

The Tao of Dietrich

A Greatsword Fighting Manual



Overview

This manual offers 20 comprehensive lessons for learning the style of greatsword fighting practiced by me, Rob Hunter/Dietrich von Stroheim, Atlantia. This is being written and shared for the purpose of helping others achieve higher levels of proficiency with the weapon form, with the goal of increasing the overall competitiveness of our sport.

The greatsword/longsword is a more advanced weapon form, and this curriculum assumes that the student already has at least an intermediate understanding of fighting principles. While this begins with fairly basic footwork and stance concepts, the later lessons and drills will be very useful even for highly experienced/Knight-level fighters.

These Lessons build upon each other and are ultimately intended to help you develop your own Technique Engine, that combination of muscle memory and combat acumen that allows you to instantly plan and execute new techniques in the heat of battle!!

Please see the 'About the Author' section for information about sharing and redistributing this work.

Training and Implementation of this Manual: The reader should not feel pressed to 'get through' this material, or advance from one lesson to the next, until you feel you have achieved a solid mastery of the current Lesson. It is FAR more important to truly grasp and integrate Lessons 1-4, then it is to have a 'basic' understanding of the entire manual.

So in your training, take it slow, master the footwork and concepts, and be able to execute the techniques with intention and control, rather than push yourself on to advanced lessons that exceed your current level of mastery.

Lesson 1: Footwork

To begin with, let us get into a good fighting stance. Regardless of which foot is forward, the toes of that foot should be pointing at your opponent. The heel of the back foot will be perpendicular to the heel of the front foot. Weight should be well-distributed and balanced, with slightly more weight on the front foot. The back heel should be raised slightly, 'just enough to slide a credit card under'. Finally, your feet should be about shoulder-width apart.

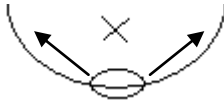
This stance gives ideal mobility and balance. Now that we are set in our stance, let's learn how to move:

Gathering Step—Advance one quick step with forward foot. Back foot follows, ending in the same positioning in which the feet began. This sliding or 'gliding' step is ideal when in striking range, or when wanting to advance without creating any openings.

Passing step—Advance with back foot, passing front foot. This step is ideal for closing distance when outside of striking range, for redirect footwork or 'jukes', and especially for a feigned move to the right that pushes off into a lateral step to the left, to outmaneuver the opponent. A passing step can also be used to step into or out of an opponent's strike, robbing it of power.

Compass step—This maneuver is the most advanced of the three, and involves stepping offline with either the front or back foot, with the other foot following behind, moving along an imaginary Arc between you and your opponent.

This (crude) diagram attempts to illustrate the arc and potential motion of the compass step, with X representing the opponent, and the oval representing you:



Compass stepping can take you all along that arc, however you will always be directly facing your opponent.

The compass step is incredibly effective in conjunction with a parry, feint or combo, for positioning yourself to be able to strike the opponent from a position that he cannot defend or counter. If you are fast enough and/or have good timing, the compass step can also be used to dodge a linear attack (like a thrust or a chop) entirely, and riposte from safety.

The compass step may seem difficult or counter-intuitive, but do yourself a favor and drill this until it is second nature. A timely compass step will win you many fights, and we are going to be using it a lot in your training in later lessons.

Footwork Drill: 16 Steps—This drill gives you practice moving smoothly, quickly and in balance with gathering steps, and compass steps. You will in essence be moving in a square around the position in which you begin.

- 1-2) Gathering step forward, gathering step backwards
- 3-4) Gathering step backwards, gathering step forwards
- 5-6) Gathering step to the right, gathering step to the left
- 7-8) Gathering step to the left, gathering step to the right
- 9-10) Gathering step diagonally forwards, gathering step diagonally backwards
- 11-12) Gathering step diagonally backwards, gathering step diagonally forwards
- 13-14) COMPASS step to the right, compass step back to center
- 15-16) Compass step to the left, compass step back to center

If you complete this drill using steps of uniform size, you should end in the exact spot you began.

Practice this drill EVERY DAY, until these maneuvers flow easily and naturally.

Lesson 2: Basic Guards

Now that you have the basics of footwork down, take up your sword. Put your dominant hand on top, just below the quillions, and your other hand on the bottom. Although there are times when it is beneficial to switch hands, this style primarily uses the dominant hand on top grip.

High Guard (Roof)—High Guard can be taken in 2 variations:

- 1) Over the shoulder (right or left High Guard) with sword tip pointing to the sky, or slightly back. The swordside leg should be back...so if in Right High Guard, right foot is back.
- 2) Over the head, with swortip pointing back. Either leg may be forward.

High Guard allows you the maximum offensive range, allowing you to begin raining down combination attacks from above. High Guard presents a credible threat of the overhead greatblow, which can make your opponent hesitant to attack. Also, the fear of that greatblow makes it easier to sell feints (see Lessons 5 and 8).



Right High Guard



Overhead High Guard

A notable weakness of High Guard is its vulnerability to thrusts...it is difficult to get your sword in place quickly enough to set aside a face or body thrust, and you must be prepared to dodge (see Lesson 9).

This stance is ideal against an opponent who does not have a thrusting tip, a legged opponent, or when you desire a range advantage and are confident in your ability to deal with a thrust.

Middle Guard (Long point or Plow)—To take Middle Guard, lower your hilt by or just in front of your left hip, with your sword-tip pointed at the opponent's eyes.

Your swordside leg will be back. Middle Guard is a good solid defensive stance, that can be used to keep your opponent at bay with the threat of the thrust. Thus it is ideal against an opponent with greater range (like a polearm fighter), an opponent who takes High Guard, or an opponent who you want to keep at a distance (like a shieldman).



Although Middle Guard is the best stance for controlling the center line, the limitation of this stance is that in order to deliver a strike other than a thrust, you must first raise your sword. However, this limitation can be mitigated by initiating attacks using thrust-to-cut techniques (see Lesson 8).

Middle Guard

Low Guard (Fool)—Sword held low, hilt in front of right thigh, tip extended out and to the right, pointing slightly down. Effective for provoking an aggressive opponent; you can quickly bring the tip inline as he closes, letting him skewer himself on it, or quickly bring the sword up high to parry and riposte. Requires some combination of timing and speed to be effective.



Low Guard

Practice transitioning between these three guards, on either sides...guard transitions will help you in fluid offense and defense.

Lesson 3: Essence of Offense

The essence of this style is a swift unstoppable offense based on

- 1) Controlling the opponent's actions through feints, misdirection, footwork and freezes, and
- 2) Flowing combinations that alternate attacks to the opponent's four corners

Attacking the Corners Imagine a rectangle that extends from just above the opponent's knees to the top of his helm. The 'corners' of this rectangle are the temples and thighs. Some of the most effective combinations involve striking or feinting at one corner, then striking at an opposite corner, often with a circular compass step.

Example: From Right Roof, you throw a heavy onside blow to the opponent's left temple. You flow right into a second blow, this one to the opponent's right thigh. The first blow brings the opponent's attention and defenses up to his upper left corner, while the second one strikes at his now-unprotected lower right. It is much harder for the opponent to bring his defenses back down to cover a blow to an opposite corner.

Attacks may also be thrown along the 'lines' of the rectangle (top of head, arms, flanks), or even along its surface (ie chest, face, etc). However, the surface area of the rectangle is usually easier for the opponent to defend against, unless you have caused him to move his defense.

Lesson 4: Drill for Basic Attacks

Footwork for this drill should be advancing gathering steps, one step for each strike.

Begin with basic attacks, starting from High Guard, to

- 1) Head--Downward stroke to top of head
- 2) Forearm--Downward stroke or slight X-Cut* to right forearm
- 3) Ribs--Heavy X-Cut* to right ribs or hip
- 4) Left Temple—Slight diagonal strike to left temple
- 5) Right Temple—Slight diagonal strike to right temple
- 6) Head-- Downward stroke to top of head
- 7) Thrust—Pull hilt down to middle guard and thrust to face or body.

***Introducing the X-Cut** This technique is a crucial part of this style, and we are going to see it again and again in this manual. The X-Cut is used after a parry or a high feint. Your sword drops to your left shoulder, and your right wrist crosses over your left wrist in an X as you twist your hips and fire into the opponent's right ribs, hip, leg or arm. You will NEED to learn this to use this style effectively...we are going to throw this shot A LOT! **Practice the X-Cut again and again and again. It will pay big dividends!**

[Here is a link demonstrating a parry followed by an X-Cut, against a two-sword fighter](#)

What does this drill do?

This drill can be done either as slow-work, or full speed in armor. It practices targeting, angulation, and fluid transitions between strikes. This also teaches you to build combos and feint-combos...i.e. you can begin the first attack at the opponent's head, then redirect it in mid-strike to his right forearm when he exposes it while raising his sword to block your faked head shot.

This entire drill should be performed at every practice, including solo practice, until you can effortlessly chain together combinations of these attacks, starting from any angle.

Lesson 5: Basic Feints

Basic feinting skills can be developed by practicing the drill from Lesson 4, with a twist...make the initial head shot a feint, and strike first to the forearm, then X-Cut, etc. Or, throw a real head shot, feint the followup at the forearm, and actually throw the X-Cut. Etc.

If you are an experienced fighter, you have a good understanding of how to execute and sell a feint well. But if you are new, or would like a refresher, here are the basics.

FEINTING 101

The principle behind a feint is to draw the opponent's attention to an attack that you are not going to actually follow through with, but that you cause him to THINK you are committing to...for the purposes of opening up his defenses in the area where you actually want to put a bruise on him.

Your opponent's likelihood of falling for the feint depends on his ability to read you versus your ability to sell it. If he perceives you as being very fast/dangerous, he may be more likely to react to a minimalistic feint (see twitching in Lesson 6). If he believes you are slower or that he can block your attack with less difficulty, you may need to complete more of the feint motion before he bites on it.

Sometimes, against an opponent who is very confident or waits until the last minute to block, you may actually have to make contact with your feint before you redirect it into the intended blow.

Basic Feint Exercise: Begin in Right High Guard. Start a slight diagonal blow to the opponent's left temple, but once your hands start to come in front of your face, stop the forward motion of your sword and pull your hands ACROSS your face to the left...your hands should now be to the left of your face, with the strong of your sword right above your eyes. Now, cross your right wrist over your left, and throw the X-Cut into the opponent's hip. The overall motion of this feint is a two-handed Crosscut (for sword and shield comparison)

This particular feint draws the opponent's attention up to his left temple when you are really striking him in the right hip, the furthest quadrant away.

Similar basic feints to this one can be made from the Lesson 4 drill, including: left head to right forearm, right leg to left head, right head to left leg (against a lefty shieldman), or left head to right head.

Be disciplined about practicing your feints. Your success with this greatsword style hinges upon mastering them!

Lesson 6: Advanced Feints I--Twitching, Freezing and Hilt-Checking

One of the advantages of the greatsword is how quickly it can be redirected due to the control you have with two hands on the hilt. Assuming, of course, you are using a sword of reasonable size for your body (Appendix A teaches you how to construct a greatsword of the ideal size for this style, rather than one of the huge 6' clobber-sticks).

Twitching: Thanks to that level of control, you can easily execute 'twitch' feints that require very little commitment on your part. Twitching involves a minimalistic motion suggesting a strike, which from a weapon this big is very noticeable and looks much more 'real' of a threat than it actually is.

As an example, from high guard with your sword held overhead, you can twitch a downward strike at the top of the opponent's head. As you opponent raises his sword into an overhead defense, you then drop your sword to your left shoulder and X-Cut into his right ribs.

The main purpose of the Twitch feint is use a minimal motion to draw your opponent's defense away from where you really want to hit him.

Freezing: Although similar to the Twitch, the Freeze feint is designed instead to prevent the opponent from attacking you for the split second you would like to inflict violence upon him.

A Freeze is a quick minimalistic striking motion, usually towards the opponent's sword side, that causes him to hold his sword defensively, eliminating his opportunity to swing. As soon as his sword is committed to defense, you then strike at your intended target, usually in conjunction with a compass or passing step to maneuver around his defense.

The difference between the Twitch and the Freeze is most pronounced against an opponent who is using a sword and a shield.

Hilt-check: The hilt-check maneuver is generally executed either after you parry, or your opponent parries. While it is illegal to strike the opponent with your hilt, it is legal to push your hilt against his hilt, sword or shield.

Example: From High Guard, you step in as you throw a downward strike to the opponent's head. When he raises his sword and parries you then thrust upwards with your hilt, pushing his hilt and sword higher and possibly forcing him back a couple steps. Immediately after the hilt-check you drop your sword to your left shoulder and blast an X-Cut into his unprotected right ribs.

The hilt-check can also be used against a charging shieldman to push his shield towards his swordside, fouling up his strike and giving you the opportunity to compass-step to the right and strike around his shield.

Lesson 7: Speed Drill with Hilt-Check

Footwork for this drill should be gathering steps, one step for each strike. This drill should be done at full-speed, ideally against an armored partner, as the purpose is to hone the speed and fluidity of your attacks while moving.

Begin from High Guard or Middle Guard and strike to:

- 1) Head--Downward stroke to top of head
- 2) Step forward, hilt-check to push your partner back
- 3) Strike four blows as you advance with gathering steps: left temple, right temple, left temple, right temple
- 4) Strike four blows as you retreat with gathering steps: left temple, right temple, left temple, right temple
- 5) Switch roles with your partner and repeat

This drill can be modified with different alternating blows other than strikes to the temples (ie hips, left/right flanks, etc.)

Practicing this drill regularly and with different strikes will improve your speed, your ability to handle your greatsword, the union of your footwork and strikes, AND your defense when it is your turn to block.

Lesson 8: Advanced Feints II—Cut to Thrust, Thrust to Cut

This type of feint changes not only the angle of the target, but the type of attack entirely. Allowing an opponent to enjoy the surge of confidence from successfully defending against your 'attack', is a great way to cause him to fall for your actual strike.

Cut to Thrust From High Guard, throw a downward cut at the opponent's head, that looks sufficiently dangerous that he has to raise his sword to defend against it. As soon as he bites on the feint, pull your cut short so that it misses. You should find yourself in Middle Guard...as swiftly as possible, extend your arms forward into a thrust into the opponent's face or chest, underneath his upraised defense!

This type of feint is great for long-range use against two-sword fighters, or other greatswords.

Thrust to Cut From Middle Guard, drive your sword tip forward in a stout upwards thrust. You WANT your opponent to either push your sword off to your right, or raise their shield to block. Either way, take a compass step to the LEFT and use the momentum of your sword's rising arc to X-Cut into ribs or right leg. This type of feint works wonders against a shieldman, as it can blind him with his own shield, or jam his shield up high into his helm to halt his charge. It is also an effective means to close to midrange against a polearm fighter, so long as you maintain weapon contact against the polearm, and control the center line.

There are numerous variations upon the Cut to Thrust and Thrust to Cut feints presented here. As your Technique Engine (see Lesson 14) grows and develops, you will be able to design and implement new variations in the middle of the fight!

Cut to Thrust to Cut! An advanced application of these principles...this is great against a shieldman who has not yet charged, and is at the far edge of your range. Begin by throwing the overhead greatblow, causing him to raise his shield. Pull it short to Middle Guard and thrust vigorously, hitting the shield and pushing it into the opponent's face, blinding him, standing him up and halting his charge if he began it.

With his shield high, compass step to the left and X-Cut into his unprotected right leg!

Lesson 9: Defense

We have gone into some advanced offense techniques before discussing defense. This was on purpose! My style of greatsword fighting has the goal of striking the opponent before he can strike, through range, speed, freezing and feints.

But when your opponent DOES attack, train yourself so that you never 'just block'...any defensive action should do at least one of the following:

- 1) Position you to riposte with a wicked counter
- 2) Maneuver you into a better position
- 3) Fluster the opponent (getting in his head, causing him to waste energy, etc)

While the appropriate defensive action to take may vary by situation, here is a GENERAL matrix of responses to an opponent's attack. This matrix offers options for a Parry or a Dodge.

| Defense Decision Matrix | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Incoming Attack | Parry | Dodge |
| Top head | Upraised horizontal sword | Compass step left or right |
| Left head | Left diagonal sword | Duck, elasticco or gathering step back |
| Right head | Right diagonal sword | Duck, elasticco or gathering step back |
| Thrust | Beat aside with sword | Compass step left or right |
| Body | Downwards cut into sword | Passing step backwards |
| Legs | Hanging parry | Passing step OR jump backwards |
| Arms | Attack!! | Attack!! |

The Hanging parry is essentially a strike into the opponent's sword, with your sword coming in tip-down to meet the attack. You can then riposte with a rising thrust, an X-Cut to the right-side head, or even a sweeping moulinet that pushes through the opponent's sword and strikes at the left-side head!

Should I Dodge or Parry? Dodging requires more speed and footwork, but offers better opportunities for a counterattack, as your opponent's weapon will generally be WAY out of position. Dodging will also usually end an opponent's combo. Parrying is generally easier than dodging, but is not as effective for setting up a riposte or ending a combo.

Against a very dangerous opponent, the most effective defense will be a combination of both (ie compass step to the right to dodge a blow to the top of your head AND raise your sword to block in case you don't get out of it entirely)

What do I do AFTER a successful parry or dodge? Whenever possible and appropriate, counterattack! Use the principles you have learned in prior lessons to instantaneously determine what form your riposte should take.

Why no defense for the arms? The best defense against an arm shot is to move your arms...it is very difficult to land a solid blow against an arm moving in the same direction. So if your opponent strikes at your right arm, throw an X-Cut into his right ribs, ideally with a left compass step. Chances are his blow will have nothing on it, and even if it does, you still win the exchange. Another effective counter to an arm shot is a face thrust...most likely, his strike will get tangled on your sword, which will still drive home into his grill.

Lesson 10: Advanced Feints II— Feinting into combos, feinting between the strikes

A good feint positions you to throw your intended shot from an advantageous position. But, a skilled opponent may still be able to block it. So why stop with just one blow after the feint?

Feinting into combos: Here we combine what we learned in Lessons 4, 5 and 8. Any of the strikes from Lesson 4 can be chained together into a combo, which will be all the more deadly if you lead off with a feint from Lesson 5 or a Thrust-to-Cut feint from Lesson 8!

Example 1: You lead off with a feinted thrust, taking a passing step to the left as you X-Cut at the opponent's right leg, then push back off to your right and strike a second blow to his left-side head!

Example 2: You lead off with a feinted blow to the right temple, rapidly snapping your hands around and twisting your hips to hit the opponent in the LEFT temple, then you drag your sword to the left of your head, drop it to your shoulder and X-Cut into the right hip.

Example 3: You lead off with a feinted overhead greatblow, which you then redirect into your opponent's right forearm, then you pull your sword back to your shoulder, cocking your hips left, and fire an X-Cut. Hey, it's the first three blows from the Lesson 4 drill, just with the head shot being a feint!

Feinting between the combos: This is effectively particularly when your opponent has seen you lead off with a feint once or twice already. The better a job you do of making the opponent think you are throwing another feint, the more likely you are to hit him with the first shot! This can be accomplished by looking hard at another target, or otherwise giving subtle tells.

Your first shot is going to be a real strike, then you immediately go into the second blow of your combo...WHICH IS A FEINT! Sell this well and your opponent will have no idea what the hell is going on in this fight and you can finish him with a well-placed third blow.

Example 1: You throw a solid shot at your opponent's left temple, which he realizes is not a feint at the last moment and just barely blocks. You shift into a feint X-Cut that you abort halfway, compass stepping to the right, snapping your hands out of the X, and nailing the luckless joker bam-smack on the left collarbone! YOUCH!!!

Example 2: You throw an overhead blow that the opponent blocks, then draw your sword down to Middle Guard and thrust at his face. In desperation he bats that 'thrust' away, adding to your momentum as you compass step to the left and X-Cut him in the right thigh!

Lesson 11: Block and strike, Dodge and strike

When you become confident in your speed and timing, it can be effective to 'bait' or provoke your opponent with an 'open' target. While you should almost always endeavor to follow up on a block or dodge with a riposte, the maneuvers we are about to cover involve intentionally leaving that opening, then closing it and counterattacking.

Block and Strike Example: You take right high guard, giving the appearance of being vulnerable to a flat snap. The opposing shieldman takes the bait, stepping in and throwing a flat snap. You take a passing step backwards, shifting your sword over to parry (your defense is actually just moving into left high guard), and as soon as your swords make contact you X-cut him in the right leg that he just stepped with.

Dodge and Strike Example: You take over-the-head high guard against a polearm fighter. He goes for the thrust at your face, and you quickly compass step to the right and swing a downwards blow into his left arm.

There are as many variations of these two examples, as there are attacks your opponent can initiate against you. Be careful, though, of making the openings look 'too' obvious, or your opponent will not take the bait. Also make sure that you have a sufficient understanding of his speed capabilities that you do not bait an opponent who is fast enough to punk you!

Block and Strike Drill

To train the reflex of automatically counterattacking after a parry, have an armored partner throw random blows at you. Parry the blow and then counter at an angle that will be most difficult for him to block. Begin this drill SLOWLY, so that you can best see the angles and judge the most appropriate counter. Ramp up speed as you are ready.

Lesson 12: Advanced Guards--Ox Guard, Tail Guard, Hanging Guard

By now you should be very comfortable with High Guard, Middle Guard and Low Guard. There is a LOT you can do just with these three stances, and their variations. But, by adding these three new guards to your arsenal, you will open up a lot of different techniques and angles.



Ox Guard To assume Left Ox (the side we will use this guard on the most), take up a right-foot-forwards stance, with your body presenting only a narrow profile, and bring your hilt up alongside your left temple, sword-tip pointed at the opponent's eyes. This guard offers you slightly greater range on your thrust, and is ideal for setting up a helicopter-like combo of head blows, especially the Zwerchau (see Lesson 14) and any thrust-to-cut techniques. Ox is not as effective for controlling the center line against thrusts as Middle Guard, but Ox is ideal if you have a range advantage.

Ox Guard

Tail Guard To assume Right Tail, take up a left-foot-forwards stance, again with your body presenting a narrow profile, and bring your hilt alongside your right hip, tip pointing all the way back. This stance hides your weapon from the opponent until the last minute, can be used to provoke attacks (see Lesson 11), and will frequently result in the opponent having no idea what kind of game you are bringing. Tail Guard is ideally used at range, where you have ample time to counter any attack, and to set up feints, moulinets or lightning-fast sniping leg shots. I have found Tail Guard to be highly effective against two-sword fighters, who will either succumb, to or overcompensate against, quick sniping leg shots, creating openings up high.



←---Tail Guard, Front View

Tail Guard, Side View

Hanging Guard This guard forms a barrier between you and your opponent. With right-foot-forwards, raise your hilt up to your face, with pommel high and sword tip facing diagonally down. Your sword should be covering your entire body, from your head down, presenting the appearance of an impenetrable barrier between you and the opponent.

While defense in Hanging Guard is quite easy, consisting of just moving your body around your sword and setting aside attacks to the left or right, you must first move out of the style to initiate most offense. However, because of the unusual appearance of this guard, you can quickly 'twitch' into a variety of feints and trick shots. Hanging Guard works very well against sword and shield fighters, denying them most of their offense while being effective for twitching high and striking their shield leg when they raise to cover.



**Hanging
Guard
'Barrier'**

Lesson 13: Advanced Feints III—The Intentional Miss

People tend to gravitate to the solution that makes most sense, especially in the heat of action. This advanced technique banks upon that principle, giving the opponent that false sense of being out of range. By throwing a moulinet, or circular cut, that intentionally falls short, you communicate to your opponent that either you are out of range, or you just intentionally chose to waste your energy on a shot that missed.

That sounds ridiculous, so most fighters just assume the former. As your sword is coming back around out of the moulinet, your opponent's brain is processing the fact that he is out of range and safe for the moment. You then throw a second strike—sometimes even the exact same one—except this time you extend into it, possibly taking a deep gathering or compass step in, and hit them before their brain can process that they actually ARE in range!

Example 1: The shot with which I won the Fechtschule America international steel longsword tournament. I began in overhead High Guard, and threw a downwards greatblow that fell short even of my opponent's parrying blade. As his brain processed this, my tip dropped, hands spinning, quickly arcing the swordtip back behind my left side and back up and over in the same moulinet, striking him cleanly on the top of his head before he could realize he was in my range.

Example 2: One of my signature greatsword techniques begins in right Tail Guard, at range. I begin with a circular cut at the opponent's left leg, that falls short and misses, but arcs back up and over my head, counterclockwise, as I compass step to the right and strike my opponent in the left side of his head. This is a horrically-fast and flowing technique that often gets people who have seen or fallen for it before!

[This technique can be viewed at this link](#)

There are numerous variations of these two examples of 'the Intentional Miss', using the principles that have been explained here.

Lesson 14: Advanced Offense I—Zwerchau, the backedge strike

Ok, we have made it the first thirteen lessons in English, but now I am going to have to bust out a little German. The Zwerchau, or 'Crosswise Strike', is a shot thrown with the back edge of the sword.

Begin by starting in Right High Guard. Rotate your hips powerfully, pulling your bottom-hand to your left jaw and your right hand over to your right and then forward. This should have the following results:

- 1) The back-edge of your sword has come around to strike at your opponent's left temple
- 2) You are now standing in Left Ox guard, with your sword hilt held by your left jaw (and your right hand facing down)
- 3) You just simultaneously parried any shot your opponent through at your head
- 4) You are now cocked for a thrust or a followup Zwerchau to the opposite side!

This is a difficult and counter-intuitive strike, but learning it will set you apart from the masses and win you many tourney fights. The Zwerchau is frighteningly effective against the SCA standard greatsword stance (sword held vertically in front of body, tip facing the sky); not only does the Zwerchau come in at an unexpected angle, oftentimes striking 'around' a block, but it also positions you for lethal followups in the form of a quick thrust (your swordtip is already right there in front of the opponent's face!), or a chain combo.

Drill: Chaining Zwerchaus The initial Zwerchau is done with the back edge, however the followup to the other side is done with the front edge (which some might say has now 'become' the back edge). You can chain Zwerchaus together to attack all 4 corners (see back in Lesson 3).

Your sword will spin over your head like the propellor of a helicopter, delivering lightning-fast shots at angles that are difficult to defend against. Advance as you throw each shot, with your choice of gathering, passing or compass steps.

- 1) Begin by throwing a Zwerchau from Right High Guard at the opponent's left temple.
Ending Position: Left Ox
- 2) Follow up with a Zwerchau to the right temple. *Ending Position: Right Ox*
- 3) Then let your swordtip drop back behind you, hands rising as you strike a backedge Zwerchau to the left HIP *Ending Position: Hanging Guard*
- 4) Drop your left hand and rotate over into a strike to the opponent's right hip *Ending Position: Hanging Guard*
- 5) Begin again by flipping your hands and sword over into a Zwerchau to the left temple!
Ending Position: Left Ox

Continue the drill for as long as you can maintain it with accuracy and control, then switch.

Spend as much time as you need to master the Zwerchau. Get with someone who can teach you in person; while I have done my best to illustrate in text how this strike is performed, it may be necessary to see it in person.

Not only is this one of the five historical Master Strikes as taught by Johannes Lichtenauer, but it is immensely useful for its simultaneous offense and defense, and the unexpected angle.

Lesson 15: How to Defeat a Polearm Fighter

The next few lessons delve into specific ways to defeat an opponent using the various weapon forms. These are not 'magic super will-always-work' tricks...these are just my preferred strategies for breaking down and defeating the opposing weapon forms. *To successfully accomplish any of these against a skilled opponent requires a thorough mastery of all the previous lessons.*

For purposes of this lesson, we will assume you are fighting against an opponent who has range on you, and a thrusting tip on his polearm. If either of these is not the case, your job will be considerably easier.

The worst threat you face from a man with a polearm is the quick spear-like thrust, either to your face or body. This all but denies you the use of High Guard, your most effective tool for increasing your range. At the same time, your opponent has more leverage with his polearm to control the center line, giving him the advantage should you take Middle Guard.

So, to counteract the advantages of this poleman, we are going to do something sneaky, called 'halfswording'. **NOTE: if you are in a kingdom where halfswording is illegal--like Atlantia--you can still accomplish this strategy by gripping the ricasso instead of the flat of the blade itself.**

When facing off against the poleman, slide your right hand down to the pommel of your sword, and place your left hand in a reverse-grip along the blade or ricasso. There should be 1.5 feet to 2 feet of distance between your hands now. This has the effect of DRASTICALLY increasing your leverage and control of the center line.

Now point your tip at your opponent's eyes, much like middle guard (this is essentially a 'leveraged middle guard'). Walk in with confidence, prepared to use your increased leverage to set aside his polearm until you are in range to thrust.

It is highly possible your opponent won't do anything in the second it takes you to close, due to his confusion at what the hell you are doing holding your sword all weird!

Now, aim a stout rising thrust at his face, letting go with your left hand and propelling forward with your right hand (like a 1-handed spear shot), and taking a compass step IN. If it connects, great, but if not, you are now in your ideal range for fighting a foe with a polearm! You are too far for him to bring the buttspike to bear effectively, but too close for him to strike you with the head of his weapon.

Act quickly! Feint an overhead blow, and throw an X-Cut into his arm, ribs or hip. If this does not connect, follow up by flipping your hands over and striking a Zwerchau to the left head or shoulder. Maintain this range, stay on top of your foe, and keep throwing combos until he falls!

[This video demonstrates the use of halfswording to close into ideal range against a polearm fighter.](#)

Lesson 16: How to Defeat a Sword and Large Shield Fighter

This is the most challenging style to defeat with greatsword, because there are few, if any, openings. You face the risk of the shieldman just running you down and wrap-shotting you into oblivion, or worse, stalking you into a corner of the list and picking you apart.

You have to create your own openings, maintain control of the range, ideally staying within your kill zone and outside of your opponents. Footwork is critical here.

Here is a basic decision tree for how to go about this fight, depending upon what, if anything, your opponent wants to do:

If: He wants to charge you

Countless SCA shieldman are trained from the beginning to just run down an opponent with a greatweapon. This charge is the bane of many greatsword fighters, but can be easily exploited with just a bit of evilness.

From Middle Guard or Low Guard, thrust vigorously into the top rim of your charging opponent's shield. The objective here is to push his shield UP and into his face, blinding him and forcing him to stand up straight, ending his forward momentum. THEN

If: He stops to reset, collect himself, etc.

Go to 'If he doesn't want to do anything'

If: He resumes his charge with shield high

Great! He can't see you! Thrust hard into the shield again, then take a deep compass step to the right and smash him in the head with a Zwerchau as he goes by!

If: He resumes his charge with shield low

Aim a second thrust right at his face...if you get him, great, if he raises his shield to cover, take a deep compass step to the left and X-Cut him in the right leg! (like in Lesson 8)

If you have to retreat from a charging shieldman, do so in a circular fashion, rather than linear. The more you make him turn, the less likely he is to hit you, and the more likely he is to stop.

If: He wants to stalk you

This is a sign that you are probably dealing with a badass, who is calm and confident. He is going to turtle up and maneuver you into a corner, then inflict violence upon you. You are going to need a Double Feint to get through his defenses.

Start off with a hard, fast Thrust-to-Cut feint, X-Cuting at his right leg. Make sure the X-Cut is easy to read, perhaps by widening your eyes a bit as you gaze down at his leg as you start your thrust. You want him to think he outsmarted you as he moves his shield low to block. Take a passing step with your left foot as you do this.

As soon as he bites on the X-Cut, push HARD off your left foot to the right, and swing a Zwerchau as fast as you can at his left temple! If he manages to block it, he should be confused and reeling, so compass step deeper to the right and hit him in the back or back of head.

That is ONE method for dealing with a large shield stalking you...another effective Double Feint technique uses Hanging Guard, where you twitch high, feint at the shieldleg, and snap your hands into a facethrust.

If you are fast as hell you can attempt to overwhelm your opponent with combos, but that is what he is expecting and confident in his ability to deal with.

If: He doesn't want to do anything

Sometimes you will face an opponent who is either uncertain, hesitant, intimidated or just has a very defensive style. Happy Day, you are about to get some pell practice!

Go into High Guard, throw a crushing overhead blow, then fade back out of range. Come back in and throw the same shot, but make it a feint, and go into a combo of X-Cut, Zwerchau, swordarm, etc, basing your combo on how he reacted to the first overhead blow. Continue to rain down death from High Guard upon this poor shmo until he goes down, calls 'GOOD' or dispenses pez!

While this is the easiest type of large shield fighter to defeat, it is still important that you control the range, and be wary of counters.

Lesson 17: How to Defeat a Sword and Small Shield Fighter

This is the weapon form that I find easiest to defeat. The sword and small shield fighter does not have the range of a polearm or greatsword, the passive coverage of a large shield, or the versatile offense/defense combination of two sword.

The fighter with a small shield has to rely on speed and timing to block, and if he guesses wrong on a feint, he does not have the wide area of coverage that say, a fighter with a 2' by 3' heater does. In other words, this style is very unforgiving of mistakes, and we are going to make sure that he makes some!

Using the principles you have learned in previous lessons—particularly the decision tree in Lesson 16—there are countless ways to kill the small shield fighter. Here are a few:

Method 1: Begin in Hanging Guard. Twitch your swordtip upwards, then swiftly snap it down into a leg shot, just above the left knee. Fire a rising face thrust immediately after: even if he somehow drops his shield low enough to cover the leg shot, his face will be unprotected. If the leg shot DOES connect, go into High Guard and start doing pell practice!

Method 2: Begin in Tail Guard. From range, try to snipe out a lightning fast leg shot by cranking your hips and letting go with your right hand, extending your left arm all the way out. Quickly recover. If your opponent blocks it, begin a leg shot again, and this time stop as soon as your sword is perpendicular to your body, and raise it up into a downward diagonal blow to the left shoulder!

Method 3: Begin in Middle Guard. Launch a rising face thrust-to-cut that turns into an X-Cut at the right leg, then compass step to your right and throw a Zwerchau to the left temple.

As you can see, the possibilities of the ways you can torment a small shield fighter are near limitless. The key is to make full use of your skill at feints, use your range to full advantage and keep your opponent scrambling to cover.

Lesson 18: How to Defeat a Two-Sword Fighter

A skilled two-sword fighter can be an interesting challenge, while a novice to mid-level two-sword fighter is essentially a lousy munchy. You are going to be dealing with an opponent who is likely highly mobile, has excellent visibility, and the ability to attack and defend/bind simultaneously, if they are able to time you correctly.

You only have one sword, so it is imperative that you maintain control of the range and use circular footwork for defense. Compass steps will also force your opponent to turn, which will often expose a weakness in his defenses.

By nature of the weapon form, a two-sword fighter has only two slender swords for defense, resulting in minimal passive coverage (compared to a 2 by 3 heater, for instance). Weaknesses tend to be against leg shots, which require the opponent to drop one of his swords very low and/or squat to cover, and thrusts, which he has to time perfectly to set aside.

So, based on the above, here is my approach to beating a two-sword fighter:

Method 1: Begin in Middle Guard, to keep your opponent at bay and make him respect the power of the thrust. Actually lead off with a rising face thrust; if it lands, great, but if your opponent is worthy anything he probably saw this coming and will manage to defend. Right-handed opponents tend to block this by pushing across with their LEFT sword, and step in to throw a shot with their right. As soon as the left sword begins to push your sword away to your left, use that momentum to bring your sword about over your head as you compass step in to a Zwerchau to his left temple.

Method 2: Begin as above, but as your opponent blocks the thrust, take a DEEP compass step to make him turn, defend against his riposte with a Hanging Parry, and fire an X-Cut into his hip or leg as he comes around, taking a backwards passing step if needed to get out of the way of the other sword.

Method 2: Begin in Tail Guard. Fire a lightning-fast leg snipe, but draw it short, intentionally missing as your sword comes around into Middle Guard, in between his swords (one of which just dropped to cover that leg shot). Snap your hands forward into a face thrust before he can recover!

Here is a video demonstrating how my style can be used successfully [against a good two-sword fighter](#). This video essentially showcases the Method 2, as described above.

Lesson 19: Advanced Defense: Voiding

I rank the desired methods of not getting hit as follows:

- 1) Defeat your opponent before he can swing at you
- 2) Don't be there when he swings (Dodge)
- 3) Parry
- 4) Void the attack by stepping in or out of it

I rank this as the least desirable defense, because I prefer to cleanly avoid the opponent's attack whenever possible. However, moving in such a way that even though the strike does 'hit', it does so without any power, is perfectly valid as well, and is sometimes the only defense you can manage, particularly against a very skilled opponent or when you have been outmaneuvered.

Legs/Body Voiding a shot at your legs or body is probably the most common application for this technique. Legs and body are covered together because it is the same method for voiding a shot at either.

The 'center of percussion,' or sweet spot, on most rattan swords is generally a few inches below the tip. If your opponent gets in range and swings at your leg, a quick backwards jump will either get you out of range entirely, or just the tip will connect, and will often lack sufficient power to be a telling blow.

By that same token, you can also rush in very swiftly, and the center of percussion will then be behind you, again possibly resulting in a light blow—particularly if your opponent is trying to tip-cut, a stretching blow at the end of his range.

Be careful with this, because sometimes the opponent will throw what is known as a 'short stem' blow, a close-range shot where all the force is towards the bottom of the sword. You can usually tell a short stem blow is coming because the opponent's elbow will remain bent, and the shot will be driven like a punch or a hammer-blow. In the event of a short-stem blow, dodge OUT of it instead of into it.

Arms We covered on this back in Lesson 9. This is the easiest kind of shot to void, because all you need to do is move your arm in the direction of the shot. For example, when you are in Right High Guard, opponents will often try to snipe your right or left arm. All you need to do to void these attacks is to collapse your arm inwards to your body, letting the strike slide off harmlessly.

Head To void a shot at your head, you just 'roll with the punch.' This can be difficult to do successfully depending on the shape and construction of your helm, but you have probably already learned how to do this if you are a successful sword and shield fighter. By cocking your head in the same direction the incoming strike is moving towards, you greatly increase the chance that the shot will just glance off your helm instead of landing solidly.

A partial duck can also have the same effect, especially if you wear a bascinet or sallet, as can a quick step backwards.

I never advocate stepping INTO a head shot, because while it sometimes CAN make a shot light, it would look really bad.

Lesson 20: The Technique Engine--Bringing It All Together

Ok, so you have stayed with me through the past 19 lessons. You have drilled the crap out of footwork, guard transitions, offense, defense, feints, the X-Cut, the Zwerchau, and more. You've put the time and training in to fully grasp the principles and concepts of this fluid, fast and cunning fighting style.

What you will find, or perhaps have already found, is that you have developed in your mind the 'Technique Engine', that battle computer that allows you to analyze your opponent's actions and either implement one of the techniques you have trained into your muscle memory...or to make up a new one in the heat of action!

That's right...all of the techniques described in this manual are just applications of the principles I have done my best to describe in this text. Developing this Technique Engine is the Holy Grail of this greatsword style...train for it, quest for it, and you will be comfortable and confident no matter what your opponent brings against you, because you know that you can adapt and counter anything he does.

An excellent way to train and develop your Technique Engine is at practice, to take your guard and let your opponent make the first move. Defend against his attack and counter as swiftly as possible! This forces you to practice adapting and countering. Then, flip the switch in your mind and make sure that YOU make the first move, seeking ways to break your opponent's defense, expose an opening, and swiftly capitalize on it.

The only way to develop this mental combat acumen is to train, to practice, to drill, and to make it second nature. This is difficult since ultimately, unlike our medieval predecessors, we are doing this just for fun and our lives don't depend on it. But like any sport, SCA heavy combat does require dedication and discipline to master, especially the greatsword style, which is one of the most difficult weapon forms to excel at.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, noble reader, for putting the effort in to master these lessons, demonstrate the awesomeness that greatsword fighting can be, and improve the game that we all so love and enjoy. I wish you much success and many years of clubbing your foes down like harp seals!

Appendix A: Dietrich's Guide to Making an Awesome Greatsword

While there are many ways to construct and balance a greatsword, I have recorded here the method that I use. I believe this is the most effective weight and balance for the particular style that I use and teach in this manual.

Step 1: My preferred method for determining greatsword length is as follows:

- Stand the staff of rattan against the floor, in front of your right foot.
- Hold your right arm straight out, at shoulder height.
- With a sharpie, mark along the rattan at the spot where it touches the bottom of your right arm.

For me, at 6'3, that is around 55 inches. This length of sword offers what I believe to be the best combination of range, control and speed.

Step 2: Cut the rattan at the spot you marked. Now if you hold your arm out again at shoulder-height, it should rest exactly on the end of your sword.

Step 3: Decide on orientation...hold the rattan in your fighting grip, as though you were about to fight with it. Turn it this way and that. Flip it around, and try the other end as well. See which is more comfortable. When you decide, use the sharpie to mark an arrow indicating the orientation (ie which side will be the hilt, and which way the hilt will go on)

Step 4: Decide on grip length. I recommend a shorter grip, around 12"; more like a historical sword, instead of the more-commonly-seen SCA greatswords that you could fit four paws on. I also believe the shorter grip allows you a greater degree of range, mobility and more techniques. Mark where the quillions will go with your sharpie.

Step 5: Carve the hilt. This is very important, as having a comfortable hilt to grip is essential for being effective with your greatsword. With whatever tools you prefer/have available, carve the hilt to a shape that you like. I personally like to carve my hilt to the same shape as my steel swords. This, again, is all personal preference, but spend as much time as you need to to make it comfortable for YOU.

Step 6: Attach the quillions. If you are using heater hose, measure and cut the desired length, then fold it evenly over the top of the hilt, at the spot you marked off. Using electrical tape, TIGHTLY tape the two folds of hose together, starting where it is closest to the rattan. Do the same on the other side of the rattan, then tape your way up to the ends of the heater hose on either side. Depending on the size of the hose, you MAY need some foam on the very ends of the quillions (the Marshalls at Gulf Wars insisted on it for me, lest I put out some poor mook's eye with the heater hose). Be liberal with the electrical tape...you want several layers going all along the heater hose, making it as tight and stiff as possible.

Step 7: Attach the counterweight. I prefer NOT to use a foam smashing pommel, because with my style, if I am that close and swinging with that end of the greatsword, it means I made a mistake. A weighted

pommel will give you more control for feints, twitching, and combos. I like to use simple pipe caps from Home Depot...they have a good weight, are easy to install (just drill through the bottom and screw it into the end of the hilt. The Windrose pommels are also nice.

Step 8: Finishing touches. Cut two circles of closed cell foam and strapping-tape them on as a thrusting tip. Apply strapping tape up and down the length of the greatsword. Apply hockey grip tape to the hilt, and cover the pipe cap as well. Apply duct tape and edge tape of whatever color you prefer. Be sure to mark the ricasso at the base of the blade, especially if you intend to use it for halfswording.

CONGRATS, YOU ARE DONE!!

About the Author

My name is Rob Hunter, known in the SCA as Dietrich von Stroheim. I come from a diverse background of combat sports, including boxing, aikijujutsu, kenjutsu, Historical European Martial Arts and SCA heavy fighting.

I imagine this is the point where I am supposed to share some statistics to establish credibility? 😊

All right. I have competed in 7 SCA Heavy Greatsword/shieldless tourneys, and won all 7. I have fought in a total of 48 SCA heavy tourneys with various weapon forms, and won 25.

I was invited to participate in the international Fechtschule America 2012 Invitational Franco-Belgian steel longsword tournament in Houston, TX. Showing up essentially 'out of the blue' as far as the HEMA community was concerned, I surprised quite a few people [by winning the tournament!](#)

I have received so much encouragement, positive feedback and requests for lessons in greatsword fighting, that I decided to write this manual to share with those who would like to learn my particular style, which I describe as '**a shameless blending of Eastern and Western two-handed sword techniques**'. Indeed, those of you who study HEMA will recognize many elements, as will those who study kendo or other eastern styles. The title of this manual, The Tao of Dietrich, is actually a tongue-in-cheek reference to this blend of fighting styles.

After some deliberation, I have chosen NOT to charge anything for this fighting manual. While on the one hand, 'what you gain too cheaply you esteem too lightly', on the other hand, this is what I do as a hobby, and it would not feel right to charge people money for it.

So feel free to distribute and share this as you see fit, with the sole caveat that I would ask 1) That you give credit where credit is due (I DID put a lot of time into writing this, after all!) and 2) That you not charge anything for this manual, except perhaps reasonable printing costs.

A finance professional or 'office jockey' by trade, I nonetheless try to maintain an active lifestyle. In addition to practicing swordsmanship, I love to go hiking, play tennis, swim, run in 5Ks (particularly mud runs!), do yoga, and work out at the gym.

I live in the beautiful mountains of Western North Carolina, have been married for 10 years to the woman of my dreams, and have a 6-year-old little hellraiser of a son, whose infamous exploits could fill a book of their own!