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The Cutting Edge

The Society of American Fight Directors

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## **The Cutting Edge, March/April 1991, Vol. 2 Issue 2**

The Society of American Fight Directors

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# THE CUTTING EDGE

Volume II, Issue 2

Newsletter for the Society of American Fight Directors

March/April, 1991

**F. Y. I.**

## Wanted: Combat Teacher

En Garde Unlimited in Minneapolis is seeking a Fight Master or certified teacher to conduct workshops for eager and energetic students. For more information:

Michael Anderson  
En Garde Unlimited  
3011 Dakota Ave. South  
Saint Louis Park, MN 55416

## Last Call for Dues

1990 dues *must* be received by the treasurer by April 1. Delinquent members won't receive the spring *Fight Master*. Dues are \$25 and checks are payable to the Society of American Fight Directors.

## 1988 Teachers

If you certified as a teacher in 1988, you need to re-certify in '91! Following is the procedure.

Send to the vice-president:

- A letter of intention
- Fifty dollar non-refundable fee
- An updated resume showing that the teacher has continued to work and hone his/her skills
- Information on, and results of, any and all actor/combatant certification fight tests they have held during their three years as teacher, including adjudicator and date.

OR

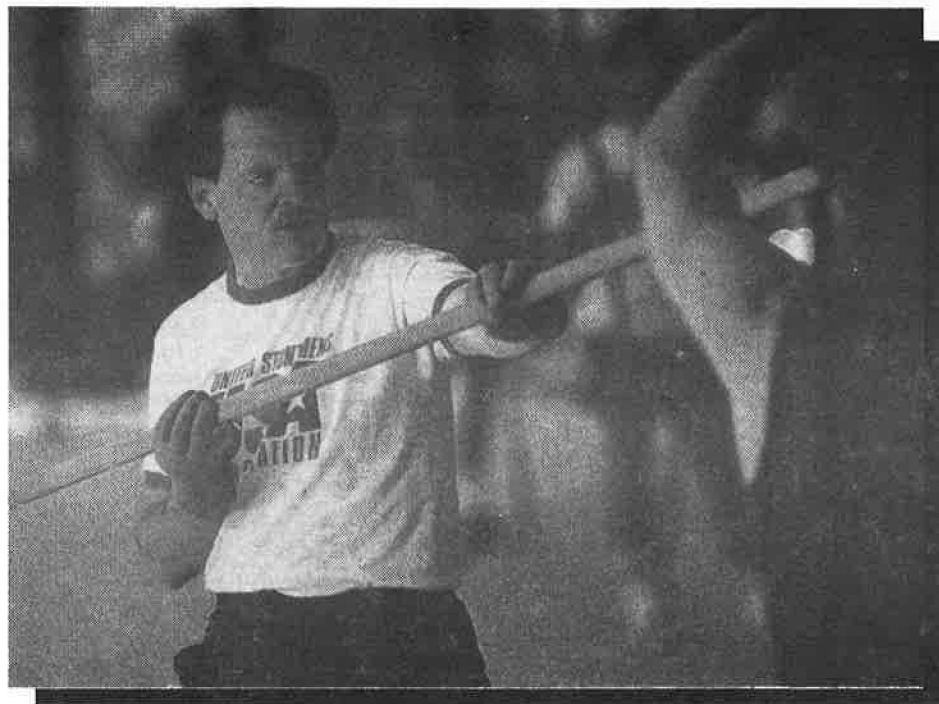
A half-inch VHS video (unedited) from a stationary camera of the candidate teaching two students fight choreography for a certification test (candidate's own choreography—not to exceed seven minutes)

OR

Written evaluation from a fight master who has seen said choreography live.

## Laundry

It was Tomi Funderburk who was certified at Theatre West Virginia last August, *not* as the fall *Fight Master* would have you believe, a Tony Thunderburg. Sorry, Tomi.



*Fight Master David L. Boushey coaches a student in quarterstaff as part of the preparation for an SAFD certification fight test.*

## Fight Test Season is Upon Us— Tips for a Successful Test

As the academic year winds down, stage combat teachers across the country are gearing up for fight test season. Although fight tests may be, and are, scheduled throughout the calendar year, April and May are peak months, as any harried fight master en route to his fourth fight test in as many days, will affirm.

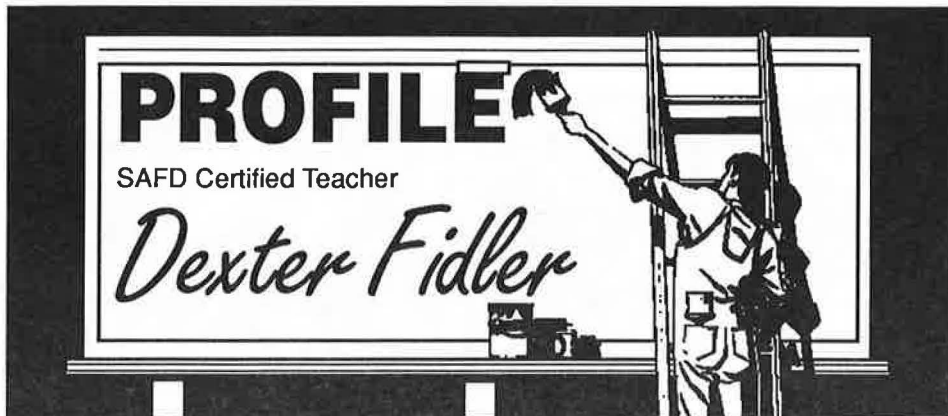
Because much hard work, study, rehearsal, and anxiety go into every certification fight test, here are some tips for teachers and students who have one looming up in the next couple of months.

### Teachers

- 1) Make your arrangements early!  
Because of the glut of fight tests in late spring, fight masters get booked up very quickly.
- 2) Be sure you are clear on all rules and regulations for fight tests. Before you can say, "... rules?"—the rules and regs. are included in this *Cutting Edge*.

- 3) Don't forget to send a signed copy of your letter of agreement with the fight master, along with the \$50 registration fee to the SAFD treasurer *before* the date of your fight test. If letter and fee aren't received, test may be cancelled.
- 4) The test choreography must include all required moves for each weapon and students must know the correct terminology for these moves.
- 5) Allow plenty of time for the test. Ask the adjudicator how much time he will need for the second portion of the test.
- 6) Performance of the prepared scenes is open to the public, so feel free to invite faculty and friends to attend. The second portion of the test is closed.
- 7) Teachers, please read the following to your students who are not members (and don't have the inestimable advantage of receiving this publication):

*Continued on page 3*



“The first time I picked up a sword was in 1985. I came to the Bay area to study at the Drama Studio of London at Berkeley. There was a stage combat course offered and I figured it would be a good skill to learn. It turned to be good therapy as well. There’s something about appearing to be out of control while actually being completely in command that really appeals to me.”

SAFD certified teacher Dexter Fidler recalls his introduction to stage combat six years ago.

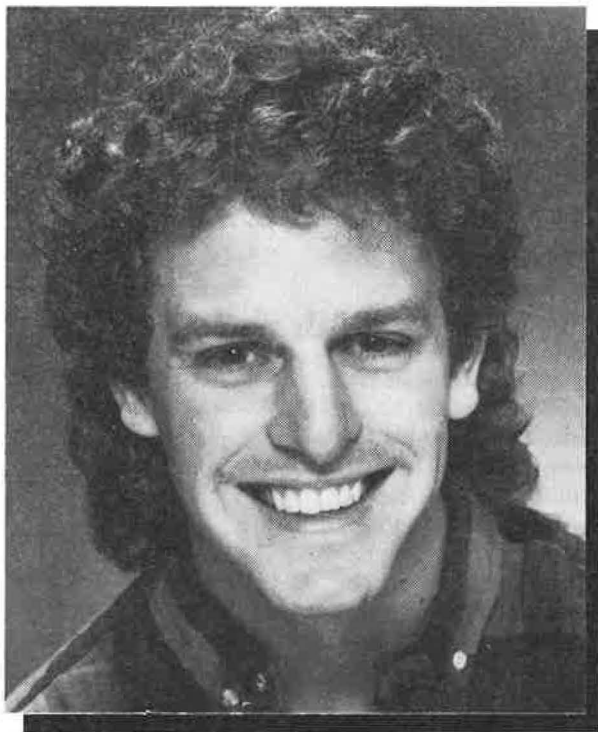
“Shortly after that first class I began studying privately with J.R. Beardsley, then assisting him in classes and finally, some small choreography jobs began to come my way.”

As an actor, Dexter was playing a small role in *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Santa Fe Rep. when he first met Christopher Villa, who was the fight choreographer. He followed up with classes and further work with Chris.

While many SAFD members had competitive fencing backgrounds when they first came to stage combat, Dexter

traveled that route in reverse. “After I had been studying stage combat for some time I took classes in competitive foil and sabre. First of all, it was fun. But it also helped me as a choreographer: having a real understanding of the logic behind the moves; seeing clearly that any valid threat to a target area demands a response.”

Traveling the stage combat road can take you down some strange byways. One area that Dexter has explored is work with the bullwhip.



*the Bullwhip* for sale. “The tape demonstrated the three basic snaps. The most familiar is the sideways snap because of Indiana Jones.” Dexter began working with a whip—cautiously. “If you send the

whip on the wrong pathway it can lash back and catch you on the back of the legs or the head.”

Meanwhile, as most actors do, Dexter was supporting himself between jobs doing temporary work when another student of J.R.’s told him that there was a job opening at American Fencers Supply, home of the Armory, theatrical weapons supplier. “I thought, ‘here’s a job that ties right in,’” laughs Dexter.

*“There is a real sense of satisfaction about creating a concrete product, a finished piece of work that you can hold in your hand.”*

Working with swords daily on the job has led Dexter into research on the complexities of steel and forging. “There is a real sense of satisfaction about creating a concrete product, a finished piece of work that you can hold in your hand. It’s a big contrast to theatrical work as an actor or choreographer, where your work, even if it is artistically exciting, vanishes when the show closes.”

A member of SAFD since ’86, Dexter read about teacher certification at the NSCW in the *Fight Master* and soon found himself headed east to Memphis in 1988 to go for teacher certification. He returned to the NSCW in 1989 as an assistant, and is looking forward to stopping in at Las Vegas this summer to show some of the Armory’s theatrical weapons.

One gratifying development that Dexter has observed in the bay area is a growing awareness of the art of stage combat. “A few years ago, you had to explain what you meant by stage combat. My first choreography job was at a theatre that had never previously hired a fight director! It was *Macbeth* and a nerve-racking experience; we were handed these great-looking but *incredibly* heavy shields, and the audience was only a few feet from the stage!”

Dexter reports that things have improved since then. “People in the business have some idea what stage combat is.” Thanks, in part, to SAFD people who are fighting the good fight like Dexter Fidler.

# Fight Test Fever Strikes

Continued from page 1

## Students

- 1) This test is for certification by the SAFD as an actor/combatant. If you certify, the SAFD will vouch for your ability to perform a safe and effective staged fight. It does not endorse you to teach or choreograph fights; other certification tests verify those skills.
- 2) The term actor/combatant means that you must not only perform technique properly, you must act the danger and violence inherent in a fight scene. Acting without technique is dangerous. Technique without acting is boring.
- 3) Your scene needs to establish who you are (character) and why you're fighting (motivation). That's all. Clever, witty dialogue is fun, but not necessary.
- 4) Scenes may be dramatic or comedic. If you choose a comic scene, do not forget the elements of fear, danger and pain. Any old Bob Hope movie shows how funny fear can be. And who got more laughs from pain than the Stooges?
- 5) You are required to perform and act a wound in the course of your fight, but please don't make your wound so severe that playing it impairs your ability to execute correct technique.
- 6) You need only test in three disciplines: rapier and dagger, unarmed, and one weapon of choice. Even if you learn four, five, or six weapons, it is sometimes wiser to concentrate on three fights rather than overextend yourself and do less than your best.
- 7) There are two levels of certification: passed and recommended. Recommendations award excellence in physical and acting technique and account for a very small percentage of certificates.
- 8) Concentrate, fight safely, and try to relax. This is a trial by fire. It has to be for the certificate to have any value. But that forbidding-looking fight master genuinely wants you to do well!

Any more questions about fight tests?  
Call Richard Raether at 1-800-659-6579.

★★★

## What's Happening?

**Charles Conwell** is directing the violence in Mark Lamos' production of *Julius Caesar* at Hartford Stage Company.

**Tim Carryer's** accomplishments are as diverse as ever: fights for *What the Butler Saw*, directing *King Stag*, and writing a murder mystery. All of this pales in comparison to new baby Justine, second child for he and Babs.

**David Leong** is currently staging the fights for *King Lear* at the Folger and *Twelfth Night* at Baltimore's Center Stage.

**Steven Earl Edwards** is initiating an advanced acting/stage combat program at Texas Tech University. Steve and SAFD member **James Manley** conducted a stage combat workshop for the southern region of the American College Theatre Festival in Lubbock, Texas.

**Robert Dillon** is deep into rehearsals for *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as staging the duel for *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* at U. of Missouri-Columbia.

**Ken Smith** is teaching a certification class at Webster College in St. Louis.

**Dexter Fidler** recently choreographed *True West* at Riverfront Playhouse and coached Robin Williams in cutlass and sabre for the upcoming film *Hook*.

**Peter Moore** choreographed the fight for *Il Travatore* at Opera Omaha.

**Jane Ridley** says, "Thank God for Allen Suddeth's choreography workshop at A.C.T.S.," as she is staging a 32-person melee in Penn State's *Pirates of Penzance*.

**Brad Waller** proved again what a nice guy he is by presenting a workshop at Virginia Theater Association and then spending a day helping **Colleen Kelly** coach students aiming at certification.

**Wendy Young** is teaching movement at the Governor's School.

**Brian Byrnes** is teaching stage combat at Indiana University in Pennsylvania.



# Help Wanted: SAFD Members

Thank you to all who responded so positively to the fall *Fight Master*. As the Raethers are once again burning the midnight oil on the spring issue and are hollering for help. "Who, me?" you ask, "What can I do?"

Glad you asked. Following is a wish list, but don't feel restricted to these suggestions.

1. Let the Raethers know what you are doing. That's their address there in the box. If you know you'll *never* stick a stamp on a letter, call in your news to 1-800-659-6579. The *Cutting Edge* and the *Fight Master* exist to promote the SAFD and *you* are the SAFD.

- 2. Teachers, where you are teaching? SAFD would like to compile a list of every school in the U.S. that offers an actor/combatant certification program.
- 3. Regional Reps., what is happening in your area? The SAFD would like to publish Regional Reports.
- 4. Write an article for the *Fight Master*. It needn't be long. Fun Facts or interesting anecdotes are welcome.
- 5. Fight Captains, what experiences have you had? Comical? Harrowing? Let us know your observations and recommendations.

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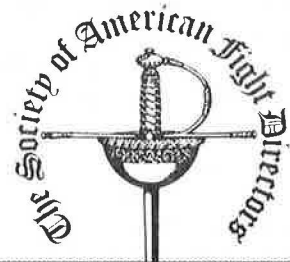
1834 Camp Avenue  
Rockford, Illinois 61103

## THE CUTTING EDGE

*The Cutting Edge* is concocted bimonthly by Margaret and Richard Raether (with sporadic help from Brian Anderson) and is a publication of the Society of American Fight Directors.

Submissions to the *Cutting Edge* should be sent to:

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