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The Society of American Fight Directors

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## **Moulinet: An Action Quarterly, Volume 11, Issue 4**

Moulinet Staff

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# MOULINET: An Action Quarterly



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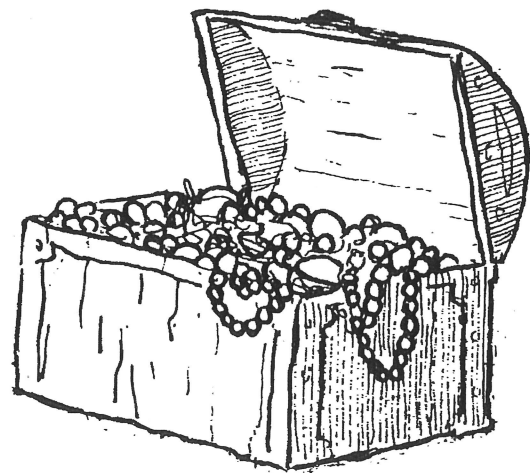
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## MOULINET: An Action Quarterly

Number Three

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Mary Shen Barnidge** is a freelance writer and theatre critic for Chicago's *Windy City Times*. She is a member of the American Theatre Critics Association, Poets & Writers, Inc. and a Friend in the Society Of American Fight Directors.

**Robert Kauzlaric** is an artistic staff member with Lifeline Theatre, where his adaptation of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* garnered five Joseph Jefferson awards in 2008.

**David Woolley** recently staged fights for the cult hit, *Cherrywood*, and is currently appearing at the Bristol Renaissance Faire in his second decade of playing Guido Crescendo of *The Swordsmen*.

**Nick Sandys** will direct fights for House Theatre's *Thieves Like Us* and will be touring this fall with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in Cleveland and Syracuse.

**Dana Wall** is a member of the experimental TUTA Theatre Company, choreographing violence for their highly-praised productions of *Tracks* and *Huddersfield* in addition to acting and directing.

**Kent Shelton** is a founding member of the Hanlon-Lees Action Theater (often nowadays seen playing Buffalo Bill Cody) and proprietor of the Wild West Knight's Rest in Luther, Oklahoma.

**Joe Bendel** weighs in on jazz and other topics in New York City at [www.jbspins.blogspot.com](http://www.jbspins.blogspot.com) in between teaching classes for New York University's school of Continuing and Professional Studies.

**William Endsley** is a former stage manager, now making his living as a freelance international real estate consultant.

## BARTER, HIRE & BROADSIDES

*A Terrific Combat!!!*, edited by Tony Wolf, with a forward by William Hobbs. Published by Lulu Press. A refreshingly entertaining compilation of documented and anecdotal commentary on theatrical combat from 1900 to 1920, by the cultural fight consultant for the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. For further information and to order, log onto [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).

*Renaissance Men: The True Story of the Hanlon-Lees Action Theater*, DVD documentary by Kevin Leeser, starring the stunt-trope whose debut in 1977 became the prototype for American Renaissance Faire jousts to this day. For ordering information, log onto [www.3alarmcarnival.com](http://www.3alarmcarnival.com)

*Sword of Hearts*, DVD film by Sword And Cloak Productions. A swashbuckling tale of adventure and intrigue in the style of *The Three Musketeers*, filmed on the grounds of the Bristol Renaissance Faire and Stronghold Medieval Retreat, starring Kathrynne Ann Rosen, Zach Thomas, Amy Harmon and Travis Estes. For order information, log onto [www.swordandcloak.com](http://www.swordandcloak.com).

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## THE THREE MUSKETEERS RIDE AGAIN: Robert Kauzlaric at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival

On the list of stories inspiring youngsters to pursue a career in acting—with swordplay a mandatory part of the curriculum—*The Three Musketeers* leads the roster, outpacing both *Zorro* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* for appeal spanning nearly two centuries. The *Musketeers* premiering at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival differs from previous page-to-stage versions in that the familiar plot—D'Artagnan's arrival in Paris, the Queen's pact with England's Duke of Buckingham, the affair of the diamond studs—proceeds at *Princess Bride* speed to resolve itself by intermission. The second act is given over to the darker elements in Dumas' story: a dizzying progression of stratagems and betrayals, the murders of several worthy supporters, the unauthorized execution of the villainous Milady Clarik and the comrades' victory—however temporary—over the scheming Cardinal Richelieu.

With the number of adaptations available to theatre companies—many of them well-established as crowd-pleasers, despite entailing far less literary machination than this intricate tale of political intrigue—what moved Robert Kauzlaric to essay another adaptation of the sword-and-cloak classic?

**MARY SHEN BARNIDGE:** There are a helluva lot of *Musketeers* variations. What spurred you to attempt another one?

**ROBERT KAUZLARIC:** There are, indeed, a lot of *Three Musketeers* scripts out there, but you'd be surprised—I certainly was—how few of them actually tell the story as Dumas wrote it. And there's nothing *wrong* with any of those, but [director] Karen Kessler didn't feel that they captured the excitement she remembered as a little girl listening to her father read to her. So last fall, she proposed that we tackle the problem by starting afresh.

**BARNIDGE:** How did you proceed?

**KAUZLARIC:** We set out to recount the whole tale in one evening. No breaking it up into pieces, no additional characters or contrivances, but as many of the twists and turns of the plot as we could fit in, along with the tricky shifts in tone from romantic and dashing to grim and serious. We wanted to build a great, galloping, forward-driven momentum that revels in the episodic nature of the story. But we also wanted to create something theatrical—not simply a

cinematic parade of eye candy, but something engaging the audience's imaginations.

**BARNIDGE:** Like using a single actor to portray all of the innkeepers for the many scenes taking place at different hostelries, or the “horses” suggested by the riders straddling crates and barrels on wheels, operated by koken-style puppeteers.

**KAUZLARIC:** Exactly! And we also have the same three actors play the Cardinal's guards, the King's guards, and the British soldiers. For the sequence when the musketeers are racing to London, all they do is change their surcoats.

**BARNIDGE:** You've done adaptations for Lifeline Theatre's compact space, but Bloomington's auditorium is huge—and it's outdoors! What difference did this make in your approach?

**KAUZLARIC:** This narrative is larger-than-life, with big characters acting on extravagant emotions, and all kinds of fights, chases, conflict and intrigue—the kind of story just *begging* to be told on a big stage. I began to consider how we might show several scenes at once—say, with the action continuing silently in one location while another starts up somewhere else onstage. The vastness of the ISF stage makes this kind of technique a viable option.

**BARNIDGE:** But what comes first to mind when we think of *Three Musketeers* is thrilling *swordfights*—ironically, we rarely see any muskets—

**KAUZLARIC:** You will in ours!

**BARNIDGE:** Excellent! How did you and Kessler and [fight choreographer] Kevin Asselin go about finding the balance, in terms of playing time, between plot and kinetics?

**KAUZLARIC:** For me, stage violence exists to further the story. If you don't see changes as a consequence of the fight, then you didn't need it. My goal was to provide *opportunities* for physical conflict within the dramatic development.

**BARNIDGE:** Such as the many times that Milady tries to knife her jailers—each time that she fails is important, because then she has to come up with a *different* strategy.

**KAUZLARIC:** Yes. And then I trust to Karen and Kevin to make those sequences blend in.

**BARNIDGE:** Was this a difficult process?

**KAUZLARIC:** Not at all. We were all on the same page regarding the fights and the motives behind them—

**BARNIDGE:** All for one and one for all—

**KAUZLARIC:** So it was a happy partnership for everyone throughout.



## THE ELABORATE MANHATTAN ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY

*The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*—originally produced by Chicago’s Teatro Vista in conjunction with Victory Gardens Theatre—after transferring nearly intact to New York City’s off-Broadway Second Stage, met with press coverage expressing unbridled enthusiasm in praise of Kristoffer Diaz’ intensely physical hip-hop commentary on the twisted world of pro wrestling.

To recap the story: Macedonio “The Mace” Guerra’s job is to lose every match to his more popular opponents. He has no problem with conspiring to make the iconic Chad Deity look like a credible wrestler for big-time promoter Everett K. Olson of the fictional T.H.E. Wrestling Federation. But issues of ethnic identity come to the fore when Guerra recruits trash-talking Hindi urban warrior Vigneshwar Paduar into the league, only to have his boss recast Paduar as “The Fundamentalist”—his signature take-out move, the “sleeper cell” kick—with Guerra now his Latin-American Marxist sidekick. The play’s dramatic conflict focuses on Guerra and Paduar’s struggle to subvert Olson’s program while still complying with their assigned duties.

*New York Times*’ Ben Brantley proclaimed, “The onstage fights, directed by David Woolley, feel as real as the real thing, which is pretty real for something that *isn’t*...the joke is that *we’re* in on the joke”, while *New York Daily News* reviewer Ed Dziemianowicz called the production “a vivid one-ring circus that spills into the theatre...[to] provide a provocative kick”.

Then there was Marilyn Stasio in *Variety*, who gushed, “If this [play] doesn’t get the guys into the theatre, there is no deity” and *NewJerseyNewsroom.com*’s Michael Sommers, who declared, “fight director David Woolley’s wrestling moves look terribly real”. Even the *ProWrestling Insider* website had its say, Mike Johnson puffing, “one of those phenomenal pieces of art that wrestling fans dream of”.

*Moulinet* had a correspondent on the scene, too. Joe Bendel, who wrote extensively on Brick Theatre’s Fight Play Festival last December, had this to say on the wrestling choreography:

“The cast displays an impressive degree of physicality, courtesy of fight director David Woolley. The scenes in the ring are cleverly conceived to avoid predictable sports clichés (there’s no big climactic

championship bout). Terence Archie’s Deity certainly looks his part, entering the ring with a flying slide and pile-driving poor hard-working Guerra to the mat. And though Desmin Borges may lack the rippling physique, he is a truly charismatic narrator, bringing to mind Lin-Manuel Miranda’s star-turn in the vastly different *In The Heights*. Indeed, the play is at its best in the moments when Guerra explains why he loves such a thoroughly compromised sport. It’s a truly winning performance, nicely complimented by a first-class production design and Woolley’s theatrically apt wrestling choreography.

“The irony, however, is that audiences who would be most inclined to enjoy a pitch-perfect play about wrestling are also likely to be put off by its ideologically-charged content. And while Diaz constantly decries ethnic typecasting, *Elaborate Entrance* engages in wholesale stereotyping of wrestling audiences, clearly implying that they are unsophisticated, borderline-intolerant rubes, while using the terms ‘patriotism’ and ‘jingoism’ interchangeably.

“Such distractions are a shame, because *Elaborate Entrance* looks great. When Deity enters the ring, we don’t get a few high-fives and preening, but a full multimedia production, incorporating video footage shot on the city streets outside the Second Stage and played on the giant jumbo-tron screens above the onstage ring. Director Edward Torres keeps the energy level amped up, so that the play never feels talky or self-consciously stagy, despite the constant narration. The fight for our sympathies may be so obviously fixed that even T.H.E. Wrestling would find it problematic, but *Elaborate Entrance* is still a feat of stagecraft worth checking out during its engagement at Second Stage Theatre.” [For Bendel’s complete review, log onto [www.jbspins.blogspot.com](http://www.jbspins.blogspot.com)]

## ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

**HANLON-LEES ACTION THEATER  
at Bristol Renaissance Faire  
I-94 off Russell Road: Bristol, Wisconsin**

There were no fish on the tiltyard, the spring rains that last year flooded the fairegrounds’ lake having been less severe, but in their place were sweltering temperatures sending most fairegoers fleeing for the

shade. Despite the harsh weather, the 2010 Faire features acts performing back-to-back all day in the locale now labeled the Royal Mews, encompassing the jousting arena, the “unicorn glade” where spectators may view the two shaggy-maned Fell ponies (one sporting a single-horn prosthetic) presented as gifts to the Queen, and the House of Equus gallery featuring equine art and literature.

Along with the three Hanlon-Lees Action Theater presentations, the tiltyard is occupied twice daily by Ray Pena’s raptors, twice by Laura Amandis and her Andalusian stallion, and once by the audience-participation foam-weapon “300 Fight”—the last including, on this weekend, a few Spartans in robot gear (hey, armor’s armor) and a loyal wife who entreated spectators to cheer for her spouse, bravely swinging pool-noodle on the field.

Among the hired mercenaries, however, are the Master of Arms, whose duties are filled this year by senior Hanlon-Lees officer Stephen Cowan (who also doubles as Amandis’ ringside commentator).

Joe D’Arrigo reprises his good-guy role of Sir Wilfred of Idlewild, flanked by Lord Darien of Persia—the first African knight to appear with the troupe since Lionel Lee’s Muhammad El Raisuli, sometimes called Lord Othello. As played by Prince Burrell, however, the Ottoman warrior emerges as a better ground-fighter than horseman.

But what villains have come to contest for glory this year! Matthew Mansour’s Sir Maximilian, Earl of Braden, his swagger enhanced by the thunder-voiced Wolf acting as his squire, along with the *Twilight*-handsome Sir Morris of Saxony, played by Lee Morrison with menacing charisma—even in full daylight—and a few facial scars reminiscent of the legendary Sir Stephen of Alsatia. The final show-down catches fire—literally—in a climactic battle pitting Sir Wilfred, armed with sword and flaming torch, against Sir Morris, who fights on even after his blacksnake whip likewise ignites, giving no quarter until the *coup de grâce* puts an end to his ruthless career.

Fantasy may reign at Renaissance Faires, but the aging of its performers cannot be ignored. While the original Hanlon-Lees players still can look forward to decades of eating dust, the introduction into the ranks of younger personnel exhibits the wisdom behind this troupe’s long success.

## A NIGHT WITH THE FIGHTS

### THE SINS OF SOR JUANA

fight choreography by Nick Sandys

Nicholas Patricca’s *The Defiant Muse* proposed a Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz who tested her theories of astronomy by sparring with swords against an imaginary Don Juan Tenorio. But Karen Zacarías’ play about the 17th-century Mexican nun is more concerned with bodice-ripping romance, and thus, it slipped the minds of the Goodman Theatre’s creative team that a single sword, drawn in preparation for combat, still signals *fight*—for which you need the services of a *fight choreographer*. And so, once again, the call went out for a 911 Knight.

And not a moment too soon. Nick Sandys not only found himself overseeing such relatively simple maneuvers as falls and slaps, but a disarm in which a pompous cavalier threatens a handcuffed thief with an absurdly oversized rapier, only to have the prisoner twist his shackles around the blade to take possession of the weapon, as well as a complicated sequence in which Sor Juana holds the aforementioned cavalier at bay—in perfect *verdadera destreza* stance—with the point of his own sword. Then, when she releases him, he pounces on her from behind, triggering a series of flails, blocks and grapples while she spits forth an angry poem. Wait! They’re not done *yet!*—as he continues to restrain her, she breaks free by threatening to stamp on his foot. (Cowards, you know, always retreat swiftly from the mere *prospect* of injury.)

“The [restraining] fight was originally just a big noisy slap,” says Sandys, “but the poem wasn’t enough to support Juana’s anger and frustration, so the director had it re-choreographed during previews. Juana was so tiny that even Pedro’s palm-blocks were bruising her arms, and with the elaborate costume, we could hardly see her pick up her foot—but it was the best we could do in a hurry.”

And these are only the duels involving a weapon! The enhancement provided by the presence of a fight director becomes increasingly evident as we proceed to Sor Juana’s recitation of a fencing-metaphor poem, accompanied by mimed parry-and-thrust, soon followed by a face-off between the cavalier and the

thief—analogue to a staring contest—which the latter wins by delivering his opponent a big smacking kiss on the mouth. And how about the sentry armed with a halberd, the scene requiring a trick knife seeping fake blood, and the last-minute search to procure a sturdier sword?

“We’d rehearsed with a Rogue Steel cup-hilt rapier, but they wanted something more ornate and had ordered a *lovely* wall-hanger from CAS-Iberia that turned out, not only to have a sharpened blade, but to be too flimsy to even drop on the floor! What we ended up using was a Dennis Graves replica, which has a standard-length schlager blade, but tended to change *size* as it moved around on the forced-perspective set.”

“The actors were eager—make that *desperate*—for fight input,” Sandys acknowledges, “but how much can be accomplished, only one week before first tech rehearsal?” This is not the first time that the big-budgeted Goodman Theatre has found itself at loose ends for a fight consultant that nobody thought necessary in the beginning. Instead of gambling on an available specialist to work miracles on short notice, wouldn’t it be easier—and more cost-efficient—to hire one at the outset who could then set aside time to carry out his duties in a safe and unhurried atmosphere for everyone involved?

## **BAAL**

### **fight choreography by Dana Wall**

Our “hero” is a slackerly student who never goes to class, but instead drinks, brawls, declaims poetry and seduces a variety of innocent, but curious, young women who find his unwashed priapal allure irresistible. Since watching a bad-boy topple one bedazzled babe after another is no longer titillating (except to other horny teenage boys), Dana Wall lends a bit of novelty by having one of Baal’s groupies engage in some rough sex play with him before the script requires her to lie down and drop ‘em.

Since Sophie is already up in his room, the (consensual, presumably) skirmish commences with the goaty casanova sniffing at her, whereupon she first deals him a hearty smack in the face, then, when he attempts to restrain her, proceeds to tackle him around the waist and spin him to the floor in as neat a take-down as you could see in tournament wrestling.

“That sequence was the brain-child of Stacie

Beth Green, who plays Sophie—the journey from repulsion to affection to love is a longer one for starting with fight at their first encounter,” explains fight director Dana Wall, “Most of my experience with stage violence in Chicago, both as an actor and fight director, has been with rough-and-tumble brawls—rapes, slashings and hair-draws—rather than nice, neat rapier duels, so my job was to give Stacie and Ian [Westerfer] a physical vocabulary allowing them to be comfortable—and safe.”

The attack finishes with Sophie sitting on Baal’s supine body, but since the script requires him to resume his phallic domination, she rolls him into her lap in *piéta* position. This allows him to launch a come-to-me-mama maneuver that foreshadows his later wrestling match with ostensibly heterosexual buddy Ekart, in which he pins the latter to his chest, crowing, “Now I have you at my breast!”

“Up to this point, Baal’s pursuit of his appetites have made him walk, sneak or run away from conflict, but this time, *he* attacks, even though he *knows* he’s outmatched. Does he want to provoke a response from his comrade? Does he want to be beaten, cut and broken? Or does he just lose a fight?”

The final confrontation has Baal fatally stabbed by his best friend in a surprisingly minimal *coup de grâce*, almost like an embrace. “That was developed out of the idea of creating a very slight directorial footprint,” says Wall, “The lights are dark, the knife is small, the thrust is swift and after the weapon falls to the floor, it’s clear what’s transpired. We wanted the audience to stay engaged in the scene, with no time to rest and contemplate what’s just happened.”

## **THE RISE OF EMPEROR ERIC**

### **fight choreography by Zach Livingston**

“Real bad kung fu” was the description offered by fight director Zach Livingston, speaking of the chop-sockies in this spoof of martial arts films. The story recounts the quest of a humble burger-stand fry-cook who brings down the tyrannical Lord Conway after defeating adversaries with such pro-wrestling sobriquets as the Toaster of Torment and the Typhoon That Topples Empires, along with assorted Samurai (red and blue), hot chicks and pizza boys. *Moulinet* field correspondent Bill Endsley reports:

“I knew that I was in for an arrested-male-adolescent ride when, upon entering the performance space, I saw a pile of ‘tighty whities’ on a prop table

at the back of the house. But it was awhile before they made their appearance on the stage.

"The play opened with a guitar-strumming prologue explaining that we are in the future, where people no longer have sex because the men no longer have penises. As the saga unfolds, the reason for this phenomenon becomes apparent: the most fatal blows are delivered straight to the crotch.

"[Livingston] fitted the fight action to the satirical style of the one-hour play by David J. Ruthenberg (among the steps to becoming a samurai, according to our singing narrators, are 'get a kimono', 'get a katana', 'eat some sushi' and 'do something awesome'). So did Timothy Bambara's direction, and the nine-member ensemble delivered kicks, cuts, and blows to the royal 'nads with capability a cut above the usual late-nite fare. As to why the victors are now also now transformed into Ken dolls, *my* take on it is that Eric recognized the destructive effects of testosterone and sacrificed accordingly.

"Oh, and the underwear? They were hurled by the Toaster of Torment like shurikens. On the night I was there, one of them knocked over a beer belonging to the couple seated at a front-row table—but after mopping up the damage, the show went on."

## THE TALLEST MAN

### fight choreography uncredited

A new addition to the physical vocabulary of Domestic Violence has made its debut at The Artistic Home, courtesy of a fight choreographer appearing to remain incognito.

"Domestic Violence" in stage combat, according to Fight Jam instructor Greg Poljacik, refers, not merely to abusive combat between friends and/or family members, but a spectrum of fights defined by the intimacy shared by its participants, grounded less in intent to injure than the preservation of rank and dominance. Indeed, the chief characteristic of such activity is often the lengths to which the participants go to avoid inflicting permanent harm on one another.

We see this dynamic exhibited in two diverse situations—the first, a tavern scuffle between drinking buddies, and the second, an attempt by one brother to delay the other from committing a rash and potentially life-threatening deed. In both cases, the victor triumphs by grasping his opponent's shirt-tails and pulling the garment up over the wearer's head. After winding it around the temporarily-blinded combatant to hold it in place, he then tips his flailing adversary to the ground.

## FIELD DISPATCHES

### BOUNDING MAIN WINS OVER KITCHEN SINK

Fisticuffs trounced swordplay in 2008, with Nick Sandys' five-minute boxing match in *Requiem For A Heavyweight* triumphing over *The Defiant Muse's* Spanish-rapier dueling in the Joseph Jefferson awards' newly-inaugurated division of Outstanding Fight Choreography. The tables were turned in 2010, however, when Geoff Coates' gritty—but still safely period—cutlasses and flintlocks for Lifeline Theatre's *Treasure Island* emerged victorious over not one, but *two* domestic-violence brawls.

As tempting as it may be for cynics to view this upset as proof that audiences and awards committees are still magpie-dazzled by shiny metal objects, two facts remain: first, that the judges were able to *identify* stage combat on sight four times in one season—recognition reflecting a heightened awareness of fight choreography as an individual discipline. And second, that though *Killer Joe* didn't win the prize for R & D Violence Designers, its sweep of the top awards, including that of Outstanding Production, augurs a wave of slap-and-smash dramas in future seasons—in turn, providing work for fight-trained actors and instructors.

But if nothing but a trophy will do—well, there's always October, when *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* will likely contend for the Lucite. David Woolley and Nick Sandys, start preparing your speeches.

### MATRIMONIAL MELÉE

There's the pseudo-traditional rite of the recently-hitched doing a James Cagney on each other with the wedding cake. And a hyperadrenalized bride lobbing a bouquet into a crowd is not without its hazards, as is the shower of rice hurled at the lucky pair as they flee the church. But when the *vir et uxor* are Richard Gilbert of R & D Violence Designers and Libby Beyreis of the Babes With Blades, one *expects* a certain level of ceremonial violence.

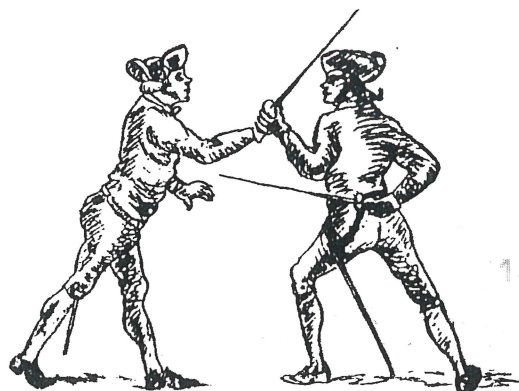
Witnesses were not disappointed. Following the reception, as the newlyweds prepared to board the nuptial automobile, the guests were issued waterproof ponchos and shown to a lawn-table bearing a lavish arsenal of cream pies (whipped, not shaving). Upon command by the Lord and Lady of the hour, the assemblage then proceeded to shivaree the happy couple by pelting one another with flying pastry.



**“To meet fair, play fair,  
and then to part fair is the  
essence of the fencing art.”**

**—Kaufman C. Spiers**

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