic in SCA light fighting. According to Outlands rules, any touch from the finger tips to the point of the shoulder disables the arm, thereby removing it from the play. That's fantasy. Here's the reality.

The reality of targeting the arm.

Target	Attacks
Nerve center in the back of the hand	furniture strikes, thrust
Tendons inside the wrist	tip cut, draw cut
Elbow (inside)	furniture strikes, thrust, tip cut
Elbow (outside)	furniture strikes
Biceps	tip cut
Triceps	tip cut
Armpit	tip cut, draw cut, thrust (lethal)
Shoulder Joint	furniture strikes

This list may read a little differently than you would first imagine. Cutting the nerves and tendons can instantly disable the arm. Thrusting into the armpit can kill or cause unconsciousness, but scratches and stabs to the outside forearm or biceps can be completely ignored (I know. During a scuffle, I was stabbed twice, once in the upper arm and once in the forearm. I didn't even know I'd been stabbed until an observer pointed out that I was bleeding through my jacket). With a sword we always want to cut with the tip (with a quick wrist/forearm action, not a baseball-type swing), stab with the last three inches, strike with the pommel/quillion group and recover our weapon intact for the next opponent we may face (some three seconds from now).

If you refer to the chart (and the anecdote) above you'll see that the outside of the forearms can take a lot of abuse without losing functional integrity. Neither cuts nor thrusts are instantly debilitating. Note: block with the outside of your arm, never the inside. Only one major nerve runs along the top of the forearm (it controls movements made by the pinky and ring finger). Two nerves, the major tendons of the hand and the vein all run along the inside of the arm. They must be protected or you'll really lose your arm, possibly forever.

We wish to point out two offensive principles here.

First: you have to hit real targets (nerves and tendons) with good strong techniques to have any chance of really denying an opponent the use of their arm(s). Rules are OK but they don't represent reality.

Second: you take a big chance trying to wound, cripple, or maim your opponent rather than kill them outright. A wounded man **knows** if he has any hope of winning/surviving he must commit right now; before incapacity and blood loss reduce his defensive capability to zero. Wounded opponents become your students only in cheesy martial arts movies. In reality, it's very risky to

hurt someone without immediately finishing them off. We advocate attacking peripheral targets because it exposes you to less risk of immediate damage. However, the moment you are successful in reaching an arm target, you must make the kill. We train ourselves and our students to make that kill immediately (this has also led us to come up with some pretty quick and fancy sword exchanges during bouts, but that's another story) and to hell with Chivalry. Not that we don't allow for that kind of panache on more formal occasions, we just don't live by it. Get in, get out, get it over with.

Back to Defense. You need to train yourself, not only to defend the arm if it's attacked, but to be aware of what's behind it on that same line. Otherwise your opponent can just keep on thrusting; right into your torso, groin, hips, legs or face. It takes time and experience to know when an attack is only seriously meant for the hand/arm. Distance can be a useful tip off. Your best defense is to move the arm away from the incoming tip but out of line with the incoming blade. We also strongly urge you to change your entire fighting angle, stance or distance from your opponent at that same moment. Arm shots are often part of a series of attacks. Changing your distance/angle often "spoils the soup" and saves your ass.

You can use your upper arm, elbow and forearm to defend against incoming shots. These moves come from martial arts other than fencing, but they do have their uses in our game. An oblique thrust toward the armpit or floating ribs can be "nudged" past you with a triceps block. All it takes is a little (OK, a lot of) training/experience. If your sword is already engaged, you can drop your furniture/hand and make another block on something else (we call it a palm heel block in Tae Kwon Do). These techniques aren't full blocks as much as checks that prevent more serious targets from becoming damaged while they are moving out of the line of fire. These techniques often deflect the incoming blade rather than stop it cold.

Let me deviate one more time. I can hear some fighters whining about push cuts. Well forget them. They don't work, we tested them thoroughly, with live steel. The physics/body mechanics just don't support them. You can't get enough inward press on a push cut with the (admittedly dull enough for period masters to advocate grabbing them) rapier, to get any useful cut. Offensive use of this technique is supported by ill-informed folks that are A: too sloppy to hit their targets on offence and B: think the blade edge on their swords can go (magically) from soft while blocking, to hard while cutting. It's not a katana, people. If it were, it'd be notched all to hell in a rapier fight, if not completely broken.

There are four main blocks:

Inside Block

As you pivot toward your spine, deflect the incoming point down and away to where you were just standing. Roll your forearm with the incoming shot to save your inner arm.

Outside Block

As you skip, forward or backward (doesn't matter), deflect the incoming point down and past your hip with the outside of your forearm.

Palm Block

As you step through and Pivot, drive the incoming point downward with the furniture of your sword. Keep your sword point up if at all possible.

High block

As you lose your legs, dive in on your knees or step back down the staircase behind you, raise your hand/forearm and deflect the incoming point over your shoulder or head.

Remember, all this can be done with the off-hand. It's just harder to think of and train your sword arm to do two things at once so I'm emphasizing it's use on defense here. All these blocks should be combined with some kind of movement, especially footwork. However, trunk twisting, leaning, head tilting and knee bending are all useful augmentations to blocking with the arms.

I know of a knife fighting principle I'd like to invoke here: one cut = one kill. You can prepare yourself (psychologically) to take some kind of damage, and by allowing for that, kill or finish your opponent, even if they draw first blood. Call it "a good trade," i.e., a hole in my upper arm for one through your opponent's lung. This kind of thinking can and does create subtle advantages. You fight "a little closer to the bone." Fear doesn't send you jumping back or flinching heavily during a pass. This leaves you more lined up for the counter thrust and reacting without thinking about the pain/shock of your recent wound. Paradoxically, resigning yourself to this (in a bushi sort of way) damage is often relaxing and can speed you up, leaving your precious skin un-perforated after the fight, victory in hand.

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Head, Trunk And Legs

It seems I start each defensive section with the offense/attacks that you are likely to see and then backtrack to the defense you're going to need against them. Since that's become the pattern, let's go with it once again.

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The Head and Techniques of Disruption

The most common offensive techniques for the head are the classic head butt (forward and backward), and biting, which my Irish ancestors seemed to prefer in close grappling as a stunner and focus disrupter. Since these techniques are illegal in SCA fencing, let's talk about the results that occur when these techniques show up.

When facing a fighter at the onset of a duel, one of the most important keys to success is to have within your arsenal, the capability to disrupt any aspect of an opponent's game. This includes not only foiling the physical attacks they bring to the bout, but the "mindset" they employ (for more on "mindset"). We've found that using ultra-light weapons like epee, means you really have to outthink your opponent. The footwork is smaller and classically driven in an epee bout. The blocks can be quite subtle and the counter thrust dazzlingly fast. Even a poor fighter can defend themselves reasonably well by retreating and briskly waving the sword back and forth across the body.

Defending yourself successfully by using your head to outthink an opponent is driven by your ability to make three kinds of change. Timing, Distance and Focus/Channeling. These can be thought of as offensive techniques because you consciously make the decision to employ them (that's what I meant by attacking the head at the beginning. These attacks are as much mental as physical) during a bout. Don't bother to say you can't fight and think at the same time (although we face fighters every week who haven't changed their thinking, approach or techniques in years). We've taught many students with many different styles and experience levels and made

this stuff part of their game. Whether it's possible to accomplish this in the "one way" forum of a book remains to be seen.

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The Concepts of Disruption

Timing

Drastically changing timing can be rewarding if you or your opponent have established a rhythm of engagement or conversation. This can be as simple as speeding up or dramatically slowing down your attack (kind of like a change-up in baseball. The guy whiffs the block by swinging his arm/blade through at an incoming thrust that's right where he likes to see it...too soon, and he's dead, wow man, that is cool!).

Distance

This concept is kind of vague because you cannot change distance per se: you have to be close enough to touch them, which generally means they're close enough to touch you. This is more about changing your opponent's perception of distance or taking advantage of body mechanics that allow you to change the distance (generally closing it) unopposed. We want to avoid an incoming technique in such a way that it leaves us in a good position to strike. If we're impatient or need to be more aggressive due to style problems or circumstances, we invite our opponents to strike, but in such a way that we can block or control that technique and "follow it in" (see Focus/Channeling).

Focus/Channeling

This is a combination of two principles. If you see your opponent focusing on one target area or having a "favorite shot" to one zone you can take advantage of that focus by channeling their attacks to where they like to put them; or (even sneakier) where you'd like them to go. If you do this correctly you can "short circuit" the process or have a counter ready (it comes about a split second after their initial shot) that it all looks like one continuous move. He moves, he recovers, oh... he's already dead.

Understanding these three "Concepts of Disruption" takes a fair amount of fighting experience and can get fairly awkward/difficult to talk about, so bear with me here. Rather than give you a thousand Do's and Don't's, I'll try and illustrate the principle with a couple of choice examples.

Suppose my opponent and I have been circling and I observe that my opponent likes to fight refused (long sword back), stop, plant the lead foot and then drive through with the other leg into a deep lunge. This is such a strong attack that, so far, I've had to skip back and make a downward block with my sword just to stay alive. I, personally, find that engaging at this extreme range and then exchanging a single "all or nothing" technique, uncomfortable so I want to change our "dialogue." I can think of three places where I could change the timing of my opponent's moves by introducing a new element.

Circling

While my opponent circles, I can begin a series of harassing attacks to the lead (empty) hand. I might observe that this causes them to "freeze" their footwork for a moment before continuing to circle. It seems to me that if I catch them with one foot in the air and feint to that empty hand, I have a good chance of redirecting my thrust toward that leading leg when they lock up their feet. No legs means no lunge. Now the problem looks smaller and more manageable.

Plant

Since my opponent likes to start from a particular distance (that they find comfortable but I don't), I can stand still (pivoting to keep them at an appropriate angle for good defense), inviting them to "get settled" at their favorite distance, and then quickly change that distance. This can be as subtle as doing a classic retreat of three inches (setting them up to overextend on the thrust and catching them in "hover mode" while they try to recover balance) or as broad as attacking with a strong series of thrusts every time they plant the "launch pad" foot. The idea here is to disrupt distance at a critical moment.

Channeling

Since I have a good read on the attack that's coming after the plant (step through and thrust to the body), I can invite the attack by leaving my torso temptingly open and undefended. At the moment they commit to the attack, I can begin my own series of prepared defensive moves catching their thinking "in one place" when it should have been someplace else. This is how Karate and other martial arts do it. They grant the opponent first strike and then program themselves to respond without thinking. This requires years of committed effort and intensive training to program the brain to react at this most primitive and instinctive level (without wasting time involving the frontal lobes of the brain).

The principle process here is this: Observe the techniques, determine the timing, distance or focus points that are susceptible to disruption, plan/train/pick the techniques needed to stun or disrupt, execute the technique at combat speed, review results and make any changes that might improve success.

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Defending the Head

Too many fencers that I meet, think their defense lies in the arms at the end of their, uh, arms. Since my first line of defense is to get out of the way (in such a way that it leaves me in a position to respond immediately), it's important to practice slipping, tilting and twisting the head out of line with the incoming attack.

Defending the head against a downed fighter requires a slightly different approach. For more details on that situation.

Just because we have a mask on is no reason we shouldn't combine moving the head while keeping our eyes on our opponent. Boxers are masters of changing the distance at the moment their opponent punches so it's a miss. It can be surprisingly hard to hit that melon with a needle sharp point when it's moving around a lot. I've seen period woodcuts where the fighter turns their head away during lunges and such. Why is having a sword go through your head from back to front better than the reverse? Not to mention, you lose visual contact with your opponent. Not a good plan.

One of the favorite period attacks was to the face. Why? It's a great stunner/disrupter. Again, why? Because without masks, face shots were forbidden during training (there were a few fencers who became famous for putting out their opponents eyes during "practice" bouts. The most famous of these so called "gentlemen" was assassinated.) Any technique that is forbidden is more devastating when used; thanks to the element of surprise.

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The Body

Defending the Body

You can void your chest and stomach (unless you've got a belly as big as mine). But the amount of distance shifted is inches at best. If your opponent is at maximum lunge, that can be enough; especially if you responded with a little footwork at the moment of their attack. You can also twist the trunk out of line with the incoming thrust. The one thing you can't do is slip a cut. Thrusting techniques are very fast and zero in on one specific target. Thrusts can be voided by the variety of techniques mentioned above.

Cuts bring up a whole other issue. Cuts are not directed at any single target but traverse a line that covers many parts of your body. Voiding a point is (relatively) easy. Voiding a line is almost impossible. Every part of you must leave that line or something bad is going to happen. If you intersect the line with defensive tools like blades and furniture, every part of you behind that tool is at risk, should the defense fail. I'm not keen on risk. I'm not keen on betting my safety on one tool in one place at one time. Protecting the trunk/torso comes down to legs. Footwork makes voiding a cut possible. Skipping back just enough for a cut to miss (again tightening that transition from defense to offence that helps us win); slope stepping off the line at a 45 degree angle; stepping through to the rear and pivoting back into guard; all requires great footwork

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The Legs

Defending the Legs

There are specific blocks for the legs that drive the incoming thrust inside or outside the knee. I'm more in favor of voiding the leg(s). First, that downward angle means there's more distance for the thrust to travel as we're riding on the hypotenuse rather than a leg (visualize a triangle. From your hand to the ground is one leg. From that point to the opponent's heel is another leg. The line of your sword arm, hand and blade is the hypotenuse. Get it?) which means more distance. Second, my point is now way off line and my defense is compromised to some degree (depending on whether you have a secondary or just your off hand). Have someone thrust at your leading leg for a while and practice voiding the leg.

You should be able to move that leg (and foot) around if there's very little weight on it. Slide it to the side. Pull it back. Lift it up. Against a thrust to the foot, it probably takes 4 inches of movement to save the leg. Now have your partner stab at the knee. If you're getting the hang of this, you don't even lift the foot, you just bend the knee side to side: Cool.

Now take a medium lunge. As your foot hits the ground, have your partner go stabbity-stab. If you've put a reasonable amount of weight on it, your partner is going to nail your foot right to the floor; and it's going to happen fairly often. Congratulations, you've learned a very important lesson. A foot with all your weight on it is vulnerable, because it cannot move. It must be defended by a block.

Take your lunge again and have ol' What's-his-Name try for the lead knee. Guess what? You can probably void the knee, even after making a lunge. Why? Because the knee is bending in the

opposite direction to the ankle. That's why we harp on knowing your anatomy. It can lead you to your own answers without our help.

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Defense Conclusions

To top this whole section on defense off, always remember you can throw a counter thrust while making the necessary void of any part of your body. In this final example your opponent is going for your foot or leg. Because your blade isn't engaged in defense, throw a shot (always try for their head when they go for your lead leg. It's so much fun when it works. They skewer their own melon like a marshmallow). At the most, it'll totally throw off their shot as the gears slip into neutral. It least, you'll take some part of them with you, even if they get you.

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Thrust and Point Control

Aim small, miss small. -- *Anonymous Philosophy of Aiming*

We believe court swords (as we see them in the form of historical replicas and our practice weapons) have very sharp points and no sharp edges (as represented by epees). We believe that rapiers have poor cutting ability and dull edges (even in the case of schlaegers or diamond shaped Del Tins). Therefore, we concentrate on point work and tip cuts.

We, as rapier fighters, have sacrificed the hewing/stopping power of the broadsword for the lightening speed and accuracy (and the ability to hit multiple targets; as many as three per second) of the needle. We need to concentrate our shots on nerves, ligaments, veins/arteries, muscles and organs as targets because our weapon of choice, the rapier (as if there's any consensus on what that was, which there wasn't and isn't), is much more effective against soft targets than bony ones. Our blades are fairly brittle and thin. They are slim enough to get trapped and/or broken if lodged in or between bones (Since historical records show that London had an edict in place regarding sword length and orders to break off points entering the city that were too long, we surmise that breaking them off required little more than a boot heel and a convenient cobble stone curb).

We also believe accuracy and precision in giving wounds is at the heart of effective rapier play. Effective means accurate because we have no stopping power (a single unblocked blow from a broadsword would do you in, often even in mail armor) at our command. With practice we've (and, hopefully, you will too) become very adept at the technique of chaining together multiple hits to a variety of targets. Since we're in favor of realism, we want to put two to three inches of our blade into a small target (like baseball sized and smaller) target, withdraw it, and move on to another. We want to do this very quickly without getting our blades hung up in bone or heavy tissue where torque might break them.

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Thrust

Initially thrust comes from the shoulder rotating, the elbow bending, the wrist setting an attitude and the hand guiding the point into the target. Range is limited to the length of the arm. Rolling the shoulder as a means to extend reach creates several problems (mostly having to do with

balance and excessive force). The amount of force in a given thrust is controlled by the weight of the weapon, the rotation of the elbow, the speed of the muscular exercise (read contraction and extension of muscle fibers) and the hip flow toward the target (as indicated by the bend in the knee, rotation of the hip if involved) with maximum distance/force equal to foot/pounds of energy at the point of impact. Tests made by others talk about pounds of pressure, as if there is any. A sword point would go into the target with very little if any perceptible resistance unless it hit and stuck in bone. Gauging distance and calibration (how hard you hit) takes training and experience. *Do not over commit* to any attack. Too hard and you could break or jam your weapon. That's the bottom line.

Incompetent fencers make distance adjustments (and, incidentally, attempt to increase speed) by rolling the shoulder forward. With the thrust, this technique can make up for incorrect distancing (and footwork mistakes) but it also adds additional force/energy. With both the elbow moving and the shoulder rolling, the fencer is unable to judge the amount of force they're creating (too many joint groups in motion to monitor effectively). Nor can one effectively put the brakes on while executing what will become a hard shot. This phenomenon leads to the classic "hard shot". Not only is this technique responsible for energy management problems, it affects accuracy.

The Tao of Jeet Kune Do (by Bruce Lee) suggests that you strike the nearest portion of your opponent you can reach. This includes: the three sections of the sword/blade, the leading hand/forearm, the off hand, the head, the leading knee/foot. To accomplish the task of striking these targets (which are small and moving around...a lot) a strong fencer *must have Superior Point Control (SPC)*.

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Point Control

What do we mean by SPC?

SPC = hitting a two inch wide washer (that isn't moving), at full speed with a slight lunge 8 of 10 times.

SPC = hitting an opponent's wrist (while it's moving) 7 of 10 times.

SPC = hitting a kneecap or biceps while you are pivoting away or slope stepping off the line.

SPC = hitting a tennis ball or playing card as it falls before you 6 of 10 times.

Don Tristan, I, and others at Scola can hit a specific finger on a moving hand. We often pick hands through open cage furniture without having our tips trapped. This is even more impressive when you consider that a bird blunt may have as little as 1/16 inch clearance between furnishings/bars, whereas a sharp point would need considerably less tolerance and hurt considerably more (brief rant here: if it's lined up with your hand, and I smack your swept hilt with my bird blunted tip, hard enough to move your hand three inches, chances are really good that I just carved up your *hand* like a frog in a blender. Just a thought. I get tired of fighters telling me their furniture "blocked" a thrust to the hand. Those guards were for defense against cuts and slashes, the hand would be wide open to a thrust).

To achieve this level of accuracy requires training, of course, but it also requires relaxation and breath control. It's not enough to throw the shot. If you are using a very tight grip or holding your

breath; it will give your sword point a "flutter" or "wobble" at full extension that will play hell with your accuracy/consistency.

You must train fundamental point control frequently. I believe it's equivalent to training shooting accuracy with a gun. If you shoot often, your accuracy improves. If you shoot twice a year, it generally degrades. Selecting specific targets, based on anatomy, and counting only those shots you meant to make, will help improve your point control, even while you're free sparring (We often baffle our opponents by refusing to count shots against them that were lucky accidents, even when they are good. How's that for chivalry?).

The next item of business is; what should you do when you miss the target you've selected. Especially in the case of limbs, we recommend changing your attack from thrust to tip cut, attempting to chain these into a single motion. If I'm taking a shot at the biceps and I miss to the outside (And my opponent has made no effort to close the line) I should attempt a tip cut across the triceps muscle group. If they followed my missed thrust up with a block I should even attempt to cut down the biceps group from shoulder to elbow and open the arm up lengthwise.

What does this have to do with point control and thrust? If your point goes too far past the limb you get a draw cut of about 4-6 inches. While this may be legal and countable in your kingdom, it's not very useful or realistic. Draw cuts are safe to perform, but not particularly effective; that's their only saving grace. The rules are trying to prevent percussive hacks and slashes, drawcuts make it harder to injure your opponent by mistake with one. Unfortunately, it's also harder to injure your opponent on purpose with one (sabers, katanas, etc, are designed for draw cuts, our straight blades are not). We tried to make them work and we couldn't. Our research with the tip cut (the real one, with speed, power and traversing an arc), however, shows this; the speed of the sword tip combined with the shallow depth of the cut, combine to make a devastating wound, even if the arm is protected by leather. It's a "crack the whip" effect and you can only get it by attacking with the last 2 inches of the sword in a broad arc.

If time and the sword work permits, a tip cut right behind a missed thrust can be an effective technique. We realize it probably couldn't end the fight, but it might create enough distraction or disability to provide the opportunity to do so.

If your thrust invades your opponent's space by only a couple of inches, without full commitment, it is also possible to redirect your thrust to another target, even if it's being moved around by a blocking tool being used by your opponent. I have had thrusts to the chest redirected downward and been able to guide the shot into my opponent's thigh. I've also noticed that when I make too hard a thrust, it is blocked more firmly and (goes off line before I can readjust) whether by sword or dagger, and it allows my opponent too much control/management of my blade. A shallow thrust has the opportunity to slip the blocking tool and continue on it's deadly course.

This leads me to my final point. Pull your shot back as quickly as you throw it out. This requires you to thrust "within yourself" without over-extending your arm or body past the point of balance or recovery. Remember, a strong deflection, bind or block can "pull" you off your center, even when you, yourself, did nothing incorrectly.

To get a better feel for your range at various stages of thrust or lunge, isolate the parts/motions and note the distances you can comfortably cover. Start with a simple thrust using only your arm. Start 2 feet away from a wall and try a couple of thrusts. Your guard and hand may even end up

being behind your hip (if this sounds ridiculous that's because it is; awkward and ridiculous. I see fencers every week who step well inside the comfortable range of their point and attempt to make a thrust). Calibration becomes, to put it mildly, a problem as well. After you find your arm's reach, slowly try rotating your shoulder, degree by degree, until you are facing some 90 degrees off the wall, in the classical strip stance, super thin, profile-type, stance. At each position, use the arm and whatever distance the shoulder has added. Then just throw shots. Lots and lots of shots at... something, anything. As I mentioned above, keep track of your shoulder roll and arm thrust, the two parts together always get mushy.

Now try both versions (squared up and facing sideways) using a slight lunge, a medium lunge and a deep lunge. Try the whole process with a step towards the wall; small, medium, large and stepping through. Don't try to take all this information in (it's meant to become part of your programming at an unconscious and instinctive level) in a single run through. It takes about a year to figure out how far you can reach using each type of thrust combined with each type of footwork and body mechanic.

Set aside about 10 minutes of each of Fighter Practice, over the course of a month to run the complete set (or if you feel uncomfortable doing this in a public forum, you can do this in the privacy of your own home). Overextend yourself deliberately (as a stretching exercise) to feel what being out of balance is like. A sure indicator that you're out of position is; you can't move your feet at all or (quickly) change position, distance or bodily attitude. Watch what happens to your accuracy as you extend to maximum reach and your balance begins to degrade.

Always remember to hit as lightly as possible. Your calibration doesn't reside completely within, but you should take as much responsibility (by training in isolation) as possible. Your opponent can add elements that contribute to hard shots, but you need to really fight "within yourself" to prevent accidents that become habitual.

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A Different Kind of Thrust

There are a couple of good reasons to hold back (physically and mentally) a bit when you fight someone.

First, you should always fight with self-defense and safety uppermost in your mind (I like my own internal percentages to be about 35% offense to 65% defense). If you're on your guard against tricks, traps and your own temper, things will more likely go your way in a duel. This doesn't mean you're being tentative or fearful in your approach, just cautious. The easiest way to "die of stupidity" is to over-commit yourself on any one technique, whether offensive or defensive; especially early in the fight. There are no fail-safe moves.

Second, figure out what you want to accomplish by being there. You need to define what "winning" means to you. I can "define victory" in a number of ways.

I can defeat my opponent. Boring.

I can limit my weapons or techniques to match an inferior fighter's experience or skill level; thereby putting myself in a "tough spot" where I have to overcome several disadvantages, as a training exercise.

I can train my "killing focus;" where I pretend it's all real and everything counts and I'm gonna **die**.

I can train my "theatrical focus;" where I want to put on a show for the crowd and do dramatic and spiffy moves. Oooh, aaah...pretty.

I can train my point control, where I attempt to take a single target and, if I get that target, I've won (e.g., back foot).

I can (attempt to) defeat my own ego; by not caring a lick whether I win or die, just fighting well. These can all be forms of winning, if I set the "victory conditions" and then meet them according to my own values and goals.

I put these two things, winning and killing/surviving into very different categories.

If you like to play "what if it were real," develop a killing focus. By this I mean patiently look for *the* moment to waste 'em. Dedicate yourself entirely to killing your opponent. Have trust in your training. Do your homework on this particular fighter. Plan a couple of strategies and try them out. Believe me, winning is generally not a problem, surviving is. In fact, if I focus strongly enough, I can crush an opponent's spirit and destroy their confidence, before the blades do more than cross (I know this is sounding more like hebee-jebbee, mojo, egotistical weirdness. Still, it's true. A Mad-Dog-Icy-Killer-Terminator attitude beats "Hey, look at me folks" every time). This is what I call a killing focus; I've totally committed myself; to the point where, even if he gets me, I'll take him to Hell with me.

After all that work (it does get exhausting) you can try this strategy. Go out there and just do your best, without concerning yourself about how you're doing. Don't look up the point total, don't ask about your rank, just fight the best you know how. The less you care about winning, for it's own sake, the easier it is to succeed. Before you know it, bam, you're in the finals (where I love to promptly tighten up, start caring about winning again, and lose *big time*). If you're relaxed, focused, and only concerned with performing well and using clean technique, you will generally get the kill without a major problem.

I have seen fighters who have an out-of-balance "winning focus." This has a totally different feel from any of the types of winning I described above. I call this kind of fighting "ego driven." It happens when fighters get sucked into caring about who's watching, or "what if I get called into court," or "I want to win that prize/job/title." This is, after all, just a game. Remember what I said; I always lose, and lose early, when my mind starts wandering off, playing games with what may happen afterwards.

If I get the impression that another fighter at a tourney or (God forbid, though this really does happen) Fighter Practice (somebody tell me what the *Hell* the point is in going full throttle and crushing some poor newbie at a Fighter Practice! How insecure can a guy get?) who "just wants to win," I make it my personal mission to wipe them out (that's my own ego talking). Generally I succeed, because I don't want to win; I just want to help them lose; theoretically, I do this out of and as a potential growth experience for this loser (I love to hear the wind whistling out of a punctured ego, even mine.), but mostly I do it because they remind me of the worst elements I see in myself. **Must Destroy!**

Many of my opponents are friends and students. Crushing them (in a spiritual sense) is rude and unnecessary. Some of my favorite fights happened at demos where neither of us wanted to win,

we were just putting on a show for the crowd. If I meet a good friend on the field, I just want to make it last as long as possible. I don't want to win, I want them to earn it. Generally this works very well and we have a terrific bout.

To summarize, Thrust and Point Control have their obvious physical elements. Don't neglect the choices you need to make to hone your mental Thrust (what am I doing here?) and Point Control (I'm gonna get this guy with a left-handed draw cut to their right kidney, only after they get my legs...whew, I am a fencing **God!**) as well. You'll be glad you did!

Here is an outline form for point work:

1. Accuracy and precision in giving wounds is at the heart of effective rapier play.
2. Strike the nearest portion of your opponent you can reach.
3. Train fundamental point control frequently.
4. Combine techniques: a tip cut following a thrust can be an effective technique.
5. Pull your shot back as quickly as you throw it out.
6. Fight with self-defense and safety uppermost in your mind.
7. Define victory.
8. Take responsibility for your calibration

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Calibration and Blow Calling

Flee from the foolish. Much blood has been shed by companionship with fools! -- *Rumi*

I want to shift gears a bit and talk about another aspect of point and thrust control, i.e. calibration and some aspects of calibration etiquette on the field.

5. EXCESSIVE IMPACT: Combat in the Society poses risks to the participant. This recognition, however, does not excuse fighters from exercising control of their techniques. If a fighter throws blows which force their opponent to retire from the field, from a real injury (even one which only causes brief incapacitation), the marshal responsible for the field shall take such steps as are appropriate to stop the problem from recurring.

-- *Y2K Rules For Light Weapons Combat: Kingdom Of The Outlands*

As a martial artist I'd like give a brief analysis/commentary on blow calling in Outlands/SCA light fighting. I believe there are five different types of touches that appear in single combat.

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Hard Shot

It's true! You really do have to cut the head off of the immortal! -- *Unknown*

A fairly common complaint I hear (and make, all too frequently, I know) is that someone consistently hits too hard (this is bad form if you haven't talked to the person you are having a problem with FIRST. I do that). A shot that buries the blade in an opponent's chest means your sword is bound up or broken at a time when it's really needed (i.e., killing the outraged seconds

of your ex-opponent). Since two or three inches are often enough to do the job (I'm not talking about *that* blade), why be wasteful?

Whether you attempt face to face, open criticism (which no one on the receiving end of, ever considers constructive no matter how gently it may be phrased), or even stoop to behind-the-back-style gossip, it just doesn't seem to make any difference to a hard shooter's game, or how the marshalate sees a fighter's ability or competence.

I admit I sound bitter and crabby. I've never seen a single green card (The Outland's fighting certificate, required for tournament play) pulled for poor behavior (even mine) or consistently throwing hard shots, even when a fighter seems obviously out of control.

Update: This has finally happened. I was suspended for a "visible show of anger" on the field and a female fighter was suspended for hard shots. That's the good news. The bad news: I was suspended for six months without any real examination of the facts or incidents involved. The female fighter was only in kingdom for a couple of months and poorly trained where she came from. Unfortunately, we also have plenty of anecdotal and eye-witness evidence that persons of high rank have been given special treatment and tolerance.

I can see how this entire diatribe may seem hypocrisy of the worst kind, but I am more than willing to listen to and respond to any complaint by any fighter in any kingdom I have played in. I'm not perfect. I've thrown hard shots, it sometimes can't be helped (as we shall see). But I sure as hell try to avoid them. I seriously object to people thumping me on a continuing basis.

I admit to having very high standards for calibration. I come from a martial arts tradition which embraces the concept of absolute self control to its fullest. I have found it to be a reliable indicator of a fighter's safety level and overall skill, regardless of style. Hard shots are a bad thing if they are the result of poor technique or control. I see way too many weekend warriors who come out for tournaments and avoid fighter practice and are, therefore, unqualified to fight as they are prone to injure others; something I consider a cardinal sin.

A reliable indicator (to me) is; how many fighters invite you to dance with them at Fighter Practice. If new fighters won't play with you or a fighter plays with you once, and never comes back; even if you ask them directly, consider yourself (indirectly) warned. I almost always have a full dance card at any FP I attend; to the point where I have trouble finding time to drink and/or rest. I consider this a very high compliment and I am humbly grateful that so many fighters like me and want to fight with me. No one will play with you if you hit too hard or abuse them. Be aware of this issue and respond quickly to any slackening of fighting candidates.

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Hard Shots Part Deux

M'lord, was there a 6 inch dent in your helm before the bout? -- *SCA Guide to Armored Combat*

Another common hard shot occurs when you and your opponent charge or thrust simultaneously. This is an entirely different kettle of fish because the *Force* (Luke, I'm shutting the power down) generated is not just doubled, it's quadrupled! Therefore, you should be responsible and take half-credit for the bruise forming on your arm. If you were advancing and thrusting, *don't blame others!* It takes years of training/experience to void your point in time (allowing for a cool draw cut if you can think of it at the time).

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Skippy

Tippy? This is rapier! That's the point! -- *Lord Louis du Ponte du Lac*

These shots require knowledge, judgment and courtesy to make a just and safe call. The point of a rapier is needle sharp. If it were to catch, even momentarily, with enough force behind it, the damn thing would be inside your chest cavity (producing the infamous "sucking chest wound") before you could say, "Oh, well struck!" A thrust that is completely spent would just leave a nasty furrow across your chest, allowing you to fight on. Those lousy plastic buttons and rubber tips confuse the issue greatly because they slip off of masks and certain fabrics too easily, even with some small amount of force behind them. Speaking of masks...

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Mask

A modern epee will bounce off a mask, even during a legitimate draw cut, because the metal screen is rigid and the body of your blade is designed to be springy and store energy by bending. *Any shot to the head should probably be considered a kill!* The head, face and neck are filled with nerves and vascular tissues that bleed copiously when cut. The psychological impact of a cutting or piercing wound to the head, face or neck can hardly be overstated. Even if the wound itself were not debilitating, the result of those few flustered seconds would be a sword in the guts. Game over. **We** are also very aware of scratches over the eyes and to the forehead and scalp. All these wounds would seriously impact vision and a graceful yield is more realistic and accurate. Hey, it's a pretty good example of personal honor and chivalric behavior too.

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Delayed Reaction

M'lord, it was a killing blow: if it didn't kill you it must have killed me.

-- *Unknown Knight in a Crown Tourney*

This calls for yet another approach to blow calling. In an intense flurry during individual combat, you or your opponent can be distracted by a bewildering array of sensory information. Shots will be coming at you from strange angles and timings; sometimes two shots simultaneously. The "window of opportunity" to throw a likely shot that will get through is often narrow and fraught with danger, especially against an opponent that scares you or exceeds your current abilities. Thrusts during tournaments are made with a little extra adrenaline which means *quickly and hard*. Drawcuts can be done in a fraction of a second and many fighters cannot tell what has happened (analysis of the action is another indicator of competence. Incompetent fighters and even people called "teachers" cannot tell you the moves they made during a pass. This is a bad thing and can cause a great deal of confusion on the field. There are times when you have to change your moves or slow them down so your opponent can tell what happened to them. It's a risk to you to make this gesture but I recommend it. You can also offer to re-fight a touch or just bow out. Some people just aren't worth the effort and if you know what you did was good work, walk away. That's part of redefining victory.)

Your control of your body and blade will be severely tested. The best medicines to cure these ills are: training, experience, awareness and communication. I often hear fighters shouting "ARM"

and "YES" when they are wounded or killed. Opponents will often shout "NO" or "FLAT" which is a polite way of giving information on what's happening in a fluid and chaotic environment. Discussions between opponents should not be interrupted (especially by field marshals who don't even exist to the players unless something unsafe happens). An "informal" hold or pause is often the safest and most courteous way to proceed. I get a panicky, claustrophobic feeling when I'm approaching sensory overload, which causes me to lash out blindly, often with too much force. This rush of adrenaline is useful in **real** self-defense situations but it causes problems on the field of fantasy. **Remember:** *You can always walk away!* If you feel yourself losing it, retreat or leave the field. After all, it's only a game. If you have a question, ask your opponent, "Did you just get me?" If they cannot answer clearly, ask the marshals what they saw. If you still can't tell what happened, do the fight over. You will be rewarded in heaven, my son.

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Tip Cut

When fighting under rules/conditions you aren't familiar with, or facing techniques that aren't normally considered good (such as push cuts), you or your opponent will be found ignoring correct shots because you don't know or can't tell that they are legal. For us in the Outlands, tip cuts don't look or feel good, they look and feel like sloppy technique. This is due to the fact that a field convention has not evolved that we as a community can use to look at a pass and say, "That cut was good. That one there, missed." The rules state that a tip must be laid on and pulled down or across at least six inches on a surface more than six inches broad; or completely across an arm or leg, if the surface isn't wide enough. This is hard to see as a correct technique if you're not used to it. Epees don't execute tip cuts very cleanly (kingdoms that are enamoured of tip cuts are almost exclusively schlaeger primary. These blades give tip cuts that are much easier to read.), and tip cuts to the mask can be really difficult to analyze, by both players. It can be very useful for you and your opponent to discuss tip cuts before you take the field. Calibrate a few to see what an opponent sees as a tip cut. It's always best to talk these things out before the duel commences to avoid hurt feelings, rudeness, and confusion.

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Calibration Conclusion

To summarize this essay on calibration etiquette: There is only one impolite touch that can be squarely laid at the feet of an incompetent or discourteous opponent, the classic "hard shot" in a two man duel. All the others include mitigating factors/circumstances. I do not agree with the following statement: "Hard shots are part of the game. If you can't accept this, don't play." This is a fine philosophy to apply to hard shots that you receive. If you hit others hard, especially on a consistent basis or under certain conditions (such as when you are off-balance, tired, hard pressed or experiencing heightened anxiety at certain ranges) your first reaction should be, "Unacceptable, I'm better than that!" Make it your constant practice to ask other fighters for feedback on your calibration, both on and off the field.

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Anatomy, Zones, and Targeting

The body can be divided into a number of zones to help you direct your attack and defense. The head and shoulders can be Area 1; the armpits to the fingertips can be Area 2; the armpits to waist can be Area 3; The waist to knees can be Area 4; the knees to feet can be Area 5 (I'll let you figure out where Area 5 is).

This is just my version (In rank order of importance, too. You can't fight if you can't see. You can't hold a sword or block without arms. You can keep going without legs, etc). The human body has design strengths and weaknesses that you can exploit for maximum success on the field.

Here are some targets and some tools to use on them. "Furniture" strikes include pommel, quillion, knucklebow, etc. Situations dictate which tool to use (point, true edge, false edge, furniture).

AREA 1 - Head

Thrust to eyes, tip cut to forehead/face. Furniture strike to temple, mandible, back of the head.

AREA 1 - Throat

Thrust to trachea. Draw cut to carotid. Tip cut to neck muscles/tendons. Furniture strike to spine.

AREA 2 - Arms

Thrust to hand/inside of elbow/biceps/armpit. Draw cut to wrist tendons/triceps/armpit. Furniture strike to hand/outside of elbow/top of shoulder. Strike to clavicle. Thrust to diaphragm.

AREA 3 - Body/trunk

Thrust to shoulder joint/solar plexus/kidney/bladder/groin. Draw cut to abdomen. Furniture strike to spine/clavicle/floating ribs/sternum. Pommel strike to bladder.

AREA 4 - Upper Legs/feet

Thrust to groin. Thrust/Draw cut to inside of thigh (femoral artery).

Thrust/Drawcut/Pommel strike to quadriceps. Thrust to hip joint group.

AREA 5 - Lower legs

Draw cut to anterior and posterior knee ligaments (inside and outside in back). Furniture strike to side of knee cap. Thrust to top of foot/kneecap.

These are more a conceptual outline than a hard $A + B = C$ formula for success. These targets may only be exposed when you close (where draw cuts are possible and point work is not), or when you're on your knees. The general thing I'm heading for here is this: Attack tendons and muscles with cuts. Attack soft targets with the sword point where it won't get bound and/or broken. Attack bony/hard targets with furniture or *en pasante* with tip cuts, so your weapon isn't disabled. Above all, be flexible with your attacks and **expect** them to fail or be ineffective. Humans are weird about taking damage. Sometimes the simplest attack will work very well and your opponent will be finished with no trouble. Sometimes three or four kill shots to great targets will have zero effect. We, in the SCA, rely on our opponent to judge whether a shot is good or not. Sometimes they miss the call (which I think helps us react more realistically). You cannot afford to relax your defense after what you thought was a good shot. You should always chain several shots together and keep shooting until you hear your opponent *say* that they are mortally wounded (Brave Patsy, you shall not have been..).

I also like to target specific anatomy because it dramatically improves my sword work, control, accuracy, calibration and focus. Aiming for "The Head" generally means you're going to miss it. Targeting the left eye (or nostril), generally means a good hit (maybe not where you intended, our opponents occasionally get a block or partial block which channels our attack to some other place on their bodies. All good for us.) "Aiming" a desperation snap shot to the head generally results in a hard shot, which means your point just snapped off in their skull. A light surface cut to the tendons on the inside of the wrist disables the hand. A tip cut to the top of the thigh cuts the quadriceps, but cutting too deep can wedge the point in the bone. You have the same problem with the ribs. A thrust of 2 inches into the kidney can temporarily paralyze an opponent (as well as preventing their scream of pain). Thrust too deep and they can keep on trucking (I don't know why the body works this way, it just does). A tip cut can be effective as a distraction before a strong finishing technique, but it needs to be done fast and light. Get stuck in the middle of a combination and YOU are vulnerable, because your brain is still trying to sort out the error code it's just received. See how it all ties together?

On the whole, I've had to discard the majority of my tip cuts and draw cuts in the tournament setting because my opponents simply couldn't read them. It's interesting that spectators can clearly see my techniques, but my opponents really can't. In one dagger only match, Natalia cut this guy four times, ending with a beautiful drawcut around the neck that would have sent his dome rolling in the dirt. There was a collective "ooh, yuck" from the crowd. But this guy just asked, "Did I just get killed?" Boy did you ever, pal.

I make cuts very quickly, cleanly and precisely and most of all, lightly. Alas, for superior skill, it all gets lost in the fog of war (many fighters, including myself, experience a surge of adrenaline on the field. One of the benefits of adrenaline is that it masks pain... you literally won't feel the light wound during a death struggle. It's really not surprising that fighters don't feel a light tap in a complex or quick exchange; it's all our bird blunts can provide in the way of sensory information. Best to take a tolerant attitude on missed shots, it's part of the package). Rather than go through the dreary business of sorting out who killed who and when (This is supposed to be a happy occasion...), these days I've learned to keep things moving along by tailoring my speed and techniques to the ability of my opponent(s) to read them. It's just another factor you need to consider when targeting your shots.

Getting back to targeting; It seems our sword and arm can only block about 2 areas at a time, sometimes less. For example, if you block a head shot, your legs and feet will be unguarded. If you block your belly, your head is often exposed. If you're busy defending your arm/hand, your entire body may be exposed.

Some of this lack of coverage is more mental than physical. If you're very concerned about a leg or foot attack (in a melee situation, for instance), a feint to *any* target below the waist can provoke an inordinately broad block/response.

When we use very light weapons, like the epee, most people can move the sword around very quickly and cover almost everything. Creating mental errors is your best course to achieving victory. It's not as difficult as it may seem at first. Zonning is really the key. Against a good opponent, these really need to be created as the fight develops and zoning is the only way to go.

"Zonning" means rapidly shooting at targets in different areas, one after another. Advanced zoning involves attacking targets that are not in adjacent areas. This is the critical component to

moving your opponent's defense around. Thrusting at the wrist and then sternum followed by an attack to the throat or groin is a combination that will probably fail. The targets are too closely grouped. Your opponent only needs to avoid the wrist attack without uncovering the torso and then make a couple of small 4 and 6 blocks to defeat the combo.

A stronger combo might be attacking the wrist with a thrust followed by a thigh high tip cut followed by a thrust to the side of the neck. This works better because the second and third attack are to unconnected zones. Even better: your opponent's second block is downward (which gravity helps to commit and speed up), but they need an upward block to defeat the third attack. Your opponent must stop and reverse directions against a significant amount of drag/inertia. This type of attack combo can even work against the ultra-light epee. If you are really sneaky you can use the percussive energy of their block to redirect your next shot to another spot., and do it so quickly they can't read it or react.

You may have noticed some of the strikes listed at the beginning of the section are illegal in SCA Rapier fighting. We are not advocating you use these techniques against any opponent. We just want you to develop awareness and defensive techniques for those moments when your opponent uses them against *you*.

Your opponent may panic, lose their balance, lose their temper, train in another martial art, be tired and regressing to that core art, or actually be cheating or trying to hurt you. If you see them attempting a draw cut, it's in your best interest to know where their furniture is, as it might end up on a dangerous line or threatening someplace on you. Unfortunately, your opponent may not even be aware there is a danger. Your primary job, even if it's only in a game, is to protect yourself. The swords we use are still weapons, even without sharp edges and points. Training for the worst things that can happen means you won't freak/freeze when disaster looms. Training "outside the box" with a skilled partner you can trust is the best way to strengthen your defense against techniques which are outside the rules or dangerous (if you're cynical enough, read: effective).

All this requires drill upon drill upon drill until it's all automatic. When your opponent reveals a target it must be attacked almost in the same instant. We often laugh out loud at fights that degenerate into one fighter blocking faster and more frantically until their sword is hanging out over in left field some place and the death blow is given. If you can make your final killing shot in slow motion so a fighter can see it coming and have time to say something, it's even funnier and cooler.

I once got Don Tristan with a timed shot when he was standing and I was on my knees. He ended up on his toes with his arms thrown back for balance staring down at my sword point hovering an inch from his heart. He relaxed, regained his balance and I withdrew the threatening point without making the touch. Don Tristan said, "I'm satisfied.", giving me the victory. The marshal was totally mystified and needed an explanation. To his eyes, nothing had happened (it's so obvious). Again, our associates in the art may be less developed and the more subtle aspects of the game will be lost on them.

To summarize:

- Human anatomy dictates the targets that a particular part of your weapon works best against.

- Your weapon is comprised of several surfaces. Learn to use them all.
- The body can be divided into zones/areas. Each area has different targets on it. These are dictated by anatomy so learn some.
- Chain together attacks to different zones.
- Drill until shots are made.
- Tailor shot selection and cuts to the ability of the opponent to read them.
- Maintain defense at all times and always throw multiple shots.

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Cutting Edges: Daggers, Sabres, and Rapiers

That's not a knife... now that's a knife. -- *Crocodile Dundee*

How can there be rules in a knife fight? -- *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

Virtually every weapons form that strikes with the edge; whether it be stick, staff or blade, uses some notation to explain where the strike started and where it ended. I prefer the "clock method" simply for clarity's sake, rather than trying to remember cut #1; that sort of thing. I'll describe the basic cuts and then talk a little bit about using them with dagger. Since we've already talked tip cuts to death, you should already have some inkling of how to employ the rapier during cuts. We've been experimenting with saber shaped blades and almost all types of cuts are effective and readable, even drawcuts.

Training the cuts often leads me to make broad sweeping motions of the arm and hand. This is wonderful for strengthening and limbering up, but real cuts need to be smaller/shorter than the length of your arm. Dagger cuts need to be smaller still (closer to your body). You need to control not only the line your blade is traveling, but the start and stop of each cut. Precise control is a must. Always make your cut as if a concrete block was just beyond the target, waiting to snap your blade like a toothpick. Stop your cuts just beyond the target. If you have a question about how much power the cut needed for the target in question, just remember lighter is better. You're not facing a man in mail or armor (if they have a cuirass on under their doublet, you'll know soon enough.) Swords and daggers are energy concentrating devices. All the energy of your arm ends up in a space of less than a millimeter. On unarmored targets, putting too much energy into the cut rather than not enough, will always be the problem (experiences with live steel have proven this to me many times. What I discovered I lacked was correct presentation of my edge so that it would cut, neither too deep nor too shallow. This can only be gained by experience. It's a feel thing based on experience. Since I first wrote this I have been working as a Butcher for a local grocery chain. My continued experimentation; "horsing around with meat" if you will, has showed me that there is an optimal combination of speed and power, but correct presentation of the blade is still the paramount issue. Any angle found in your presentation can affect the cut and even cause the blade to bounce off without causing any damage at all. This is definitely a feel/experience thing and very hard for me to transmit in this format).

Here are the basic cuts (blade in your right hand):

12-6 (12 o'clock to 6 o'clock)

Straight down from your head to your navel, palm facing left.

6-12

Straight up, palm facing right, thumb down (I know this feels awkward but there are reasons, based on physiology, for doing it this way which I won't get into right now) outside knuckle leading. Try it palm up, first knuckle leading, and really hit something a few times (here's a hint, the weakest part of your grip is the space between your thumb and first finger). You'll figure it out for yourself.

2-8

Downward, right to left, palm up.

8-2

Upward, left to right, palm down.

3-9

Horizontal, right to left, palm up.

9-3

Horizontal, left to right, palm down.

4-10

Upward, right to left, palm up

10-4 (good buddy)

Downward, left to right, palm down

I've gone through all this gobbledy-goop, in this precise order, because it makes a nice pattern of cuts that lead from first to last in a nice way, each cut ending nearly where the next cut needs to begin (this is called "chambering" by the way. Each move ending in a place where then next one starts. Speeds your moves up considerably. Wink, wink, nudge, nudge.) This is both a helper and a hindrance. Patterns help remind us to do everything on the list so we don't miss/forget anything. They also lead to predictable sequences of movements, which is a "Bozo No-No" in combat.

Try doing these smaller and smaller until they all run together into mush. Do them fast, do them slow... do them in the snow. I do not like them, Sam I Am.

This is a fairly unrealistic and artificial way to train your cuts. The real interesting stuff happens when you get a partner and have them stand there, in an on-guard position or with their sword arm extended, while you look for interesting things to cut. I will not attempt to give you a laundry list of cuts (there are many, many, and it's boring). Use your new found knowledge of anatomy and start whittling. Have your partner make simple lunges and combine the cuts with some footwork. Interesting things will begin to happen. Just go slowly, and try to work out what is possible at combat speed.

Those are the eight basic cuts, (almost) as they were taught to me (my teacher was more sarcastic). Use both hands and practice, practice, practice. I wasn't taught these for sword work, I learned to apply them to the knife/dagger. But they are applicable to any circular cutting style.

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The Sabre

As our research into sabers has developed we have always tried to block with the flat and cut (primarily drawcuts for safety) with the edge. We try to allow only two edge blocks before the

blade is considered "broken" and the fighter must then switch to the dagger (conveniently held in the belt for the purpose). It may not be realistic but it's fun.

You can develop drills for saber blocks yourself, but we just had each fighter make the eight basic cuts while their training partner attempted to deflect with the blade flat. After a while, the most efficient, correct angle and percussive force needed to redirect an incoming slash at the basic angles became obvious. We then sped up and applied more power to each cut. We then made multiple attacks starting with two cuts on the same line and gradually working our way out into multiple lines. This is in keeping with our philosophy of layered exercises and approaching combat technique without any preconceptions (within the bounds of safety, of course), allowing experience to dictate what is effective. Eventually we'll corroborate with period masters to see how close we came. This is our approach to rapier fighting in a nutshell.

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The Dagger

Here's what I can tell you about dagger fighting as it's currently practiced in the Outlands. We'll discuss the rules, the strategy and tactical use of the dagger and some training concepts.

Why am I emphasizing the dagger for cutting? Because it's stiffer and sharper than a rapier. Slashes with a knife are really effective. It's almost as if you have taken the last 12-18 inches off the rapier and mounted it on another handle. Every technique is, in effect, a tip cut. At close range fighting, it is a weapon without peer. It's also the one you're most likely to have available to you whether you're at an SCA event, Fighter Practice, or on the street. The information and applications I'm describing are something you should know, anywhere you go.

The fighting knife our flexi-daggers most resemble was a very late period weapon (the furnishings we use for the most part fall beyond our historical era of interest) designed only for fighting. The blade was double edged, approximately twelve to twenty inches long and had a needle sharp point. Nobles carried one everywhere (even to church), and it was often the only readily available weapon. Duelists were familiar with its use from early childhood.

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The Rules

Since "sword and dagger" was a clearly documentable style of dueling and brawling, the Outlands Rules of Fence allow a fighter to become authorized in this form (abbreviated as PFOS - Period Fencing Offensive Secondary). Check with your local SCA groups' fencing marshal for more information. The March 2002 rules state that the dagger must have a bell guard or quillions or both. The use of the point is the same for sword and dagger, but the draw cut differs. The rules state that "...most of the dagger blade must be used to press against the opponent." I believe this last part to be incorrect--if you want to play dagger more realistically, allow for any length of cut from a 1 inch deep tip cut, to a 12 inch draw cut, to be good. I've seen a razor sharp two inch blade open up a 4 inch deep, 8 inch long slash in a cow carcass. Don't take anything flat or thrusts of less than an inch, but err on the side of caution and take just about every knife contact you receive from your partner as if it were made by a scalpel.

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Strategy and Tactics

Period Fencing Masters relied heavily on the dagger as a primary part of defense. Woodcut illustrations show the dagger held well forward in the off-hand, with the arm almost fully extended. The rapier, in contrast, is held low and near the trailing knee. This gives us some insight into the division of labor the masters sought in personal defense. The dagger was expected to parry the incoming rapier, allowing the unencumbered sword to perform a swift counter-strike. For the modern practitioner this can be somewhat awkward as we haven't (most of us) spent our lives playing with knives.

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Use of the Dagger

The dagger has three useful ranges and all three can be safely played within the rules (as opposed to the rapier which has only two).

At long range, the dagger is used to create openings for attack and as bait for traps. It allows you to "manage" your opponent's blade from long range without committing yourself to the more dangerous middle range. If you start with the dagger forward, it is "relatively easy" to maintain a blade press as you step through and use your rapier to attack. This can be done by inching forward with classical footwork and requires no offensive moves by your opponent. It also looks "period" which is nice. The reverse can happen also. As your opponent makes a strong attack, you can catch the incoming blade with the dagger and as you step back make the kill with a stop thrust. You can "offer" your dagger hand as a target, accepting the attack and binding with either the sword or dagger. It then becomes a matter of adjusting the distance to make the touch.

At the middle range, the dagger can be used defensively to ward off attacks and offensively against the arms and hands. At this range the dagger makes larger blocking motions than at long range. The blocks at this range are also stronger and can be made more "aggressively" since you are more likely to make contact with the heavier parts of your opponent's rapier. Long "conversations" can take place here with neither fencer changing distance much or gaining advantage. Changes in angle of attack and rhythm are necessary to achieve a touch. I have also been experimenting with making draw cuts and touches to the sword arm of my opponent at this range.

At close range, the dagger rules supreme. The long sword is often unwieldy and in a poor position to cut or stab. As movements must be made faster at middle range and fastest of all at close range, the dagger can make a wide variety of cuts and thrusts that are impossible *under the rules* with a rapier (I remind you that the sword only has two ranges under our system). In a real duel, pommel strikes, punches with the knuckle guard and jabs to the eyes with quillions have all been documented by historians. None of these blows, including knee strikes, kicks, and anything not done strictly with the blade are prohibited. These moves were *effective*, but they were also for keeps.

Remember, the Outlands rules consider a match to be lost when you no longer have an *offensive weapon* at your command. Your opponent can be chivalrous and allow you to recover a dropped weapon or exchange a scabbard for a rapier, but they don't have to. The "sword and dagger" system allows you to continue to fight at a variety of ranges and under a variety of conditions. It allows for attack with either hand, as in case of rapier, but the imbalance in length gives you flexibility at all three combat ranges. The dagger's only short-comings that I have discovered are

against missile weapons (It's buckler weather out there...) and in training time (in our opinion, Case is a bit easier to learn) to achieve proficiency.

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The Rapier

We've given our opinion that the rapier is ill-suited to cuts, excepting the last 2 inches or so. We believe the physics of using a straight blade in a circular motion are both too percussive and rather ineffective, given the rapier's dull edge. I'll repeat myself again: A blade soft enough to withstand the rigors of defensive use cannot be razor sharp--if it were, it would notch and then break. This does not apply to the back sword (with it's strong spine and single edge construction), seax or other weapon, only to the rapier. Push cuts are ineffective, draw cuts are barely so. Tip cuts with 35 degrees of arc (or more) are highly effective, just too painful to execute without wearing the equivalent of heavy armor to absorb the blow.

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An Analysis of Fighter Styles

Know your dope fiend! -- *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Don Tristan and I have been discussing SCA style fighting and how we approach the basic form of combat: dueling (*duello*). This section deals primarily with the style(s) of individual fighters in that setting. This is a generalized overview of fighting styles. In our opinion, the more adept and versatile a fighter is in moving through the styles, the more dangerous they are in a duel.

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Types of Fighters

So far as we can determine, there are four types of fighter. These are not completely rigid templates and there are overlaps. The amount of time a person has been engaged in SCA fencing, their frame of mind while fighting, their training, and their experience level are factors that influence and complicate any analysis we make here with regard to style.

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The Charger

This is a fighter that is predominantly aggressive and seeks to end the conflict by their own means. These fighters tend to attack early and often without a lot of preliminaries. They are predominantly linear in their approach (the shortest distance etc). A Charger tends to have a few obvious "tells" or motions that signal the perceptive opponent their intentions (which are simple: get in there and *kill*).

Chargers tend to be middle level fighters with limited experience and approximately 2-3 years "training" (as I say, there are exceptions). They are not receiving what I would formally call training in the SCA venue; by that I mean their fundamentals are either weak or unbalanced (they know a few moves really well, but have other flaws in their overall skills). Their ability to analyze their own fighting (during or after a duel or battle) as well as the fighting of others is weak. Their ability to change styles is weak.

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The Blocker

This is a fighter that is predominantly defensive. They seek to end the conflict by a wider variety of means than the Charger: When they are attacked, the Blocker does just that, block. They generally have a set pattern of counter attacks called "Riposte" in the greater fencing community. The Blocker tends to seek a rhythm of exchanges or "conversations of the blade": Attack, block, riposte, reset, repeat. They also tend to be linear in their approach. They tend to use very little footwork, preferring to stand and fight.

Blockers tend to be higher level fighters with as much as 5-7 years of experience in the duello. They tend to be better trained or at least, have a deeper grasp of the fundamentals and can look at their own fighting. Their ability to change styles is somewhat better than that of the Charger but they are still pretty limited. Their natural tendencies make them excellent line fighters in the melee setting.

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The Runner

This is an elusive fighter. They have no idea how to end the conflict and are mostly reactionary. They tend to have neither a strong attack nor outstanding defense. They often make tentative or peripheral attacks on extended targets like arms and legs. When attacked they run away. When blocked, they run away. When looked at funny, they run away. The Faux Runner can be a smart fighter employing a strategy of "hit and run" by design. This can be an effective way to meet a Charger. Generally, the Runner has limited training and experience; 1-2 years at most (although there are experienced fighters who have "perfected" this and made it their core style). A duel with a Runner can take a long, long time (which can be part of their strategy if they are actually using one and are not running out of "fear"). They are difficult to engage and do not establish "conversations." If they can out-wait you, you may do something stupid from frustration that a Runner can take advantage of. Runners generally have poor blade work and/or fundamentals; with the obvious exception of footwork related to the retreat. Their ability to change styles is also weak. They tend to get thrashy and panicky when finally trapped against an Eric or some other barrier.

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The Shifter

This is the most difficult fighter to describe, until you meet one. They tend to fight as a runner at first, then shift to blocking or charging with no obvious pattern. They may attack strongly. They may stand and block or stay far away. They may leave the line of engagement and approach or retreat from their opponent at a variety of angles. They are difficult to describe and analyze because Shifters are actually thinking about the fight as it unfolds. They have strong fundamentals and may be very proficient at any one range (close, middle or far ranges); maybe more than one. Their ability to change styles is strong because they have a mastery of basics like footwork, blocking and attacking (If you review the material just presented you will see that the other styles mentioned have a strong grasp of one fundamental and not much to offer in the other categories. This is why I refer to them as unbalanced).

The more times you meet a Shifter over the course of fighter practices or tournaments, the more difficult they are to defeat (because they are reading your best moves and actively thinking of ways to defeat you. If you aren't progressing to more sophisticated techniques and strategies, a Shifter will eventually be able to beat you over and over, with no real effort. To add an extra-special layer of humiliation, they may beat you with different techniques each time they fight you just to mess with your head. This is also a way to enhance your fighter practice time when facing obviously inferior fighters. Instead of taking their legs a dozen times in a row, try four or five different things that all work; close and cut, snipe, riposte...practice your whole bag of tricks. Try to start from awkward or disadvantaged positions to see if you can "get out of that one". Try not to make it too obvious or un-fun for your opponent or they may be too embarrassed to return and fight again another day. Against a foolish, ego driven, or unsafe fighter, take pains to develop the knowledge you need to defeat them as quickly as possible in a tournament. This lowers your risk of injury at their hands when they are least able to control themselves, i.e. on the field).

Shifters tend to have a great deal of fencing experience (7-10 years). They may train in another art and often perform well in the melee setting as line fighters, flankers, skirmishers, etc. due to their ability to adapt to the mission profile, the styles of fighters they are teamed with or opponents they are facing off against.

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Conclusion

I'll let Don Tristan describe how the various styles match up, but before I leave this topic, here are a few words of caution. Match ups in any sport are all theoretical, the two sides must meet before reality can unfold and actually show what happens. This is important to remember. A Runner who underestimates the speed and range of a talented Charger is *dead*, before they can get away. The training, conditioning, size, speed, natural ability and experience of the fighters involved always plays a significant role in the outcome of the match. No matter what kind of fighter you are, you need to be able to describe what you see other fighters doing and what you, yourself, are doing on the field. The better you become at reading yourself and others, the more you will grow as a fighter, teacher, tactician and commander.

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Watch and Learn

What changed me from an amateur into a professional was getting a really firm grip on the fundamentals. -- *Lessons in the Fundamentals of Go*, by Toshiro Kageyama (7 dan)

One of the best ways to observe the four types of fighters is to attend a fighter practice (FP) or tournament outside your home area. Tournaments have their own feel and formats that tend to offer advantages to different fighter types, and present information to you in their own way.

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Fighter Practice

SCA fighter practices tend to be fairly chaotic and unstructured, with many fighters doing different things simultaneously. This is what I've seen in the Northern Outlands. I've heard about FPs from other Lands and I've read training manuals and lesson plans from other Kingdoms.

Generally speaking, most of the rapier fighters in the SCA do not seem to have a general martial arts or military background. Rapier fighting is a casual hobby for most (as are most martial arts practiced in the US). Rarely do I see fighters doing the things I consider essential for excellence in all of the styles and at all of the ranges. This holds especially true for people who have mastered or nearly mastered one style. They've gotten this far by doing certain things. If it worked, they kept on doing those few things. To advance further, a rapier fighter needs to start thinking about (and training toward) other aspects of the game. Even more importantly, they must if they've had no grounding in basics, retrace their steps; returning to the fundamentals which make mastery of other styles possible (the label "Master" in my lexicon means - "I have a basic understanding of fundamentals.").

This is a very rare event. It's boring to go back to doing "just" footwork. You won't be seen as a "big shot" if you do plain old parry drills or point control. The truth is, each of the first three styles of fighter we've described rely on a few of the fundamentals and only those few. To cross over easily from one style to another (or to achieve the kind of mastery we think the Shifter exhibits) requires personal interest, discipline, commitment and honest self appraisal. If you are reading this, you have the potential to do just that; enhancing your fighting ability and enjoyment as a participant or spectator. How a fighter prepares for and participates at FP will give you clues as to their interest, ability, style and experience level. I'll group this stuff all together under the general label "*mindset*."

New fighters are often unprepared for fighter practice. They lack sufficient funds or equipment and stand around watching. Their *mindset* is unfocused. They don't really understand what they are looking at, nor do they know what they should be looking for. It's too bad they don't do this kind of thing two years later, after they've become active. Watching can be very helpful. Experienced fighters actively watch others when they are fighting, drilling, resting. Who is busy talking? Who is paying attention? Who is checking their gear? Who is padded up and ready to play? Who is on the field first? Who is on the field last (as in; at the end of a long day, who is still playing or observing)? Who is teaching (and can you tell from a distance what the hell they're trying to teach...I've seen some very weird stuff going on under the heading of "training.")? Who is doing exercises, drills, etc (by themselves or with a partner). The next step is to watch fighters warm up or fight. New fighters (who have some background) can be seen doing basic footwork or lunging against a wall with a sword (or even just a scabbard). The best of the old timers can be seen doing the exact same things (they just look really smooth doing them).

The three basic fighters all have clearly defined *mindsets*; these permeate everything they do. You should be able to pick up "tells", because the three basic types rarely do any useful warm up (I'll discuss the concept of "tells" further in a moment). They just get out there and start fighting. After all, what's there to train? They won't work on their weaknesses to improve them. This requires slow, frustrating, uncool-looking, (even painful) drills. The best way to warm up is an individual choice. The only consistent thing to be considered is the *mindset* the fighter exhibits. Good fighters come to Fighter Practice to *practice*! Good fighters are warming up with a purpose. They are stretching or doing a drill or even (apparently) free sparring with a clear aim; controlled and focused. They came to improve something, something specific in their game.

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Tournaments

Chevalier, you will be the thirteenth I have killed. -- *Anonymous Champion in a Duel*
And you will be my seventy-second. -- *Chevalier d'Andrieux, functioning as the champion for the opposing party*

Unlike the fighter at a fighter practice, the tournament fighter is operating on a much higher level (and paradoxically a much lower one). Most fighters will revert to their most comfortable form during a tournament and this allows the observer an excellent opportunity to examine the full depth of a fighter (this is the lower level). During a fighter practice, most fighters are typically playing at 50% to 75% of their full speed. Accordingly, most fighters spend quite a bit of time playing manually (i.e. they are thinking about their offense and defense) rather than letting muscle memory and reflex handle it automatically. During a tournament, however, fighters will up the speed and accordingly, turn a large portion of their offense and defense to auto pilot so they can concentrate on reading their opponent and anticipating their next attack (this is the higher level). Inevitably, a fighter in this excited state will exhibit their most basic forms and tells. An example: during a practice I will typically use a lot of flashy parries, hand picks, and cuts. During a tournament, however, I tend to revert to head shots and retreats. The increase in speed results in a radical change in my style.

Why is tournament analysis important to us? Since fighting offers a high stress combat environment, style changes are common. Many fighters will revert to their core style during tournaments.

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The Base Style

Every martial artist starts his or her training somewhere -- nobody is born a fighter. As a result, the most early training is also the most deeply ingrained and under high stress or speed, most fighters revert to their original training. This is especially true with new fighters who learn the drills and do well when sparring at low speeds. However, the instant their opponent starts to push them, most new fighters degrade into a mass of flailing parries and cuts. Even advanced fighters with several years of training and experience can be forced to revert to their basic training under the right sort of circumstances (extreme fatigue, sudden pain, etc).

In tournament fighting, fighters tend to use their most comfortable form/style. As a result, the best way to beat another fighter is to recognize their base form and adapt your own style to it. Unfortunately, this is difficult to do. On the one level, you have to be able to recognize your opponent's , find a style that gives you the advantage and then override your own tendency to use your most comfortable style (as it may be the wrong one). When you become more fatigued as a tournament progresses, you will feel more and more pressure to revert to your original style.

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Before the Tournament

One of the best times to analyze another fighter is just before the tournament during warm up bouts. As a general rule, a fighter doing a warm up bout will start to transition from their surface style into their base style. This is all part of the normal process of psyching up and tends to be

unconscious (this is why it provides useful information, it's uncensored). Your best course, if possible, is to observe a fighter through several bouts to see any change in their style.

Once you have a feel for a particular fighter, the next step is fight a warm up bout with them. If possible, try to get a late warm up bout when your opponent is fully warmed up and fighting at speed. I recommend fighting about 75% (of your own speed and ability. In fact you should lose most of the warm up points while carefully noting their speed, range and idiosyncrasies) with your opponent and spend most of your bout watching your opponent's reactions to your choices in technique speed and range. I generally have several target areas in mind prior to the bout that I have selected from observation prior to our dance.

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During the Tournament

Once the tournament begins, try to watch every bout that you're not participating in. If possible, try to work as a field marshal, as it gives you an up close look at a fighter's style at speed. At this point, most fighters are operating at 90% to 100% effort and most of their offense and defense is now on auto pilot. Look for favorite attacks, tells, and footwork errors. In addition, talk with other fighters about their bouts against this opponent. Try to get an explanation of the bout in detail, describing good shots or parries, how they won/lost, what made their opponent difficult/easy, etc.

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On the Tournament Field

At some point, you will have to take the field and fight. During combat you have the perfect opportunity to use the observations and analyses you made from the sidelines. As you step into the Eric, take the opportunity to loosen up (shoulder shrugs, jumping, wrist rolls) and watch where your opponent gets set. I will often take the "on guard" position several sword lengths out of range. Many fighters have a very fast attack from the "on guard" position and dying two seconds into a bout is not constructive to learning. On the commencement ("allez"), slowly close the range.

Once you get to a comfortable distance, it's time to start looking for holes in their defense. If my opponent is not someone I was able to observe or warm up with, I will start by attacking the nearest target areas and observing any reaction. In most cases, I do not use a committed attack, but instead throw the shot toward a spot about 2 inches from the intended target area. Most fighters will react as if the attack was "live" and defend or attack appropriately. My general order of targets (depending on weapons and physical makeup) are primary hand, front foot, head, front knee, off hand, and torso. If I get a strong reaction (overly large parry, strong riposte, etc), I throw a second attack at the same target. If I get the same reaction, then I designate that area as a "soft target."

Once I get a feel for the other fighter, it is the time to move in for the kill. Tournament fighting is very tiring due to the high stress level. A long bout is most likely going to drain you, resulting in sloppy point control, wide parries, and poor footwork. Under good conditions, I try to identify two holes, but if I can only find one or my opponent is starting to press me, I will now attempt to penetrate their defense through that hole.

Once the duel is over, take time to discuss the bout with observers on the sidelines.

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The Truth Tells

The limited fighter (sometimes even the master of many styles) has what we call "tells" short for telegraph; which means they do little things that tell you what they'll probably do next. Tells have to be consistent and (basically) unconscious or uncontrollable to be considered good tells. If a fighter does something a few times and then kills you right after that, what you saw was probably just a set up by a Shifter. Shifters are not committed to any one style. They don't really have solid tells or they have tells in one style that evaporate when they change to another style. Difficult and tricky folks, those Shifters...Some of these tells may be blatant. Some may be subtle. It depends on many factors: size, length of limb, speed, the skill of the fighter. Some are unique to one fighter (which is why it's good to watch others fight. Their deportment on the field will often tell you what to watch out for even if you've never fought them before in your life). Some are more general. I'll try and give you an idea of what to start looking for.

- **Charger**
 - Weight shift forward.
 - Head bobbing forward and down.
 - Tensing of shoulders, hips, or neck (sometimes all three).
 - Sudden intake of breath.
 - Holding breath.
 - Stomp.
 - Heel or toe pop (lifting off the ground).
 - Some chargers will adjust their blade position (e.g., drop to a low guard or take the tip off-line).
- **Blocker**
 - Shoulders "squaring up" under strong attack.
 - Weight setting.
 - Stance deepening
 - Powerful wrist and arm use during parries and blade work.
 - Elbow close to body or "retreating under pressure."
 - Not advancing and/or re-engaging after *your* retreat/separation.
- **Runner**
 - Leaning back.
 - Maintaining "too much" distance (too far away to engage).
 - Cringing posture.
 - Excessive retreat from slow advance or slow simple attacks.

- o Weak parry.
- o No blade work.
- o Overreacting in general.
- Shifter
 - o Not consistent, difficult to describe on paper, and look out for their "tells" being feints.

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Tournament Fields and Formats

Eric's, field footing, and tourney conditions can all impact how you approach a particular duel or fighter's style. Here's some information to help direct your thinking.

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The Charger

Prefers small, narrow fields with definite corners (we once fought two fields on a theatrical stage, twenty feet across, fourteen feet deep and 3 feet off the ground.) where running room is all but nonexistent.

Slippery conditions (like linoleum) can inhibit a Charger's rush somewhat, if they have trouble getting enough traction to accelerate. Your chances of bailing are also slight, so be prepared to fight at close range. Watch their furniture and be prepared to pivot or take a knee to get control of the Charger's weapons. I've seen a charger "glide-skate- run" through three fighters (getting cuts on each of them, but no kills), because momentum had taken over and they really couldn't stop. If you can fade back and leave a stop thrusting weapon at home, you have a good chance of getting a Charger to impale themselves while you drift away. Chargers will often get a "late kill" after you've made your touch, which is annoying to a purist like me. Try and keep your defense going for another 5-8 seconds after a touch.

Tournaments with time constraints ("hold the field for aggregate time" is a format that comes to mind) encourage the Charger to do his worst as the more fighters he faces, the more points he can score. Nothing says "I Love You" like legging a Charger and staying outside while the time goes tick, tick, tick ...Oh, too bad, not enough points to advance (redefining victory is a prime covenant of our philosophy. I may make it my personal business to keep a dangerous or incompetent fighter out of the finals... whether I move up or not).

Weapons restrictions can also play hob with your ability to survive a Charger's game. A long blade gives you enough range to react and dispatch a Charger, but a "dagger only" format means it's almost a crap shoot whether you can get them before they get you; a Charger with a dagger is mostly committing short form suicide to begin with. A dagger is primarily a defensive and counter attacking tool, even when used alone (the first doofus to extend his arm gets the "fillet of forearm" treatment). Anyone who disregards proper distance and closes in a dagger fight is going to die, probably double killing with their opponent (it's really hard to overcome that pesky "it's only a game/fantasy courage" factor. It reduces the necessary pause made by actual opponents who think very long and very hard about charging me if I have a *real*, ultra-sharp knife in my fist.) in the process. This can go on for several repetitions/do overs, until you get a clean cut on

their primary hand/arm, while they miss and/or trade arms with you. At this moment, all that bilateral training you've done to even up your game on both sides will pay dividends (Chargers are really unbalanced. They have a primary hand and nothing else). If you have been lazy about working your off hand...oh well. Back to the drawing board.

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The Blocker

Will most likely take a position near a corner, neck or other natural choke point on the field and simply stand there...all day if necessary. They'll wait and wait and wait until you play their game. Field size doesn't matter much to them, anyway. They don't know how to use it.

I have seen a hybrid blocker/counter charger type of fighter down South (Santa Fe). These fighters tend to be short, female fighters (they have a number of genuine handicaps, true) who want to engage in blade play until one of three things happens:

- You begin to overwhelm their defense because you're better than they thought.
- They believe they have a good bind, block or press that will allow them to close the distance on their stubby little legs.
- You fall asleep mentally (from boredom) and they notice you'll play/pick but not press or lunge. This usually gets them stirred up and they'll finally come at you.

The bottom line is that they play blocker until they feel the scales tip against them at which point they don their sacred head bands and "Banzai" into the guns.

Slippery conditions also favor the Blocker as they can stand there and do what they do best. Any large footwork or momentum change you try will probably favor them, so small steps and tip top point control are the order of the day. If you have the energy you can do lots of circling on a large field, hoping to hypnotize them, cobra style, until you can get the kill in an incremental moment of error (damn, my block was 3/8 of an inch too wide and he took my wrist.) where you draw their defense further and further out of position.

Tournament conditions that require you to fight with your off hand holding your primary weapon are often a hoot when facing a blocker. They are unbalanced in their approach to fighting (just like the Charger is) and anytime you can make them fight off-handed you've won a major advantage. Kinda nice when the tourney itself requires them to start off with an awkward or unfamiliar weapons system. Some tournament formats make you fight on planks or plank to plank. Again, the Blocker is going to feel like a happy camper, he gets to just stand there again. Groovy. Time to start hitting those zones and really move his defense around. Just remember not to take their lead arm so they don't switch back to their old (read stronger) game. Time constraint formats require you to pull out what I call "Wonky Play." These are moves that end the fight quickly but are unorthodox and have a tendency to flummox the blocker long enough to win. Here are some examples:

- Deliberately throwing down one weapon, while closing with the other.
- Falling forward (twisting and landing on your back) and crabbing toward them while fighting upside down and shooting upward at a 45 degree angle over your head.
- Holding your weapons in the classic Psycho Killer, Kitchen Knife Stabbing format.

- Growling, barking and lifting your leg to the side until they laugh.

You get the idea.

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The Runner

Large fields are obviously Heaven on Earth for the runner. With enough room to run in, your tactics will rely heavily on the "bait and switch" techniques described in the Chapter 12. It can be a real challenge to track down a runner and pin him against something. Try to use natural irregularities, saddles, dog legs or corners to limit the Runner's room to maneuver.

On a round field, move slowly and then make a quick rush when you get a feel for which way they are going to drift on the arc. Corners on a square field can also allow you to herd them into a small enough patch that you can predict the panicky bolt that's coming. Runners habitually retreat in one directional arc (to their right or left) or straight back. Don't feel too bad about running them into the flags around the boundary. They chose this style, they can live with it. Crowding them one way and then cutting back against the grain (Watch rodeo footage of a good cutting horse to get the idea) can be an ideal way to lock them up (mentally) long enough to get the kill. Don't forget about peripheral targets; leg shots are your friend.

Above all, don't let pesky field marshals try and "center you two up" if you've gone to all that work to pin a runner down. It's your fight, you've worked hard to establish that advantage. If you have time, talk directly to the Marshal In Charge (MIC - pronounced "Mick") before the bout, even before the tourney begins if you can. Explain your reasoning/strategy and they'll probably let the fight continue on the spot where the idiotic active marshal called that totally unnecessary and illegal "hold."

Slippery field conditions can allow you to bluff a hard charge, hesitate (while the runner goes over backwards in a confusion of arms and legs), and stroll leisurely up to the supine simpleton and take a leg(s) shot or get the kill. Gravel, wet grass, snow etc. all help you defeat the poor Runner. Lumpy fields that promote tripping can allow you to accomplish the same thing. Just keep constant, relentless pressure on them (Terminator Style) until they run backward over something that trips them up.

Weapons restrictions can cause a Runner to enter the field with a fuse or two already blown. If they get the long weapon and you get the short one, consider playing "broken wing" until they get close enough and/or over confident.

Always factor in weapons or field conditions that play to the greatest fears of the Charger, Blocker and Runner. Any or all of these fighters can go for a radical style change when faced with almost certain defeat should they maintain their usual style. It's embarrassing to get killed in some awkward and defiant charge by some "usually" mousy Runner and watch them advance to the next round through what is mostly luck and surprise. Don't get surprised! Keep the unexpected in mind.

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The Shifter

The best rule of thumb for dealing with a Shifter under any circumstances is to note the limits of the weapons, terrain, tournaments conditions etc. and then think about what's possible under

combat conditions. Let basic principles guide you here. Daggers dictate one kind of fighting, swords another. Cloaks allow for some kinds of defense and not others. Time limits will spur most competitors to rashness and "all or nothing" dashes (the last speed tourney Don Tristan and I were in, He played for quick kills and sniper shots. I played my normal "cross up their timing and distance" game. Surprisingly, after 45 total minutes of play on two fields, only 6 kills separated us: his 33 to my 27. Significantly, our different styles did not mean radical differences in efficiency. Had I held the field one more time than he, I could have easily had more kills. Our grand total of 60 kills was also pretty impressive as most speed tourney winners are lucky to have 15 total kills.) Expect something different from the Shifter every time you fight them, especially under any vagaries in format or conditions. Planks limit footwork and test balance, look for the Shifter to play there for a while and then "go somewhere else." Your best hope when facing a Shifter is to "go for the tie" and hope you do things well enough to eke out the victory anyway. A split second here, a late balance shift there, your hand in a better position than theirs at the crucial moment, etc. all these will affect the outcome of the bout. Winning against the Shifter often depends on something happening during the duel that you will see and can take advantage of, but I on this page at this moment, could never predict.

There are fighters that I face with the following basic approach: If I win, great, but it's a complete toss up - with many factors of the moment contributing to my success or failure, including luck.

I will say one thing about beating the Shifter, and it is predicated on the reactions I see and hear from other fighters around me when a tournament and it's limitations or conditions is being described by the MIC. Weaker fighters moan and groan when they hear conditions that are unfavorable to them. They sigh and look down and shake their heads. They are half beaten before they even take the field. A Shifter will be standing there thinking, and thinking hard. They'll be saying to themselves: "OK, I can do this. I'll use that, try this, fight with these factors in mind..."

A Shifter can fight with both hands, one hand, no hands. A Shifter can use short weapons, long weapons, scabbards etc. A Shifter can fight on a plank, a log, a hay bale, a burning deck, in a collapsing mine shaft, by lantern light, even blind folded. A Shifter can fight tied to another person at the wrist/ knee/ neck. A Shifter can fight (and win) with no legs, laying on his back, whatever. The reason a Shifter can do this is that (s)he has already trained for these eventualities before they ever occur in combat. The Shifter worked hard, virtually every day, to overcome their weaknesses until (to an outsider it appears) they don't seem to have any weaknesses.

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Sidebar: Period Masters and Modern Times

Up until the start of the sixteenth century there were few solid principles of how best to fight with swords. Masters, mainly army veterans, passed on a hodgepodge of techniques, mixing together swordplay, dagger work, and wrestling moves--anything that would help their pupils survive. -- *By the Sword: A History of Gladiators, Musketeers, Samurai, Swashbucklers, and Olympic Champions*, by Richard Cohen

Each individual master taught merely a collection of tricks that he had found, in the course of an eventful life, to be generally successful in personal encounters, and had practised until the ease

and quickness acquired in their execution made them very dangerous to an unscientific opponent.
-- *Schools and Masters of Fence...*, by Egerton Castle

One of the advantages I believe we have, that period fighters didn't, is that we train in public, fight each other repeatedly, and always get another chance to rectify our mistakes. Masters, anywhere in the world at any time in history, recognized the power of good intelligence: i.e. fighter analysis. They understood that a move seen is a move weakened. Seeing something for the first time, live on the field, usually gets you killed in a real fight. Seeing it from a distance, with minutes, hours or even years to prepare, means you have a good chance to survive and even prevail.

I know a fighter who likes to take a deep lunge and extend it further by putting his off hand on the floor and shooting upward at a 45 degree angle. It even has a fancy Italian name, *Passato Sotto*. The point is, that particular move worked on me exactly twice before I found ways to get around it. Had I not have gotten to see it performed by this fighter first, in practice, I might not get to survive it under lethal--live fire conditions (it is dramatic). That's my advantage, the advantage we all have in this game: we've seen these things tried, in tournaments and in Fighter Practices. We can adjust to these tricks without paying the full--bloody--price for learning about them. I've probably seen a hundred tricks that a period fighter never saw, or only heard about from gossip, after another duelist died; as that particular trick was first revealed on the field. Secret moves were very effective when nobody knew what was being explored in secret. When the grapevine sizzles and everyone knows about what is being done: who does it, who trains it, who has the counter for it, etc. then, over time, its effectiveness withers and dies. My own case is a perfect example. I came to the Outlands with 20 years of knife fighting experience. At first I could take 30 or more fighters in a row with my double or single dagger style even against Case. Since then I've spent the last 6 years teaching others all my moves. My chances of holding the field with that style through even a few of my peers and students these days is slight. I'd be happy to win without receiving a crippling wound in the process!

Period duelists who survived 8-10 duels often went on to survive fifty or a hundred. Why? Experience. The diaries I've read of soldiers who survived combat (from WWII through Viet Nam) show that men who made it through 30 days in combat often went on to survive the war. It's the constant cycle of fresh meat, in the form of newbies, who get to die for their country and who suffer the most casualties, as they attempt to learn the trade under harrowing conditions. If you survive long enough to learn to make the right moves in the field, you've seen everything a human can think of to do (with those weapons at that time in the history of warfare) and will most likely survive. That's why I keep saying: the moves are the moves are the moves.

My greatest weakness in this game (in my opinion) is that I rarely psych up and fight all out (what's the point? it isn't real). I stay in "teacher mode" most all of the time, even with fighters I don't know or could easily beat. I mess around during duels, extending the time on the field, encouraging my opponents to fight hard and do well, even pointing out improvements they could be making as we go. This has earned me a reputation for "playing with my food" or "having a bad attitude" or "dragging a fight out in a cruel or humiliating manner." This is not true. I want others to do well, as this pushes me to do better. It takes pretty desperate odds or very difficult conditions for me to get excited enough to cut loose and fight full throttle (this is not bragging. I'm trying to make a point about fighter analysis, bide with me a moment).

One more war story: We did a fighting exercise after a tourney where each individual defender was placed in a narrow corridor, to be rushed by four attackers (all of us using single epee). Each attacker's release, in series, was delayed by a three second count, thereby ensuring a bead on a string effect, with a few precious seconds available to dispatch each aggressor, before the next arrived. Take too long, and you're facing too many swords and die (the corridor did have a "bulge" in the middle where your opponents could face you three across, a very bad situation for the defender). This was such a novel, difficult and complex challenge that I got excited enough to give it my all (I added a couple of constraints for myself: only one second between each attacker's release into the corridor, and I decided to use only draw cuts to win). In seven seconds, I had killed them all (I'm not precisely sure how I did it either. I was pretty tired from fighting all day and I just flowed into "mushin." I do remember using one fighter to delay another, briefly, sometime during the attack, then, poof, it was over and the time keeper was calling "Seven seconds." At the time, it seemed to take much longer. A nice display of Zen fighting, if I do say so).

The point is, there are wonderful fighters who won't show you all they are, or all they have, in one single sitting (other masters in other martial arts are notorious for this. They always seem to have a trick or two left in the bag, even if you've watched them for years.) These masters are probably--just like you--learning new stuff all the time; moves so subtle and refined that they couldn't teach them to you or me until *we* get that many years under our belts (at which point, some of these moves will probably have become self evident).

Experience and constant training normally give the serious, long-term practitioner the edge. You may not see a master's best stuff until you've played them for years, because they aren't being challenged hard enough to use it. Remember that factor when you are making your analysis of a particular fighter. There are no dangerous weapons, only dangerous men.

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The Downed Fighter (DF)

Express elevator to Hell, we are going down! -- *Aliens*

And again, the thrust being made through the hand, arm, or leg, or in many places of the body and face, are not deadly, neither are they maims, or loss of limbs or life, neither is he much hindered for the time in his fight, as long as the blood is hot. -- *Paradoxes of Defense, by George Silver*

In SCA rapier fighting, we continue to battle even when we lose the use of our legs; which, as I understand it, is pretty unrealistic. Still, it's good training for the head bobs, upper body evasions and blocking that you sometimes need in static situations (and that Blockers specialize in. As Shifters we want to be able to imitate the Blocker at need). It concentrates on defense and improves or expands on your repertoire when the other fighter is controlling the pace/tempo, or when you are the "Up Fighter" and in command of these same principles. Can we analyze a "downed fighter" (DF) the way we do a standing one? Can we factor in the skills/habits of the four basic fighter types when they are DFs? Can we predict how they will function when paired with a DF in a melee setting or two-on-one tournament and we are facing them alone?

Of course.

We will look at two basic combinations:

1. You as the DF, your opponent as the Up Fighter (UF).
2. You as the UF, your opponent as DF.

We will not consider the DF/DF scenario because mirror engagements are tactical stalemates and the chances of a double kill are high. In other words, it's a crap shoot. We will not consider the DF versus two UF scenario either as the DF should die in about 3 seconds and you do not want to be that person... ever!

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You as the Downed Fighter

How a fighter approaches being a DF is readily apparent by the posture they take on the ground. When working as a DF, we recommend that you use the kneeling position, rather than the "leg(s) in front" position. Although the "leg(s) in front" is popular, it only gives the illusion of stronger defense. There are serious weaknesses, which I will address when you are attacking a DF that adopts this posture. For now, assume all my comments about being a DF include your having taken the kneeling posture (if you have injuries or flexibility problems, the "Indian Style" is an acceptable alternative, but it limits the range of torso motion a bit and I find it harder on the lower back).

Remember, you are, in effect, a Blocker when you lose your legs. Take every effective attribute of the Blocker and apply that knowledge to your preparation and training as a DF. You should practice every aspect of SCA rapier fighting, including this one. If you are a poor DF, you are probably a poor Blocker. Adjust your *mindset* and your training commitment to include: all four basic parries, classic ripostes, draw cuts above the horizon line (common sense, it's hard to do an upward oblique cut, like a 4-10, when your target is above you.), the middle, and close range defense, body evasions and forearm/elbow blocks.

The one factor that is outside DF's control (that is critical for success) is *distance*. Since the DF has no mobility, they have no control over the distance between two fighters. They must rely on the UF making an error. The error can be withdrawing too late or too soon, closing too deeply or getting mentally sucked into standing still, thus giving up their mobility "voluntarily." DFs can do things to help create that error, but without that basic flaw in UF's attack, a DF cannot win.

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The Charger

You will need both hands (if at all possible) to defeat this type of fighter. The kneeling posture, itself, is an invite and a trap. You are encouraging an all out assault by leaving the ground in front of you temptingly clear. Chargers have problems when they get too close and you're inviting exactly that error. Also: be aware that (It is ironic that the Charger often adopts the "leg straight in front" posture when they are a DF. This gives us some insight as to what type of attack they fear and why they are Chargers themselves.) the Charger is coming, and soon. Thankfully, the DISTANCE question is often solved. The Charger will be with you in a moment. Stay alert and don't drift off mentally. You will have very little time to adjust your defense once the Charger gets rolling. The fight will move to close range very quickly. Charges also lack the discipline and skill to stay just at the edge of engagement and pick at your extremities. This all

works to your advantage if you are prepared. Training against the "suicide" charge is essential as drawcuts will probably become your only useful (and safe) response.

It's best to meet a Charger "square up" with two hands at shoulder height, "en passant" (strip style with your single remaining hand forward) when one-handed. You need to watch the "tell" peripherally and focus on the weapons coming at you. You will have to "wedge out" the incoming point(s) while keeping your own point on line. Your blade must stay inside theirs so your cut is to the belly and theirs is to the shoulder. Most of the time, the Charger will run right onto your point if you can keep it somewhere on line. To make this possible your blocks will need to be more "aggressive" and powerful to hold off a Charger's attack. The Charger's body weight will be behind any attack they are making (and how!) so it is vital that your blocks be powerful enough to compensate and manage that excess energy. Try not to block beyond the "batter's box" of your frame, although this will be hard to do. Any wasted motion will put your tools out of position and too far from your body. Keep your elbows too high long enough and you'll get carved up.

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The Blocker

Here is the most difficult UF to face as a DF. You must play his game, and play it better, to survive against a blocker. By engaging in blade play and conversation while gradually retreating with your torso and your parries, you may get the blocker in close enough for an "mini-charge" of your own by combining a strong thrust and a forward torso lean (According to the rules you can't rise up off your buttocks). The normal way to defeat the blocker is to take control of their defensive tools, move them around and then make a strong attack or close and overwhelm their defenses (Sort of like a Charger, but more thoughtful and controlled). This is hard to do without legs, but it can happen. You can also play a kind of pick game as a deformed runner. By taking shots at the lead hand of a blocker, you can keep them at the very edge of range. Making them cross this added distance can lead them too come in too far. This makes sense because the Blocker rarely advances and under pressure may have trouble managing a large enough advance and retreat to get you. Occasionally you can pick their primary hand or forearm. When they switch, beware, as you've probably turned them into a poor man's charger. Because their off hand (as a primary tool) is generally weak, your chances of success are increased (just be aware that a committed blocker may become desperate and feel they have to change into a charger. They'll probably be fairly clumsy, but they can still kill you. You cannot afford to be caught napping as a DF if/when this occurs).

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The Runner

You must play the runner in a similar fashion to the blocker, but there is more of a "trout on the line" feel to it. Try to appear as awkward and helpless as possible. Take an open "en guard" position with your sword on the ground or low and off line. You must offer them first bite and make it look safe for them to commit. If you prefer to engage and do some blade play, the runner must be brought into range so gradually they are unaware that they've gotten too close. If you commit to a "mini-charge" too soon or too often, you will scare them out of range and have to begin the dance all over again. Use the "lean away" and "retreating arm" sparingly and convince

them that they are still too far away for you to get them. When you have a good read on a runner, make your torso lean and thrust, but make it count. You've got to get a piece of them or all that subterfuge is wasted. Also: watch out for hand/wrist/head picks by a runner, it's usually their best shot and they feel safe making it.

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The Shifter

Be prepared for a long afternoon as a DF. A shifter may be patient and pick at you from long range like a runner (all the while they will be thoroughly gauging and assessing your blade work, defense, mindset, fatigue factor, and range capabilities; they'll spend that time keeping you under pressure, constantly chipping away at your defensive tools until you have no limbs and the fight is over) only to change gears after a bit of blocker style conversation and *charge* to the bellybutton (if you have an "outie" it'll be touching them) range to slice you up. When and if the Shifter decides to change games or ranges, you have to be ready and able to meet them at that game. Your thinking cannot afford to lag or they'll make the kill before you have time to "change gears" mentally as well as physically.

Personally, I like to close and bind a DF and then step away on the 45 degree angle to finish them. It's a bit sneaky because I'm no longer facing them "square up" in the required chivalrous style and I often arrange my escape away from the long blade. If I move to the shorter weapon or off hand side this causes them to mask their own sword because it must travel across their own chest to get at me. This makes them awkward which is all good for me. I feel it's fair because I've given up controlling the distance. The DF has a good chance to fight at their best range and if they can work a blade free, they stand a reasonable chance of getting me (This almost never happens as I'm very comfortable at close range but it seems nicer than staying outside and picking them apart. I find that against newer fighters that option is distasteful. Against fools or enemies, however, feel free to toy with them like a cat with a wounded mouse...taking their defense away brick by brick until they are completely at your mercy and must yield. Delicious!).

You must be totally focused when you are a downed fighter. Develop the ability through training and excursions to shift your defenses to meet threats from any of the styles and any of the ranges, almost instantly. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to anticipate a shifter'S decision to change styles or distances.

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Attacking a Downed Fighter

Now that the basic groundwork has been laid, you should be able to think about how you would attack the four types we've defined when they become a DF. Tactical and strategic thinking are part of the overall fighter package. Try to improve your skills in this area.

If you wanted to take a DF RUNNER'S arm (strategic goal) how would you do that (tactical problem)? Can you get them to extend it for you so you can just lop it off? Probably not. This fighter is naturally tentative. Without help (read invitation) they won't extend themselves enough. You'll have to leave a target open, a big fat one, to get that arm out where you can stick it. You "channel" their attack with bait and have a preset counter measure ready to go when they make the fatal blunder. Get the idea?

All the information just presented on how you are going to be attacked as a DF is applicable to killing a DF. Just reverse the rolls. Remember to make the "mistake" of closing to an appropriate distance, fully aware that you are in charge and can leave if the tide of battle shifts against you. Don't get sucked in to staying too close if things aren't working out. Retreat, regroup, reset. Depending on the style you wish to employ, you make the choices that lead them to do what you want to see. If you know you're getting really deep you're not making a mistake if you have a plan and are executing a technique. Closing is only a mistake if you haven't weighed the risk and are just messing around, hoping it will all work out. The key is to remain observant enough to withdraw and regroup when you feel the play is going against you. It's a bit embarrassing to me to lose to a downed fighter--I have a big advantage in controlling the distance and length of engagement--it should be an easy victory.

There are two basic DF positions: "Leg(s) forward" and "kneeling" (or "Indian Style").

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The Leg Forward Downed Fighter

If you lean back like that again I am going to aim for the one target on you that isn't moving. --
David ap Llywelyn, speaking to Buta during practice

The DF with their leg forward is being a bit un-chivalrous, even discourteous, because they *expect you* not to step on them or hurt them. In a real fight, I'd "sewing machine" that lead leg until it fell off or they begged for mercy (Editor's Note: Or I'd walk away and let them try to chase me--in period a leg blow either [ended the fight](#) or it was barely noticed). What the DF in this position is doing is attempting to channel your attack to one side of the obstacle or the other (as well as giving you something safety related to think about. Since MY safety is always MY responsibility, I don't give it over to another person lightly, especially if I can avoid it. The fighter with their leg out is depending on their opponent to watch out for them. This is unwise and unrealistic. It's just one reason I recommend the kneeling posture when you are a DF). Since you are required to attack their front, it's a bozo no-no if you step in behind their back or shoulder and start cutting their throats from ear to ear. OK, (un)fair enough. How do I deal with it?

Let's use the lead arm's elbow as the defining landmark. If I'm talking about the *inside* line, that's the side the elbow bends toward, i.e. the chest and groin. The *outside* line of approach is the triceps side or back of the arm, because the elbow doesn't bend back, it locks. If you have some strip training, these are the **four** (inside) and **six** (outside) line, even on a fighter sitting down.

Let's describe the scene a bit. Say the DF is right handed, still has their primary arm/hand, and has their right leg out (this is another thing that irritates me about this type of DF. I can wound either leg and THEY get to decide which one they leave out. If I could make a rule about this, I'd say that the wounded leg must always be left "dragging" out there in front for added realism). If and when they chose to lean back.

Leaning back is a favorite way to get you into a DF's effective range. I'm not against doing that, I just don't like to do it in a blatant and clumsy way, which this leaning back business is. I don't even want to get into the fact that Marshals will often call a hold when these fighters end up on their backs. It's one thing for an UF to force a DF onto their back. It's another if they choose to lean that far back. The idiot chose to fight there, so let him! This is similar to trapping a Runner

in a corner and having to let him out again, on the Marshal's say so. I just don't feel it's my fault or problem if the DF put himself into a physically uncomfortable or potentially dangerous position.

Anyway, the DF will probably be leaning back on their left hand.

The best way I've found to handle this posturing is to work to the *outside of the forward leg* (I know, that's technically behind the shoulder but if I attack along a line right behind the elbow, I can get away with this. It's especially fair if I hit them in the front or four area with a thrust or drawcut. After all, their weapon is available to block if they choose to do so.

I want to keep them from pivoting around on their buttocks and whipping me with that lead leg. I want to prevent their furniture from bashing my knee. I want to keep their leg pinned to the ground if possible (this prevents them from doing much else but going over onto their back, which is what I want). If, as I attack, I place my foot (my right foot; always use the same foot they are using. Do not go "mirror image," here) at their knee level on the outside of the leg (stepping on the pants leg is always a nice bonus), while managing their blade (with an 8 block or off hand check) they cannot trap or sweep me with the leg. They cannot elbow strike me with the lead side arm. They can't hit me with their furniture. They cannot drawcut me (a 9-3 drawcut for them). Good idea, let's go with it.

If I step outside their lead leg and control their lead arm, everything gets a lot easier. Use what you already have learned about managing and killing **blockers** and you should do fine. If you can push their blocking tool across their body, it opens up the whole neck area. Good enough. Stick 'em in the armpit, the throat, the head, the groin, etc. Drawcut their wrist and then stick 'em some more. Step back. Help them stand. Say something nice like, "good fight." Go record your victory with the list meister.

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A Kneeling Downed Fighter

This is probably a **blocker** or a **shifter**

Approach with extreme caution. They are probably going to be comfortable at most if not all of the ranges (middle and close and super close) that decide the issue. I believe the kneeling DF also has a few inches of mobility in the torso that other styles of DF don't have. Be aware of side slipping and body evasions by this type of DF. Estimate your ranges carefully. If you do charge in close, be kind and do not bowl over the DF. Legs trapped under hips and buttocks can be seriously injured if the DF hasn't practiced this particular kind of stretching.

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Summary

- Take your analysis of fighters and extend it to the DF situation.
- Practice fighting as a DF to gauge your own defensive skills.
- Practice fighting as a UF to gauge your ability to control the play.
- Explore strategic and tactical options you can employ against the 4 fighter types when you are a DF.

Develop a plan for dealing with this situation because it is a frequent occurrence in SCA rapier fighting. Taking a leg should always be part of your strategic repertoire and I find there some fighters that I always try to take their leg as part of my initial attack; especially if I believe they are wild, hyper-aggressive, sloppy, or have hurt me in the past. Taking the leg gives me the opportunity to dictate the pace of the bout, which in my opinion, always means a safer fight.

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An Analysis of Weapon Styles

Introduction

It occurs to me as I write about the weapons we use that Don Tristan and I appear to have a bias for single Sword and Sword and Dagger style play, as opposed to the other forms acceptable to SCA rapier fighting. As the resident curmudgeon, I thought I'd give my take on *why* we lean toward these two styles by analyzing the other styles on their strengths and weaknesses (remember what the first two syllables of "analysis" are..).

So here we go...

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Scabbards and Drawing Weapons

According to my research scabbards in period were of soft or semi-stiffened leather (yet another reason that rapiers were dull). They were buckled into frog and belt arrangements that allowed the sword to hang at a 45 degree angle, just in front of the left knee. European fighters (as opposed to Samurai, etc) could not have used their scabbards to augment their rapier play, and in fact, the masters do not mention their use. We play with PVC pipe, covered with caps and cloth, leather, and/or tape. This gives us a rigid, "parry only" defensive secondary, without historical corollary. Sword canes from the 18th century and beyond come in wooden walking sticks with pointy brass ferrules (you can get modern ones made of exotic, space age plastics). *Their* use as a secondary is fully endorsed by us because the sword part of a sword cane is barely longer than our practice daggers (18 inches) and needs the extra help.

Before you get all shocked (i.e., is Randal going Period Nazi on us?), I'm not using period realism as the only criteria for discrediting this form--sword and scabbard fighting as practiced in the Outlands is a lot like Case only more clumsy and ineffective. I have other problems with scabbards, most notably: draw length. We've experimented with drawing swords from our play PVC scabbards a bit and discovered that drawing a sword is highly dependant on how tall you are, how long your arms are and how long the bloody blade is! There has been an increase in the use of longer and longer blades here in the Outlands (40 to 45 inches) both in the epee format and with the schlaeger blades. Since I made the mistake of finally reading the period masters (knowing what was "correct" can be Hell, ignorance *is* bliss), I discovered that many manuals talk about preparing the sword for draw, keeping safe distance from a potential opponent during the verbal exchanges, and other tactical problems in getting a long, skinny sword into action in tight quarters.

I even went so far as to hold a tournament where the fighters began with their swords in belt or scabbard with their primary drawing hands touching at the fingertips. On allay they were required to draw the sword with no footwork allowed until the sword was clear and free of any

encumbrance. The results were entertaining, educational (some fighters couldn't even draw a 34 inch epee smoothly and economically; the 5 block suddenly became popular; initial moves included downward drawcuts to the face and scalp as part of the drawing motion--too short to be legal, but informative) and often hilarious. The two finalists were both over 6 feet tall--what a coincidence...

If we're going to use scabbards, and we are, some changes might be in order. Length, materials, construction and other factors would significantly impact the Sword and Scabbard game.

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Buckler

Here's a great tool in the wrong box. Bucklers in period were mostly steel and roughly 20 to 40 inches in diameter. They were round, square, diamond shaped and some obviously needed ironing (cool undulating shapes that turned rapier points, trapped and/or broke blades) and were pretty heavy.

They were hold-overs from the more crashy-bashy time when the preferred weapon was more often (at least in England) the back sword, transitional swords over an inch wide, and war swords being converted to civilian use; the fighting style was bigger and broader with more broad cuts, etc. In fact, Joseph Swetnam and John Silver both allude to the excitable Englishman's habit of taking a full swing in the heat of the moment and both were right in their assessment that a rapier is a lousy sword to try and block or deflect broad cuts with lots and lots of energy in them. To compensate, period fighters recommended complicated (read as: risky) augmented blocks with the dagger helping out the sword or vice-versa and strong admonitions to never, never, never block with the dagger alone as it could be overwhelmed (as in blown aside) with bloody, contusive, painful, and terminal results. All good info.

In the Outlands, bucklers are oval, octagonal, square and circular. We have gotten that part right. They are mostly made of wood, slate, plastic and other interesting materials, with metal coming in dead last as a preference (heavy, fatiguing and rusty). We have gotten that wrong; but the game and weapons have dictated what is effective. Our bucklers have to be much lighter than the real thing because we don't allow big circular strikes (which they deflected most admirably), only thrusts. A buckler better be mobile to deflect a thrust from an epee. Actually it does a fairly poor job even when light and mobile. There is so much concentrated energy in a thrust that a deflection doesn't have a lot to "work with" in driving the point off line. The materials we use would have allowed a needle point to stick in the surface, making it more effective if we use real weapons, but less effective against rubber bird blunts. Under field conditions, you often end up getting skewered in another part of your anatomy than that being protected as the point skitters off... which is very disappointing performance at best.) That is not what bucklers were designed to do. What really happens is that the buckler is used to clear a lane for a fighter seeking to close on an opponent during a rush. What you see on the field is smart fighters picking away with lame thrusts while preparing to dash should their sword become engaged with the buckler of the invariably incoming (charging) fighter. It's okay, I guess, but not how the old time game looked.

A fighter kneeling behind a buckler is another artificial construct we've developed with no historical counterpart. Leg wounds made with a Back Sword or Cut-and-Thrust would most likely have ended the fight. A buckler fighter on their knees is almost fully protected, for as long

as the fight lasts. I've seen too many standing fighters lose to this type of fighter (the standing fighter having so much more to protect) for me to be comfortable with the realism of the exchange.

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Case of Rapier

Ah yes, the *crème de la crème*, the Cadillac of rapier play, the pinnacle of power... oh, you get the drift. There are fighters around who wax rhapsodic on this topic for hours. To Hell with enthusiasm and passion, let's hear what Mr. Curmudgeon has to say.

Weapons in period were apparently (woodcuts are unreliable) *designed* for use in pairs. They were fitted into one scabbard, had half guards for the right and left hand respectively, and were the same length. They were not used as one primary weapon with a back up in case of failure. There are documented duels with Case of Rapier, so we can play it without reservation. The practice and training of case fighting is also well documented (example: [diGrassi](#)). And that's about all I can say on the positive side of the ledger.

Here's the bad news: Case, the way we play it (with point work only, no broad cuts), has only one effective range. The long range trading of thrusts is okay but it leaves out reasonable exchanges at middle and close range. The drawcut is the best offensive option with long blades at close range, but it's a safety convention and not particularly effective with real blades anyway.

Not many Outlanders are ambidextrous, so Outlandish Case Fighters tend to use one blade with the other sort of floating around and getting in the way. Most kills are made with the primary side weapon, and the off side will occasionally be used to initiate a block, deflect, or bind on one (or both of) the opponent's blades. Case fights tend to be long, inconclusive, sloppy and determined more by luck than skill. The weapons used are not designed to be a complimentary pair but are often serendipitous matings with widely varying furnishings, weights and lengths. Going back to my personal peeve about draw length etc; I'd like to see a 5'8" fighting fool (the kind that walks out to a "meanest mother" tournament with a 40 and 45 inch weapon in each hand) draw this chosen weapons from their scabbards before the fighting begins. Odds are, the fool would be dead before they could "clear leather".

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Sword and Dagger

Finally, my personal favorites. The practice is documented and clearly the style most explored by period masters after the use of a single sword. The imbalance in length between weapons gives flexibility at all ranges and in most situations; from cramped tavern table to wide open field. Often the dagger can be used where the sword cannot and be usefully augmented by cloak and other secondaries. It moves faster than the sword and it's stronger and sharper. It obviously doesn't have the range of the sword but is an excellent compliment in most situations. It's also nice not to lose offensive capability in the event of weapons failure (of either weapon, be it broken blade or loss of grip. The tactics have to change but the fight can still be won by a superior fighter; especially one that's trained, quick witted and fast acting.)

On the down side, the dagger is a poor defense against cuts, and heavy weapons like broad swords and back swords. A shield is even more useful in casual, "all in" fighting, as it can defend

against swords, lances, glaves, spears, axes and even some kinds of arrows and projectile weapons. It's damn hard to deflect an arrow with a dagger. Our daggers are over long and over furnished. I still can't see how period fighters used period daggers I've seen that were only 11 inches long, with short quillions. Those knives would require a fighter to possess a great deal of skill and some luck to be effective in the fury of combat, even with the sword as part of the equation.

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Sword and Hatchet

As we look to the future, we have talked about adding the hatchet to our repertoire of destructive toys. After seeing hatchet fighting in *Cutthroat Island*, *The Patriot*, and *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, we are interested in seeing how Sword and Hatchet or Dagger and Hatchet plays. A thick wooden handle (or PVC in our case) might provide better single defense against the Back Sword group. The right angle attacking blade and poll or back spike allow for interesting trapping, striking and stripping possibilities on offense and defense. The energy concentrating metal head (rubber in our construction) provides penetration of most defensive systems including mail and even plate. It cries out for circular cuts and strikes made by a weapon even better suited for the techniques than most swords. Even though broad cuts are illegal, we'll keep messing around.

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Sabre

This curved blade and an attendant game are also being researched and considered for use in the Outlands. Curved blades make drawcuts practical and readable. You get interesting traps and cool thrusts around furnishings and straight blades that are otherwise impossible. Again, we'll keep playing and testing these fascinating weapons. They make a nice triumvirate that rather mirrors the strip fencer's games: Epee (Court Sword) in place of Foil, Schlaeger in place of Epee (for realistic Rapier) and real curved sabers in place of whippy straight wires. Using all of these greater weight weapons, combined with fighting in the round without "right of way" can only mean loads of fun for years to come.

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Summary

There are no hugely compelling reasons why we can't continue to play with all the toys currently used and even introduce new ones. Some are going to be more "realistic" than others. Safety means limits and all that I have offered above is obviously just one opinion. We could always tweak the game a bit to improve realism. We could improve training and green card requirements as well. There's always room for more toys. But, overall, the Single Sword and Sword and Dagger come closest to representing the function and realism of period tools as I found them during my research. They are the best of the best, among the current choices and under the current rule system.

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Fighting Against Pairs, Trios and Groups

Well for God's sake, in a state where the nobility attack three-on-one, I think I'm a fool to step outside in less than a full suit of plate! -- *Brian Duffy, The Drawing Of The Dark*

I've been specializing in group fighting... fighting in gangs for local charities and that sort of thing... -- *Fezzik, The Princess Bride*

We have run into occasional tournament formats (Hero vs. Rogues) and melee situations where we, as individuals, have had to fight against multiple opponents. Although it isn't strictly a duel, it isn't a full melee situation either. Occasionally we have reached the end of a melee scenario where we are the sole survivor for our team and we face more than one opponent left over from the other team. There are principles, tactics and techniques you should master as a solo fighter for these situations.

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Attacking a Pair

Split Focus

This is a general technique for facing all teams. Using Unfocused Vision (stare at a point on one fighter's chest. Relax your focus until you can see the entire fighter from head to toe. Then expand it further to include the fighter standing next to them.) try to monitor all the actions of the team. Throw a few shots to mix it up, without any intention of seriously attacking either and see what they do. Occasionally you can throw in a broad sweeping block, trapping all their defensive weapons and *close* to dagger range, killing both fighters. Sad, but true. This one works best on pairs and trios your analysis tells you haven't worked together, aren't communicating well verbally or fail to key off each other's shots nonverbally.

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Take Advantage of Errors

Fighting a pair requires you to make close to zero mistakes combined with their making one or two. The burden is definitely on you to perform. But there is an essential weakness in the pair. They are not controlled by one mind but by two. Complete sympathy/telepathy is impossible to them. Training and familiarity can minimize the gap that they face in coordinating their movements, but this "communications gap" will never be completely eliminated.

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Mobility

Defending your legs is critical to success against the herd. You will be using mobility to its utmost. Your movements can be decided on and implemented without hesitation, quickly take advantage of terrain. The pair or trio will have problems moving together. Driving the pair into an obstacle or barrier (even each other) can be of immeasurable help. Split them apart with trees, bushes or benches. Moving to higher ground often results in one of the pair leading and one flagging. Active mobility on your part can help create the errors in distance and judgement you need to defeat greater numbers.

Using your footwork, see if the team will adjust their positions to maintain coverage of the overlapping ranges needed for proper defense. If you see a gap or feel a mental displacement where the fighters haven't adjusted to each other's movements, etc. give them a strong attack and

watch what happens. There is occasionally a "cascade failure" as all the fighters in a team over-react or work at cross purposes. I've taken 3-4 arms in a couple of seconds as each fencer failed to adjust the line or their position and then overcompensated. Any time you can face a pair or trio "in series" where each fighter is in the way of the one behind them, you have a momentary advantage. Taking a leg concentrates the pair and anchors them. This can give you time to adjust or recover your defense or balance.

If the pair is experienced and refuses to be pulled apart, you could be facing a threshing machine of blades. Taking arms is probably a better choice against the pair if you have time, opportunity and can execute the techniques. If you are fortunate enough to discommode a pair with terrain, or trap them in a corner, don't let the marshals take away this important weapon in your arsenal. "Matte" (a command that means "You're near the edge of the field") doesn't mean "Hold" ("Stop fighting. Something bad/unsafe has happened!"): You need the option of pinning them against the ropes. If they're dumb enough or inexperienced enough to stand there and interfere with each other's blade play/defense, take that advantage, by all means.

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Tactics

Remain fluid in your thinking. Take what the team gives you on any single pass...and then run away and regroup. Long engagements are almost certain death for you. I can keep track of one or two shots by each individual, for about 3-5 seconds. Then timing changes, chaos theory intervenes, and you get mush as the pair loses cohesiveness and communications. Don't stick around for that. Break off and regroup.

Pick them apart, little by little, if at all possible, Make a series of attacks on one fighter and see if the other(s) will "go to sleep." If you haven't attacked one of a pair for a couple of seconds, throw a shot and see if it lands. Fun to do when you pull it off.

I have seen cascade failures, where the team dissolves after one touch on one arm and they were rolled up like a rug, but generally this is due to their whole focus being on some other part of the field or melee action. Since their entire focus will be on you, don't depend on them folding after you take a single arm. During the weapons exchange, the hurt fighter is generally being covered by the whole one...that's the point of team fighting).

If you've been paying attention, you have already guessed that the best way to defeat a legged pair is to draw a UF outside the protective range of the DF. Essentially, you are then facing a string of individuals again and can slaughter them with ease (provided UF isn't just trying to sucker you in. You wouldn't fall for that, would you? Nawwww..). Divide and conquer is the general rule.

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Attacking the Trio

Many of the guidelines expressed here will work on both the pair and the trio, but there is a different feel when facing the three fighter groupings.

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Engage the Weak

Engage the weakest fencer of the trio and watch. If that fighter is a Runner, you may scare them off the line momentarily. It's possible to "carom" off this attack and hit another fighter because it needn't be a fully committed shot to get the proper reaction from a Runner, and it can then be redirected. At that moment, you can attack either of the wingmen if the Runner is in the center position (which is often the case) with a reasonable hope of doing some damage before retreating again (the time frame we're talking about here is only 2-3 seconds at most. This is all going to happen pretty fast). Take what you can get and then: retreat, reset and try something else.

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Engage the Strong

If one of the trio is a Charger, engage them directly. Their ego will generally draw them into a heated exchange. If you can retreat slightly on the "tell", you again create the opportunity to kill them all in series as explained above. If you can kill the Charger and retreat unscathed, it's a tremendous morale killer for the existing pair. They may take some time to regroup, as their best fighter (the one in truth, that they were depending on to get you, so they wouldn't have to die) is swept away without doing any damage.

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Engage the Flank

If you can make a good attack on one of the wingmen in a trio, the other fighter(s) are less effective (with the center fighter being the greatest threat and the far end fighter being the least dangerous. This is determined by critical distance. One fighter has it, the next in line does not). If the center man is shorter than the wing men, the effect is enhanced. This technique is even more effective if there is a barrier (trash can, tree, etc.) or something behind the center man or affecting the far wingman. In effect you can "peel off" the wingman you've just engaged, long enough to get the kill. There's even a chance the far wingman will dissolve the formation just to get clear of the object or barrier you ran them into. Now you face a mob of individuals, not a coherent force, which is much easier to deal with.

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Shot Selection

If you've not read the Blue Company [Melee Manual](#), here's a brief reminder of what you need to concentrate on when facing pairs, trios and groups.

Any part of the body that enters "no man's land" is a legitimate target.

You will most likely be able to safely reach hands and arms and shoulders (with an occasional head). Learn the best angles to hit these targets from so that an opponent calls them good (straight on, right arm to left arm is generally bad. Oblique angled shots; your right arm to their right arm, are better. Face off against a couple of friends and try some thrust only drills. You'll soon see that the arm directly across from you is not the best target to hit, it's the arm at an angle that is).

Try to make every single shot count.

This means improving your accuracy. Excellent accuracy at a high rate of speed is a morale killer, too, so use it. Even near misses can cause a team fighter to freeze, hesitate

and/or retreat physically from the line. Some level of offensive shooting is required to keep them off of you anyway (in this case the best defense really is a good offense).

Throw multiple shots at multiple opponents in a rapid, yet controlled, manner.

Always be prepared to abort a shot and play defense if it looks like something they are throwing will get through and nail you. Your off hand will be most likely defending you against all the shots that come in toward your chest and face. Be prepared to switch your sword over to defense if you lose momentum and have to flee.

Attempt to control the fighting distance if at all possible.

If you can funnel them into a doorway, down a bridge or between two trees, do so. If they will just stand in place and let you roam from flank to flank do that (this can be especially workable if you leg the centerman in a trio).

Keep in mind the individual styles we've discussed

Try to form a strategy that could create your best opportunity to get the touch (based on individual weaknesses or unwillingness to modify a particular style for the team). Watch for over-commitment by either wingman and then, *strike!* Hey, if this was so easy, why would anyone need to train?

Move in and out, and all about.

Move up, move down, and wear a frown. I do not like them Sam-I-Am. These geeks are being un-chivalrous as hell, aren't they? Attacking as a group instead of individually. So kill 'em all and let the MIC sort it out. Which reminds me...

It is important to exude an aura of "Death And Destruction." Think menacing thoughts ("Are you Sarah Conner?"). If the group thinks you are weak or even slightly intimidated, they'll probably run right over you (although I have had a pair chase me until they ran out of arms. They were taking hits, not covering each other and simply refused to acknowledge the losses; i.e. no verbal communication. After a few seconds of my back pedaling and shooting, they were done. No more offensive tools left). Don Tristan has a blindingly fast head shot. I don't use it much, myself--I'm not tall enough. But I have worked it in against a trio with excellent results--it's very important to make hit after hit without missing (or missing by much). The negative psychological impact to a trio of taking hit after hit after hit is a terrific ally for you. Try to develop it.

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Training Mishaps and General Safety Issues

Editors Note: This section discusses many things that are barely legal or actively illegal within society rules, yet many of these things still happen or have the risk of happening. The expression "Dead Right" is used in driving for when someone was legally correct, and died for following the rules--don't let yourself be a victim, but also take responsibility for your own actions. This deals more with rapier as a martial art than rapier as a sport.

Safety is obviously an important priority--we want every fighter to be safe. Oddly enough, new fighters--by definition--aren't (new schlaeger fighters, doubly so). We also want to streamline our own technique, which means speeding up. Speeding up always puts us at the very edge of control of our technique. Naturally, we're going to fall over into unsafe moments when our "reach has exceeded our grasp." We also want to be alert for unsafe play from our partner. This

can be especially hazardous if they are strangers, who come from other lands, and fight by different rules.

There will be training mishaps. That's a given. What can we do to minimize them or make them a positive training tool? Our philosophy is this: Expect your opponent to do bad things. Be paranoid. Expect furniture strikes, leg sweeps, hidden daggers up the sleeve, head butting, that sort of thing. Prepare to see this stuff and not freak out or freeze with surprise. Never stand there and get quillion punched while thinking, "Hey, that's not legal!"

Likewise, we also want to accept nothing less than perfectly clean, safe play from ourselves. I'm not allowed to throw stiff shots; I will not tolerate them from myself. No tricky wrist locks or binds, either; well, except with close friends. No forearm/elbow strikes, most of the time. No kicks (I have a long list of things I really shouldn't, er...don't, allow myself to do.). So on and so forth. Fight within the rules yourself. Expect your opponent to go totally barbarian.

We do allow one exception. If you see your opponent doing something that will hurt you (even while observing them as they fight somebody else), you can take steps to protect yourself. If a fighter does cross the safety line, even unintentionally, you have every right to prevent them from bashing you. There are moves that aren't strictly legal by SCA rules that should be in your repertoire for those moments when you see something coming and get that "Uh-oh" feeling. These aren't to be used to create an advantage on the field, they're meant to be preventative, not pre-emptive. We do allow students to *practice* some of these techniques against very senior, very experienced fighters that have a proven track record of self control and safety. Students need to get a feel for when they may be developing unsafe technique themselves. Students need to see unsafe technique coming at them to learn proper mental programming and useful defense. I realize this can get very close to "The Dark Side" where you, as a teacher, are turning out thugs and assassins.

Period masters struggled with this issue in their writings as well (not too hard though--for them, a life and death struggle included the "all in" style of fighting, and everybody seems to have spent time teaching grappling and dirty tricks. We're supposed to be playing nice, but the weapons *are* weapons and they have illegal uses. Things can happen whether you want them to or not). This type of training must be handled delicately and requires constant vigilance when students are engaged in it. We have found that knowing the bad has made our fighters live the good. They are quick to speak up and talk to opponents when they see something unsafe in a technique. As far as we can tell, this is the only way to help potentially dangerous fighters to straighten themselves out. These 'safety techniques' deserve to be mentioned.

We call these steps "checks" and "balance destroyers." Here's how they work.

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Checks

Any time you are engaged in six (right shoulder to right shoulder, facing opposite directions) you need to have your off hand ready to perform a check. This technique is most often needed when either of you decide to step forward, halving the distance to medium or close range. When you press on an opponent's arm, just above the elbow, you have effectively taken control of their sword arm for a few seconds. You don't have to actually grasp the arm (which is a Bozo-no no), pressing down and away with your palm is sufficient. From here you can guide the arm, hand

and blade in a safe direction. What's the point of this? Techniques with the elbow leading are very powerful (techniques with the wrist or pinky leading are not--prove this axiom to yourself).

Anytime you are close to the sword side shoulder of your opponent, they can whip back at you with their elbow, furniture and blade, in that order. The technique they are most likely to be attempting is some kind of draw cut; but the first two weapons (the elbow and furniture) are most likely to hit you before the blade ever gets into position. This is a powerful technique to manage safely because an opponent is likely to be rotating their hip, which adds power to an already dangerous technique. Some fighters panic when they feel you are "behind them." Animal instinct kicks in and they spin away from the implied threat, whipping up the arm, furniture and blade in reaction. Quillions and furniture can become entangled as well, causing a "tug-of-war" to develop as the fighters wrestle to free their weapon and continue the battle. I've been accidentally disarmed (and disarmed others) by an overlap in bells combined with a sudden jerk (an arm motion, not the nickname of my worthy opponent).

It can be also be awkward to block with your own right side weapons, the forearm and hand, as they are in a fairly weak position to handle a horizontal attack coming in on your right side. If you get your blade and arm turned vertical (hand pointing up or down) to face the incoming threat correctly you have two problems: the forearm is dangerously rigid (If you block with the forearm and happen to catch the incoming elbow instead of the upper arm, you can potentially break their arm. Bad form, old boy.), or the hand, which is covered with steel bars (the furniture around your hand will most likely have the quillion facing them, point on, again, very dangerous). If you keep your right arm and blade horizontal for safety, the strike may pass underneath your right arm and into your floating ribs or kidneys. If the offending elbow passes over your arm, it gets channeled up into your neck and face region. This is all bad news for you.

By using the left hand to check (often combined with some fancy energy bleeding footwork), even if you have to make a check across your body, (and even if you're holding a dagger), you have your wrist and shoulder lined up to act as rotating shock absorbers and can diffuse or redirect the incoming energy (this can be hard on the wrist if you get your hand bent backward, true, but it's much better to have a sprained wrist than a fractured jaw or lacerated larynx).

Checks (whether done with the hand, leg or shoulder) can be used in a variety of places. Checking the opponent's elbow with the hand to redirect a dangerous incoming force is just the most common example. The principle behind any check is this: it should prevent any sweeping motion of an opponent's arm that includes the furniture of the weapon leading. We want to place the hand where it's most likely to redirect or block the incoming technique's energy. If this is still unclear here's another example (true story).

I closed with a fighter and locked her sword and my sword down between us (right hand to right hand). My dagger (left hand) came up to thrust at her face. Her eyes got very big and she whipped her dagger (left hand) up to block. I knew we were too close together, so I let go of my dagger and put my hand across my face, palm facing out, next to my right temple, a split second before her dagger quillion crashed into the right side of my face (I had a mask on, but still...). I literally caught it in the palm of my hand. It happened totally by reaction (by that I mean extensive training). I always try to have my off hand ready to make a check, *even if I've "lost it"* due to a correctly executed touch to my hand or arm. I always expect my opponent to do

something stupid (she apologized profusely, but I was secretly delighted at how things worked out.).

I guess this also should point out that you are able to defend yourself without arms as the knee, forearms, shoulders, even head can often be used to shield more sensitive portions of your anatomy from impact and harm. Again things have gone considerably wrong for you to need these checks when you're hands are both empty. But the checks you discover can always augment your fighting with single point and even with multiple weapons. One of the best ways to get your students thinking about this is to have them defend themselves against a sword empty handed for several passes. Make a variety of attacks and closes against them and see what they can come up with, empty handed, that doesn't involve actual grabbing, etc. Holds can be called and not heard. Your defensive moves shouldn't cease until you are out of range and reasonably sure everything is "over".

One more war story.

I was facing a fighter who had very little fencing experience; he was a heavy fighter (fully armored stick fighting) by trade, but it was one of those tournaments where you do everything: fight, archery, fencing. We were facing off with single schlaeger. The next thing I know, he's leaping through the air, body and face wide open, blade coming down in a katana-type head splitter. An absolutely crazy thing to do. I instinctively voided my blade and furniture under my left armpit (I just didn't have time to take it to the right), My left arm, was executing a rising block (left fist over right eye, forearm facing out) over my forehead and stepping IN toward him. His whole body kind of raked down my front and his sword pommel just barely got through the block, tapping me on the forehead. He pretty much fell on his ass because all his weight rotated in mid-air around my left forearm and shoulder. This combined a Tae Kwon Do block with an Aikido projection and saved me mucho damage. It helped that I'd been training that block for 12 years. But it really just functioned like a check. He ran into it and I channeled the energy in a safe direction (rotation and up/away from me).

These are fairly extreme examples (I am filled with a great sense of relief that they worked), I know, but the little checks can save you a bruise too. Get in the habit of placing your off hand where it'll do the most good if things go wrong. Up by your face is a good place. Occasionally you'll need it across your other arm (under or over). Spend some time with this concept and have your partner take a few swings at you or have them get grabby in the close fighting. You'll pick up the idea pretty fast.

You can always take a forfeit or re-fight an awkward pass that required these "life saving" measures after the dust settles. What's important is that you protect yourself rather than rely on your opponent to protect you, regardless of what the rules say.

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Balance Destroyer

Occasionally you'll get a fighter that through basic style, or circumstances, puts all their weight behind a thrust or charge. You'll even get a fighter that loses control and does something crazy (No way? Way!). You may find yourself in need of a balance destroyer, which is just another kind of check. A BD is a technique that causes an opponent to fall off their center of balance,

even momentarily, preventing them from executing any another techniques and (occasionally) causing them to fall down. I call it the "hover effect."

There are two types. Leg BDs and Arm/Shoulder BDs.

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Leg Balance Destroyers

There are three ways to execute this technique. You must be facing the same direction as your opponent for the first and third technique. If they have lunged, you may have pivoted just enough that they have missed you and are now fully extended and standing slightly in front of you (again, this is an ideal. It rarely happens that way). The second technique can be done facing either way.

- Tuck your knee under their thigh and lift slightly while stepping forward. A gentle guiding hand or forearm on the near side shoulder blade often helps them to plant their face firmly in the loam. I strongly recommend you sit on them until additional help arrives. Under no circumstances let them get up until three more people have offered to assist you in subduing this fighter. This fighter isn't hurt, just humiliated, and they will get up in a very agitated state.
- Tuck your left foot inside their right instep, ankle bone to ankle bone, and skip back. This one is pretty dangerous because the opponent may end up in an involuntary split and tear something (most likely a ligament). If you want to be nice about it, press down on the top of their shoulder as you tap the foot just a little bit sideways, thus ensuring they fall on their back.
- Put the toe of your left foot/boot in the pocket behind their knee and gently put your weight on it while raking forward and down. Not too hard, as you are driving their knee into the turf and may crack the kneecap if you do this too fast or with too much weight behind it.

These are the full-blown leg style BDs. They are rarely needed. A smaller, lighter, minimal version of any one of these (using the thigh to thigh press or stepping on their foot can be effective) can cause your opponent to "hover" in the air for a moment, allowing you precious time to escape, which is the point of the exercise.

Untrained spectators may be unaware of what happened. Your opponent will probably know (but not always) what you did. They may even get angry and argue or dispute with you. Ignore the content of their outburst and remind them that excessively violent and unsafe technique is prohibited by the rules. You felt their technique was excessive or dangerous and you were just "trying to get out of the way." Try to keep a straight face. If they still seem "hot" forfeit the bout or leave the tournament.

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Arm and Shoulder Balance Destroyers

Occasionally you'll get a charger who is not executing a lunge, they're just going to plow right through you like a full back headed for the goal line. Their feet are in motion and not available for a leg BD. You'll need an arm or shoulder BD. The most important facet of these techniques is: you must never be directly in line with the incoming energy. There must be some angle

between you and your opponent for you to execute these techniques or they will not work (the larger the better, actually. If you can execute these combined with a 90 degree pivot, they can be blown completely off their feet.). The charge can come in a little behind your shoulder or a little in front, doesn't matter. What is of supreme importance is that you be off line. The other fundamental part of this technique is something called "grounding." Your center of gravity should be below theirs if at all possible or you will bounce off them, not the reverse. If you've ever played football, all of this will be old news.

Arm Balance Destroyer

Using the leading vertical forearm, hand up, meet the incoming shoulder just where it meets the arm. Drive slightly forward and down. Bend your knees. Try to use the off hand rather than the sword hand. If your off hand was back, near your chest at the beginning of the charge, feel free to step back and execute the technique. It'll work even better because your hip rotation is going to add power to the technique. If you have to use your hand, make sure it's open so it doesn't look like a punch. If the opponent's scapula is toward you as they charge by, drive your opponent's shoulder down and away from you. If your opponent's collar bone is toward you as they charge by, push up and away from you.

Shoulder Balance Destroyer

This is executed with the same feel as the arm type, it just means your shoulder takes the impact. In any case, when executing any BD, tuck your chin into your chest and anticipate a collision of some kind. You may be slightly in the way and get tangled up in the fall/crunch/oof. Keep a deep stance and everything should be fine.

We began this section with the title "Training Mishaps." People can get hurt doing the things described above. To ensure safety, do everything super slowly and gradually speed up. The more energy your opponent "gives you" through a committed attack, the less energy you need to execute a valid BD. It's a lot like a shove, only they have to be coming at you pretty hard for it to really have any effect. This is why I don't get too excited if they fall down and go boom.

They were in some way out of balance or over committed, which means out of control or the BD wouldn't have worked. Being "out of control" is prohibited by the rules. Doing something desperate or extreme, just to win, shows a lack of mental balance or concern for my safety. It's that inversion of priorities that allows me to protect myself with a clear conscience.

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Conclusion

Consider learning how to fall without using your hands to stop you (kneeling on one knee, then kneeling on both knees and just falling over on a nice mat or grassy slope are good places to start.). Your bones tend to poke out of your wrist if you put out your hand to stop a fall. Roll and take the impact on the shoulder. Your hands are most likely full of weapons and cannot be used anyway.

Consider letting go of your weapon(s) when you feel you are strongly trapped or your wrist is about to snap. Consider where your furniture (or your opponent's furniture) ends up when executing some of these techniques. Consider these things carefully, practice them slowly, then

go out and have some fun--these moves were all advocated by period masters, so feel good about your "period" fighting style if you wish.

I don't think it's my responsibility to remind you not to do risky things like: fence drunk, by lantern light, without masks, on gravel or ice, standing on logs, fallen trees, hay bales, or in knee deep water, blind-folded, etc...although you may learn some useful things if you do. Not preparing for a visit by Mr. Murphy is the number one stupid thing to do. If you train to handle yourself when presented with these situations/variables, you can and will minimize training mishaps.

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In Conclusion...

There are no secrets. There are no mysteries. There are no short cuts. There are natural laws to human endeavors.

Time and again we are asked "How do you do that? I could never get that good." The truth is *anyone* can do what we do. Whatever you do will be somewhat unique (we are all individuals here), but true excellence can only be achieved by the very simple methods we have outlined here.

Develop drills and exercises to improve your ability and comfort level when fighting superior numbers. If you practice often enough, this situation becomes more familiar. This often translates into your exuding the kind of relaxation and confidence that your opponents can sense and come to fear. If they hesitate, you have the advantage and can defeat the enemy, even given a great imbalance in numbers. I have held off as many as 10 fighters; but I can honestly say most of that success can be traced to reputation (They know I'm good), and effectiveness against the first couple of attackers. By dispatching them quickly and almost effortlessly, the rest of them became timid, which made me more effective.

You can learn by watching and by doing; by asking and by teaching. If you bring passion, discipline and commitment (including the time and resources, of course) to anything you do, true excellence is sure to follow. End of sermon. The day of redemption is at hand, and the fat lady will now sing, "Nearer My God, To Thee..."

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Training Drills

Speed comes from repetition! -- *Qwa Ja Nim Larry Hampton*

Note: the phrase "Then have" denotes more difficult variations layered on the basic exercise. Also, a melee drill should be considered their own category. A student who is an advanced rapier fighter in normal dueling can still be a newbie in melee.

Finally, while the drills do not specify it, all of them should be done with both primary and off hands.

Drills for Beginners

Hand/Target/Touch

- In alternating pairs, have person A thrust at partner B's hand.
 - Then have the target size reduced to three fingers, then the single thumb. For advanced fighters hold up three fingers and have the fighter touch individual fingers. If you really want to go all out, have the targeted person NAME which finger the advanced fighter must hit... and so on. This is the essence of layer exercises.
- Begin with a static target.
 - **Then have** (this phrase will appear repeatedly. It's an indication of layering and which direction layering can take. Be creative and experimental only after the basics have been mastered.) them touch only when the hand has stopped moving.
 - Then have the target in continuous motion throughout.
 - Then have multiple static targets, e.g., both hands (or the middle finger on both hands).
 - Then have multiple continuously moving targets.

Equipment needed: One rapier and one glove (for the target hand).

Simple Footwork Face-off

- In alternating pairs, students maintain distance between themselves. Initially, you can have students face the same direction and raise their hand (Left or Right, respectively) making contact with two fingers, respectively. Have one person lead in movement forward, backward and to the side as the other "follows" and maintains distance/interval.
 - Then have the fighters opposed to each other, each one retreating or advancing.
 - Then have students hold swords, crossing blades at two inches, and repeat.
 - Then have the students repeat the entire format with the follower blind-folded or with eyes closed.

Equipment needed: None.

Slow Parry Drill

- In alternating pairs, have one person thrust slowly in Four and Six with a scabbard or sword, while their partner parries with the rapier. The thrust must invade space and make contact with chest or shoulder if not parried.
 - Then have the students do the sequence Four-Six-Seven-Eight.
 - Then have the students do the parries with a random order.

Equipment needed: One rapier and one scabbard or one additional rapier.

Walk the Cliff

- Using a line of tape (or anything suitable as long as it's straight and can be stepped on), have students line up on the line, facing perpendicular to it, and

move along in correct stance, with correct footwork when you call out movement commands (e.g., "Advance!", "Retreat!").

- o Then have students also follow the commands of "extend," "lunge," "recover forward," and "recover back." Mix and match appropriately.
- o Then have students move in combinations of the five types of steps: advance, retreat, pivot, skip and step-through-pivot (e.g., "retreat, retreat, pivot!").

Equipment needed: None. Hand up or sword in hand optional.

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Beginning Dagger Drills

Eight Cuts

- Place four pieces of tape on a mirror in an star to mimic the eight basic cuts described above.
- Make the eight basic cuts with the dagger in your primary hand, trying to stay as close to the tape as possible.
- Start slow, then gradually speed up as you gain proficiency.

Equipment needed: None. A dagger, wooden knife, or a even pen is recommended.

Develop Defensive Timing

- Work with a partner.
- Have your partner make slow, controlled thrusts to predetermined targets.
- Parry each shot with the dagger, then bring it back to a ready position.
- Don't anticipate--wait for them to extend before parrying.
- Try to minimize extraneous movements and over-blocking.
 - o Then have the attacker vary the location of their attacks, still keeping things slow.

Equipment needed: Single point for both participants and a dagger for the defender.

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Beginning Melee Drills

Swirling Chaos

- Divide group into teams of three.
- Each team has one person who acts as the comamnder.
- The commander takes charge of his unit with the basic melee commands (advance, retreat, form a bubble, etc).
- Periodically rotate commanders.
 - o Then dynamically assign the teams objectives.

Equipment needed: None. Sword optional.

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Drills for Intermediate Students

Three Strikes, You're Out

- In alternating pairs, thrust to three targets named by the instructor or a member of the pair. Call all three, then say "Begin!"
 - Then have a small lunge added.
 - Then have a deep lunge added.
- Start with unlimited time, softest touch possible.
 - Then have time reduced to three seconds, calling "Stop!" when time has expired. Hit too hard and you're out.

Equipment needed: One rapier and one mask (or any amount of armor that makes the instructor comfortable. With advanced students, no other padding but the mask required).

Off-Hand Comment

- In alternating pairs, have one person thrust with a scabbard/sword as the other parries using the off-hand only. Begin with parrying hand advanced. All thrusts should be made below the armpit for safety.
 - Then have the hand refused.
 - Then have the rapier in the unused hand.
 - Then have the block followed by a riposte.

Equipment needed: One scabbard and one glove (rapier optional as the drill progresses).

Uncrossed Swords

- In alternating pairs, have students engage and move around the floor. One person leads. Have students maintain distance with only one rapier held up and "engaged," the other held low. Leader says "Check!" and Follower lifts blade and engages. Measure the distance, using a two inch rule.
 - Then have both students engage without any blades. Leader says "Check!" Both blades are raised to measure.

Equipment needed: Two rapiers.

Runaway Thrust

- In alternating pairs, have one student engage "refused." On the command "Thrust!" given by the instructor or defender of the pair, "refused" student steps through and makes a thrust. Defender uses footwork, parries and makes a riposte or drawcut.
 - Then have defender parry with off-hand only and riposte (defender is encouraged to also use footwork).
 - Then have the defender use only footwork (skips and pivots) and get off a controlled riposte.

- o Then have refused student make more energetic thrusts to various targets, continuing as before as before.

Equipment needed: Two rapiers, armor to suit instructor/speed of drill.

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Intermediate Dagger Drills

Develop Control

- As in "Develop Defensive Timing" above but try to make a simultaneous riposte with your sword as you parry with the dagger. Beware of making hard shots.

Equipment needed: Same as for "Develop Defensive Timing," armor to suit instructor/speed of the drill.

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Intermediate Melee Drills

Marquee Lights

- Arrange class into two lines facing. Beginning at one end, have that student make an attack to the line opposite (no attack to the student directly in front of them. 45 degree angles only).
- Single point only, those attacked can defend themselves.
- No riposte allowed.
- Have students rotate.
 - o Then have each student to the left attack when the preceding student has finished.
 - o Then have those students who can reach attempt to hit the arm or the leg of the person who is attacking after they have fully extended. Remember to keep it slow--this is for training.

Equipment needed: Single point, full armor.

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Drills for Advanced Students

Draw Cut Wonder

- In alternating pairs, have one student thrust. Parry with any off-hand tool, step through and draw cut the abdomen or arm.
 - o Then have students engage blades while facing each other at close range. Have the leader begin a drawcut. Defender continues with parry and/or draw cut combined with a footwork escape to critical distance.

Equipment needed: Two rapiers and full armor.

Nowhere to Run

- In alternating pairs, put one student against a wall or similar barrier. Have leader make ten thrusts to various targets. Defender uses both rapier and off hand to parry.
 - Then have attacker using case while defender has no weapons.
 - Then have, in groups of three, two attackers alternating ten thrusts (keying off each other as to when to begin) at the defender who continues as before.

Equipment needed: One Rapier and scabbard or two rapiers and full armor. A wall or suitable barrier.

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Advanced Dagger Drills

Isolate the Defensive Tool

- Working with a partner, use the dagger in each hand to block a variety of thrusts.
- Do this at slow to medium speed and with a set timing to the thrusts (Have the blocker count off: One, two, three...etc).
- Concentrate on positioning the tool correctly. Make each thrust run well past the target, ensuring proper placement for the block (nothing at risk behind it).
- Use no footwork.

Equipment needed: Two daggers and a rapier, armor to suit instructor/speed of drill.

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Advanced Melee Drills

Three On One

- In groups of four have three students attack one. Limit movement of attackers. Limit attackers to single point. Defender can use multiple arms/weapons. Wounds are cumulative on attackers and a leg wound means they're out.

Equipment needed: Four rapiers and full armor.

Six on Three

- Divide into three groups of three students, have three students form a line against a wall and the other six students form a line at the appropriate distance.
- Each group of three students decides on a "pulse order." This is the order which, when attacking, that set of three students will follow.
- Rotate the groups of three students every so often.
- Those against the wall defend, the other six students attack. Note when hit, but don't worry about blow calling other than correctly indicating the strike.
 - Then have the defenders riposte attacks.
 - Then have the attackers take shots as if it were actual combat (defenders are still immortal).

Equipment needed: Single point, full armor.

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Appendix A: Version History

24 September 2002

First Published on the Web

25 September 2002

Added a counter :-)

29 September 2002

Added a brief glossary, will increase in size as time goes by.

30 September 2002

Added a section on footwork, also written by Lord Randal.

Moved what was written in "Conclusions" to "Introduction."

7 October 2002

Added Appendix C: Sniperio

Added "Six on Three" to the Advanced Drills section, written by David ap Llywelyn based on a drill that Lord Randal ran at Fighter Practice.

1 Novemeber 2002

Expanded the Glossary with some more of Lord Randal's material.

Added the section "Mission Statement and Philosophy," also by Lord Randal, as another introduction, may be moved in the future.

Added the section "The Theory: Successful Offense and Defense," again by Lord Randal. Separated some of the drills into a "Melee Drills" section.

Some minor changes to grammer.

13 Novemeber 2002

Added sections on defense and targeting, by Lord Randal.

Added section on Intermediate Melee Drills.

Moved "Marquee Lights" to "Intermediate Melee Drills" from "Advanced Melee Drills."

Added "Furniture Strike" to the glossary.

A couple of formatting and grammer quirks got fixed.

Added some quotes to the various sections.

Expanded the "Marquee Lights" drill slightly.

Began the long process of linking the glossary, this is going to be halfhearted until I have more of the manual up.

24 November 2002

Added a couple of new sections.

Updated the "Last Updated" at the top of the page, oops.

More minor changes to the HTML and formatting.

Added to the "Slow Parry Drill."

Clarified and expanded on the "Walk the Cliff" drill--it now describes what we formally call "line drills".

Added all new dagger and melee drills.

2 March 2003

Added an *incredible* amount of new material (32 pages!) from Lord Randal and Don Tristan:

- Different weapon forms and our own personal biases.
- Information on various types of fighters and how to read them (some of this is taken from the [Melee Manual](#)).
- Realistic Anatomy and dividing the body into "zones."
- Information on being and fighting against a Downed Fighter.
- Fighting against a group of individuals who are intent on killing you.

Added a few quotes and moved some of the others around. To answer the question on everyone's minds, yes, the editor plays [Go](#) :-p

General editing and shifting.

Did a *lot* of basic cleaning of the xhtml code.

Improved the "Runaway Thrust" drill.

4 August 2003

Added all new material from Lord Randal about the less savory side of what we do--self defense, training mishaps, and how to prepare for the worst.

Updated "Snapiro" so that it would format correctly.

Moved to a new home.

22 June 2007

Moved back to Caerthe.

Removed an errant quote tag that caused the page to render incorrectly in Firefox.

Whoops!

Made the entire thing XHTML-Transitional compliant.

Fixed a lot of minor errors in the HTML.

Expanded the basic point control drill.

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Appendix B: Glossary

There is no r in tickets!

It's a silent r... -- [movietickets.com](#) commercial

Aikido

A Japanese Martial Art dedicated to locks, throws and unarmed defense against a sword attack.

Angled Attacks

Attacks that are designed to come in on the center line (as you stand in Classical Stance) at a 45 degree angle.

Balance Destroyer

A technique that causes an opponent to fall off their center, even momentarily, preventing them from executing another technique and occasionally causing them to fall down.

Bind

Any number of techniques in which you make contact with your opponent's blade in a way that prevents it from cutting or impaling you for a few seconds.

Bird Blunt

A rubber cap used on arrows by archers to hit birds without impaling them. We use it to cap our sword tips for safety.

Blade Press

Pushing your opponent's blade toward them as you move to close range.

Blocker

A fighting style characterized by a certain group of techniques.

Body Evasions

Moving your head, body and limbs in various ways to prevent them from being damaged.

Body Mechanics

The normal range and direction of motion possible to the muscles, ligaments and joints of the human form.

Boffer

Padded weapons combat designed to simulate cutting and impact weapons like broad swords, axes and maces.

Bushi

Literally "War" in Japanese, it refers to warriors and soldiers (more encompassing than the term Samurai, which was a specific class) and a code of conduct.

Calibration

The subjective amount of impact felt by a fighter. Tests of various parts of the body are made to determine if a fighter can "feel" the blow and call it well struck.

Case of Rapier

Fighting with two swords. Historically these swords were mirror images, of equal length. In the Outlands they are often of varying lengths up to 45 inches.

Center-line

An imaginary line that divides your body in half, including your center of gravity; from the top of your head, out through your pelvis. Many critical points in the human anatomy are along this line.

Centerman

The individual fighter in the middle of a trio.

Chain

Linking several actions, both offensive and/or defensive, together into a continuous movement.

Chambering

Finishing one technique in a way that allows a following technique to flow from it, quickly and naturally. See also: Chain.

Channeling

Directing an opponent's attack, either actively or passively, to a specific target area on your body.

Charger

A fighting style characterized by a certain group of techniques.

Check

A variety of techniques that prevent, redirect or block an incoming technique; particularly any sweeping motion of an opponent's arm that includes the furniture leading.

Circular Attack

Those attacks, whether with point or edge, that describe an arc.

Coupe De Jarnac

A technique combining a footwork evasion and a cut to the ligaments behind the knee, rendering an opponent immobile.

Court Swords

Short bladed, small guarded swords from the 17th Century that had needle sharp points and no edge.

Critical Distance (CD)

A variable distance found between fighters that generally means one can execute a technique that would be fatal to the other (i.e., a fighter with long arms reaches CD before a fighter with short arms does).

Cross-stepping

Moving one foot behind the other while circling.

Deflection

A block that redirects an incoming thrust just enough to miss you.

Del Tin

Maker of diamond shaped theatrical blades.

Depache Mode

French for "latest fashion." A really silly band.

Draw Cut

A slicing motion whereby the blade is laid on an opponent and withdrawn toward you. In the Outlands, a draw cut must be 12 inches or more.

Epee

A 34 inch long, triangular, training sword that simulates the court sword.

Eric

A border of ropes, with colored flag, attached tied to 3 foot tall spikes; used to define the fighting field.

Extreme Range

Engagement beyond sword point, where ground covering footwork would be needed to get close enough to make the touch.

Feint

A technique whereby an attack is made, but not carried through; designed to draw a particular response from an opponent.

Fighter Practice

Training session.

Four, Six, Seven, Eight

A system of numbering the regions of the body/parries based on an opponent holding a sword in a forward stance. "Four" is on the inside (body-side) of the blade; "Six" is the on outside of the blade; "Seven" is the back leg; and "Eight" is the front leg.

Free Sparring

A practice duel with no stated training objective.

French Numbering System

Numbers given to specific blocks by the French Schools of Fence. See also: Four, Six, Seven, Eight.

Furniture

The parts of a sword that protect the hand. Including, but not limited to: quillions, a guard, and a knucklebow.

Furniture Strike

Hitting the opponent with the furniture of your blade. Common examples include a Quillon Strike and a Pommel Strike. See also: Furniture.

Grappling

Grasping an opponent or their weapon with the intent of immobilizing a threat or destroying their balance or self-control. Illegal in the Outlands.

Guard

Physical and/or mental preparation for combat. Those parts of the sword that protect the hand.

In-line

Those attacks that move directly from one fighter toward another, in a straight line.

Inner Circle

Includes those target areas on your body that, if cut or stabbed, are instantly mortal and must be protected. These include the head, throat, chest cavity, armpit, spine, abdomen, groin and femoral arteries. See also Outer Circle

Intersect the Line

Meeting an attack, either circular or in-line, with a blocking tool which disrupts that attack's orderly progression.

Jeet Kune Do

Martial arts style and philosophy first advanced in the West by Bruce Lee.

Karate

A type of unarmed combat practiced by various Japanese schools/styles.

Lunge

An in-line attack utilizing a deep step toward the opponent, combined with a thrust of the arm.

Manage

A variety of techniques that allow you to take control of an opponent's blade or arm for a few seconds. Similar to a bind but broader in scope.

Mandible

Lower jaw.

Masking

Attacking a fighter on the side opposite the long sword, thereby requiring them to thrust across their chest (which shortens their range). Using their arm (or your own arm) to obscure their vision of the technique(s) you're employing. Using anything that obscures your opponent's vision.

Melee

Light weapons fighting in groups or teams; often includes a military objective. See also: The Blue Company Melee Manual ([PDF](#)) ([HTML](#)).

Mindset

The particular physical or mental approach a fighter brings to dueling as evidenced by their choice of technique(s).

Mojo

Magic.

Mushin

A Japanese term for fighting without conscious thought, purely by instinct (more accurately: through intensive conditioned response, until behavior is executed without overt decisions, below the conscious level).

Nerve Center

Those places on the body where nerves are near the skin or can be affected/damaged by a technique.

Newbie

A person interested in rapier who has little or no experience; generally less than one year.

Oblique Thrust

A thrust made with the wrist turned out with the elbow straight. A shot to the outside of an imaginary line between the elbow and wrist; usually hindered by the action of the elbow joint itself.

Off Line

The concept: making attacks that fall outside a fighter's blocking tools as limited by body mechanics. Attacks made in such a way that they cannot be blocked, only avoided.

Off-hand

That hand which does not hold a weapon, is not dominant, or whose weapon is shorter or limited in capability.

Outlands

A Kingdom within the Known World of the SCA incorporating several states of the Western USA. See also: SCA, [The Outlands Website](#).

Outer Circle

Includes those target areas on your body that, if cut or stabbed, would be debilitating, but not instantly mortal and could (theoretically) allow you to continue fighting for some limited amount of time. These include the hand, inner wrist/tendons, elbow joint, biceps, triceps, shoulder, scapulae, feet, Achilles tendon, knees and attendant ligaments, quadriceps, buttocks and hips. See also: Inner Circle.

Passata Soto

Voiding the body under the incoming thrust and executing the stop thrust in one motion.

Point Control

A measure of accuracy when thrusting.

Point Of Balance (POB)

The natural balance point on a weapon. That point at which a fighter has lost control of themselves and is about to stumble or fall.

Qwa Ja Nim

A "Master Instructor" in the Korean Martial Arts (e.g., Tae Kwon Do, Hapki Do).

Rapier

A modern term (historically, it had very limited and confusing use) used to describe swords that were long, thin and had sharp points, with little or no edge.

Reach

The distance a fighter's arm and sword traverses to make a touch. Variable due to individual human anatomy.

Refused

A stance whereby the primary weapon (and the attendant foot) is held close to the body and the empty hand or defensive tool is held forward.

Rhythm

The concept: some duels develop a timing whereby opponents exchange blows in a metered way that establishes an expected pattern of technique(s); these patterns can be similar to those found in music. An individual can make a sequence of moves that become rote and are done at a specific speed as well; this is also a type of rhythm.

Runner

A fighting style characterized by a certain group of techniques.

SCA

Society for Creative Anachronism. See also [The SCA Website](#).

Schlaeger

In the SCA, heavy practice blades, oval or diamond shaped; originally used during ritualized--live steel--duels by German fraternities.

Schlemiel Voice

That voice inside our heads which saps our self confidence.

Shedding

Making body evasions that diffuse or minimize the impact of an incoming attack.

Shifter

A fighting style characterized by a certain group of techniques.

Slipping

Making body evasions that cause an incoming attack to miss (just barely).

Slope Step

A full stride, forward or backward, made at an angle away from opponent's position/stance.

Stoccata

A pivot off the lead foot while raising the hand above the head and thrusting downward into the opponent. Essentially, a rising block in four combined with a stop thrust.

Stop Thrust

A defensive technique whereby, a short thrust is combined with an opponent's advance, causing them to impale themselves.

Stopping Power

A firearms measure, normally described in foot/pounds, that describes the theoretical amount of force needed to stop an attacker with one shot. We use it to describe swordplay/techniques that could stop a duel instantly (such as severing a limb or making a pommel strike to the temple).

Sweep

In unarmed combat, a foot technique that impacts the foot, leg, knee or hip which then destroys an opponent's balance.

Swept Hilt

A open cage of bars found on any sword designed to protect the hand from cuts and slashes.

Sword Exchange

A disarming technique whereby two opponents close, grapple, and end up twisting the swords out of each other's hands simultaneously (made famous in *Hamlet*).

Tae Kwon Do

Korean martial art that emphasizes powerful kicks made upon armored or mounted opponents.

Tao

A philosophy, perspective or systematic approach.

Target Profile

How vulnerable a particular body part is to attack. A variable describing how much of a particular target can be seen or attacked, given an opponent's particular defense, range or stance at that moment.

Timing

Dynamic interaction, involving the speed of your techniques (footwork, offence, defense) combined with the speed of your opponent's moves.

Tip Cut

A swift, shallow, slice, made with the last two inches of the blade.

Trachea

Windpipe.

Unfocused Vision

An ocular and conceptual focus adjustment that allows you to see an entire fighter using peripheral vision.

Vacuum Effect

A technique whereby an opponent is drawn into committing their weight to the advance, at a time when it's dangerous to them to do so.

Voiding

Using footwork and body mechanics to displace a target, avoiding an incoming attack.

Window of Opportunity

That brief moment (usually only a fraction of a second) when an attack can be completed successfully.

Wingman

The flanking fighter(s) in a pair or trio.

Woodcuts

Carved wooden tablets that are inked and pressed against paper to make a picture.

Zen

In Martial Arts terms: a nonverbal physical expression of perfectly unified mind and body in response to an attack. (True Zen cannot be explained, only experienced. In Zen terms this book is a total failure.)

Zones

Arbitrary divisions used to separate the body into target groups such as the head, limbs, torso/trunk and legs. See also: French Numbering System

Zonning

Rapidly shooting at targets in different areas, one after another.

[To The Top.](#)

Appendix C: Sniperio (Just for Fun)

Sniperio

(To the tune: White Rabbit by Jefferson Airplane)

A Randal the Malcontent Original (Copyright © Randal Ames 2002)

One shot makes you nervous
And one shot makes you fall
And the ones that newbies throw out
They don't do anything at all

It's Sniperio, he seems ten feet tall

And if you go fighting melees
And you find you're full of dread
'Cause you die in just an instant
When Sniperio hits your head

It's Sniperio: You blink, you're dead

When the fighters on the chessboard
Get up and all refuse to go
Though your buckler is shaped like a mushroom
Still, it's moving way too slow

Its Sniperio, and it's his show

When you leave for resurrection
With your eyes all filled with red
And the white scarf is talking backwards
And the marshal's off his head
Remember what the Scolan said

Guard your head
Guard your head
Guard your head...