

HAVE SKILLS, WILL

"Be prepared" is not just a motto for the Boy Scouts. It is an absolute necessity if you hope to achieve success in the murky and turbulent waters of a show business career.

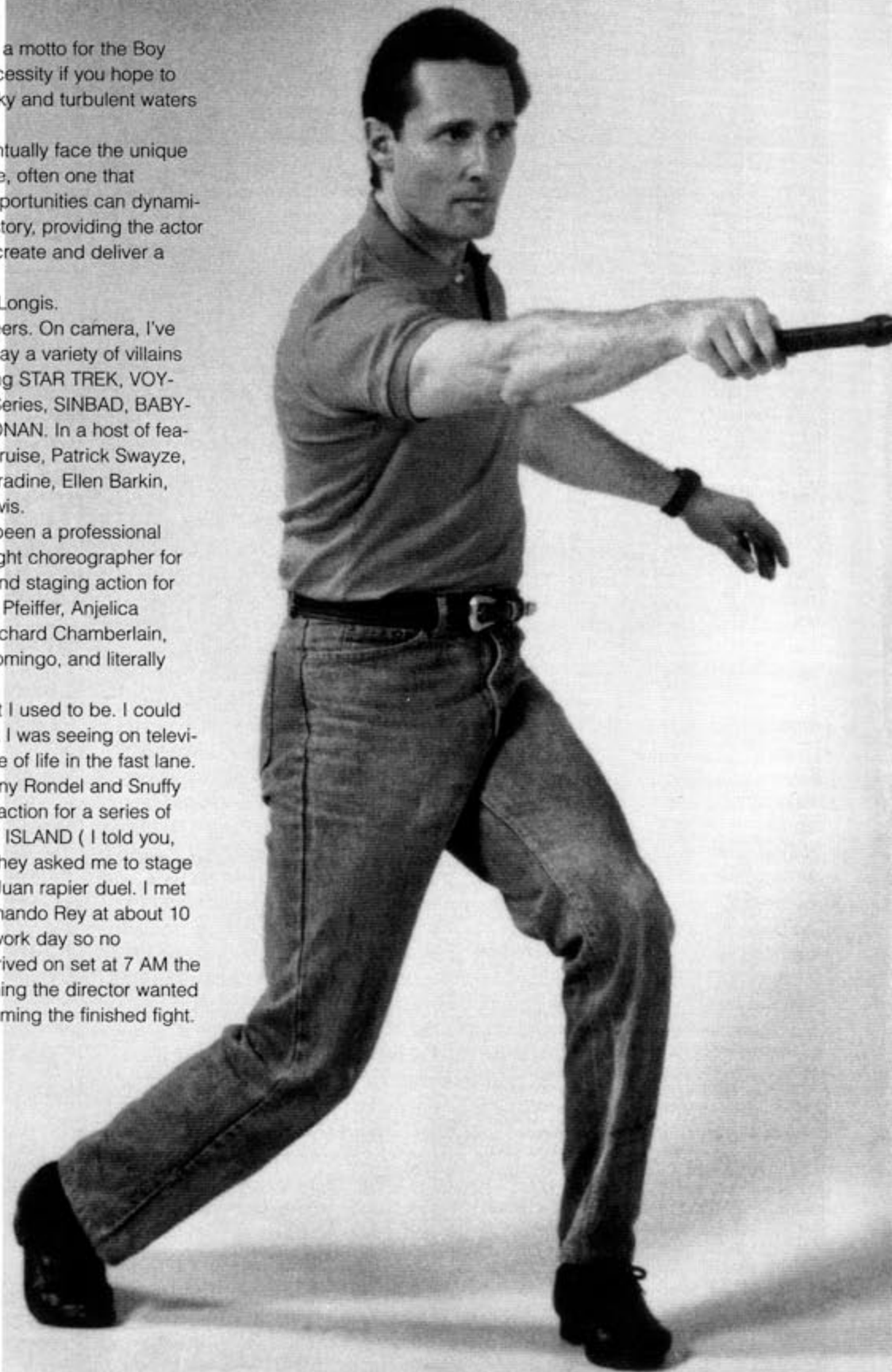
Every performer will eventually face the unique demands of an action scene, often one that includes weapons. Such opportunities can dynamically define character and story, providing the actor has the skills necessary to create and deliver a safe, exciting performance.

My name is Anthony De Longis.

I juggle two full time careers. On camera, I've been fortunate enough to play a variety of villains on series television, including STAR TREK, VOYAGER, HIGHLANDER, the Series, SINBAD, BABYLON 5, RENEGADE and CONAN. In a host of feature films I've battled Tom Cruise, Patrick Swayze, Dolph Lundgren, David Carradine, Ellen Barkin, Richard Grieco and Joe Lewis.

Behind the scenes, I've been a professional weapons coordinator and fight choreographer for twenty-four years, training and staging action for such luminaries as Michelle Pfeiffer, Anjelica Huston, Charlton Heston, Richard Chamberlain, Dolph Lundgren, Placido Domingo, and literally hundreds of others.

I remember how arrogant I used to be. I could do better work than the junk I was seeing on television. Then I got my first taste of life in the fast lane. Two stunt coordinators, Ronny Rondel and Snuffy Harrison, were juggling the action for a series of projects including FANTASY ISLAND (I told you, this was a long time ago). They asked me to stage the sword action for a Don Juan rapier duel. I met Ricardo Montalban and Fernando Rey at about 10 PM. It was the end of their work day so no rehearsal was possible. I arrived on set at 7 AM the next morning and the first thing the director wanted to see was the actors performing the finished fight.





Now I've had no chance to train or even evaluate the performers, and the director wants to shoot the finished product. Incredibly, this is more often the norm than the exception. The standard "quick fix" is to double the actors. Never mind the added character dimension and credibility the performer enjoys when the audience realizes he's really wielding the weapon himself.

Obviously, there are times when it is necessary to double an actor, but Ricardo Montalban is a consummate performer and a product of the old studio system's rigorous training regimen. He was able and anxious to do the work himself and quickly absorbed the simple routine I had planned. But, as the star of the show, he was in nearly every scene. Rehearsal was virtually non-existent and I was called on to double Mr. Montalban for the long shots and for Mr. Rey's closeup coverage.

Mr. Rey hadn't enjoyed the prior training afforded Mr. Montalban and was an absolute stranger to the sword. The pressures of time were quite his undoing. He couldn't master even the most basic combinations.

As a former collegiate saber champion, I was confident but appalled when I was reduced to saying to Mr.

Anthony De Longis (left) is considered the foremost bullwhip expert in the business, having coached such stars as Michelle Pfeiffer and Ellen Barkin, to name a few.

De Longis does extensive historical research to make fight sequences not only exciting, but historically accurate.



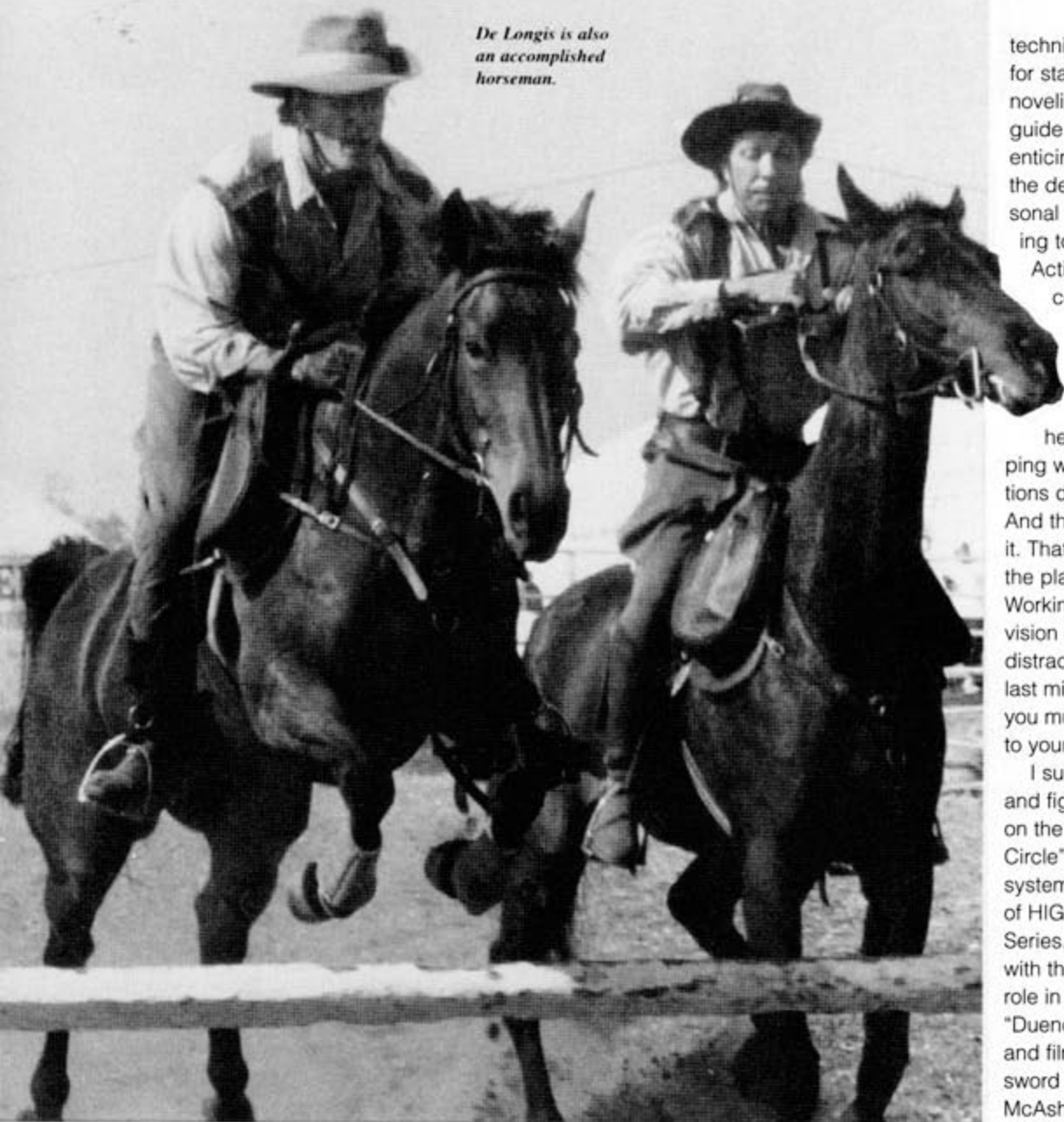
Rey, "Just come at me, Fernando, try to hit me. Don't worry, I'll parry." It was the only way to get the shot. But I learned a valuable lesson. Never again would I criticize another choreographer's work when they were undoubtedly doing their very best in the face of the near impossible. And, if this is how the game is played, there had to be a way to give myself an edge.

Never stop learning

That's your only hope. You have only the tools you possess and can bring with you to the set that day.

Do your homework. Feed your mind with research and hone your physical skills with practice. There is no substitute for practice. Investigate different weapons and study a variety of styles. This will change your perceptions and offer you different timings and syncopated rhythms to season your work. The greater your knowledge, the more options and choices you can draw on to overcome the obstacles that will be thrown in your path. Make a plan, but be ready to abandon everything and start from scratch when that is the only way to get it done. This happens all the time. You can only "wing it" when you have the skills to fly.

De Longis is also an accomplished horseman.



Your greatest enemy is time

Essentially, you have none. Somehow you must beg, borrow and steal what you can, but no matter what they promise, you'll always end up with far too little to do the job the way you'd like. I got my start in theater choreographing action for dozens of productions at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego, the Ahmanson and Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and a variety of venues up and down the coast of California. I've kept up my stage chops as Fight Director for the Los Angeles Music Center Opera since its inception in 1985. I've drunk the heady waters of preparation, training and rehearsal that only stage work can offer. I've savored the luxury of carefully constructed safety protocols and the cultivation of sensitivity

to distance and timing.

Granted, the schedule is always harried, but you get to evaluate, then develop the techniques you can optimistically expect your actors to "perform" on opening night. It's always a challenge, but the growth is palpable and the rewards eminently satisfying. Kiss this goodbye on any television set and most film locations.

Performers and choreographers must be story tellers and problem solvers. We transform difficulties into opportunities that articulate character and drive our story forward. All that is needed to seduce an audience into actively participating in your fantasy is your own unique creative perspective, an intimate knowledge of camera angles and story presentation, and superb execution of superior

technique. That's just for starters. Like a great novelist, your choices guide the audience, enticing them to supply the details that are personal and most affecting to them.

Action probes the visceral realm, the deep emotions we all carry.

They are no longer in their heads, you are tapping wellsprings of emotions deep in their guts. And they'll love you for it. That's the goal, that's the plan. But beware. Working in film and television is a miasma of distractions, delay, and last minute changes that you must somehow turn to your advantage.

I suggested a story and fighting style based on the "Mysterious Circle" Spanish training system to the producers of *HIGHLANDER*, the Series. I was rewarded with the guest starring role in a episode entitled "Duende," written for me and filmed in Paris. The sword master, F. Braun McAsh and I worked together to evolve three complex rapier and dagger duels. The final conflict was to be fought outdoors within the "Mysterious Circle" itself. The night before, the series star, Adrian Paul, had never seen the completed routine. He called a half hour break in filming — he's the star, he can do that — and Braun and I showed him the final fight for the first time.

The next day, we filmed in a driving rain, on a surface as slippery

Biography: ANTHONY DE LONGIS SAG — AFTRA — AEA — ACTRA — UBCP

Anthony De Longis successfully combines careers as an actor, a fight director and professional weapons teacher/trainer. De Longis is perhaps best known as the recurring character of the alien Kazon leader, "First Mate Culluh," a role he created for the STAR TREK-VOYAGER series. This year, De Longis was invited to reprise his guest starring appearance on HIGHLANDER - the Series, after suggesting a story based on his research into the Spanish sword training system, the "Mysterious Circle."

His feature film credits include ROADHOUSE, MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, SINBAD, THE NOVEMBER CONSPIRACY, EXPECT NO MERCY, CYBERTRACKER 2, THE LAST CHANCE DETECTIVES, WILD BILL, FAR AND AWAY, CIRCLE OF IRON and JAGUAR LIVES. De Longis coached and choreographed Michelle Pfeiffer for her CATWOMAN whip

action in BATMAN RETURNS. A partial list of stars trained and choreographed by De Longis includes Anjelica Huston, Ellen Barkin, Charlton Heston, Richard Chamberlain, David Carradine, Dolph Lundgren, Richard Grieco, Richard Thomas, Jon Voight, Placido Domingo and Thomas Allen. De Longis has occupied the staff position of fight director for the Los Angeles Music Center Opera since 1985. He taught Fencing, Stage Combat and Character Movement at UCLA's Theater Arts Department from 1974 to 1993. He was honored with a Dramalogue Award for his work at the Mark Taper Forum. Universal Studios called on De Longis to be choreographer and Fight Director for their studio tour's CONAN SWORD SPECTACULAR from 1990 to 1993. He continues to train performers for the WILD WILD WEST and WATERWORLD live action entertainments. An accomplished horseback rider, De Longis is a founding member of "THE LIGHT HORSMEN," a mounted cavalry team which performs realistic combat routines with sabers, lances and bullwhips.

The "Duende" episode of HIGHLANDER: THE SERIES was based on De Longis' research into the Spanish "Mysterious Circle" training methods.





*De Longis starred opposite Adrian Paul in the highly acclaimed "Duende" episode of **HIGHLANDER, THE SERIES**. This was the most complex fight scene in the history of the show.*

as ice with only the rehearsal we could manage while standing in the down-pour. That's what the schedule demanded, that's what we had to deal with to make it work.

Braun pronounced it the most complicated one on one combat in his five year history with the show. It was a bitch, but the rain provided million dollar production value and the lack of rehearsal gave the fight a real edge.

"Acts of God" are not uncommon. When I guest starred on **CONAN**, an El Niño hurricane flipped our schedule and pushed our final fight to the first day instead of the last. The sword master, Kiyoshi Yamazaki, showed me a rough version of his ideas. He knew my background and welcomed my input but warned that Ralf Moeller, the star, would have no time to rehearse. I kept my adjustments to a minimum but requested an additional phrase to enhance the story.

I met Ralf when he walked onto the set in costume and Kiyoshi showed us both the newly extended fight for the first time.

We had five minutes to walk our way through the choreography while the whole crew watched and waited.

Then the director demanded we start shooting because he was behind schedule. We literally rehearsed on film, shooting a little more of the action with each take. I wielded Conan's heavy steel broadsword, "the Sword of Atlantis", while Ralf was swinging a two handed aluminum monstrosity. Within five minutes,

we were shooting the fight, in its entirety, at an intensity that had the crew cheering. But it required all my training and experience to constantly adapt to Ralf's energy and changing distances so we could work safely at that level of performance.

We had no rehearsal time to discover a common rhythm to build our character choices around. It shouldn't have to be this way, but most of the time it is.

Turn hazards into opportunities

In the same **CONAN** episode, when Conan disarms me, I grab his pal Danny as a hostage. I'm stabbed in the back and left for dead by the gypsy woman I've betrayed, played by Lydie Dernier. She's on her knees hugging Danny when I drag myself to one knee and plunge a dagger into the base of her neck. Lydie and I worked together on **General Hospital** and she was very comfortable with my cues and execution. TJ Storm, another hero pal of Conan's, is to vault from a mini-tramp to fly about 15 feet over the great altar to dispatch me, an instant too late.

TJ is a very talented martial artist and his first instinct was to utilize a "neck break" illusion, normally very effective. I was a little worried about his momentum on landing and we had

the additional problem of the dagger still in my hand. I suggested he pounce and grab my wrist as the first beat. This allowed him to stabilize his balance and gave us a strong visual exchange for the camera that speaks volumes.

It also set the cues for our next piece of action: TJ tears the knife from my hand, steps toward camera to open the distance, and spins to cut my throat. His body obscured the lack of gore, maintaining our PG rating, and the move turned him directly into camera for his closeup coverage, all in one shot. A win-win solution.

Master your basics

Distance, timing, footwork and an unbroken sensitivity to your partner's energy. These are your building blocks and they must be razor sharp and laser clean. You will almost always be working with a stranger. You must possess the skills to instantly adapt and constantly adjust both distance and technique in order to maintain safety and lift your choreography from simple survival and mechanical execution, to the highest levels of dynamic story performance.

All action should be character driven and story motivated. Pay attention to detail. Einstein says, "God is in the details". Your "art" is in the details you choose to articulate, and your ability to execute the subtle differences each adjustment carves into your character's story.

As **CATWOMAN**, Michelle Pfeiffer performed all her own whip work in **BATMAN RETURNS**. No doubles, no inserts. She did it all because she'd worked hard to develop her skills. Our training dramatically changed the way she moved and afforded her a range of additional choices and tools to dynamically articulate her character. Her achievements gave her portrayal an enormous boost. I've never understood why most producers would rather pay forty crew members to stand around and wait while the director struggles to get something mediocre on film, rather than pay two or three people to rehearse and create a superior product that everyone is proud of.