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Stunt School

How to sell and receive a stunt-kick

with Ray Anthony

In the first of our new series by Australian Film Fighting Academy founder, Ray Anthony, we give you the low-down on how to kick someone for the camera... without hurting them!

Welcome to stunt school. As a performer who has worked with martial artists from all over the world, I've noticed that in the last decade, nearly every feature film has had a fight scene in it. In Australia we have some of the most talented and skilled martial artists in the world, though unfortunately most of them are undiscovered. As a professional stuntman, martial artist and fight choreographer in the film industry, the most common question I get asked from martial artists is, how do I kick and hit an opponent and not hurt them?

TO SELL A KICK

Firstly, the most important aspect of film fighting I'd like to discuss is the impact distance between the performer – you

– and the actors. In film fighting we try to create the illusion that the fight is real. As a general rule, before I start any sort of fight action, I always measure the distance between myself and the actor. Whether it's a punch or a kick to the face or body, I allow a good six inches leeway for the safety margin. This allows myself and the actor to monitor the distance for the fight scenes and change if we need to. As a fight choreographer, most of the actors I've worked with have expressed the same concern to me: they were worried the martial artist was too close and they were going to get hurt during the fight scene.

TO RECEIVE A KICK

The performer receiving the kick has just as many aspects to consider as well. These are:



From this top angle view, the performer delivers a roundhouse-kick to the actor's head. Let's say, for instance, the actor doesn't want any contact to his body. What do you do? The only way to do this is to change the impact line through the camera – this creates the illusion of impact while the actor remains completely safe. As the photo shows, the kick is a good distance away from the actor's head and there is no chance of impact.



The performer measures the distance between the actor and himself to allow for a safety margin. This is done every time you reset after a take or if the fight moves have changed, and should be done before the fight starts. The reason we do this is to cover ourselves for any mistakes and because we know the actor is not a fighter and might over-step the mark and cause an accident.

DISTANCE

As previously mentioned, you must measure the distance from the target to where the kick will begin to correctly define the safety margin. Place a piece of small tape on the floor near your supporting leg as a marker. It will stop you creeping forward and position you perfectly for the cameraman every time.

TIMING

Your timing must be perfect, a second late or early will create the illusion that it's a miss, and it won't register for the camera. What you think is the right timing might be different to the camera's lens. I sometimes record a fight scene and watch it back in slow motion, frame by frame. This helps me monitor the reactions for all the hits and kicks. The only way to achieve correct timing is to practise.



By putting it all together and reacting accordingly to the action, we have achieved the same results as a real kick and not hit or hurt the actor in any way.

REACTION

For every action there must be an equal reaction, meaning that if the actor punches or kicks you without great force, your reaction must equal that level of force. The biggest problem I find with performers is that they tend to overreact in an effort to make the action look incredible. This instead makes it look unrealistic.

With a roundhouse-kick to the head the reaction can vary depending on the script and what the director wants, and who is kicking you. If the performer's character is a fighter then the force and reaction can be quite fast, but if the performer is a child, such as in the movie *Spy Kids*, the reaction would have to equal the child's action.

GOING LIMP

The term 'going limp' in film fighting means to relax your body movement and head and not be rigid upon the strike's impact. Your reflex action should look natural and believable, as opposed to stiff and mechanical. We practise this by relaxing the whole body and just throwing the arms and torso side-to-side like a washing machine. It may sound silly, but this helps very much to relax the body for reactions. Another way is to get to the beach or pool and practise throwing yourself around like you are being hit or kicked. The water acts as padding and prevents injuries that you'd normally get from a hard surface or mats.



By changing the camera angle to the side view and creating what is called the 'impact line' through the camera's lens, we create the effect that the actor is being kicked. To complete the effect, however, the actor must create the right reaction.

FALLS AND ROLLS

It is imperative for all movie martial artists to know the techniques of falling and rolling safely to create believable but safe reactions. This topic will be discussed and demonstrated in an upcoming issue.

Ray Anthony has 18 years experience in martial arts, dance and gymnastics. He has worked on over 60 productions, including feature films *Star Wars II*, *Crocodile Dundee*, *Mission Impossible 2* and the *Matrix* trilogy.

For more info on Ray or the Australian Film Fighting Academy, email stuntman@netspace.net.au.

