Of Bubble-gum and Name Taking

WRITING GREAT ACTION AND FIGHT SCENES
A (But not The) Perfect Fight Scene

- The Last Samurai – Ambush
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7jcaXQgds
- The Matrix – The Lobby
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Es2uYtSJh-Y
- Saving Private Ryan – Final Battle
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM6zdom8sf4
Introductions

- Travis Heermann
  - [https://www.facebook.com/travis.heermann](https://www.facebook.com/travis.heermann)
  - Author of “The Ronin Trilogy”

- Quincy J. Allen
  - Author of “Chemical Burn”
Overview & Caveats

- What we’re covering
  - Audience
  - Character
  - Action Scene “Components”
  - Story Arc
  - Key Methods
  - Rules & When to Break Them
  - The Human Condition
  - Weapons & Environment
  - Group Exercise
  - Research & References

- The Use of Film References
  - Limited Time
  - Because a picture is worth a thousand words
Writing to Your Audience

- Know your genre
  - When to say “gun” and when to say “Steyr Bullpup 5.56mm Assault Rifle”
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kUoXCVey_U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kUoXCVey_U)
  - The difference between Romance, Fantasy and Gun Porn
  - What about cross-overs?

- Know your lexicon
  - Audiences who read *Bet Me* by Jennifer Crusie have a very different vocabulary from those who read *Morrell’s First Blood*
Know Your Character

- Goals
  - Immediate
  - Long-term

- Traits
  - bravery / cowardice
  - cleverness
  - deceitfulness
  - thoughtfulness
  - recklessness
  - compassion
  - vindictiveness
  - malice
Know Your Character (cont.)

- Weapons of choice
  - Fists
  - Blades
  - Firearms
  - Furniture?

- Moves (Technique)
  - Martial Styles
    - Know the terms
      - I.E. Tiger Form vs Mantis Form
      - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLYWJcGsaw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLYWJcGsaw)
  - General Combat
    - Combat Troops
    - SWAT Teams
    - Untrained People
  - Karate Kid
    - The kick
    - The drums
Know Your Character (cont.)

- **Strengths**
  - Raw Physical
    - Arnold Schwarzenegger (Conan)
      - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNV86VFd4Zw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNV86VFd4Zw)
    - Sigourney Weaver (Copy Cat)
  - Trained Skill
    - Jackie Chan
      - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74OBuMA2qEk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74OBuMA2qEk)
    - Inspector Clouseau
      - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOtVy3t7-Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOtVy3t7-Q)
  - Intelligence
    - Sherlock Holmes (Downey Jr.)
    - Bobby Bucher (tackling scene)
Know Your Character (cont.)

- Weaknesses
  - Everyone has kryptonite
    - Without it, you lose tension and emotional investment
  - Limitations in
    - Physical prowess
    - Training
    - Philosophy
    - Other
- Every question answered here defines how the your action scene decisions are made
Components of Action Scenes

- The Move
  - A single action: like a kick, a punch, a dodge, or a jump
  - *Technique* is demonstrated through moves
  - *Technique* is an expression of character

- The Engagement
  - A series of actions linked by cause and effect
  - *Strategy* is demonstrated through engagements
  - Strategy is also an expression of character
Components (cont.)

- **The Scene**
  - One or more engagements in a single location, coming to some kind of a finish
    - “The Three Musketeers” laundry room
    - “Hard Boiled”
      - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wYCh5nxyCI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wYCh5nxyCI)

- **The Sequence**
  - Two or more scenes in different locations
    - For example, a fight in a gym's locker room ends with one character trying to escape through the gym, and the other character chases him over the exercise equipment
Story Arc of a Fight Scene

- Stasis
- Trigger
- The quest
- Surprise
- Critical choice
- Climax
- Reversal
- Resolution
Key Methods

- **Chronological Order — Get the Sequence Right!**
  - “Disarming the Bomb”

- **Establish a Rhythm**
  - Using Short Sentences to increase pace and increase impact
  - Use long, more complex sentences to increase time and broaden emotional tension

- Get Deep inside your Character POV
Key Methods (cont.)

- Funneling Time
  - Condensing sequences for effect
  - Drawing Out Time for effect

- Detail Seasoning
  - In the middle of chaos add in minutiae to create details that add to our perceptions of sense and establish a feel for the characters

- Know when to kick your character’s butt
  - There are times when your character needs to take a beating
    - Showing vulnerability
Key Methods (cont.)

- The Importance of Setting and Using the Environment
  - Denis Leary in Suicide Kings
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h69it_56K4U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h69it_56K4U)
  - Jackie Chan
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74OBuMA2qEk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74OBuMA2qEk)
  - Raiders of the Lost Arc
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr-8APoTo4k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr-8APoTo4k)
Rules to Never Ever Break... and when

- Introspection – Sherlock Holmes
- Conversations – Princess Bride
- Technical Accuracy
  - How many bullets does that gun have???
  - The Riddle of Steel
    - Blades chip, nick, bend and break
  - Bleeding and Trauma
  - Armor and Big Boobs
Combat: The Human Condition

- The five senses of combat
  - Sight
  - Sound
  - Smell
  - Touch
  - Taste
  - Temporal
Combat: The Human Condition (cont.)

- How humans respond to combat situations
  - Fatigue
  - Mental Duress
  - Bleeding and trauma
  - How often bullets don’t kill
    - The story of the 5.56mm round

- The Lesson of the Battle Crap

- The emotional and physical aftermath, from initial shock to PTSD
Weapons and Environment

- The realities of body size
  - (big vs. small... when it applies and when it doesn’t)
- Pugilism & Martial Arts
- Know your weapons (and components)
- Using the Environment
“Perfect Fight Scene” Redux

- The Last Samurai - Ambush
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7jcaXQgds](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7jcaXQgds)
Group Exercise

- 10 minutes: set the stage with protagonist, antagonist, environment, and weapons
- Write a 1-2 paragraph fight scene using those details

Reading

Discussion

- NOTE: When offering a critique:
  - Address problems and also offer suggestions
  - Mention what they did well
A Word on Research

- Wikipedia is NOT research... it’s a paper trail
- Get your hands on some weapons
  - Sporting Goods Stores
  - Shooting Ranges (they have classes and rentals)
  - Those funky Asian stores at the mall where you can buy anything from paintball guns to LoTR replicas, to Katanas to batleths
A Word on Research (cont.)

- **Know what’s possible**
  - For fisticuffs watch:
    - Pro Wrestling
    - 60s Kung Fu movies
    - Modern martial arts movies
      - Anything with Jet Li (Master of using his body)
      - Anything with Jackie Chan (Master of using his environment)
      - Anything with Jason Statham
    - Competitive padded martial arts tournaments
    - Olympic judo
    - MMA
    - Any footage you can find of international, *full-contact* tournaments
  - NOTE: None of those are the same thing.
A Word on Research (cont.)

- For blades watch the following:
  - Olympic fencing
  - “The Three Musketeers” (1973)
  - “The Seven Samurai”
  - “Gladiator”
  - Errol Flynn Movies
  - SCA Long Sword competition
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C46AHAhjyI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C46AHAhjyI)
  - “Blade” movies
A Word on Research (cont.)

- For firearms watch:
  - Any war footage you can get your hands on
  - "Band of Brothers"
  - "Saving Private Ryan"
  - Any Western
  - The Expendables (1 & 2)
References

- **Reference Books**
  - On Combat (Lt. Colonel Dave Grossman)
  - On Writing Horror (Edited by Mort Castle)

- **Fiction**
  - “Chronicles of Amber”
  - “Druss” Series (David Gemnells)
  - Harlan Ellison
  - Kevin J. Anderson
  - Stephen King (Shining & Firestarter)
Good Example Films

- Sherlock Holmes—Robert Downey Jr. Version
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS-Od-jQFkM
- The Forbidden Kingdom
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLYWIJcGsay
- Last Samurai (the ambush)
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7jcaXQgds
- Rob Roy (the final Duel)
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHCvV8uUr9U&list=PL7C7B11D87CD18878
- Band of Brothers
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p052DQytEs
- Saving Private Ryan
  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtlP2vrlq_w
References (cont.)

- Good Example Films (cont.)
  - Raiders of the Lost Arc
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr-8APoTo4k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr-8APoTo4k)