



Using Weapons in Film-Fighting

Professional stunt man, martial artist and fight-choreographer Ray Anthony has twirled hundreds of different weapons in his role as a film-fighting specialist. His job also involves finding the best and safest performer for each job. He tells ATKD how it's done.

As a fight choreographer, I'm employed by production companies and stunt co-ordinators to teach actors and performers how to do fight scenes for their films. Using my expertise in different styles of martial arts, dance choreography and acrobatics, I work with them to make fight scenes safe and believable.

Weapons in Fight-Scenes

Over the years you may have noticed that most film-fighting scenes now involve some sort of weapon, and many of these are not your standard guns and knives. These days the weapon could be anything at all — a sword, stick, shopping trolley, chair or umbrella. The classic example would be a Jackie Chan movie, where anything he gets his hands on becomes a weapon.

So, it's more than likely that at some stage in your film-fighting career you will use a weapon.

Why use weapons?

Weapons are used in film-fighting to create the illusion of added danger in a fight scene. When a script requires the use of a weapon, it is attempting to give the audience a sense of violence and intensity that is not possible with hand-to-hand combat.

The primary use of weapons is to create a more visually exciting fight sequence

for the audience. For example, imagine a hand-to-hand fight scene where someone suddenly pulls out a knife and tries to slash the head of their opponent. In this way, the use of a weapon greatly increases the danger in the scene and makes it more visually exciting.

Safety

Although most weapons used for film fighting are made from soft rubber or plastic, you can still be cut or bruised. Safety is the highest priority when using weapons in fight scenes. There can be no mistakes or someone will get hurt.

On a TV show I was working on, there was a gladiator fight with around 30 fighters in an arena. The weapons they were using were made of hard rubber so they looked real while not being floppy. During the fight, while filming, one of the fighters drew his sword back too high over his head and managed to hit the guy behind and crack his head open.

It is not only other people wielding weapons who are of concern to you. When you have to take a fall yourself, with the weapon still in your hand, it's quite easy to injure yourself. Also, when you have to lose your weapon during a fight scene, be careful that it does not accidentally hit someone.

Safety is of paramount concern when using weapons, as the actors should never be exposed to any risk or injury during a



Ray playing a neo-nazi gun-freak in *Rocket Science*

fight scene. As a fight-choreographer, it is my job to ensure that the actors are totally safe. As I choreograph, I need to ensure that there are safety precautions put into place during the rehearsals and filming, while still making the fight look believable.

With regard to safety, it is now becoming necessary for fight-choreographers to have some knowledge of risk-assessment and insurance issues in film and television.

Training

The best way to train to use weapons is with a qualified teacher at a martial arts school. This will give you a good understanding of the principals and movements involved in using the weapon. Proper training in the basics of using weapons is important because it will give you a better grounding to

perform safely and convincingly.

Once you have the training and you secure a fighting role, the fight-choreographer will use your weapons skill and apply it to a fight scene.

Rehearsals

Rehearsing a fight scene involving weapons is a time-consuming process. When I start choreographing a fight scene with weapons, I always allow double the time that I would use for hand-to-hand fight scenes. I start very slowly and with control, so that both fighters will learn the moves and choreography and the correct way to hold a weapon. By doing things slowly, you can speed up the moves with less chance of injury. Obviously, if you know all the moves first, when you speed up the fight the moves are easier to perform. It is also important to remember never to take your eyes off your opponent when using weapons.

The more practice between the performers, the less chance of injuries when filming. It is always best to have at least one rehearsal in the actual area where the filming will take place. If that isn't possible then try to recreate a similar environment.

Finally, you must be ready and confident when working with weapons, and should fully commit when performing each move. If you aren't confident, you must tell the fight-choreographer and spend more time working with the moves. If the scene is not properly rehearsed, this could be very dangerous. When you start shooting there will always be time lost on the day. You don't want everyone

waiting while you rehearse with the actors. Apart from being unprofessional, this can cause unnecessary stress for actors on the set, and can be very expensive for the production company.

Preparation

1. Try to find out as much as possible about the fight scene in advance. Find out what the surface of the floor will be, as it could change the nature of the fight.
2. Try to find out what weapons will be used and what they will be made from.
3. Find out what you will be wearing — anything that might have an effect on the fight. You should also know if you are allowed safety padding, as this will effect any falls you might have to take.

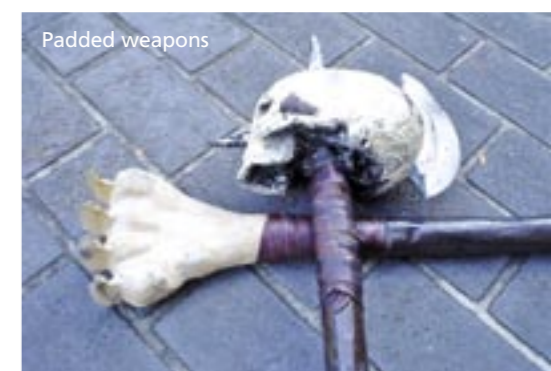
Working with Actors

The ultimate test for any fight-choreographer is working with actors, as opposed to martial artists. You need to be patient and practise carefully with them so that moves become second nature. Every fight is different and every actor has different abilities. This must be kept in mind while rehearsing the scene. I make a point of discussing the fight moves with the actors so that, if necessary, fight moves can be changed to suit their ability.

Ray Anthony has worked on over 60 productions, including Star Wars 2, Mission Impossible 2 and the Matrix trilogy. He will be conducting film-fighting workshops in Sydney in coming months. For more info, email stuntman@netspace.net.au ATKD



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