

# MODERN AGONISTICS

## A FIGHTER'S VIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

James Lafond

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## Modern Agonistics

### A Fighter's View of Experimental Archaeology

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Photos by Lynn DiGennaro

For Chuck Goetz, without whom Modern Agonistics would not be.

### About the Author

James has fought over 600 stick-fights and over 200 machete duels.

"Yes, you watered your tender little flower and nurtured it until it bloomed into a fighter—and I just crushed it."

- "Big" Keith Hardesty, October 2005, after knocking out a sparring partner

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## Chapter 1: THE SEDUCTION OF ARMS

*"The history of the sword is the history of humanity."* - Richard F. Burton, 1884

In August 1998 I had just completed *The Logic of Steel: A Fighter's View of Blade & Shank Encounters*, and was beginning research on ancient boxing. My mind was by now attuned to the dark shadow cast by the blade in the everyday life of my recent subject: the modern criminal. Then, as I paged through old collections of photos of ancient boxing images, I was struck with a realization: that ancient boxers also lived in the shadow of the blade. Indeed, ancient boxing and war-fighting had a close physical, psychological and metaphorical relationship.

The most obvious examples were the many illustrations of the earliest Greek boxers, who

were depicted boxing in postures almost identical to those used by shield & spear fighters of the same period. Mythology and philosophy provided other corollaries. However, the pictorial evidence alone, along with my curiosity about blade fighting engendered by the study of modern encounters, was enough to send me down the path of experimental weapon combat.

I determined that this effort would be named Modern Agonistics, after the ancient Hellenic term for preparation for contest. The root word, *agon*, means contest. *Agony* is the ancient Hellenic term for the suffering of the contestant. My partner, Chuck Goetz, contributed the slogan “as real as you want it” as our guiding principal in recruiting practitioners. The modified hockey helmet and baton in the logo are set opposite of the ancient helmet and sword as indicative of both our methods and goals.

Modern Agonistics is not an art, a sport, or a science. It is a method: a means by which modern fighters might reconstruct the *competitive* and *preparatory* aspects of extinct fighting arts. Welcome to our journey.

James LaFond, Tuesday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

## Chapter 2: EVOLUTION

### A Chronological Record of the Evolution of Modern Agonistics

“Tracing or reconstructing extinct martial arts requires more than a fair share of speculation.”

- J. Christopher Amberger, 1996

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Illustration 1: James (left) verses Robert (right).

Agonistics demonstration, Saturday, August 8th, 2005, Jim Frederick's Kenpo Karate

James is armed with an aspis made from a dish-sled, knee-pad, steel-plate, bailing wire, twine, duct tape, electrical tap and cowhide, with bunched bandanas for a blade curtain. His weapon is a wooden makhaera made from a red oak wakisashi wrapped with a split bicycle tire inner-tube and electrical tape. Robert is armed with a modified and painted Museum Replicas shield and a battle axe made from a pine dowel and two range-top burner plates. The axe broke on the aspis, which caused the shield to flex enough around James' hand to cause a wrist sprain and end the fight in Robert's favor via submission.

The outcome of another such encounter with Robert, armed with a spear, likewise proved disastrous for the smaller man and inspired the following comment from Brett Goldstein, "You were asking to get your ass whooped. You never give a big man a big weapon."

## Evolution 1.0: August 1998 thru February 1999

Chuck and I limited our activities to fighting full-contact knife bouts. We either used the fencing 5-touch system, a submission system, or a 5-point forensic system. The submission method consisted of one of us calling our self out when we had taken hits that actually incapacitated us [like

a stab to the temple of solar plexus] or, which would have resulted in our incapacitation with sharps.

The 5-point forensic system was a compromise. A fighter begins with 5 points. Combat is continuous. A fighter calls himself out when he has taken 5 points worth of damage. Damage is assigned according to the following values:

3 points: a stab to the torso, neck, head, or a slash to the neck, eyes, brachial artery or femoral artery.

2 points: any stab to a limb or any slash other than those mentioned above.

1 point: any strike with the spine or butt of the blade or a spear-hand to the goggles

From the beginning I wanted to leave edged-weapon scoring in the hands of the fighter being scored upon, for three reasons:

1. Most of the subjects of my study who had been stabbed had not realized that they were being stabbed at the time. I wanted us to develop the sensitivity to help us survive a real attack, and also permit us to eventually duel with steel blunts without being seriously injured. The reason for this self-scoring was essentially the development of contact sensitivity.
2. The second reason was that I wanted to eventually organize freestyle weapon competitions, which, if done with assigned officials, would be against the law as such sports are not sanctioned by the Maryland State Athletic Commission. Such events would have to be self-scoring to be legal. With the hyper-competitive ancient Greeks as my inspiration, I wanted competition to be the keystone of our method.
3. I eventually wanted to reconstruct gladiatorial combats. I was aware that many groups in the U.S. and Europe were doing just that, but none with competition as the basis. All were looking at theoretical and technical reconstructions. Figuring that most of the emphasis would remain in this low-risk category, I wanted to take the truly experimental contact route. Gladiatorial combat was a submission art. Often fighters were killed outright. However, it was more likely that a fighter would be maimed or incapacitated before losing consciousness. There would then be an acknowledgement of defeat. The standing gladiator would then appeal to the editor of the games for mercy on behalf of his fallen opponent. The end, when it came, was likewise ritualized and prepared for through training.

We began sparring and dueling with rubber knives. Our defensive equipment consisted of

garden gloves, goggles, and a mouth piece. We did our training and fighting outside, at Riverside Park in South Baltimore, either on the abandoned basketball court, or, when it was raining or snowing, under the pavilion with the bums, who often had some constructive input.

During this evolution we logged 1,328 knife bouts. Injuries consisted primarily of thumb sprains, wrist sprains, finger sprains, tennis-elbow, bruised ribs, an ankle sprain and four concussions resulting from head stabs.

The rubber knives were giving us problems with developing sensitivity and avoiding hand injuries. The rubber blade offered no resistance and the rubber handle was actually encased steel.

## Evolution 1.2: February 1999 thru April 2000

For this evolution we logged 2,906 knife bouts. In response to our high incidence of thumb and wrist sprains we began wrapping with boxing wraps and changed over to fold-rolled penny-savers. Penny-savers are light newspaper-like local magazine/advertisers. Tightly folding two of these and binding with two rubber bands produces a good blunt with an obvious flat and edge. Folded tightly enough this blunt can transfer enough kinetic energy to knock men out with a stab to the head or solar plexus. Painful slashes and effective stabs may be delivered with one of these for about twenty bouts, or roughly three stabs and twenty slashes. Sparring with this had the added benefit of permitting us to train with a legal, and useable self-defense tool that could be carried—and even constructed—anywhere.

The hand injuries stopped, but the rib and ankle injuries remained a problem. Chuck was left handed and we were always stepping on each others' feet and we did much of our sparring on cobblestones.

## Evolution 1.3: May 2000 thru April 2001

We added shinai [kendo sticks] to our arsenal, and began fencing with these according to the 5-touch system. A typical session consisted of shinai drills, boxing mitt drills, 5 shinai bouts and 20 knife bouts. A typical week of training included two such sessions: Monday and Wednesday morning, and a pure knife session of 40 to 60 bouts on Saturday morning. At this point we were adding hats, belts, shirts and jackets as side-arms for the knife duels.

The shinai knocked off a few finger nails and sprained some fingers. Taking head shots was

a problem so we added hats to our outfit, and this prevented head cuts. Our interest in the shinai had nothing to do with research and was just a recreational impulse—a desire to duel with swords!

### Evolution 1.5: May 2001 thru October 2001

We added arnis sticks to our weapon set [originally to serve as a scabbard for shinai].

Unlike the shinai, the arnis “stick” [a vine actually] is a real weapon. The use of this item required some protection. We also added the red oak wakisashi [side-arm or short sword]. We now needed to gear-up or go to the emergency room. All we had was foam karate headgear over which we strapped the goggles, and kenpo gloves, from which we had to remove the thumb and fingertip padding to be able to handle the weaponry. We continued with the Saturday morning “stabathon” and the Monday and Wednesday morning full set. Our full set consisted of the following:

1. 5 shinai bouts
2. 1 shinai & scabbard bout
3. 1 shinai and wakisashi bout
4. 1 wakisashi bout
5. 1 arnis bout
6. 1 wakisashi and arnis bout
7. 2 rounds of boxing [We had the gloves on—might-as-well use them.]
8. 2 knife bouts [without the clumsy gloves]
9. 1 self-defense set with the knife.

Our self-defense set with the knife consisted of the following. One unarmed man would wait inside the tip-off circle on the ball court. The knife-armed man would enter on the bisecting line and attempt to do 5 points of damage to the defender. The defender would have to escape from the “room” at the same point the attacker entered. Since so much real knife-work happened at very close proximity, we developed this as an unarmed-against-the-knife drill. What happened was that we developed so much quicker in the use of the knife to murder some unarmed guy than we did as defenders that this basically just became a form of comic relief as we took turns executing one-another.

Of the 100 “knifer-in-the-room” drills we did there were two near successes. In one incidence

I managed to knock Chuck out with a spear hand to the goggles just as he chopped off all the fingers on my other hand. On the other occasion I stabbed Chuck as the knifer, and he clamped down on my knife hand with his forearms so fiercely that I was not able to pull it back for another stab. Chuck then picked me up and carried me “out of the room” as I twisted and twisted with the knife. He then sat me down and lay on his back with a sigh of repose, “At last, I get ta die in the hallway!”

This drill, and its ultimate comic death, illustrates a truth about weaponry. The cold, hard fact is, that humans are tool-using predators, and they adapt much more quickly to the use of weapons than to the use of the body as a weapon. Not only is the body a less effective weapon, it takes longer to learn how to use it. The unarmed hero is doomed. The armed villain is destined for victory.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #1**

This evolution culminated in a 4-man, round-robin, 3 ½-hour session on October 27th on the ball court at Riverside Park between Chuck, Bryant, Dominick and myself. These were all 1-point clashes, with the man to score keeping the court. In order to keep all five points in a given set, a fighter who took the court first had to prevail in 15 consecutive clashes. Most of the sets were won by a man retaining 1 of his five points; that is taking 11 out of fifteen clashes in the set. This was a very demanding format, which we would return to later in our evolution. That windy autumn day remains one of my top ten Agonistic experiences. It was brutal, ruthless and taxing, and death in the room was never more fun. We all scored a zero on the last set, as we were mercilessly cut down by our executioners. The two guys who lost most of their sets were particularly ruthless here.

### **Evolution 2.0: November 2001 thru May 2002**

We now had 2 women, 2 boys, and 4 men practicing Agonistics regularly. We moved into United Martial Arts on Eastern Avenue in East Baltimore for morning sessions. I soon sprained my ankle kickboxing with Charlie Wallace and had to sit out December and January sessions. I took the sideline as a coach and devoted my time to constructing helmets, shields and exotic weaponry for gladiatorial reconstructions. My sickest invention had to be a battleaxe made of a TaeKwonDo clapper kick-pad, roped and duct-taped to the head of a 4-foot pine staff.

At this time Chuck and I were still training outside at Riverside Park once a week with increasingly dangerous weapons. A Mexican floor tech by the name of Freddie Ruiz began filming our bouts for all of his Mexican friends back in East Baltimore. His English was bad and my Spanish was worse, but he did manage to forward requests from the many viewers at home and apparently back in Vera Cruz. Freddie did inform us of one surprising fact. We had become underground celebrities of a sort. It wasn't just the cops, bums, dog-walkers and landscapers at the park watching us beat each other up. There was a whole migrant labor force for whom we served as hero and villain. Their hero was Chuck, who they called Loco Lobo [Crazy Wolf] for his pain tolerance, fearlessness, and for wearing sleeveless shirts in the snow. The villain was James, who they called Diablo Mano [Devil Hand] for being a sneaky "cheap-shot artist".

The others who practiced Modern Agonistics during this evolution were Bryant Burriss [Jeet Kune Do], Joshua Cummings [Agonistics], Roy Cummings [hockey], Dan Funk [wrestling/boxing], Dominick Mattero [Hung Gar], Don Mayeski [TaeKwonDo], Garren LaFond [Agonistics], Will Phillips [Agonistics], Barbara Walker [boxing], and Charles Wallace [Nadaraja].

In March we became aware of the financial troubles of United Martial Arts, and determined to hold an agon and sell tickets to raise money to keep the school open. This eventually fell through as five of our original eight confirmed fighters pulled out due to the entry of Washington D.C. area pro-wrestler Shawn Pregant. The events were to be submission wrestling, Greek boxing, arnis, and shinai. We made a lot of contacts with good people through the efforts to recruit fighters and promote this event.

## **AGONISTICS MOMENT #2**

This evolution ended on June 1st at United Martial Arts as Mister Frank Gilbert gave Mark LaFond and myself a boxing clinic, while spectator, Janice Kelley stepped up to best Chuck Goetz, Don Mayeski, and heavyweight black belt Mike Rudolph in a round-robin knife set. In between one of our boxing rounds, as Mister Frank wiped our blood off of his head gear, Mark LaFond looked over at "Big" Don holding Janice three feet off the ground as she stabbed him repeatedly in the neck, and said, "What art is that?"

Mister Frank sagely answered, "That is the fine art of Domestic Violence, my friend. I'd say you're lucky to be boxing today."

## Evolution 2.1: June 2002 thru August 2002

With the closing of United Martial Arts we were back outside. Below are the highlights.

June 14<sup>th</sup>: The much feared Shawn Pregant took the train to Baltimore to spar with Chuck. Although Chuck had to take it easy on the bigger man James could still find no martial artists in Baltimore willing to fight Shawn, because of his listed size of 6'1" and 240 lbs.

July 27<sup>th</sup>: We began training on the shot-put platform at the Patapsco High School track in Dundalk. Four Baltimore County cops did question us once.

August 18<sup>th</sup>: Freddie Ruiz began marketing his videos of Chuck and James as *Video Combato*.

## Evolution 2.5: September 2002 thru September 2003

James joined USA Boxing as a coach, was retained as a visiting weapons instructor by David Lumsden for the Archbishop Curley Fighting Arts Club, and joined Ron Lygren's Dundalk Martial Arts and Boxing Academy as the boxing and weapons coach.

Dominick and Christopher Atilas began knife sparring at Amsfort Park in Flatbush New York.

Chuck and James developed a method for constructing wax-wood long-swords and claymores.

Our focus during this period was fencing with heavy medieval-style weapons outside and boxing inside. In August Chuck and James fought with dull machetes for the first time.

The Dundalk Martial Arts and Boxing Academy was wiped out by a flood at the end of September.

## Evolution 3.0: September 2003 thru October 2005

The Archbishop Curley Fighting Arts Club adopted Modern Agonistics as a component of its MMA format. At the direction of Head Coach and Moderator David Lumsden James organized the fighters into a *ludus* or gladiatorial school. David wanted us to focus on stick and knife, as his program was a certified Doce Pares Escrima school under Richard Bustillo out of California.

In need of an objective rating system, James used the five point bout structure. To test out a

fighter had to complete 20 five-point bouts. This would generate three percentages: one overall; one for points retained [defense]; and one for points taken [offense]. Over 40 Curley students and coaches tested out on this program and have, through Evolution 10, provided fighters for all Modern Agonistics events.

In August of 2005 Bryan, Robert, Keith, Damien and James fought a three-hour demo of some 60 bouts at Jim Frederick's Kenpo Karate in Towson.

In October of 2005 James and David began having trouble scheduling sessions at Curley due to their work commitments and the Agonistics aspect of the Curley program was dropped.

During this period Damien Kestle and James conducted seminars at Curley and at Sifu Tom Clark's Practical Martial Arts at Norwood Elementary in Dundalk. We also held three agons at Curley, and even tried playing stick football with Marvin, James' gladiator helmet used in the logo, who unfortunately did not survive the encounter.

The high point of this evolution was when Keith, Bryan, Charles, Greg, Patrick, Damien and James drove out to Finksburg Maryland to fight at the birthday party for Steve Addict's best friend. People dropped money in a hat for their favorite fighters and the kids asked for autographs.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #3**

Damien and I were doing a linked knife bout, with each of us holding onto one end of a five foot chain and trying to stab one another with a bowie-size machete. As we circled between the volley ball net, the trampoline full of kids, the hillside full of adults, and the neighbor's house, a window to that house slid open and a man said, "Hey Joe, there's a hippie and a skinhead trying to stab each other in your yard. Should I call the cops?"

"No Dave, I've got my money on the skinhead. Come on over and crack a beer."

At the end of this evolution James was not permitted to re-register as a USA Boxing coach because the officials suspected him of recruiting potential boxers into "stick-boxing."

At this time Chuck Goetz also stopped practicing Agonistics.

As of 2011 our only video footage is from the three 2005 events that were taped by Charles Meisling.

James began sparring with WEKAF fighter Aaron Seligson, who destroyed him in 29 out of 30 bouts. For the next few years Aaron occasionally gave James clinics to help him prepare for FMA and freestyle competitions.



## Evolution 4.0: October 2005 thru April 2006

Robert Geyer and Sam Cooke began practicing Agonistics and brought a great deal of craftsmanship to the hobby; constructing excellent shields, helmets, neck guards, and weapons. Charles once again began practicing Agonistics, provided James with yet another moment.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #4**

Charles was taking on Keith at Patapsco with heavy 1-inch thick sticks. Keith scored a hard blow to Charles' ulna bone, resulting in Charles curled up in a fetal position and rocking back and forth. As Keith stood over us I checked Charles' arm and declared that it was probably just a simple fracture and severe bone bruise, and informed him that Keith did this to me about every ten days, and that he would be alright, even though his forearm appeared deformed because of some displaced skin and fat. Charles then snarled at me through clenched teeth as he continued to rock, "Well excuse me for being a human being and not a fucking mutant gladiator! Just go eat your raw meat and leave me alone."

I then looked up at Keith and he said, "Yes, you watered your tender little flower and nurtured it until it bloomed into a fighter—and I just crushed it."

The dent in Charles' ulna never went away but he would be back with a vengeance.

As Chuck had been the guts of Modern Agonistics, Charles became its whit. Charles put up a Modern Agonistics web site which was very nice, but which James lacked the sophistication to properly utilize, eventually letting it die on the vine. Thanks to Charles and his great website James experienced another Agonistics moment.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #5**

I was contacted by an attorney via e-mail through the website. The attorney sent her picture: a pleasing blonde in a black cowboy hat. She then referenced a video of Damien and myself fighting with machetes, "Are you the one in the green or the beige?"

I e-mailed back, "Green."

The lady then asked for my address and informed me that she could be over in twenty minutes. I played hard to get and responded something like, "How about 19 minutes?"

The evening was great, but the best part was when I got home the next morning and my female roommate had left notes in various media all over our condo: "Man Whore", "Boy Toy", "Slutiator", and my favorite, "Did you even get her name?"

Thanks Charles.

In January we were welcomed by Sifu Edgar Livingston at his Chinese Health & Fitness in the same location as United Martial Arts had been. He possessed a vast armory of Chinese weapons lining the walls. It was a rush sparring in this atmosphere. We constructed a heavy training post. At this time 11-year-old, 74-pound Brett Goldstein began practicing Agonistics.

### Evolution 5.0: May 2006 thru April 2007

James began attending and competing at FMA events in order to recruit fighters. After Rico Arus mowed him down at the Maryland Open in April, Rico agreed to fight in future freestyle events. Coming up with a freestyle stick format that FMA people could get on board with as competitors was key toward widening the pool of potential opponents for Agonistics practitioners to sharpen their skills against.

On August 5th 2006 Master Edgar Livingston hosted a freestyle and Agonistics competition promoted by James to benefit Saint Jude's Children's Hospital. The freestyle rules were negotiated with John Jacobo of SWACOM, a hardcore FMA group who provided five fighters for the event: Leonard Anderson; John Bosch; Jeff Realo; Don Panzer; and Michael Ponce. This was a five-event, best-of-three bouts, single-elimination tournament. This whole thing was incredible. We raised 1,600 dollars from ticket sales and donations. The winner of youth could advance to the men's division and the winner of the men's division to the masters.

With 10 men and 4 youths the winners were Gus Gus Gamboa, youth; Rico Arus, men; Aaron Seligson, masters; Damien Kestle, excellence [in steel bouts against James]; and Charles for courage [in 2 suicidal attempts to take out Rico and Aaron].

The highlights of this event were three:

1. Jeff Realo and Rico Arus went at it hammer and tongs for 3 rounds. The spectators were actually gasping at the sound of their sticks ripping into flesh! People still talk about this fight in 2011.
2. Charles took on Rico in double-stick [pictured below] providing us with the only occasion known in which Sifu Arturo Gabriel, serving as referee, was ever horrified by a beating.
3. Aaron Seligson launched James from the center of the ring , over Damien Kestle, and into the second row of [thankfully empty] seats, with a perfectly executed side-kick, set up by feinting a vertical forehand which James actually thought he was going to stop with his ill-fated roof-block.

We took a month off to heal up, and mourned the loss of Robert Geyer from Agonistics due to an illness that caused his joints to actually burst. Robert almost died from this and could no longer fight.



Illustration 2

Charles and James got together in September to renew training, and Charles provided James with yet another moment.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #6**

Charles and I met at Livingston's for sparring. He brought his pretty young girlfriend and I brought a woman who I had recently hooked up with at biker weekend in Ocean City. As we began ripping into each other we both winced and stepped back. Charles looked at me and said, "How did we ever think this was fun? I know, we just have to take a few more shots and we'll be good."

We were just sparring so I had neglected to bring my cup. I was wearing boxers under sweats. Charles ripped off a high-velocity forehand that caught me on the head of the penis. I have never felt such pain. Charles stood over me apologizing as I attempted to get up the courage to take a look. Finally I rose and duck-walked toward the bathroom, holding myself. I remember thinking that I was bleeding, as there was a "running feeling" in the member. As I walked by the women I saw my girl stabbing her finger up into the face of his girl and snarling, "I have a date with him tonight. If he's disabled I'm borrowing your man!"

Charles walked behind me, "Please man, be alright!"

After finding only severe bruising I called Doctor Lumsden to ask if it was safe to let Charles off the hook. He gave me the go-ahead and promised me that it would be the quickest healing bruise I had ever had. He was right.

In January 2007 Adam Swinder began practicing Agonistics. We held another benefit for Saint Jude's at Livingston's in April 2007, won by Rico over, Aaron [who was sick] Charles, Adam and James. SWACOM had broken up with the departure of John Jacobo for the Southwest, and it was tough trying to get sane people to fight the likes of Aaron and Rico.

### **Evolution 6.0: May 2007 thru December 2007**

Aaron agreed to give us a stick-fighting seminar at the Baltimore Martial Arts Academy in Ellicott City to prepare us for a fight in Chesapeake Virginia against John Bosch, Don, and Remmel, a

big muscular Filipino-American cop. This was a PickYourFight promotion by a really cool guy named Big Al, held at a Shriners' event center. Jame's roommate had family in Virginia Beach and agreed to drop us off in Chesapeake. The road trip alone was a classic series of moments, including a conversation with an insane lady at a fast-food joint. Again though, the quintessential moment was provided by Charles who was riding in the backseat with Adam.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #7**

Charles was teasing Adam, as, at this stage in their careers, Adam was Charles' punching bag, and Charles wanted to toughen the new guy up; physically and mentally. Attempting to divert attention from his fighting ability, Adam changed the subject to a discussion about his desire to date the beautiful female student of a martial arts instructor who had brought this student to Livingston's. Before Charles was able to demolish Adam's hopes fate did it for him.

As these two guys were fencing with words the instructor of the beautiful student called me, and asked me for Charles' phone number, as his female student had taken a liking to Charles and wanted to call him. My roommate gave me a look of stern disapproval for loading up Charles with this nuclear ammunition in the middle of an already brutal affair. Of course, Charles ripped into Adam's self-esteem to the point where Adam sought refuge in his electronic gaming magazine.

After some time, Charles softened his tone and began asking Adam intelligent questions about the articles in the magazine. After a discussion of one particular game, Adam and my roommate relaxed as all signs of tension and critical comments faded from thought. Then Charles asked Adam about a particular role-playing game, wondering if he played it. Adam, sensing common intellectual ground with his senior sparring partner, lit up and said, "Yeah, I was thinking of getting into a new campaign."

Charles responded sagely, "Don't worry Adam, the female characters in your role-playing game will never judge you and find you wanting."

That was so brutal and cruelly calculated that even Adam had to laugh. My roommate said to me, "Are they going to fight? Should I pull over?"

I comforted her with the thought that the hatchet was now buried firmly in Adam's psyche; the

psychological genocide already a done deal.

Later that night Charles walked Adam to the ring, cornered for him, and even congratulated him on the numerous fouls he inflicted on poor Don, which included a judo throw!

The next fight was Charles and Rimmel, which provided James with yet another Charles moment.

### **AGONISTICS MOMENT #8**

John Bosch was cornering for Rimmel and I for Charles. Rimmel looked really buffed and was practicing some high-flying stuff in the dressing room. Charles looked worried so I gave him my assessment, "Look, He's bigger and seems more skilled, but I don't think he spars because he's not wearing a glove on his stick hand. He's muscular and anxious and is going to gas. Just push the pace."

The bouts consisted of a single two-minute round. Charles went in there and nonchalantly paced around as Rimmel hammered him with sick combinations which drew huge oos and aahhs from the crowd. Charles looked like he had tiger stripes on his arms. Eventually, after about a minute, Rimmel kicked off a combo with a floor tap and just pulled up short. Charles then spread his arms with a "Is that it?" gesture and Rimmel backed up. Charles stiff-armed Rimmel's face mask, pushed him into the corner, and whacked him for the rest of the fight. The crowd went insane.

When the bell sounded the referee asked John and I if we wanted them to go another round or call it a draw. We both said, "Draw."

John then looked across the ring at me and said, "Hey, we're not going to have a fight like that, right? We're going to have a nice pretty fight, right?"

I responded, "Amen—a pretty fight man."

John and I had a nice largo mano fight and the ref wanted to call it a draw. But John had broken a stick on me and had also broken my right hand and ripped open my thigh, so I raised John's hand for the victory. Big Al, his people, John, his guys, the Tidewater crowd, and my guys, were all just great to be around. If God ever lets me relive a moment this will be my



request.

The highlights of this event are pictured below:



Illustration 3: Adam fouling Don with a Judo Throw.

(continued on next page)



Illustration 4: Charles fouling Remmel with a kick and a punch.



Illustration 5: James with John Bosch, one of the hardest hitters he has faced.



Unfortunately, by the end of the year Sifu Livingston had to move his school to a location we found difficult to make. We had to look for another location, so we began training at Damien Kestle's new Sanctum MMA Club in Halethorpe Maryland. At this point we were beginning to add stick & shield as a regular training set, but otherwise stuck with the knife and FMA stick.

## Evolution 7.0: January 2008 thru January 2009

As a weakness of point sparring is that fighters tend not to develop good combination striking, we switched to a five point stick-sparring system in which a fighter only scored a point for a combination. A single counter could not nullify this for a draw point as with our old 5-point format. An effective counter had to be a combination, delivered with a beat of the last strike in the scoring combination.

The highlight of this evolution was a road-trip to Virginia Beach to fight in another PickYourFight promotion. We had no opponent's and Rico's opponent did not show, so he fought a demo with Adam. Adam and Charles fought a good bout and Damien and James did 15 rounds with machetes, chains, pipes, shields, knives and sticks. They split 7 kills each and 1 mutual, with Damien winning the 16th round with a feint into a solar plexus stab. They were both pretty badly injured, and have not gone at it with each other since. Fighting in this epic battle, with the crowd cheering for Damien and calling for Jame's demise, constitute **AGONISTICS MOMENT #8.**

An even better moment was provided by Rico though...

## **AGONISTICS MOMENT #9**

Without an opponent Rico was bored and looking for something to get into. The ad-hoc nature of this event provided him with the perfect opportunity. We were fighting at a Masonic lodge on the main drag in Virginia Beach, about a mile or so up the road from the naval station. The entire cafeteria of the lodge had been segregated into two dressing rooms and there were many fighters. This was a big event. I got changed next to this former Navy Seal who looked like he was carved out of stone. He won his fight by arm-bar and was there at ringside with all the other fighters to cheer Damien on when he picked me up and tossed me to the canvas and

slapped an arm-bar on me to end our pipe verses chain bout.

This was an ISKA sanctioned event, and, for the safety of each fighter, he was required to show up with a coach, wraps, and mouth-piece, and was expected to have these with him when he was interviewed by the matchmaker. Damien and I were gearing down after our bout, during which Rico had become my corner man. My loss apparently left him wanting for victory, so he was looking for another fighter to adopt.

This light heavyweight showed up alone, with only a pair of shorts, and sat down in front of the official, between Damien and I, who looked on with interest. Used gear was scattered all over the table. The matchmaker asked, "Do you have a corner man?"

As the fighter tried to think of something, Rico, who had never met this man, stepped up and slapped him on the back, "I'm his coach."

The fighter looked up at Rico with eyes filled with surprise and relief and said, "Yeah, him."

The matchmaker then asked for the man's wraps. Rico reached across the table and grabbed a pair of sweaty wraps another fighter had just taken off and dropped them in his lap, "Wraps, check."

The matchmaker then asked the fighter if he had a mouthpiece. Rico looked across the table to a mouthpiece left there by the loser of the last bout, sitting in a widening pool of saliva. Damien and I locked eyes and mouthed, "No, no way!"

Rico snapped up the gooey dental apparatus, wiped it off on his pants leg, and slapped it into his new fighter's mouth, "Mouthpiece, check."

The matchmaker was shaking his head, Damien was looking for a bucket to puke in, Rico was beaming like a proud father, and the fighter was happy—he just picked his fight. What a great time. We stayed and watched GSP defeat Mat Serra on the large screen TV. Big Al gave us plaques, shirts, a case of soda, gas money, and a case of beer, and had his best friend take us out to an after-hours club and put us up in his house for the remainder of the morning.

Our next trip to Virginia fell through and then, at the end of January 2009 Damien had to close up the Sanctum and we were out in the cold again.

## Evolution 8.0: February 2009 thru August 2009

During this period we trained and sparred in Adam's basement, which limited our stick work but really made us sharpen our knife game. During this period we used the wooden machetes and small punching shields a lot. At this point Cory Bracken began practicing Agonistics

## Evolution 9.0: September 2009 thru December 2010

During this period we trained in doors with Leroy Dinatale at Jim Frederick's Kenpo Karate in Towson, and outdoors at Loch Raven Rec Center. In January we got back to Curley on a regular basis thru May. In April Ray Ordowski, a Curley alumni, invited James to do an Agonistics seminar at Randolph Macon College in Ashland Virginia. The MMA club that Ray and Josh Wilburn formed at Randolph Macon was small but dedicated. They made James feel right at home and insisted on having some full-contact stick-fights at the end of the day.

The highlight of this evolution was a tournament in honor of Adam, who was moving out of town. This was a round-robin freestyle event, with seven fighters matched accorded to seeding by James, who served as a second. Mike Aaron had a perfect day, and managed to best a field of younger and much larger fighters, some of whom had more experience than him.

We did a demo at Fredericks on November 13<sup>th</sup>. However, scheduling at Fredericks became a problem at the end of the year and the Curley program was in turmoil again.

## Evolution 10.0: January 2011

In January James devised the four-part format that the reader may find in Chapter 5.

This is the point we are at now. There are only three active fighters: Brett, Corey and James. We did a demo at a YMCA for Sensei Jansen's karate class, and joined Master Bob Light's martial arts group to study Bais Tres Manos under Guro Reyamar Asonalleba. Brett and James practice in a spare room at Sensei Jansen's house, and we wait impatiently for spring, and our pick of outdoors training spaces.

James, for one, is attempting to get in shape with the Loch Raven Boxing Team, and is

anticipating a possible Agonistics Moment #10 for our 2011 outdoor season.

## Chapter 3: THE FILIPINO CONTRIBUTION

“Contemporary Filipino martial arts are very political...  
It is important to remember that these are ancient arts for survival.”  
- Guro Reyamar Asonalleba, 2/8/11

Agonistics practitioners cross-train in the Filipino Martial Arts [FMA] for the following reasons:

1. The teachers of these arts teach weapons first, empty hand second.
2. The traditional FMA weaponry is very similar in length, configuration and quality to ancient Greco-Roman weaponry. These forensic parallels should bring out bio-mechanical parallels and assist in the reconstruction of these ancient arts.
3. FMA is only a generation removed from actual dueling; whereas most other Asian and European arts are at least 4 generations removed from identifiable dueling traditions. This should result in less impractical and anachronistic elements imbedded in these arts.
4. FMA people [very often big Anglo-Americans] are really the only martial artists out there who are willing to actually fight with weapons.

### **FMA Influences in Chronological Order**

#### Sifu/Guro Arturo Gabriel

Gabriel introduced James to his form of FMA in 1994. This is largely based on the teachings of Dan Inosanto, Billy Bryant and Paul Vunak. Gabriel's own hybrid adaptation is called Dos Manos Kurtado and is essentially double knife with stick work as the base. Gabriel awarded James his black sash on 3/17/7. This was strictly an honorary award, granted with the expectation that James would fight under Gabriel at FMA events when requested. James is not qualified to teach this art.

#### The Dog Brothers Videos

James and Brett have probably spent a combined 1,000 hours plus watching Dog Brothers

videos. We believe that the Dog Brothers represent the purest form of combat stick expression. Unfortunately, as Marc "Crafty Dog" Denny has noted, their stick-format does not do blades justice. We also appreciate, but do not emulate, the no winners and no losers approach. We want stick-fighting to someday be a spectator sport, and also seek to reconstruct ancient Hellenic and Latin arts that were psychotically competitive.

### Doce Pares Escrima/Jeet Kune Do

This influence comes through David and Kevin Lumsden and Damien Kestle of the Archbishop Curley Fighting Arts Club, who are certified instructors under Richard Bustillo. Richard Bustillo was a student of Bruce Lee and Dan Inosanto and overseas the IMB [International Martial Arts & Boxing], of which he is the founder.

### Doce Pares Arnis

James has received 2 hours of beatings and 16 hours of instruction from Aaron Seligson of the Baltimore Martial Arts Academy in Ellicott Maryland. Aaron is an amazing stick-fighter who has competed overseas. James would pick Aaron over any of the Dog Brothers he has seen on video. Aaron pretty much regards James as a crude barbarian when it comes to stick fighting, but did do his best to educate him in the basics of the competitive form of the art.



Illustration 6: Aaron executing a foot-bind clinch against a charging lunge.





Illustration 7: Aaron checking the stick-hand and countering in perfect form.

## FMA with Rico Arus

Rico has studied FMA under Aaron and Leo T. Gahe. He has administered 3 brutal beatings to James, including 2 KOs [once even going to get James' second-place trophy while the Chinese Medicine instructor at the event patched James up], has cornered for James against Damien, and has given James 3 2-hour lessons. Rico is a natural fighter who prefers the "long grip" and the "shoulder-load". He is a salsa dance instructor with superb footwork for a big man. The scariest thing about fighting Rico is that moment when you figure out you can't stay away from him. Whereas losing to Aaron has the surreal quality of being bested in a duel by an evil genius, everybody that has lost to Rico walked away feeling like they had just been mugged by an alpha-male who was so impressive demolishing them that their girlfriend decided to abandon them in the alley and follow Rico back into the nightclub.



Illustration 8: Rico [left] and Leonard Anderson do King Kong verses Godzilla.





Illustration 9: Rico using his superior footwork to hunt down the smaller and quicker Jeff Realo during their epic three-bout clash in 2006. Master Fred Ocampos judging [seated in yellow to the right], Hung Gar Master Johnny V. refereeing to the left, Sifu Gabriel refereeing to the right.

### Bais Tres Manos with Guro Reyemar Asonalleba & Maestro Bob Light

Guro Reyemar has described this art to Corey and James as an FMA cross-training format based and focused on the blade rather than the stick. As of this writing we have only had a few lessons with him. In James' opinion Bais Tres Manos seems an ideal style to cross-train in while attempting to reconstruct ancient blade arts, for reasons 1, 2 & 3 cited at the head of this chapter.

We look forward to cross-training with more FMA practitioners and instructors in the future.



## Chapter 4: COMPETITIVE EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

“Though for centuries the duel with the sword was regarded as more dangerous than that with the pistol, it had become, for the most part, a harmless exercise.”

- Paul Kirchner, *Dueling with the Sword and Pistol*

When it comes to ritualized fighting with edged weapons—as opposed to battlefield actions—the level of lethality is dependent upon the specific forensics of the weapons and the rules of engagement. The extent to which forensics or rules indicate lethality is dependent upon the culture of the duelists. The historical sources will indicate this balance through direct statements and inferences. Below is an example of direct and inferred sources.

### Forensics and Culture

The American Bowie knife of the 1800s shared many of the same characteristics as ancient Roman gladiatorial arms: a short heavy blade good for cutting and thrusting. In both ages these weapons were used for dueling. The American form was quick and decisive but often not immediately lethal, as the loser and victor often lingered for hours until finally dying, or were maimed for life. The Romans incidentally considered dueling with this type of blade without shield or sidearm suicidal, and reserved such activities for condemned criminals. In the case of 19<sup>th</sup> Century duels with the Bowie, American sources clearly state that the lethal nature of such duels was due to the nature of the weapon and the aggressive nature of the antagonists.

The Roman sources infer this about their equivalent weaponry through the fact that combat with sharps was regarded as lethal, and that a significant portion of combats ended with the ritual execution of a disabled or submissive gladiator. In other words, combat with gladiatorial weapons was lethal, but usually not immediately so.

An interesting counterpoint to this discussion of deadly short arms was the use for duels in the 17<sup>th</sup> century of the English broadsword—essentially a heavy saber; that, in pure forensic terms, is a more deadly weapon than either the American Bowie or the hodgepodge of ancient gladiatorial blades. The sources clearly state that few broadsword duels conducted on the stage

[A railed stage was the origin of the modern boxing ring, and the first modern bare-knuckle boxing champion was James Figg, known as “The Atlas of the Sword”] resulted in death because of the rules adhered to by the combatants. Such duels were won after the best of three cuts. Time

would be taken to sew up a slashed fighter before the duel was resumed, and no fighter need be cut a third time according to this tradition. The broadsword was a battlefield weapon that could be used for sub-lethal duels with adherence to the proper rules.

In other cases, dueling traditions that develop around a battlefield weapon, particularly edged extension weapons, can be very—and very immediately—lethal. Two perfect examples would be the psychotic lethality of dueling among the early medieval Norse [Vikings] and the late medieval Japanese [Samurai].

What proportion of the lethal sum of any dueling tradition is attributable to forensics or to rules is entirely dependent upon the culture that embraces this activity. It is obvious upon examining the sources that sub-lethal competition with lethal weapons is a possibility.

### Competing with Steel Blunts



Illustration 10: Damien Kestle [right] kicks James in the knee while fighting with blunt but slightly pointed 18-inch Ontario machetes and light shields made from door-handles and riveted pie-pans. Adding a shield or side-arm to the dueling equation encourages aggression and generally requires a chain of combined arms techniques to bring a duel to a close.

## Contact Sensitivity and the Submission Ethic

A steel weapons fighter must have superior contact sensitivity or wear armor. The safer method is developing sensitivity, because the armor can always fail. Extensive armor is also not realistic in reconstructing gladiatorial, or for that matter most other dueling traditions. Generally military armor tended to protect the torso and head, while armor developed for dueling was generally limited to protecting the extremities, often including the head.

Stick fighting has long been a method for developing edged weapon skills in various cultures. In fact gladiators were known as “rod-fighters” as most of their preparation was done with wooden tools. The down-side of the stick-fighting model is that competitive stick-fighters tend to develop pain-tolerance more than sensitivity. This can lead to disaster. Even dull machetes will puncture your abdominal wall if you step into a thrust and eat it like you would in a stick-fight. James and Chuck had a close call of this nature early on.

The other characteristic that duelists must have, that prize-fighters often lack, is a submission ethic. Just as a submission grappler must know when to tap a duelist must know when to declare himself done in order to avoid pointless injuries and develop the ability to achieve a clean kill, which is the duelist’s goal.



Illustration 11: Charles [right] and James in a linked machete duel in April 2007. To make bowie-style knife-fights entertaining we often link-up with a five foot chain. In this frame James takes a chop to the elbow as he stabs Charles just beneath his armor—an ugly end for both fighters.

## **Recommended Contact Blade Evolution**

The methods below should eventually be mixed in the same routine on a rotating basis.

1. First-blood sparring with shaped plastic blunts. We use Sharkee brand training knives. This develops sensitivity, edge-sense, defense and timing.
2. Submission duels with plastic blunts. This corrects bad habits that creep into a fighter's form after too much first-blood stop-point fighting.
3. Stick as blade. Since the stick actually hurts and handles easily it is a good intermediary method for developing response time and respect for the weapon one faces.
4. Kill bouts with heavy wooden blunts. These help develop the beat and an increased appreciation for the edge and flat of the blade [edge-sense]. The handling is slow, which also helps develop footwork.
5. Best-of-five sets with blunt steel knives. We use clipped-point 12-inch machetes.
6. A single kill bout or best-of-three kills with blunt steel.

The key to developing the necessary attributes is mixing the above methods. Done exclusively every one of the above methods will foster bad habits. Use these methods on a rotating basis to round yourself out as a fighter.

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Illustration 12: Damien Kestle crashes into James in a xiphos and shield bout. Both blade strokes were checked with the shields during this bout as sparks flew. This illustrates how difficult it would be for a judge to score such an encounter. Only the combatants really know what is going on, and in this case both were surprised that they were not cleaved. This illustrates the importance of continuous stick & shield work for developing gladiatorial swordsmanship. Damien eventually won with a cleave to the right temple.

However, to really hone your instincts you need to compete with people outside of your own circle. One thing that edged-weapon fighters cannot afford to do is refuse to fight their own club members. This is common in MMA but will result in blade fighters having no one to compete with. The only opponents you are likely to find outside of Agonsistics practitioners will be FMA people. They will want to fight according to their rules, and you cannot expect them to fight with your weapons and according to your rules. Compromises have been made. The freestyle rules outlined in the next chapter were negotiated between John Jacobo of SWACOM [FMA], Damien Kestle [Jeet Kune Do] and James LaFond [Modern Agonistics] in June 2006.

## Chapter 5: COMPETITIVE FORMATS & TESTING

“You can’t score a blade fight like a boxing match. The man that is pressing the action might be getting sliced up by the man giving ground. Judges need to be able to appreciate the attacking limb as a target.”

- John Jacobo

I originally met John Jacobo at a stick-fighting meet in which his fighters were unfairly served by the stilted boxing-based scoring system in use by the host school. He accepted the results graciously. But I could tell by the look on his face that he had some firm ideas as to how weapon combat should be scored. I sought him out in an attempt to outline a set of rules that would permit stick and blade fighters from various FMA backgrounds to compete meaningfully with each other and experimental groups such as our own.

Note: before meeting with John I had Aaron outline safety parameters. What these men provided was a guide that has since been modified somewhat. Below we will outline the four sets of rules that we compete by. We believe that freestyle is the most inclusive. We begin with the forms that place the greatest emphasis on the weaponry and progress along a brutal curve toward forms that place progressively more emphasis on the fighter’s abilities. For our Agonistics meets we use a round-robin format with seeded fighters. When #2 seed takes on #1 seed he gets his choice of format. This is a way to level the playing field and test the more experienced fighters where they are weak.

We use a 5-point split scoring system, with the fighters awarding each other the split after the round has been completed. We don’t use judges. What really matters is what your opponent thinks of your performance.

There is one harsh reality here. When you introduce steel blunts into the equation it doesn’t make much difference what format you fight with.

### Heavy Fencing

These affairs tend to be long range bouts and are generally the least entertaining to watch. This is dueling, and fighters engage in such bouts to gage their weapon-handling ability. These are simulated edged-weapon encounters that can be as real as you want them.

Choose a type of blunt knife that is combatable with your headgear. For simulating machete, khris, cutlass, broad-sword, saber or small sword duels chose sticks of an appropriate length and weight. Or go for it, and use steel blunts.

These bouts are decided on the best of 5 strokes. Simultaneous strokes are not counted. We call this a draw point. Two strokes are considered simultaneous if landed within a single beat. This does give a cut fighter an immediate chance to nullify his opponent's point with a half-beat counter. This is really a lot of fun. The fighters will walk away with each having a score ranging from 0-5.

All targets are open. There are no fouls. Wear a cup.

Only weaponry is to be used for contact. No clinching or striking is permitted. Disarms must be done using your weapons only.

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Illustration 13: Damien and James dueling with forestry machetes. MMA [Gladiatorial] bouts without sidearms tend to go down very much like a heavy fencing bout. These bouts tend to have a lot of tension and not much action and end quickly on a single beat. This one ended on a disarming stroke that sliced between Damien's weapon and glove.



## **FMA**

This is our attempt to fully accommodate FMA sport arnis competitors.

## **Weapons**

Matched sticks are to be used.

Daggers are to be represented by 1-inch thick sticks that cannot penetrate WEKAF masks.

## **Fouls**

Any use of the hand or body other than to check forward progress or instantaneously disarm are prohibited. No grabbing or clinching is permitted.

Strikes to the neck, spine, back-of-head, groin, and below the knee are not permitted.

Thrusts with the stick are not permitted.

Thrusts with the dagger must be supinated or pronated, not thumb-up from the low-line. Thumb-up stabs tend to glance off of breast-bone and sink into the throat, especially with WEKAF gear.

## **Duration**

A single two-minute round constitutes one bout. This facilitates round-robin and elimination tournaments without placing too much emphasis on conditioning. Nobody wants to watch a boxer win a weapon tournament just because he has better cardio.

## **Incidentals**

In case of a disarm the weapon is returned and the bout is restarted.

A fighter who takes a knee, turns or retreats out of an un-rope ring is asked if he wishes to continue before the bout is resumed.

## **Scoring**

We recommend that the fighters agree on a point split. If they cannot come to a conclusion a moderator should be elected by the fighters. In the case of a tournament, if the fighters cannot agree even on this they should submit to a vote by the other fighters. Once Don looked at James after being stabbed in the face-cage in front of 3 judges and a ref. he said, "I don't think they saw that. You better do it again."

That is the attitude we need to bring to weapon combat.

Disarms and pauses are not considered when determining the base score.

A draw is scored at 2.5 points each.

A win loss is scored 3/2 with adjustments to follow.

The score is adjusted by 1 point for each disarm or pause, 5/0 being the top score.

If a fighter cannot complete the bout the score is 5/0.

In the case of a stoppage due to foul the 5/0 is awarded to the disabled fighter.



Illustration 14: Gus Gus [right] and Don using the checking hand during their action-packed bout in 2006.

## Free-Style

Freestyle fights are the most entertaining format for spectators.

This is based on our FMA rules, and the weaponry and duration differs slightly from our Agonistics test at the end of this chapter. The outline below only cites the exceptions to FMA.

## Weapons

Add shield: the smaller lighter shields will accommodate FMA people more readily.

Agonistics fighters might want to use steel blunts instead of wood blunts for daggers.

### **Fouls**

A 10-second clinch is permitted. If both fighters go to the ground the bout is restarted.

If a single fighter goes down he must fight his way to his feet. There is no restart. Watch out for those Judo and Greco guys!

Thrusts with the stick are permitted according to the guidelines for wooden daggers.

### **Duration**

A freestyle fight consists of a single 3-minute sudden-death round. A disarm or submission results in an immediate 5/0 conclusion.

### **Incidentals**

A turned or disarmed fighter may be beaten but not fouled; no spinal shots, etc.

### **Scoring**

5/0 = disarm or stoppage

4/1 = dominant win

3/2 = marginal win

2.5/2.5 = draw

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Illustration 15: Rico and Jeff Realo in their vicious freestyle bout in 2006.

## MMA

This is our attempt to accommodate Jeet Kune Do and MMA practitioners. To keep people from gaming their gear and achieving unrealistic results we recommend stopping the fight for gear-failure. Below are two good examples of “gear-gaming”.

1. A stick-fighter puts on extremely heavy gloves and uses them as shields to crash into the grapple. He then takes off his gloves in the clinch so that he can submit his opponent. This is wrong. If the grappler needs gloves to get inside, then he should be forced to grapple with the gloves once he gets there to simulate hand injuries.
2. A fighter chooses a WEKAF headpiece and crashes in, taking head hits. The fighter that gets grabbed in this situation would have gouging options. If he is able to remove the opponent's head-gear by hand this could simulate a successful gouge, and could at least balance out the fact that fighters with head-pieces can ignore head hits.

Conclusion: Loss of gear in an MMA bout should equal bout loss. This will encourage less gear and should cancel or counterbalance gear-gaming.

## **Weapons**

Stick, stick & shield, double-stick, stick & knife and knife. The knives should be steel.

## **Fouls**

Clinching is not a foul. Unlimited grappling is permitted.

All targets are open for the knife but are still restricted with the stick.

Do not drop fighters on their head when throwing.

## **Duration**

An MMA weapon fight is scheduled for 1 5-minute round. The fight continues despite the loss of a weapon and might be ended by submission or any single kill stroke with a blade, or loss of headgear.

## **Incidentals**

Lost pads may not be replaced. Lost glove or headgear causes bout-loss.

## **Scoring**

5/0 = kill, submission or loss of headgear/glove

4/1 = dominant win

3/2 = marginal win

2.5 = draw

Competition Notes: Bout length of one round has been selected as most stick fights take place in a meet or tournament setting. Bouts scheduled to go on prize-fighting cards should be 1 round amateur; 2 rounds pro-am; 3 rounds pro.

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Illustration 16: Rico [top] and Damien in an MMA stick bout in 2006.



Illustration 17: James [right] against Aaron in MMA stick, who soon launched him over Damien [bottom right with red kick-shield] with a fully extended sidekick. James flew 12 feet in the horizontal and was ruled KO'd by the referees, who had to dig him out of a pile of folding chairs.

In 35 bouts against Aaron James is 1-34.

Aaron won 19 of 20 stick-fencing bouts, mostly by 4-1 margins.

Aaron won 10 of 10 untimed submission bouts: 8 by disarm; 2 by submission on the floor.

Aaron won 3 of 3 freestyle bouts: 1 by disarm; 2 by decision.

Aaron won 2 of 2 MMA bouts: 1 by disarm/submission; 1 by KO.

As of 2/12/11 James has had 620 recorded bouts: 415 wins; 154 losses; 51 draws. In those 154 losses James has lost his stick 16 times: 10 to Aaron; 3 to Damien; 1 to David Lumsden; 1 to Keith Hardesty; 1 to Adam Swinder.

## **The Seeded Challenge**

The model below is an attempt to infuse ancient European dueling ethics into the weapon-fighting equation. In the case of a round-robin tournament this helps level the field, which is desirable with a sport that is so young and obscure that there are not enough people for divisions. In the case of meets between teams this system can be handled by a match-maker or manager from each team. This would permit a non-combatant member of each team to actually have an impact on the combat, in much the same way as the coach of a ball team. This has not been tried, but should make for a lot of fun.

## **Sample Seeding Situation**

Let us say that Corey [22-years-old, 6'4", 340 lbs] is seeded ahead of Brett [16-years-old, 5'4", 113 lbs] because he is an adult, and Brett is a minor.

## **Challenge Terms**

When their bout comes up Brett decides on heavy fencing rules in order to take away Corey's strength advantage.

## **Weapon Terms**

Now Corey, with his vast target area, has been placed at a huge disadvantage by the "little devil". The leveling factor is that Corey may now choose the weaponry. He has a choice between knife, knife & shield, double-knife, sword, sword & shield. Corey picks sword and shield to try to take advantage of his reach and strength.

## Weapons

Brett and Corey agree to fight with steel. The duel is on.

Below is the parameters and testing format for Modern Agonistics practitioners. Two fighters may test themselves simultaneously. A single fighter might want to utilize various opponents to test himself over the course of numerous sessions.

### Modern Agonistics Armed Combat Test

To qualify for an agonistics rank a fighter must fight all 20 bouts against ranked fighter[s], completed in the fighter's own time and preferred order. Each bout earns 0-5 points. A perfect score is 100. There are 4 5-bout categories: heavy fencing; Filipino martial arts; Free-style weaponry; MMA weaponry

#### Heavy Fencing [steel knife, stick-as-sword]

Best of 5 clean strokes [a counter within 1 beat results in a draw-point]

No clinching, striking or ground-fighting

Knife .....	_____	
Knife & shield .....	_____	
Double knife .....	_____	
Sword .....	_____	
Sword & shield .....	_____	TOTAL _____

#### Filipino Martial Arts [stick, steel knife]

2-minutes, 5-point-split, restart after disarms, no clinching, striking or ground-fighting 5-0 stoppage, 4-1 dominant, 3-2 marginal, 2.5-2.5 draw

Stick .....	_____	
Stick .....	_____	
Stick .....	_____	
Double-stick .....	_____	
Stick & knife .....	_____	TOTAL _____

#### Freestyle Weaponry [stick, steel knife]

3-minutes, 5-point-split, disarm ends bout, no striking or ground-fighting

5-0 stoppage or disarm, 4-1 dominant, 3-2 marginal, 2.5-2.5 draw

Stick .....	_____	
Stick .....	_____	
Stick & shield .....	_____	
Double-stick .....	_____	
Stick & knife [untimed, best of five kills] .....	_____	TOTAL _____

#### MMA Weaponry [stick, steel knife]

Stick, 5 minutes: 5-0 stoppage, 4-1 dominant, 3-2 marginal, 2.5-2.5 draw

Blade, pure submission: 5-0 clean kill or stoppage, 4-1 kill/wound, 3-2 kill/maim, 2.5-2.5 kill/kill

Anything goes, gear failure = stoppage

Stick .....	_____
Stick & shield .....	_____
Double-stick .....	_____



Stick & knife .....  
Knife ..... TOTAL \_\_\_\_

Fighter \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_ Start \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Finish \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Opponent \_\_\_\_\_ Witness \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 6: GEAR

*"The surprising thing about leather armor is its reactive quality against blunt weapons."*

*- Robert Geyer, February 2006*

This chapter will be divided into 4 sub-sections:

1. Headgear
2. Handgear
3. Pads
4. Armor

### **Gear Ethics**

Chuck and I decided early on that each of us would wear the gear we were comfortable fighting in. It is obvious with protective gear that each increase in protection will usually cause a corresponding decrease in mobility and dexterity. With best made gear this is not necessarily true. With the worst gear it is terribly true. When it comes to competitions organized or sanctioned by a third party there will have to be uniformed gear to a certain extent.

Our goal is to get as real as we can without being maimed, crippled or killed. What follows is nothing more than what we have learned over the past 12 years.

### **Headgear**

There are 6 categories of headgear that we have tried. We have not experimented with kendo masks and have yet to use fencing masks, though fencing masks will be used in Evolution 10.

1. Motorcycle & football helmets have been modified for this activity, but not successfully,

because of the lack of ports for anchoring face wiring and neck guards.

2. Lacrosse helmets have been successfully modified, although there are problems with enclosing the face cage. Another weakness is the thin back-of-head protection.
3. Scrap-built pieces have been made by James and medieval groups such as Markland. However, these are labor intensive and generally too heavy and vision restrictive for stick-fighting.
4. Foam karate headgear has been modified but has failed to protect the skull from power shots unless encased, which pushes it into the scrap-built category as a helmet liner.
5. WEKAF headgear is good for stick-fencing and FMA competition, is dangerous for freestyle use, and is inadequate [mainly because it does not stay on] for MMA use. The main reason why we shy away from WEKAF and Kendo pieces are that blades will slide right through the face cage. These pieces are only good for stick. They do offer excellent side-of-head protection. The weaknesses are poor back-of-head protection, poor throat protection, poor thrust protection, and poor stability. The main problems are the closure system and the lack of cross-bars on the face cage. These pieces are however easy to maintain.
6. Hockey helmets are perfect for modification into steel fencing helmets, as the face-cage is easily enclosed and there are plenty of ports for anchoring blade-catchers and neck-guards. The weakness of the hockey helmet is poor ear protection, which should be rectified using leather. Finished leather is absolutely the best material for constructing neck-guards. Throat guards must be double hung. James has constructed 16 such helmets. The shell cost between \$40 and \$120. The leather for the neck-guard can range up to \$300 [it's your neck] and the wiring takes 12 to 14 hours per face cage. Once you have a good face cage it can be moved from shell to shell. This piece is face-heavy. Binocular vision is poorer than with the WEKAF piece, but the periphery vision is better.

Everyone from white-water rafters and Professional Bull Riders have come to the same conclusion that we have, that the hockey helmet is the best and most versatile head-piece out there. Of the many brands available Bauer is the best for combat modification.

## **General Notes on Head-pieces**

Head-pieces either come off in the clinch or, if they are the kind that stay on, make a fighter prone to neck-cranks. Lacrosse helmets even permit your opponent to choke you with the bottom of the cage.

WEKAF pieces tend to break sticks. Agonistics pieces tend to shred the ends of sticks.

## Helmet Gallery



Illustration 18: A fully-enclosed, triple-wired hockey helmet with double hung neck-guards.





Illustration 19: A triple-wired hockey helmet with laced neck-guard with under-hung throat guard.

(continued on next page)



Illustration 20: [Back] Modified hockey helmet with hemp blade-catcher designed for stick & blade. [Front] WEKAF mask. Essentially a kendo mask on built-up boxing head-gear. The soft slippery neck-guard offers a lot of deflection but cones above the breast bone todmi sticks t the pit of the throat. The leather areas are superb, cage and soft areas marginal.

(continued on next page)





Illustration 21: A hockey helmet modified for machete dueling. The wiring is looser, only being single and double, but is of painted iron wire rather than aluminum. Note the leather ear piece and the under-hung neck-guard. The crest is made from a feather-duster with a twisted aluminum wire core. The chain blade-catchers are laced to ventilation ports. This piece is hot and heavy.

(continued on next page)



Illustration 22: The same helmet from the previous picture, from afar.

(continued on next page)





Illustration 23: A steel helmet with double-hung neck-guards. The top is plated with glued nickels held in place with electrical tape. Made from our first Bauer, which had cracked after 6 years of action.



Illustration 24: Another steel helmet, featuring aspal guard made from a baseball catcher's instep guard.



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Illustration 25: A marginally-wired helmet, later upgraded.

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Illustration 26: The same helmet from the previous picture, rebuilt/upgraded.





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Illustration 27: Double-woven light wire. It was found that this had to be upgraded to a triple-strand. This is adequate against stick slashes but not thrusts.

(continued on next page)





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Illustration 28: Close-up of a well-maintained WEKAF helmet. The bar just over the fighter's left eye will eventually bend from repeated forehands, making a u-gap that will admit even thick sticks that are thrust with a pronated right hand. A Doce Pares #9 or Bais Tres Manos #10. This particular piece has a better neck-guard than [Illustration 20], though the throat guard will still cone.

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Illustration 29: A back-view of a WEKAF piece. The closure is very convenient. But, larger heads will open an unprotected seam next to the steel-loops, and the helmet will rotate on smaller heads.



Illustration 30: Rico [left] was only able to complete this event because he was put into an Agonistics helmet. His head had been ripped open with a butt-stroke when his WEKAF piece came off against Leonard. The hockey helmet with do-rag underneath actually compressed the injury and stopped the bleeding.

Note: In the background is a crucifix gladiatorial post or palus, made with pine, rattan, hemp and electrical tape.



## Handgear

Below we will review all of the various types of handgear that we have used for sparring and competition. Only a few types, will, however, be recommended. Handgear is the biggest headache in the weaponry game because it is the one area in which the tradeoff between protection and performance is so extreme and immediate.

James has competed with every type of handgear. He is an expert at having his hand broken: with two breaks to the right thumb [one from a broken]; five breaks to the right forefinger; and a break to the left pinky. He has also had two severe wrist sprains fighting with blunt knives.

## Under-gearing

Some of the lighter types of hand-gear require sensible fighters to layer their hand-protection. Below are the methods we have tried.

1. Boxing wraps are recommended if you have a loose or soft glove and are fighting with steel or hardwood. The wrap is different than with boxing. You want to keep the palm open and double-wrap the thumb.
2. Leather hand-straps for the base of the thumb and wrist can be used on an injured hand or when dueling with steel or hardwood.
3. Batting gloves are an ideal accessory for the MMA or WEKAF glove. Batting gloves can be used by themselves if you are a lot better than your opponent.
4. Welding gloves are good for holding a shield, as they have little bulk and offer better fingertip protection than most other gloves. Have been tried for steel knife—once.
5. Electrical tape and adhesive tape can be used to tape gauze or makeup removal pads over fractured or bruised bones. Tape alone is a good idea to go under any glove that you know is not going to protect your hand to compress and limit fractures.

## Gloves

Gloves are rated in 3 categories: protection; handling [mostly wrist mobility]; and grip [this includes keeping your stick and taking his] and their total value between 0-15. The ratings are 0 = nothing; 1 = terrible; 2 = poor; 3 = fair; 4 = good; 5 = excellent/total. They are listed below in the order in which we experimented with them, accompanied by a brief summary.

1. Kenpo gloves: P-2/H-1/G-1/T-2 Say goodbye to the fingertips.

2. Foam karate hand-pads: P-1/H-3/G-2/T-6 Use only with batting gloves.
3. MMA gloves: P-1/H-2/G-2/T-5 Say goodbye to the thumbs.
4. Boxing gloves: P-5/H-0/G-0/T-5 Don't even bother picking up the stick.
5. Leather hockey gloves: P-5/H-1/G-1/T-7 Some people like these for sparring.
6. Canvas hockey gloves: P-5/H-2/G-2/T-9 Good for sparring.
7. Heavy lacrosse gloves: P-4/H-3/G-2/T-9 Pictured with helmet #7. Good for steel.
8. Medium lacrosse glove: P-3/H-4/G-2/T-9 Cover with electrical tape for steel duels.
9. Light lacrosse glove [warrior brand]: P-2/H-4/G-3/T-9 A good knife or shield glove.
10. Mail & plate gauntlets: P-2/H-5/G-4/T-11 They do not hold up. Useless against sticks.
11. WEKAF glove: P-3/H-5/G-4/T-12 Without an under-glove sweating will cause problems.
12. WEKAF over batting glove: P-3/H-5/G-5/T-13 The best option for competition.
13. Easton hockey gloves: P-5/H-4/G-3/T-12 A good, good glove. The best sparring option.

## Glove Gallery



Illustration 31: Left wears leather hockey & right wears medium lacrosse. The fighter on deck [far left] wears batting gloves, with WEKAF gloves [mittens really] at his feet.





Illustration 32: Left wears light lacrosse with under-gauze. Right wears WEKAF with fingerless batting glove.

Note: Hockey gloves [all of them] are the only type that offer total thumb protection.

## Pads

Let's make this simple. Huge guys and evil unhittable wizards don't need pads. The only thing that an adult man needs to pad is knee and elbow. The only pads that you should consider are pads for roller-blading and skating. Retain the plastic cups for steel bouts. Take the cups off for stick-fighting because they offer zero additional protection against sticks and make you look like you are afraid to get hurt.

Children, women, injured fighters and over-the-hill fighters have a vast array of hockey, baseball and lacrosse gear to choose from. For steel bouts we do recommend solid shin guards. Gladiators wore them for a reason.

Warning: All of this protective gear really ends up stinking and is a pain to haul around.

## Armor

Whatever you buy is not going to be functional. You will have to make or modify it. A lorica

style suit made by Robert Geyer is pictured below, made from belts, rivets and rawhide.



Illustration 33: Note the weapon is a wooden blunt. The shield is made from a bread-rack under laced twine, with a wiffle-ball bat as a handle. The shins are hockey. The hands are lacrosse. The elbows are for street skating.



## Chapter 7: STICKS

“[I submit] to rods and toils unmeasured.”

- from an ancient fighter's oath

Below we will review the types of sticks that Agonistics practitioners have fought with. The basic equation is this: most woods are going to break bones on a decent hit, are not very durable themselves, and don't inflict a lot of pain to soft tissues. Stick-fights with hard wood are boring—and then someone goes to the hospital. Sparring with hardwoods in preparation for steel bouts is useful.

The problem with most wooden sticks and weapons is that they are machined from large pieces of woods. Whenever possible you want something made from the entire trunk of a smaller plant. This will be more flexible: offering pain; durability; safety against broken bones; and the feel of a real flexing piece of steel.

**Ironwood** is expensive, will break your bones, crack your helmet and shatter on impact with other such sticks. Keep it by the front door.

**Ash** is good for making short blunts. It is too hard but not ridiculously so. It will dent up for a long period before it starts to splinter off. The ancient Greeks used this for their spear shafts.

**Red oak** is the most commonly used boken material and is junk. It will chunk off and cannot be used for heavy contact unless twined and taped over—and then it is really dangerous.

**White oak** behaves much like ash, is not as pretty, and is cheaper. The Japanese make their premium bokens, naganatas, etc. from white oak.

**Hickory** is white oak on steroids and is preferred for blunts that are just to be used for contact drills and not combat.

**Pine** is what the Aztecs used for their stick-fighting, and their style revolved around breaking legs. This stuff is cheap and will not hold up. It is good for blunt daggers, short composite blunts, and wrapping in hemp for training posts. As a baton pine won't even hold up on a heavy bag. You can see the hard grain and soft pulp clearly in a piece of pine. Soak it in oil for defense.

**PVC**, or our modern synthetic stick, inflicts massive amounts of pain and breaks bones easily. It will also shatter. Only use PVC as a base for short blunts and training apparatus.

**Light plastic tubing**, and all such safety sticks made from this material will break, flex too much to permit meaningful thrusting, and are over-priced, especially when you consider that they will soon snap.

**Bamboo** is a grass, and is used to construct shinai, or kendo sticks. The kendo stick is an ingenious training device and good for its purpose. Mixed with other woods and weapons the shinai will splinter and this could result in a long sliver of this really sharp stuff penetrating your face cage. For mixed weapon sparring you have to twine and tape it, which turns it into a vicious shaped war-club that will still break 8 inches from the tip. The only use we have found for these was cutting them down and twining them up and counterbalancing them to represent European swords like the spatha. Whole pieces of bamboo are hollow and do not hold up.

**Wax-wood** is available as a whole tapering sapling, is hard, durable and flexible. You can take one of these Chinese fighting staffs and cut it into two wasters. Use the heavy end and the thin tips as a claymore and cross piece, and the center as a broadsword. Twine them up and put plastic golf balls on the end for safety tips—talk about sting! Since it is flexible and tapering wax-wood makes good shafts for pole arms and blunt daggers. To make matching sets of weapons you need to work from matching staves. You can get some good half-inch tapering to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch fighting sticks out of two matched staves. Because of the extreme taper wax-wood is not recommended for spear shafts.

**Rattan** is not a wood but a vine. It is a whole fibrous plant that will be denser when younger. Generally speaking the thicker pieces are less dense, but not always so. Rattan does not break, it frays. It is inherently safe. It flexes, therefore inflicting much pain to soft tissue and saving the major bones from breaking, cutting when thin for blade simulations, and serving as a durable training tool. Although it will not break you up like oak, it will break oak up.

There is a wide variety of rattan arnis sticks available in the U.S. in lengths from 26" to 31", with 28" being the normal length. If you go under a half inch in diameter you have a nasty whip that is great for use in heavy fencing as a blunt to represent a sword. If you go over an inch and it is a dense piece, then you have a bone breaker. We recommend  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick 28 inch long rods for competition. For stick and dagger we like 26 inch rods. Sticks under a half inch may penetrate WEKAF cages on a thrust.

When selecting your rattan look down on the end to determine the density. The more little gaps you see between fibers the softer and less durable it will be. You want a hard piece of rattan for drills and sparring. Below are some features to look for.

**Decorative burn marks** are often used to dress up poor quality sticks. Look closely at these. If they are thick and burnt they are usually junk. Some of the thin "lamiscas" are real nice.

**Segmentation marks** indicate that the stick is either un-finished or partially finished. Look for evidence of sanding. Sticks with scab-like growth segments that taper toward one end are whole plants and should last if dense. The hardest sticks are often those with clearly sanded heavy ends

and segmentation marks that have been refined to be a uniform thickness. A 1-inch thick rod of this type is a heavy hitting stick.

**Carved grips** are usually only put on dense, burnt and glazed 28 inch sticks. Only one end is designated for striking, so they wear more quickly than other dense sticks. We prefer these for stick-as-blade and stick & shield competition. When they start to fray and require taping you can twine them up to make really authentic blunts with a lot of flexion.

**Glazed** sticks are denser, will last longer, and are preferred by many fighters.

## Tapping

Tiny pieces of rattan can break off from the growth segments and ends of the sticks, posing a danger to the eyes. So, for sparring and competition, three turns of electrical [not duct] tape is recommended. Once a stick starts to fray around the sweet spot it can be lightly taped and hold for a while. Once the stick has frayed to the point where it must be heavily taped, it should not be used for competition. It is not just a stick any longer, but a dangerous composite weapon, which is still good for drilling, heavy fencing as a blunt blade, post and bag work, and controlled sparring, but not for FMA, Freestyle or MMA competition. Light taping is defined as 2-3 turns of isolated rings no more than 2 strips wide. Continuous diagonal or overlapping tape jobs are defined as “heavy”.

## Chapter 8: WOODEN BLUNTS

The English term for this is a waster. The Japanese call it a boken. The Romans just called it a rudius “rod for fighting”. Below we will describe in step-by-step fashion how to make three types of durable wooden blunts. We already discussed how claymores, dirks, broadswords, and for that matter rapiers, may be constructed from a piece of wax-wood. The specific techniques described below can be applied to convert your wax-wood staff into such functional wasters.

Note: When you start adding long weapons and shields to your arsenal you need to put on some shin-guards. Shin bone breaks are rare but can be catastrophic, sometimes resulting in amputation or death. The medical history for this is found mostly among soccer players. Historically speaking, as many as 60% of excavated casualties from late medieval battlefields [the age of the long arms] had cleaved legs.



We recommend staying with the short weapons outlined below for all-out sparring. The longer ones should be used in controlled sparring and possibly heavy fencing competition. Going continuous full-contact with long weapons is both dangerous and anachronistic.

## **Blunt Machetes**

The modern word machete is derived from the Latin machaera, which was derived from the Greek makhaira, which meant cleaver. Therefore a dimachaerius was a type of gladiator that fought with “double-cleavers”. This type of short, broad, single-edged blade was a common sidearm in the ancient world, when steel was not as good as it is now. Gladiators, although named after the gladius or sword used by the Roman military, usually fought with a variety of obsolete weapons formerly used by those tribes that Rome had conquered. This would be analogous to modern American gladiators being trained to do combat against each other with the surplus and even reconstructed weaponry of the German, Italian and Japanese soldiers of World War II.

For this reason we duel with machetes when reconstructing gladiatorial combat and therefore train and spar with blunt machetes in practice. It is important that your wooden blunts are heavy, as this helps develop your beat, shield stability and footwork. Forcing the hands to work in slow motion puts a premium on footwork, which people using very handy weapons tend to overlook. Footwork though, constitutes fully one third of the basic gladiatorial bio-mechanics. The other two thirds are shield-work and weapon-work. One might say that footwork is the most important of these. No matter how good you are, if you stand in one place and your opponent moves around, you will likely be struck. Also, a heavy training weapon will help you develop strength over your full range of motion, in-case you ever get caught in a bind at an unusual distance.

We are covering the most dangerous piece first because it is easiest to modify, and most fighters are short on patience when it come to craft work.

## **The Modified Wakisashi**

We are not going to fully modify this to be durable, because we would rather you be durable than it. So we will not twine or rubberize it. Spar with this item with shields only, after you have used the shorter heavier model. This will break on your partner’s shield—if he has a good one—or when beating his weapon. The brittle quality of this weapon puts you in the position of the real ancient gladiator who did not have a flawless piece of highly crafted spring steel in his hands. Sparring with this weapon should be undertaken in the spirit of working around your partners

shield and weapon, not clubbing your way through.

## **Components**

1. A red oak wakisashi boken
2. A heavy work glove
3. A roll of duct tape.
4. A roll of electrical tape

This is simple. Cut the thumb off of the right handed glove and use it as a safety tip for the boken. Wind the electrical tape over the cloth part and leave the leather tip exposed. Wind the tape down to the hand guard. Use half of your duct tape to build up the front of the plastic guard otherwise it is gone in your first session. Use the other half of the duct tape to build up the pommel for a counterbalance. The uncut left handed glove should be retained for holding your shield. Finding gloves that work with shields is difficult, and these suede finger-tipped work gloves are about the best solution.

## **The Plunger Design**

1. 2 dollar-store toilet plungers
2. A roll of jute twine
3. A roll of duct tape
4. Two rolls of electrical tape

Keep the cups screwed onto the dowels. Cut the cups off around the hard rubber screw plug. Reverse the dowels and stack them, using half your duct tape to fix them in place. The screw plugs will serve as your pommel and safety point. Stack the cups and slide them down to within 5 or 6 inches of the pommel, and fix them in place with the rest of your duct tape. Twine the blade portion from behind the point plug to the base of the handguard with a lot of tension, compacting it as you go until you have a tight weave. Then twine it diagonally from the point to the guard, with excess twine used to build up the front of the guard. Cover the entire thing in tightly wound diagonally overlapping electrical tape. This is a tough training tool. Properly constructed it will last 2 years if you spar weekly.

## **The Blunt Sword**

1. Carved arnis stick that is starting to fray.
2. Twine or soft clothesline
3. Two rolls of electrical tape
4. A small cardboard disc with a hole in the center.

Tightly twine and tape an old carved arnis stick. Soft nylon clothesline also works. Use twine to build up a pommel. A cardboard disc can be used for the backstop of the hand guard, with twine and tape used to affix this and taper it down to the stick. This is simple but does take some time to twine something of this length. This thing will last forever and is good for post work. This is really just a mini training post. Rattan, overwrapped with tightly wound soft twine or rope, and then taped over with tightly wound electrical tape is almost unbreakable.

## Chapter 9: STEEL BLUNTS



Illustration 34

From right to left:

1. A cheap standard machete used as an ancient horseman's makhaera
2. A bolo machete used as a footman's makhaera
3. A sugarcane machete used as a sica [Thracian cutlass]
4. A forestry machete modified to serve as a gladius [Spanish sword]
5. A double-edged machete used as a Greek xiphos [reaper]
6. A kukri machete used as a Greek kopis [chopper] or Latin falcata



The 3 on the left run about \$5. The 3 on the right run about \$20.  
WTF IS GOING ON IN HERE ????



Illustration 35: Clip-pointed 12 inch machetes used as knives.

We have used a dozen varieties of machetes for dueling. Grind off the point and then grind the edge back to the belly of the blade. These will cut you when they hit bone. They are also good for cutting through any soft gloves and fracturing your fingers. If one gets nicked it will rip you open. All the cuts are superficial. Keep honing oil, a file, and a stone on hand and clean them up.

### **The Edge-on Reality Check**

Every blade art we have studied specifies that one parries or beats with the flat or back of the blade. This is very astute blade-care. The problem with this is, if your opponent is as fast or [horror] faster than you, you will be forced to beat his blade with your edge, resulting in some terrible nicks. The fact is your weapon will handle more quickly edge-on, as it is more ergonomic and you do at least 50% [probably a lot more] of your training edge-on. This is probably why European blades were usually double-edged.





Illustration 36: The dreaded Ontario machete-knives.

Dueling with steel blunts should not be done with cavemen. Do it with a technical fighter.

## Chapter 10: SHIELDS

*"Return with your shield or upon it."*

*- A Spartan mother to her son*

Those inclined to build shields will be very few, and, if so inclined, will need little instruction from us. Robert and Sam have each built two shields, and modified most of our Museum Replicas shields. James built 21 shields and gave most of those away. We have used for frames: pie pans; plastic plates, pizza pans; trash can lids; dish sleds; karate kick shields; bread racks; plywood; woks;

and range-top burner plates.

Shields range in size from 7 to 50 inches, and come in two basic designs: the hand-held shield; and the arm-strap shield. The primary problem with constructing or modifying any shield is a functional grip and/or arm-strapping arrangement. Do not purchase a shield out of a catalog unless you can see the back side of it. The face is less important.



Illustration 37: This functional pie-pan shield can actually be used, unlike most you will purchase.

(continued on next page)





Illustration 38: The dish-sled aspis. The best way to build an arm-strap shield is to build it around the arm of the fighter it is designed for. Both fighters are showing excellent form, with shield edge-on.



Illustration 39: The fighter on the right is using an un-modified Museum Replicas buckler and is unable to hold it correctly. The fighter on the left is using the same shield modified to have a functional grip, and is free to press the action with the edge of the shield, which is even more dangerous than the machetes they are fighting with.

## **A Brief History of Shield Purchases and modifications**

1. Four Museum Replicas bucklers, eventually modified with lock-washers and door handles. As is the handles will not admit a gloved hand, the boss will dent into an ungloved hand, and the washers do not hold. A good piece once modified. Will concuss heavily helmeted fighters.
2. One Museum Replicas arm-strap shield [See Chapter 1.] that was unusable without heavy arm padding. Once padded this was a wonderful piece.
3. One West German police surplus plastic riot shield. It handled fine, but James blew through it with a stick after about twenty power shots. Aaron would have ruined it with a single combination.
4. In 2010 Leroy and James bought a set of 9 inch steel shields from the Warrior Emporium on Light Street in Baltimore City. They are excellent, but are not stainless and must be oiled regularly. These are the only shields to date with functional grips.

Most warrior cultures embraced the shield during the age of muscle-powered weapons, with the notable exception of the Japanese, who glorified suicide. There is a corollary. Properly used the shield is a weapon of aggression. It is not to be hidden behind. The top two things to remember about fighting with shields are:

1. Using it to defend the low line will get you killed.
2. All shields cause a blind spot, equivalent to the area of static coverage it offers the user. Your opponent can use your shield's blind spot to stage and redirect his attacks. Maintaining discipline [keeping it high and edge-on or oblique—not face-first] is critical as is continuous footwork and moving the shield unpredictably.

Do yourself a favor and start with smaller shields and move up from there, learning how to manage the blind spot. Also, taking up boxing will do you a world of good when it comes to maintaining your guard. If you have any shield related questions contact James.



## Chapter 11: EXOTIC WEAPONRY



Illustration 40: Chain and knife against caestus and knife. James was unable to use the "Hell Boy hand" to close the distance. Damien is a master of flexible weapons.

### The Devil's Toy Box

We have constructed and fought with a number of experimental weapons including: 3 types of chain flail[always a crowd pleaser]; 3 types of pole flails, with the most deadly one having two slatted wiffle-balls filled with pennies and wrapped in twine and electrical tape for heads; a war-hammer made with a football for a head; 3 types of axes; 3 types of war clubs with heads made from pipe insulation, a tennis ball, and a turkey baster; a wooden sica; rattan quarter staffs; rattan spears; wax-wood claymores, broadswords, dirks and rapiers; an oak trident; a pine trident; a quadrant made from a coal fork; skewers made from aluminum rods; a caestus [gauntlet] made with heavy lacrosse gloves, tape, rope and wooden knobs for spikes; various chains; a 12 inch by 1 ¼ inch steel pipe; a net; a lasso; an oar-shaped sword made of coat-hanger wire and foam mat-padding; a pair of five foot wax-wood sticks; a sax made from laced wooden salad spoons [which really hurt]; and a pair of spathas made from cut down shinails.

Have fun, don't get crippled or killed, and keep us up to date.

## Chapter 12: THE SKILL SET



Illustration 41: John Bosch power hitting in 2008: a big #1 to a perfect chamber for a big #2.

### Terminology & Scope

Our terms are as generic as possible to facilitate cross-training and help spectators follow the action. This is not intended as an instructional manual but a reference

### Defining the Stick

1. Tip. For thrusting [mainly for position] and slashing through gaps in gear.
2. Sweet Spot 2 to 4 inches below the tip.
3. Shaft. Only used for defense.
4. Grip 2 to 4 inches from the butt.

5. Butt. Used for hooking and hammering.

### **Conditioning Exercises**

1. Fanning, with the stick held in the center
2. Rapping, fast, continuous vertical forehands using only the wrist
3. Forward figure-8
4. Reverse figure-8
5. Rolling guard
6. Roof block draws with double-stick from under arm
7. Sitting on the stick stretch.
8. The reverse-grip stretch, standing with a hand on either end.
9. Striking a post or bag, for speed, in combinations, for power, for precision. Mix it up.

### **Stroke Basics**

1. The stick moves before the hand, from the wrist. Do not present the hand.
2. Stroke through the target and return to guard or reverse guard.
3. Add elbow action for more power but be careful.
4. Add a pivot for even more power when practical.
5. Use gravity for more power and strike perpendicular to the target when practical.

### **Stick Strokes**

This 20-count target specific system is based on an FMA count taught to James by Aaron Seligson in 2008, and modified with the advice of Leroy Dinatale in 2010.

1. lateral forehand to the ear
2. lateral backhand to the ear
3. lateral forehand to the elbow/rib
4. lateral backhand to the elbow/rib
5. forehand stab to the gut
6. backhand stab to the gut
7. diagonal forehand to the knee
8. diagonal backhand to the knee
9. forehand stab to the chest



10. backhand stab to the chest
11. vertical forehand to the top of head
12. vertical backhand to the top of head
13. diagonal forehand to the temple
14. diagonal backhand to the temple
15. diagonal rising forehand to the chin
16. diagonal rising backhand to the chin
17. diagonal forehand butt-stroke to the collar-bone/neck
18. lateral backhand butt-stroke to ear/neck
19. diagonal forehand butt-stroke to the kidney or vertical to shoulder
20. vertical backhand butt-stroke to the solar-plexus



Illustration 42: A power-assist #2 backhand. Jeff got a disarm off of this, winning this, the second of his three bouts with Rico.





Illustration 43: A #12 with a high-step.

## Defenses

1. forehand check
2. backhand check
3. forehand beat
4. backhand beat
5. roof block
6. drawing block
7. reverse shift
8. double reverse shift
9. bind
10. forehand trap
11. forehand hip catch
12. backhand snatch
13. catch & twist
14. catch & snake
15. body check
16. elbow check
17. shoulder check
18. head check
19. snake clinch
20. fang



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2006

Illustration 44: A #13 catch & twist disarm.

(continued on next page)





Illustration 45: A forward shift in guard.



Illustration 46: A perfect inside check against a #1 with a forward triangle-strep.





Illustration 47: Advancing under a rising roof-block with a forward shift against a #13 with a forward shift into high-step.

## Steps

1. Reverse shift
2. Forward shift
3. Step and drag
4. Shuffle step
5. Outside forward triangle step
6. Inside forward triangle step
7. Outside reverse triangle step
8. Inside reverse triangle step
9. Outside pivot
10. Inside pivot
11. Outside C-step
12. Inside C-step
13. High step
14. Lunge

(continued on next page)



Illustration 48: Twerp Hunting by Rico Arus. *Give him an opening while you advance. Yes, he took the bait!*



Illustration 49: *His power shot has now fixed his position, and your salsa dancing enables you to avoid the forehand. Crush him! His girlfriend is cheering you on! Crush him!*





Illustration 50: *Punish him for challenging you. Yes, right on the elbow bone! Now let him run a little so that you can finish him off in front of the young chicks behind you.*



Illustration 51: *You can smell the fear. He can run, but he can't hide. Beat him down bro!*





Illustration 52: The empty hand check by Charles.

Check the head to stall an advance. Wow, someone actually touched Aaron!

(continued on next page)



Illustration 53: Roof-block the forhand, then check the stick hand and counter with your own #13 forhand or even a #17 or #19 butt stroke. This is some good defensive work.

Fight on...