

THE SWORD - CARE AND HANDLING

For both costume and combat swords, rust and stress are the main villains. Both are always present, and both must be looked to at every opportunity. Maintaining the temper of the steel is a vital long-term goal.

RUST:

1. Refrain from grabbing the blade with an ungloved hand. Not only will this prevent cuts and scrapes, but our hands have oils which contain many salts. Salts attract air-borne water vapor; water creates rust.
2. Oil from time to time with a light weight machine oil or heavy grease or car wax for long term storage.
3. Never leave weapons lying on grass; never stick the tip into the ground.
4. When rust is spotted, remove it. Use a dull emery cloth or fine steel wool.
5. If make-up or stage blood gets on the weapon, remove it as soon as possible.

TEMPER: is that combination of strength, flexibility, and “springiness” which is built into the steel, and will vary from blade to blade, often on purpose. Temper is a balance: too stiff a blade is also too brittle and can shatter; too flexible a blade is too soft. Temper is lost by stressing the blade and also by excessive heating and cooling of the blade, so for long-term care of the weapon, practice the following: avoid storing the sword with the tip resting on the floor; keep weapons away from extremes of temperature; never allow power machinery to build up heat on the blade; always disassemble a sword when repairs to any part are necessary.

STRESS: All weapons can break. It is unfortunate but true. Even a broadsword can snap in half in the middle of a fight and it will give no warning before it happens. That is because swords are constantly under a great deal of stress, and sometimes adding just a little bit more can be the little bit that causes it to break. Where does stress come from? Either internally or externally.

Internal stress comes from over aggressive pommel tighteners who try to squeeze the pommel down as far as it will go in order to make the sword ring louder. (Some choreographers even go so far as to tighten the pommel using a pair of vise grips!) Ringing is just the aural manifestation of unrelieved stress - the more you hear, the more you have. *Tighten the pommel using only your hands* until you can turn it no further, then and only then use a wrench to give it one more turn to line it up with the blade if necessary.

External stress is the banging of sword when in use. Naturally you need to use the swords, but always make sure that the actors are well grounded in good stage combat basics. All fights should be choreographed by an experienced stage

combat instructor, not necessarily a fencing instructor. (The techniques of competitive fencing are unsafe for both actors and swords.) No actor should ever be in the position of having to make a block in order to save her life. Discipline and control have no substitute.