

In A Nutshell

Official Newsletter
of the Incipient Canton
Gleann nam Feòrag Dubh

October, AS XXXIX
Volume 1, No. 9
Marfial Issue



Enter

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Web Site

Meeting minutes and other Canton information:

<http://www.feoragdubh.eastkingdom.org/index.php>

Newsgroups

Canton discussion list:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dubhfeorag/>

Canton announcements:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/dubhfeorag-announce/>

Submissions

Submission guidelines:

<http://www.feoragdubh.eastkingdom.org/Nutshell.php>

Or contact the Chronicler at:

canton_chronicler@yahoo.com

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Populace Missives

From the Chronicler

Greetings unto all this cool season.

With the arrival of October comes the close of my first year as Chronicler for the Canton, and this is an issue I've much enjoyed putting together.

This month's issue focuses on martial activities. Lord Griffith Davion of the Argent Tyger shares his poem about a duel, which he presented for the Baronial rapier championship at Something Fishy This Way Comes in July. Don Ian Raven of Tadcaster has offered his notes from a course on lefty-righty rapier fighting, co-taught with Lord Geoffrey Gryffon at this year's East Kingdom Academy of Rapier. Don Duncan Kieran includes his article on defensive dagger use. To these I have added an article for newcomers to the arte of defence on remembering to use the off-hand in single rapier fighting. To all contributing gentles, my thanks.

I am seeking a deputy Chronicler. If you have good English writing skills and some knowledge of HTML and are interested, I look forward to hearing from you. My contact information is listed under Chronicler in the Officers listing.

Enjoy your autumn!

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Canton Meetings, Practices, and Workshops

Canton Meetings

Canton Business Meetings are held the first Monday of each month. The Canton welcomes members, friends, and visitors of any age to all meetings.

The next Canton meeting will take place at 7:30 pm, Monday, November 1st, 2004, at the home of Lady Eleanora the Tilemaker:

**114 Ferguson Avenue
Broomall, PA 19008
(610) 356-9176**

Directions:

Take your best route to 476 (the blue route).

Exit at Route 3 and go West on Route 3.

Once you have cleared the 476/Route3 interchange, take the 3rd right turn (the 1st street after the 1st light) and turn right onto Ferguson Avenue. (If you pass a Pathmark, you went the wrong direction on Route 3.)

The house is after the first stop sign, 6th house on the left.

Please bring:

Snacks (veggies and dip, cheese and crackers, fruit, etc.)

Datebook and/or notepad

Garb not required

Canton Practices

Middle Eastern Dance Classes are held from 7:30 to 9:30 pm, the third Friday of each month, at the home of Baroness Scheherazade Al-Zahira:

**3900 Ford Road, 5G
Philadelphia, PA 19131**

(215) 878-7721
allouyna20@aol.com

Directions:

**From Rt 95, take your best path to Rt 76W.
Go to City Line Ave, which is a left hand exit.
Go 4 lights and make a left on to Bellmonte, at the Mobile station.
Take the very next left, Ford Rd.
Go 3 blocks, 2 lights, and look for the high rise on the right.
You can park in the parking lot on the right, just before the high
rise, going thru the toll gate. There is no toll going in - take a token
from the bowl on the way out. Scheherazade is in apartment 5G.
You will need to tell the guard at the security desk you are there to
see her.**

Please bring:

**Sash or coinbelt (loaners available)
Garb not required; loose clothes or dance/exercise clothes
recommended**

**European Dance Practices will be held locally on the second
Monday of the month, beginning November 8th from 7pm-9pm, at
Indian Lane Elementary School:
309 S. Old Middletown Road
Media, PA 19063**

Directions:

**From Route 1 near the Granite Run Mall, take 352 South.
At the second traffic light, make the wide left onto Old Middletown
Road.
Go about one-quarter mile, the school will be on the left.
Practice is in the cafeteria, to the right from the front doors.**

**For more information, contact
Lady Suba al-Hadid Jamilia al-Bhakailia
mka Penni Bachelor
571 Mount Alverno Road
Media, PA 19063
Home: (610) 565-6661 (until 9pm)
Cell: (610) 209-2101 (9am-9pm)
jamilia@pennib.net**

**Fencing Practices will be held locally on Tuesday nights, beginning
November 9th, from 7:30-10:00 pm, at Indian Lane Elementary**

**School:
309 S. Old Middletown Road
Media, PA 19063**

Practice will not be held on the following dates:

**Nov 23 (Thanksgiving break)
Dec 28 (Christmas break)
June 28 (School is out)**

Directions:

**From Route 1 near the Granite Run Mall, take 352 South.
At the second traffic light, make the wide left onto Old Middletown
Road.**

**Go about one-quarter mile, the school will be on the left.
Practice is in the cafeteria, to the right from the front doors.**

**For practice on Thursday nights, 7:30-10:30 pm, visit the Bhakail
Baronial practice in Northeast Philadelphia. Details on the Bhakail
practice are available on the Tadcaster Militia Web site at
http://www.smidgeonink.com/tadcaster_militia/ (look under
Directions).**

For more information, contact the Marshal in Charge:

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Work: (215) 569-2300, ext. 27 (ask for Kaly)
canton_chronicler@yahoo.com**

**Or the Canton Marshal of Fence:
Lord Geoffrey Gryphon
mka Jefferson Stephens
Home: (610) 362-0208
Work: (215) 365-4007, ext. 18 (ask for Jefferson)
geoffreygryphon@yahoo.com**

**Please bring:
List-legal armor and weaponry (loaner gear may be available --
contact the Canton Marshal of Fence)
Plenty of water to drink
Garb not required**

Canton and Other Workshops

Embroidery Guild Workshops take place from 7:30 to 9:30 pm, the fourth Wednesday of each month. Guild members come from all over the region to meet, share ideas and research, and work on group projects.

The location of this meeting varies by month, so contact Baroness Scheherazade Al-Zahira of the Embroidery Guild for directions and other information:

Baroness Scheherazade Al-Zahira
(215) 878-7721
allouyna20@aol.com

Head of the Embroidery Guild: Lady Gisela Sabot

Please bring:

Sewing/embroidery projects, or other paraphenalia
Garb not required

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Event Announcements

Bhakail Yule Revel

Hosted by the Barony of Bhakail
December 11th, 2004
Mask and Wig Club
310 S. Quince St.
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Event Web site: <http://www.bhakail.eastkingdom.org/>

Site Opens: 11 am

Site Closes: 10 pm

The icy grip of winter may have a hold on the houses in old Bhakail, but in one inn the lights are burning and the sound of reveling spills out into the streets. You are heartily welcomed to join the Barony as we celebrate the season with yet another Bhakail Yule Revel!

Our site is the Mask and Wig Club in Center City, where from eleven in the morning until ten o'clock in the evening we will make merry with good friends, dancing, music and more. To sate your hunger, a sumptuous Elizabethan feast will be prepared by Master Huen Damebrigge of Wychwood, proprietor of godecookery.com. The Barony will also hold its annual competition to select the next Baronial champion of Arts and Sciences. Those interested in becoming Baronial Champion must enter at least three items in three different categories to be considered for Champion. 'Best overall piece', 'best novice piece', 'best children's piece', and 'populace favorite' will also be awarded.

The site is wet, but no alcohol may be brought onto the premises; a cash bar will be provided. A dayboard is included in the site fee; limited parking may be available on-street, and directions and price information for nearby paid lots is available on the event website.

Note for those attending PhilCon - the Yule site is approximately 5 easily-walkable blocks from the convention site. Join us for the

afternoon or for dinner!

Site Fees:

Adults \$10

13-17 \$9

3-12 \$5

0-2 free

Feast:

Adults \$8

12 and under \$6

Reservations deadline: 12/4/04

Send Reservations to:

Lady Damiana Almodóvar at the below address:

Joy Gomez-Farrow
18 W. Felton Ave.
Ridley Park, Pa. 19078-2024

Autocrat:

Lord Calogero Urso & Lord Christopher Jameson (mka Ron Smith
& Christopher Bogs)

215-386-5604

yule@bhakail.eastkingdom.org

Other Contact Information:

Cook:

Master Huen Damebrigge of Wychwood
(mka James Matterer)

masterhuen@godecookery.com

If interested in merchanting, please contact Lord Olrik van
Lubbeke (mka Eric Schaffer) at HerrOlrik@att.net. Merchant fee is
\$15.

Make Checks Payable to: SCA Inc., Barony of Bhakail

Directions:

Quince Street is a small street found between 11th and 12th streets
in Center City Philadelphia; the site is on Quince Street between
Spruce and Pine Streets. Quince St. is not suitable for traffic;
parking may be available on the surrounding major streets.

From I-95: Exit onto I-676 (Vine St. Expressway) West. Follow from

* below.

From I-76: Exit onto I-676 (Vine St. Expressway) East. Follow from
* below.

*Exit the expressway at the “PA-611/Broad St./Central Philadelphia” exit, and follow the signs to PA-611 (Broad St.) going south. Continue south on Broad St. and turn left (east) on Pine St. Quince St. is 2 ½ blocks east of Broad.

Public Transit:

The SEPTA Broad Street (Orange) line stops at Lombard and Broad; exit onto Lombard and walk 2 ½ blocks west to Quince, then approximately 2 blocks north to the site.

The SEPTA Market-Frankford (Blue, E1) line stops at 11th and Market; exit onto 11th and walk 4 blocks south to Spruce, ½ block west to Quince, and ½ block to site.

The PATCO Speedline from New Jersey stops at 12th and Locust; exit at the 12th-13th Street stop onto 12th and walk one block south to Spruce, ½ block west to Quince, and ½ block to site.

Numerous bus and trolley lines stop near the site as well; for more information visit the SEPTA website at www.septa.com .

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The Duel

by Lord Griffith Davion of the Argent Tyger

Two men draw steel, take fighting stance
And thus begin their deadly dance.
To those about they both stand still
For none can see this test of will.

Both men prod and poke and seek
To see where others guard is weak.
But in their minds all this takes place
The only motion wind through lace.

A game of chess with life on line,
The loser wins a box of pine.
Neither wish this gruesome fate
So both men stand and watch and wait.

Feint, thrust, lunge, redouble.
No, This would only bring me trouble.
For he would vault while retaking guard
And then hoist me up on his petard.

If he doth take his line just so
I'll parry hard my erstwhile foe
And if he were to then advance
I'd vault left and end this dance

And so it went for quite some time
This game of chess with life on line.
Waging war in mental state
While both men stand and watch and wait.

A wrist twitch here a small step there
To catch the other unaware
They try to draw each other in
To show their plan before they begin

**They test each others guard and stance
To find their steps in this dire dance
Neither wishes to commit
Until they're sure their blade will hit**

**This game of Chess with life on line
Draws to a close without a sign.
The game is played and now it's mate
While both men stand and watch and wait.**

**And then at once too fast to track
Both men move in an attack
All around see naught but steel
But both men know what they do feel**

**For it seems both blades struck true
And each has run the other through
Neither man will walk away
Both, will die upon this day**

**Both men's remains are taken clear
While two other men doth appear.
Two more have come to test their fate
Where both men did stand and watch and wait.**

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Off-hand Thoughts: Remembering the Other Hand in Rapier

by Lady Katrine Lyndesay

A year ago, a new fencer (even newer to this art and skill than I am) told me of his trouble with remembering to use his off-hand when fighting with a single epee. He had failed his first attempt at authorization the week before, in part because his off-hand remained raised but idle -- it was no help in his defense, and an easy target for his opponent.

Rapier authorizations are a confirmation to the marshals that the fencer is safe with steel and in his balance. They also require a show of basic skill, including offensive or defensive use of the off-hand. In the rules of the East Kingdom, a fencer using a single rapier is assumed to wear a chain-mail gauntlet on the off-hand. The gauntlet protects the hand from cuts, but not from the sharp point of a thrust. Unlike the duelers of the Renaissance, we are not permitted to grab (or in other ways trap) the opponent's blade -- but we can deflect it by pushing it away with the off-hand. One way to do this is to -- to use as technical a term as I like to -- *snag* the blade. This gesture catches the blade between the open fingers of the off-hand and shifts it away from the body.

In this article I'd like to share a few ideas that might help new fencers overcome the hurdle of remembering to use their off-hand, if they find the need. This is an article about *remembering* to use the off-hand, not about using it well.

All told, then -- it is an odd thing that we should forget a hand. Yet this is a common problem in the beginning, and I suspect it arises from how the mind divides its focus in a fight. Our conscious minds might consider some of the things we process when fighting: the rules of the game, distance and sword length, whom we are fighting, the initiation of attacks. On a good day, this thinking works in concert with the natural intelligence the body has -- the more instinctive awareness of balance, timing, and the weapons at our disposal. That your primary hand grips a sword reminds the body's intelligence that the sword is there to use, to stick in the other guy (the pointy end!). That your off-hand is empty might

cause it to be forgotten.

One: The Dagger

When I was learning to remember off-hand use, a more experienced fencer put a dagger in that hand. He had noticed I wasn't using it, and had found before that putting a weapon there helps a fencer remember to use it. This was the first time I'd played with a secondary weapon, and the trick worked like a spell. I caught blades with the dagger offensively, and also parried in defense (not well, necessarily -- but we speak of remembering to try). Behind the scenes, my body's brain was telling me: "You're holding something in your hand. Use it, dummy!", so I did. When he took the dagger away, a little of that muscle-memory remained, and I continued to use the off-hand.

Since the technique of dagger use helped me to remember, it was the first suggestion I made to the new fencer. He answered that he had tried this already, so I suggested hand extension.

Two: Hand Extension

Another trick to recall off-hand use is to hold the secondary arm nearly straight, so that the hand stays just below the direct line-of-sight. This might feel awkward at first, and the body-mind might not much care for it; but it serves two purposes: *seeing* the hand may remind the conscious mind to use it, and the hand -- now closer to the opponent's blades -- has a chance to deflect those blades while they are still further away from the body.

The fencer I was attempting to help did find this awkward, but I think it can help, by way of exaggeration, toward finding a happy medium in off-hand use.

Three: The Centered Focus

Having played with him now, I considered how he was fighting, and how he hesitated whenever I threw an attack toward his off-hand. The conscious mind can paralyze the body in martial play if used too much. My teacher had once suggested to me that I focus on a place between his neck and chest, right about the center of the collar bone. When I did so, peripheral vision did more than its lion's share of the work, finding more of his attacks and parries while my sight was fixed in the middle. My conscious mind was occupied, and the body's intelligence freed to respond.

I suggested this idea to the fencer, and we began another bout. Now his hand moved without pause to deflect my blade in many of my attacks. His eyes were focused on me -- not the sword -- and the

body-smarts had taken over.

Four: Look -- No Swords

An idea I have heard of, but never tried, is to set the weapons aside and play-fence with hands only.

Five: The Wrist-brace

An idea I have neither heard of nor tried -- but might be worth a go -- is the use of an orthopedic brace on the secondary hand and wrist. If bound snugly on the wrist (but not so tightly as to hamper circulation), a wrist-brace might serve as another reminder to the brain to use the off-hand. If there is any lurking fear of damage to the off-hand preventing its use, the brace might provide a sense of protection, even simulating the chain-mail gauntlet to some degree. Such braces are available in some pharmacy stores for carpal tunnel relief or athletic support; but as the price is \$10-\$25 and the use quite short-term, I recommend asking around for one to borrow. Use it only in practice, until off-hand use becomes a habit, for it is likely to interfere with calibration (feeling good shots).

Six: Refused Stance

The final idea, which may be used in conjunction with any of the above, is the adoption of a refused stance. The first stance many of us learn is to have the same foot as the primary arm forward, and the other foot back; presenting a somewhat slimmer target to the opponent. In a refused stance, the foot of the secondary arm is forward and the primary foot back -- a position that puts the secondary hand, and anything in it, in a stronger place for aggressive offense and defense. This might help off-hand use in a natural way, and even tried on its own, be all a new fencer needs for the technique to click.

Addendum

I'm happy to say that the fencer I was assisting late last year has long since gained confidence in his off-hand use and authorized in single epee. Vivat to him.

Now if I can just induce him to start coming to practices again. Watch for a future article: Affectionate and Colorful Nicknames Earned While Missing Practices.

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A Brief Look at Fencing Off-handed Opponents

by Don Ian Raven of Tadcaster,
a course co-taught with Lord Geoffrey Gryffon

1. Problems inherent in facing off-handed opponents

As a right-handed fighter, there are many problems that arise from the sudden realization that your opponent is left-handed (and vice-versa). This issue has bothered new and experienced fighters alike since we first fashioned swords out of rock when the Earth was still cooling.

The main problem is that fencing as we know it is a game of angles and counter angles, handed down over centuries of study and thought. This in itself isn't a problem, but for the most part those angles presuppose two right-handed fighters. With this in mind, it's easy to see why lefties have a harder time understanding the concepts in our game, and why right-handers who have years of experience can become rank newbies when facing southpaws: the angles are all wrong!

Most other issues dealing with this subject spring from the problem of angles, and often build into a mental block that can be paralyzing to one's development as a fighter. We'll try to address some common issues and their solutions in this class, but bear in mind that this is the tip of the iceberg.

2. A look at common types of trouble

- a. Swords on the same side ("mirror image") can cause confusion
- b. Traditional angles of attack and defense rendered ineffective or awkward
- c. Sword arm is a closer target and more vulnerable
- d. Off-hand becomes ineffective due to distance from weapons
- e. Secondary weapons and parries ineffective or troublesome for similar reasons (cloak, for example, just doesn't tend to work)

3. Some solutions to these issues

Distance and Time – In fencing, distance and time begin to blend. In other words, by better controlling your distance, you can gain time to react and plan. All of the solutions that follow are easier to

employ if you give yourself a little more space to see what's going on.

a. Mental distress

i. Mental practice: don't allow the situation to rattle you.

This one comes mainly with experience, but you can speed things up by having someone you practice with fence you using their left hand...or go to a practice with a lot of lefties. Like Bhakail. Or Quintavia.

ii. Arm yourself with options to fall back on. Such as...

iii. Fighting one arm at a time, or applying offset theory from armored combat.

If you can adjust your position while facing your opponent so you are engaging one arm more than the other, you can gain both a favorable angle and a respite from the other hand, be it empty or bearing a secondary. This is especially useful when your opponent has case or dagger, but also handy for getting a pesky cloak out of the way.

You can also borrow from the the heavy-list side to strengthen your guard. When a heavy fighter faces a left-hander, they often move their shield to protect the sword side of their body – where the lefty's blows are more likely to fall. This would be like a fencing position four, on the side opposite your sword arm.

The practical application for us would be to set yourself up in a cross-body ward, such as in Four, to protect the opposite side of your body and force most of your parries to be crossing sixes. This technique allows for a lot of personal exploration and individual variation.

iv. Begin the fight off-handed.

That way, if you lose the sword hand or arm, you switch back into your strong hand. This is a strong psychological edge for some fighters, and can sometimes overcome the issues of off-handed opponents in a roundabout way.

b. Sword arm/hand vulnerability

While this can be a drawback, it can also be an asset if used to your advantage. Many people feel uncomfortable with the sudden closeness of a blade to their hand, but remember that your opponent's sword hand is closer to you, too. If you can internalize that piece of information, you can turn it from stumbling block to

strategy (see item “f” below).

i. Use a stronger guard

By this we mean wider, lower & shallower than your normal guard position, unless that’s where you usually start from. Drop your sword hand slightly, tweak the wrist out to the sword side somewhat, and bring the sword closer to your body to start. This does a few things for you:

First, it forces the weapons out of parallel, which helps strengthen parries by increasing the amount of blade you can employ against your opponent’s, hides your sword arm and hand behind your bell or swept hilt and also puts a few more inches between your hand and your opponent’s point. In addition, it can help correct sloppy parries.

ii. Fight in denial

Turn your body and reverse your footwork (left foot forward, if you’re right-handed), putting your sword back and your off-hand forward. This benefits both the sword hand and the off-hand, protecting the one while bringing the other better into play (see item “d” below).

c. Angles

While the usual angles of swordwork are less than helpful, angles can still be your friend – if you apply them to your mobility instead. The basic idea of the Spanish Circle and many other period methods is the geometry of safe and dangerous distances and angles. If you work off-line footwork into your practice regimen, you can step outside (literally) of straight-line modern fencing and confound your enemies while increasing your chance to hit without harm to yourself.

Our earlier comment about choosing one arm to fight at a time will also help here, as you can enforce certain helpful angles while negating others that aren’t as useful (like the ones that allow your opponent to hit you).

d. Reasserting the off-hand

i. As mentioned above, fighting denied can bring the offhand to the forefront.

ii. Practice parry-passing

For example, capture your opponent’s blade in Four then switch to the off-hand, freeing your blade to attack.

iii. See below for notes on secondaries.

e. Secondary forms

i. Case:

As long as you make sure to be ambidextrous with your blade work, case is the great equalizer. It tends to negate handedness, since successful case work requires both blades to work together.

ii. Dagger:

1. We recommend a mobile dagger technique that allows you to cover larger areas than the standard off-hand half of the body.
2. Parry-passing works here, too.
3. Bait and Switch: Offer your opponent your dagger hand. Make it say, "Look at me, the poor dagger hand, all pink and naked..." Of course, this works best with open dagger guards. Be alert for the shot to the dagger hand, and snipe the arm as it extends towards you. Tricky, but useful.
4. Parry with the long blade and go for the dagger kill. Ian is very fond of this, both for the fun of it and for the element of surprise. You'll be close enough to see your opponent's eyes widen.

iii. Buckler and rigid parry

The heavy-list offset theory, as mentioned in item 3a above, works best here... y'know, since you have a shield and all. Move your buckler position across your body and work over and around it. While this requires some getting used to, it opens up a world of possibilities when combined with blade angles and off-line footwork.

For example, the over-the-top rotating shot works well and keeps both your point in line and a buckler between you and your opponent.

Or, you can use Offensive Buckler techniques such as punch blocking, sweeping and simultaneous blade and buckler movement.

All of the above work best when combined with a good sense of distance and angles other than straight-on.

iv. Cloak and non-rigid parry

To be honest, this form is the least useful of the five that we study when opponents are off-handed. The cloak or soft parry is always further from the opponent's blade than is intended, and the very fact that the weapons are on the same side as each other instead of lined up against the off-hand makes it difficult to effectively employ the form.

To counter this, you can use "dirty tricks" like dropping your soft

parry object to the side or directly onto opponent's blade (note that you cannot "throw" the object per current East Kingdom rules). Conversely, you could become André L'Epervier, one of the few left-handed fencers to truly make cloak work and work well. (This is a difficult technique that we don't recommend for anyone but the most advanced students.)

f. When in doubt, snipe the hand

As much as some people may loathe being known as hand-snipers, the simple fact remains that the hand holding the sword is the closest part of your opponent's body.

The hand snipe can be built into other tactics as well, such as moving that pesky weapon away from your opponent's body to open up the kill shot, or as a prelude to a head or foot attack. Remember: just because you shoot for that hand, it doesn't need to mean you want to hit it.

4. In closing

As we mentioned in our title and introduction, these are by no means the only issues to arise from facing off-handed opponents, nor are the solutions we offer the only ways to combat the problem. They are, however, a good jumping-off point for further discussions and explorations.

The most important of all the suggestions we can give are these: keep a sharp eye on your distance and don't get rattled. The first will stand you in good stead for all you do in fencing, and the second will allow you to keep a clear head and think back to the options above or others that you will undoubtedly discover in time.

Good luck and happy fencing!

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The Arte of Defensive Dagger

by Don Duncan Kieran

Traditionally, a dagger in society rapier combat is held with knuckles forward, point toward the sky, or with knuckles down, point toward your opponent. However, there is a second method of using the dagger, which I will refer to as "defensive dagger." My use with the defensive dagger began a few years ago during a practice with a relatively new fencer. He wasn't using his off hand for defense, and tended to leave it at his side. Typically, I will give a fencer a roll of duct tape, a large glove, or some other object to hold in order to "remind" him to use his off hand. In this situation, however, I had none of the aforementioned objects. I handed him my boat sail main gauche, and because I didn't want him to stick me with it accidentally, I had him reverse his grip on it, aligning the blade with his forearm. My intention was that the weight of the dagger would remind him to use his parry hand.

What happened however, was particularly exhilarating. The fighter went from blocking hesitantly to blocking aggressively almost immediately, and understood that if he missed the block with the guard, he still had the length of the blade to protect his arm.

Afterwards, I began using the dagger this way to work out its pros and cons. I would often use the defensive dagger when fighting an opponent armed with a single rapier. It would allow me a slightly more defensive position, while not gaining the typical offensive position-something especially important when facing new fencers. However, I found a definite trade-off: although you gain power, you lose speed. With an offensive dagger, you can quickly move your wrist to turn an attack to the side.

If using defensive dagger, you must turn your elbow and forearm, taking more time for the movement. When you sweep the blade to the outside using defensive dagger, however, it is much more difficult for your opponent to "push" his way through your guard as the leverage is to your advantage. I have found that the trade of speed for strength is not always a good one, especially when facing a foil blade. Unless your opponent is particularly slow or relatively

new, you will find yourself extremely pressed to use the defensive dagger to your advantage. This holds true similarly when facing an epee, but not to the same degree. If your opponent is using a medium- to heavy-weight guard, you will see where the defensive dagger's strengths lie with a bit of practice. It is not difficult to see then, that the defensive dagger is most practical when facing an opponent using a schlager.

In practice, there are four moves that are most often used, though you will find many variations and subtle changes are available from the classical dagger style. I will describe these moves using my boat sail main gauche as a reference, which is much better suited than a cross hilt dagger in this style, and from the right-handed point of view.

High Ward:

Hold the dagger in front on you, knuckles forward, pommel up, and blade parallel to your forearm. When an attack is made, step forward, presenting your guard and/or forté against your opponent's blade with an upward movement, drawing it off-line. Depending on your proximity to your opponent, you can follow with an attack to the body, or a cut to your opponent's forearm during your retreat. When applied correctly, you will leave your opponent's right side and underarm especially vulnerable. This move is also particularly effective when you are pressed. Apply the same upward movement while dropping to one knee. A follow-up draw cut to the belly can be extremely devastating here. The high line attack is not without its own counter. Instead of bringing your dagger straight up to catch the attack on your guard, bring your arm to the right, knuckles to the right, and blade straight up, taking the blade against your forté and quillon. Make sure that you have caught your opponent's blade well before continuing, as a mistake here leaves your head wide open for attack. You can immediately draw cut on the way out, or step forward to engage your opponent (one of the most effective maneuvers if done correctly). At the same time reverse your arm back to the left and outside, applying a modified high ward and locking your opponent. Your lock with the quillons should be in the lower half of the blade, making it nearly impossible to disengage without retreating, and setting yourself up for a very open inside attack.

Outside Ward:

Again, hold the dagger reversed. The outside ward is used both in response to an attack, or as a lead in for an attack. The block can be delivered one of two ways: either as a leftward movement with your forearm perpendicular to the ground, or parallel to it. In

either case, you are attempting to lock your opponent's blade by catching it between your quillon and forté. Follow with a slight downward turn of the guard to further ensure the lock. This ward, when properly applied, can allow you to retain control of your opponent's blade, forcing him to retreat in order to disengage. If he attempts to go under your blade, a simple downward movement will increase your defense. At most, a flaw in your block during this exchange would result in a cut to your leg, while putting you in a position for a kill.

Inside Ward:

This ward is essentially the same as the outside ward, in arm movement and intent, but is done with the inside of the blade. In order to be effective, this ward should be used en passe, your dagger arm moving from left to right, your counter attack a draw cut. It is most often used when your opponent makes an attack to your sword arm, though it can be used in the more offensive manner, if you wish to initiate an attack.

Leading Engage Ward:

This is most "offensive" of the three guards, as in the majority of situations you initiate rather than react. From the starting position bend your wrist backward, pointing your pommel towards yourself, instead of the sky. Your blade will no longer be parallel to your forearm but extend between 60o and 120o toward your opponent. With a forward step, engage your opponent's blade and turn it to the outside with an approach similar to the outside ward. Similarly, if your opponent moves into a high guard, you can counter into the high ward, while still maintaining control. Excerpt from Vincentio Saviolo his Practise, London, 1595: As you can see below, Saviolo discusses a block similar to the leading edge ward mentioned above. The other three are natural extensions of the style.

V. The scholler must break it downward, with the point of his Dagger toward his left side, and then put a stoccata to my belly beneath my Dagger, in which time I breaking it with the pointe of my Dagger, goe a little aside toward his lefte hand, and make an imbroccata above his Dagger, and the scholler shall breake the imbroccata with his Dagger upward, parting circularly with his right foote toward my lefte side, and so thrust unto mee an imbroccata above my Dagger, in which time with the pointe of my Dagger, I will beate it outward toward my lefte side, and answere him with a stoccata in the bellye under his Dagger, parting circularly with my right foote toward his left side: and in the same time he must answere me with the like under my Dagger, breaking

my stoccata outward toward his lefte side, stepping toward my lefte side with his right foote, at which time I must moove with my bodye to save my face, and breake his poynte toward my right side, answering him with a riversa to the head, and so retire with my right foote, at which time he must come forward with his left foote in the place of my right, and his Dagger high and strait, turning his swoorde hand, so that his poynte may goe directlye to my bellye, and he must take the riversa on his sworde and Dagger.

L. But is it not better for the scholler to holde his Dagger with the point upward, as I have seene many doe to defend a riversa?

V. He that holdeth the point upward, is ever in danger to be hurt on the head, or to receive a fincture in the bellye or in the face, and likewise he is in jeoperdye to be hurt with a Stramazone, betweene the Rapier and the Dagger, because he closeth not his weapons: therefore remember well how to carrye your Dagger, and by exercise you shall see the Dagger, for there are many that breake the stoccata inward. A fighter holding a dagger in this method would be inclined to draw it back and make a thrusting motion toward his opponent. Any attack made against you during this move would need to be compensated for by one of the above methods, disregarding your attack so you do not take a wound on your dagger arm. Though I don't encourage it as a primary usage, the reversed dagger can be turned inward after a block as a thrusting attack. However, one must be particularly careful, especially with stiff blades, not to bend the wrist too much. Otherwise, the same power you gain from defense will be transferred into your attack. A draw cut with the dagger reversed, once you are inside your opponent's guard, is extremely quick, because the movement is made through your waist, instead of your wrist. Facing a Defensive Dagger When facing an opponent who has chosen to use a defensive dagger style, your offensive tactics change slightly. As the attacker, you must be cautious when thrusting and making draw cuts to his dagger side, avoiding the potential lock. You should watch for an opening attack against his forearm, when he brings the dagger across his chest for a block, and neglects to keep the blade angled properly against it for defense. Secondly, a feint attack low, causing him to commit, and then a counter to a high line is particularly effective. Though the defensive dagger's speed is slower, it is often enough for the initial attack. A recovery, however, is often difficult, and can leave him defenseless.

Conclusion:

Though use of the defensive dagger may feel awkward initially and

doesn't lend itself to every fencer's style, I encourage you to try it. You will be pleasantly surprised by the differences and similarities to the classic dagger style. I continue to train with it and instruct others in its use, and with the increase of schlager qualified fencers in the East Kingdom, I'm sure we'll be seeing others using it as well. With practice, you'll find that the pros outweigh the cons, and that the defensive dagger is a viable alternative and addition to your repertoire.

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