

## FAQ:

### What's your rate?

I don't have a one. Fees are based on show requirements, prep time, rehearsal time, weapons wrangling, travel time, etc. I can't know the price until I know what you want. Do you want one or two rehearsals and to be sure your slap is safe, or do you want period choreography for a full-scale production of *Romeo and Juliet*, including *teaching technique* before we even begin staging fights? And do you need me to provide weapons? Let's talk about what you need, and then talk about how much. Recent fees have ranged from \$250 to \$1,200.

### How much rehearsal time will it take?

Same answer: I don't know. As much as it takes to be safe and effective. Plan to give plenty of rehearsal time to fight moments - more than is required by other scenes. Also, once a fight is learned, it needs to be *rehearsed regularly*, so factor that into scheduling. You don't stage a fight scene, and then leave it alone until tech week. BTW: the earlier sentence about "teaching technique before we even begin staging fights"? Understand that certain things, like sword fighting, will require *a great deal of time* for actors to learn *before* they learn choreography.

**True story:** the director of a production of *Moon Over Buffalo* emailed me on Thursday to ask if I could stage the swordfight (a full-on comic fight involving three characters), and he'd give me a half-hour before rehearsal on Tuesday! To understand this problem, suppose the director of a musical asked you to stage a tap solo the following Tuesday, with someone who has *never tap danced before*, in half an hour. Now put a three-foot long piece of steel in that tap soloist's hand.

### Where can I train in the Boston area?

Sorry, I don't know. While there was at one time a local studio dedicated to SC training (where I did most of my training), it exists no more.

**Can I train with/take a class from you?** I'm not currently associated with any studio, theatre, or school, so I don't have a regular available space in which to run classes or individual training.

### What is Stage Combat, anyway?

Stage Combat is the art of using *carefully* planned, *safely* executed *cooperative* physical energy to create the *illusion* of violent action in a dramatic context – physical acting that *tells a story* about violence.

### Do I even need a Stage Combat Choreographer (SCC)?

If you're asking, the answer is yes. If there's even one moment of violence – one character grabs another, someone falls, one slap – then the potential for danger is there, and you need a SCC.

### When do I bring a SCC in?

ASAP, *before you even rehearsals*, especially if it's a fight-heavy show. In fact, you shouldn't *do* a fight-heavy show (like *She Kills Monsters* or *Romeo and Juliet*) or a show like *A View from the*

*Bridge* or *Mauritius*, which while not fight-heavy have several key moments of violence, if you don't have a SCC. See above about *Moon Over Buffalo* – have your SCC lined up well in advance.

### **Can't I just slap/be slapped/fall/grab, etc.?**

No. That's dangerous and ill-advised. Also, it's dangerous.

### **My script calls for a kitchen knife. Can I just pull one out of the drawer?**

See above re: danger. No, don't pull a knife out of your drawer. No, don't use that decorative rapier you bought on Amazon, or those rusty fencing foils from the prop room. Your SCC can guide your choice and sourcing of stage-safe weapons (but let's be clear: safety is in the *technique*, not the weapon).

### **BTW: ABOUT BLANK GUNS:**

Blank firearms are *firearms*. They're dangerous. Most are not built well, so they WILL jam and misfire. They're louder than you think. They spew out gas and little bits of solid material in odd directions. And did I mention they're dangerous? *Avoid using them*. There are plenty of ways to tell a story about a gunshot with much less risk. Also, many people are not aware that the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts say: "the carrying or possession of a firearm and blank ammunition therefor, during the course of any television, movie, stage, or other similar theatrical production, by a person within such a production, shall be authorized; provided, however, that *such carrying or possession of such firearm shall be under the immediate supervision of a person licensed to carry firearms.*"

### **What does a SCC actually do?**

A SCC figures out, very specifically and moment to moment, exactly how actors can work together to tell a story about violence onstage without real violence: techniques and practices to make the moment *safe, effective, and repeatable*. This requires skill, knowledge, and experience in the following areas:

- Safety concepts and their practical application (cooperative v combative energy, etc.)
- Biomechanics – how the body works, especially in violent situations, and how it reacts to violence
- A variety of specific stage combat weapons disciplines
- Historical fighting systems: fencing, martial arts etc.
- How theatre works in terms of process and hierarchy
- How to use physical acting tell a story
- General physical training
- Basic first aid

### **But doesn't the script tell me what to do?**

Scripts don't generally tell you exactly what happens in a moment of stage violence or how to create that moment onstage. A script might say: "*John slaps her, she falls*" or "*Tom grabs Bill by the throat, strangles him*" or "*Sara pulls a knife, stabs Gina*". For each of those moments there are a *hundred* specific details of technique, timing, stage position, cooperation and other things that make the moment *safe, effective, and repeatable*.

Here's an excerpt from *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen, a show that includes MANY extensive fight scenes: "Tilly is surrounded by a horde of Kobolds. She quickly slays each of the monsters with grace and efficiency."

That sounds cool, but it's not very specific. How many is a 'horde'? What do they look like/move like? The script says Tilly has a sword – are the Kobolds armed? If so, with what? What's the first move in the sequence? What's the next move? What specifically makes Tilly gracious and efficient? What exactly happens when a Kobold is slain? These are questions the SCC has to answer.

Several Shakespeare plays include extensive swordfights that are essential to the story. In each of these cases, what does the script say? "*They Fight*". That's it. Everything else is up to the SCC (and the director).

**CLICK HERE** to see my choreography notes for a recent version of the Tilly/Kobolds fight. If it doesn't make sense, that's okay. The point is to see the specific planning that goes into a piece of choreography – and this is a relatively short, simple, fast fight, maybe 20 seconds long.

**CLICK HERE** to see choreography notes for a short unarmed sequence for *The Lightning Thief*.

**CLICK HERE** to see my notes, including script pages, for the *entire* swordfight sequence from *I Hate Hamlet* by Paul Rudnick, a long, comic, swashbuckling sequence that is the climax of Act I.

### **How real does it have to be?**

Real enough to tell the story – and no "realer" than any other element of your production. Your set has only three walls and no ceiling. How real is that? BTW it's fairly well known that onstage violence that's *too* real can easily take the audience completely out of the show.

### **What's the difference between a SCC, a Fight Director, a Violence Designer, etc.?**

There isn't any, really.

### **What does "Certified" mean?**

Nothing, at least in the way people usually mean it. It's not a driver's license, or a law degree. A number of organizations – the SAFD is a well-known one, but there are several – provide training in stage combat techniques. In the SAFD, you'll train for 30 hours with a qualified teacher in a specific discipline (unarmed, rapier and dagger, quarterstaff, etc.), after which you'll take a test (SPT: Skills Proficiency Test) which consists of performing a piece of fight choreography using all or most of the techniques you've learned within the context of a scene. If you do it well, you'll be given a certificate that says you passed *that* test. That's it. Do more tests, and you'll get more certificates (the SAFD recognizes levels of proficiency based on tests passed). It doesn't mean that you're then competent to perform – or *teach or choreograph* – *any* kind of stage violence. For more information about training, SPTs, and how you *can* become competent to teach and/or choreograph, visit the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD): [SAFD](#)

## **SELECTED RESOURCES:**

### **BOOKS:**

*Swashbuckling: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Art of Stage Combat & Theatrical Swordplay*

Richard Lane

*The Art of Unarmed Stage Combat*

Robert Najarian

*Fight Directing for the Theatre*

J. Allen Suddeth

*Academy of Theatrical Combat Basics Level 1*

Dan Speaker

*Stage Fighting: A Practical Guide*

Jonathan Howell

*The Theatrical Firearms Handbook and The Screen Combat Handbook*

Kevin Inouye

### **Theatrical & Practice Weapons Purchase and/or Rental:**

Kult of Athena: [Kult of Athena](#)

Rogue Steel: [Rogue Steel](#)

Fiocchi Swords: [Fiocchi Swords](#)

Jesse Belsky Stageswords: [Jesse Belsky](#)

Zen Warrior Armory: [Zen Warrior](#)

Fight Designer, LLC: [Fight Designer](#)

Preferred Arms: [Preferred Arms](#)

### **Stage Blood:**

[Gravity + Momentum](#)