

## Fakes and Feints for Heavy Weapons Fighters

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Too many fighters get stuck at a certain level of success because they fail to adjust to the fact that at the higher levels, their opponent's defense is much better, likely, than the opponents they are used to fighting. Target-hunting or waiting for your opponent to make a mistake may work up to a point. But to succeed against the top fighters, you must create the openings in your opponent's defense. Just being fast or just being strong won't be enough, because there is always somebody just as fast or strong. So what then?

One excellent way to move beyond the intermediate level of fighting is to incorporate fakes and feints into your technique. Using a combination of deceptive movements and faked attacks, you can distract your opponent's attention away from the real attack, and create the openings you need to get past their defense. This is how to defeat those who are faster and/or stronger than you.

This class will teach several fakes and feints that can bump your fighting level up a notch or two quite quickly.

[Note: For simplicity, in the many examples that follow, I will assume right-handed fighters unless otherwise specified. And “on-side” means to your opponent’s left side. “Off-side” means to your opponent’s right side.]

### So What Is The Difference Between a “Fake” and a “Feint?”

The truth is that there is a lot of overlap between these two concepts. But basically, here is what the two terms mean:

- **Fake** - Partial or incomplete attack that precedes the REAL attack
- **Feint** - Body movement, eye misdirection, pace change-up, etc.

### Why Does It Work?

Humans are excellent at pattern recognition. It helps us make sense of things and quickly create automatic (unconscious) recognition and behaviors. This is very helpful for living our day-to-day lives, but it makes us susceptible to tricks – illusions and misdirection.

### For The Fighters Who Are NOT Crazy Fast or Strong

For some, learning the proper mechanics of a blow is all it takes. They have enough reserves of natural speed and strength that with practice, they’ll be faster and/or hit harder than many of their opponents. Heck, for those who have especially gifted perception and/or DNA (fast-twitch muscles, right build, natural athletic ability), they won’t ever really need to use fakes or feints because they are just that fast/strong. But that’s the exception. What if you’ve been taught how to properly throw a blow - and

you have honed and practiced it to where it's pretty much not going to get much faster or hit much harder - but you STILL can't seem to land the blow very often? You've reached the realistic limit of your physical ability to execute a given blow, and you still aren't winning many (if any) fights. Are you done? Do you just give up? Nope. Adding the dimension of fakes and feints, misdirection and illusion, can make you APPEAR to be fast; when really what you are is tricky!

## Tells!

All we need to bring to mind a complete pattern (a set of cause-and-effect events) is the very first movement, or other sign that we have coded as heralding the onset of the pattern. Another word for that sign is a "tell."

Is it helpful to be able to figure out your opponent's "tells?" Sure. It almost allows you to have the block in place before your opponent has even begun their attack! What's not to like? But being a "tell reader" gives a tricky opponent - one who deals in fakes, misdirection, and illusion (what fakes and feints are all about) - an advantage over you. If they purposely execute a "tell," and then proceed to NOT do what everyone ELSE does after that tell, you may be in the middle of blocking a face-thrust when your opponent is busy hitting your wide-open helmet.

It's the fighters who "KNOW" (that is, they THINK they know) how to read their opponents who are most susceptible. You think you KNOW how this move goes? Wrong - smack!

## Will This Stuff Always Work?

Just like any other technique, you may not be able to fake your opponent out with every fake/feint you try. For them to work, it is absolutely crucial for you to CONVINCED your opponent that you're going for the faked shot (or moving in the "feinted" direction) with an intentional tell! If you make your tells too obvious, they won't convince your opponent that you are ACTUALLY initiating the "real thing." If you're tell is too obvious, it raises suspicion in your opponent. Try to make your tells subtle enough for their unconscious mind's to notice, but not so obvious that their conscious minds pick it up. In general, the more experienced your opponent, the more subtle the tells have to be. Maybe make the movements smaller.

## Won't They Stop Working When My Opponent's Figure Them Out?

Actually no! Yes, another reason that these techniques may stop working is that your opponent(s) may have caught on to your tricks 😊. But that's actually OK! One great thing about fakes/feints is that if your opponent catches on to when you "fake high and go low," you can simply *fake the fake* by faking high and actually GOING high. Your opponent will be all smug, thinking "every time he pumps his sword up and out, he actually goes for the leg. So I'm going to avoid the trap by blocking the leg when he pumps up and out." But instead, you do the pump high, and hit his unblocked head 😊. If he catches on to that, then he'll never know where the blow after your high pump is ACTUALLY going to land.

Snnnnneeeaaaky!

## So How Do I Do All This Stuff?

In SCA fighting (any fighting, really), we want to find (or create) and make use of the patterns our opponents have relegated (*coded*) to their unconscious.

- **Finding the patterns** – We will start by relying on common patterns where there is already a high probability that a given fighter will have it coded. Later, you can often discover a pattern by making a move, and observing how your opponent reacts.
- **Creating the patterns** - Then we will start to create these patterns FOR our opponents! Like I said, we are VERY good at recognizing patterns and we do it quickly.

Once we have a good idea how our opponent is likely to react to a trigger (some action on our part), then all we have to do is provide that trigger – in the form of what he thinks is a tell - and basically “launch” that pattern of reaction in your opponent – usually a movement of his shield. That is when you can strike your opponent in a place that he left open when he reacted. This is a great way to create openings in your opponent’s defense.

Once you get some faky/feinty experience under your belt, you can create a pattern for your opponent. You basically train him – set up a model for your behavior. Then break your pattern to violate that model. For example, you can dip your right shoulder and bend sideways to the right a bit, before throwing your sword at your opponent’s leg. He’ll probably block it. That’s actually good. It gives him confidence that he knows how to successfully deal with that pattern. Do the same thing again. After usually just 2 or 3 of these patterns (though try to mix them in with other shots so as not to be too obvious) – you have created in your opponent an expectation of what will follow when you dip your right shoulder. That’s your tell – the trigger. Once you think your opponent is nice and trained, launch your trigger movement, but swing for the head instead of the leg. It (his head) will probably be open 😊.

Here are several specific techniques that should trigger a reaction in most fighters without having to “train” them.

## The Techniques

1. *Rising Snap (fake low/go high)*: As the name suggests, the actual attack is your basic snap shot – probably the first blow you were taught to throw in SCA heavy weapons fighting. Because this shot is so common, we are used to looking out for it and probably learned how to block it in the first days or weeks after first donning armor. But we ALSO probably learned how to block a leg shot very soon thereafter. So that, too, is probably an automatic (unconscious of “lizard brain”) response to a perceived leg shot. THAT is why this works so well! If you can trigger an automatic response in your opponent’s defense, you can then put your sword where their shield (or whatever they use to block) ISN’T.
  - a. Start the attack as if you are throwing a standard leg shot. When your opponent’s shield moves (unconsciously, we hope) DOWN to block the leg shot, we throw the sword UP into the now open (we hope) helmet.

- b. A nice variant to this is to quickly move your whole body (leading with your right foot) 45 degrees forward/right, and bend low. This should temporarily hide you behind your opponent's shield. Then quickly throw the snap-shot to the head.
2. *Pump high/leg shot (fake high/go low)*: Just what it sounds like. From your normal "ready" position, quickly raise your sword-hand up and a bit toward your opponent. The idea is to make him raise his shield to block his head. But you actually throw a leg shot. Hopefully, your opponent will have helpfully raised his shield away from his leg. This can be done with either a straight leg snap, or a leg wrap. It can also be done while stepping in with your right leg, which puts you in a great position for a leg wrap. The latter variation is how I like to do it.
3. *Fake on-side head that is really an off-side head shot (fake right/go left)*: This one starts out looking very much like your standard snap shot to the head. But it actually lands on the off-side of your opponent's helmet. The first part of the technique looks almost exactly like a standard snap, so your opponent should raise their shield to block the LEFT side of their head, leaving the right side open.
  - a. Make all the same body movements that you normally would do to throw an on-side snap to the head. But just as your hips and shoulders move to your left, stop your sword from swinging and breaking the vertical plane between you and your opponent. At the point where you stop, the back of your right hand will be in front of your head, facing your opponent, and the tip of your sword will be pointing to your left.
  - b. Now your body is coiled taught and you quickly release the tension in the coil by turning your hips and shoulders back to your right – toward your starting position, while simultaneously turning your fist palm-down and pulling your right elbow up and to the right, hopefully smacking your opponent in the right side of the head.
4. *Fake Left/Go Right (my accidental fake)*: I discovered, purely by accident, that I was faking out some opponents with the movement I do prior to some of my primary strikes. Sometimes, I like to launch an on-side blow starting with the tip of my sword pointing slightly down and to my left. I was fighting one guy and noticed that right before my shot, he would move his shield to his right! I didn't even know why. But it was perfect for me, because my sword was always bound for the left side of his head! It turns out that I was "setting" my blow by moving my sword from its en garde position, which is basically tip-up, by moving my sword hilt in front of my face and dropping the tip down to my left. Duh. My opponent saw the tip of my sword move toward his right, and logically thought this meant the attack was coming from his right (my left).
  - a. So just make a movement with your sword to your left JUST before you throw a standard on-side shot to your right (high or low).
5. *Fake face thrust/jump right and snap head (fake center/go right)*: I do a lot of face-thrusts. Usually, I start from just out of range and drop my sword forward, lunging forward with my left foot. The sword aims straight ahead to your opponent's face. But folks catch on to the set-up eventually. So one time I decided to try lowering my sword and lunging forward on my left foot.

BUT, when my left foot landed, I pushed off of it to my right, and threw a plain old, garden variety snap to the head. And there was nothin' but steel☺. My opponent had moved his shield over to block the thrust wasn't there, leaving the left side of his head open.

- a. From just out of range, lunge forward with your left foot and drop the tip of your sword in front of you as if to thrust.
  - b. When your left foot touches down, push off of it to move your body to the right by about 3 feet.
  - c. Once your right foot lands, throw a snap shot to the head.
6. *Fake up and left/Go low and left (hits leading leg with an off-side leg or body shot):* This is a variation of my *Fake Left/Go Right* technique above (#4).
  - a. Push your sword hilt up and across your face to a point just above your left eye. This will draw your opponent's attention up and to his right.
  - b. Throw an off-side shot to your opponent's leading leg (whichever one). When this works, your opponent's shield should be high and over to his right, and your off-side (swinging back toward your right) leg shot will slide nicely under your opponent's shield
7. *Move your body left/Hit right:* Step forward and to your left to get your opponent thinking "he's going to attack on my right." Then throw a normal right-handed wrap to the left side of your opponent's head.
8. *Against a Lefty – Step right, then push off your right foot, move quickly left by stepping there with your left foot, and throw an off-side shot to the head or body:* This takes advantage of the fact that lefties, expect their opponent's to throw shots – especially wraps – to their left side. So make a big quick move in that direction, stepping slightly right and forward with your right foot, but quickly pushing off that right foot to your left, and throw an off-side shot. I often see completely open and unprotected backs when I do this, because my lefty opponent has turned his body to his left and I have pushed mine to his right – yes, BEHIND him (if you're lucky☺). Sir Brom and I both did this to each other at the same time once and cancelled each other out.
  - a. Step forward with your right foot, making for your lefty opponent's left side.
  - b. When your right foot lands, push off of it toward your left, moving your body about 3 feet to the left (prepare your sword arm for an off-side shot while moving to your left).
  - c. When you land on the left foot, throw an off-side shot to your opponent's head or back.
9. *Fake Everywhere/Go Anywhere:* I saw Duke Andreas Eisfalke do this when he had his opponent on his knees during a champion's battle. He literally was moving his hips, sword, feet, head, shoulders, etc. in all directions, totally confusing his poor opponent, who had no idea where the shot was gonna come from.

## **Other Weapons Forms**

1. *2-Sword:* You have 4 weapons (potentially) – 2 pokies and 2 blades. Your options are numerous.

- a. *Fake left sword hit with right*
  - b. *The opposite of that*
  - c. *Fake thrust*
  - d. *There are obviously a lot more. 2-sword is not my primary. But just ask a 2-sword fighter.*
2. *Polearm*: There are two fakes I like using with a glaive:
- a. *Pool-cue from down low*: If you hold the glaive low (just letting your arms sort of dangle naturally by your thighs) with the point aimed at your opponent's face, and you have the angle right, all he will see is a point – the small circle that is your thrusting tip – and no shaft at all. You can thrust without moving your body much and not changing the angle, and he'll never even know the glaive moved.
  - b. *Fake high left/go low right*: Starting with right foot forward, move in and hold the glaive up high and to your left. Then step left and pull the back hand (left hand) to the left and strike your opponent's leg with an off-side glaive strike.

**Let's Have Your Favorites** *(for the hands-on class)*

**Now start making up your own!**