TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND PERFORMERS
A STUDY GUIDE

Unarmed Stage Combat II: Perfecting The Fundamentals
F1180DVD

DVD Index
This educational study guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the DVD “Unarmed Stage Combat II: Perfecting The Fundamentals.”

The following DVD index coincides with the chapter numbers on the main menu on your television screen, as well as the contents of this study guide. Use this key to jump ahead, or review a section, or to locate a particular technique and/or obtain material presented to you in one of the “tricks of the trade” sessions.

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The following section is meant to assist teachers and performers when practicing the techniques in this DVD. It may be helpful for teachers to read aloud the information presented to performers both in this next section as well as the additional notes on helpful tips that occur throughout this study guide.

**TIPS FOR TEACHERS**

1. Work in a clear open space and try to practice on a wooden floor. Use tumbling mats to cushion any accidental falls. Wear non-restrictive, comfortable clothing and supportive and protective footwear. Avoid high heels, boots, slippery shoes or socks. Remove all jewelry and empty your pockets.

2. Always begin the rehearsal of practice session by having the students select a partner. You may or may not want to assist them in this process depending on the age and experience of the students. It is not important for them to partner with a person of the same sex, but it may be easier to learn the techniques with a partner approximately the same height and weight.

3. Arrange the rehearsal space so that every performer can be seen at all times. This will assist you in coaching them through each of the techniques.

4. Always rehearse in slow motion. By example, set the ideal slow motion tempo and have them practice it along with you. Also demonstrate what it means for everyone to work at the same tempo.

5. Divide the performers into two groups and alternate the practice session if you have too many performers for the size of the room. Each performer should be able to move about freely in all directions for several feet before running into a fellow performer.

6. Organize the performers so that all partner A’s face the same direction and all B’s face the same direction. Never have two people playing the same part work back to back because it will cause unnecessary traffic problems once they begin moving about the space.

7. Don’t try to accomplish too much or too little in practice session. Rushing the learning process can be dangerous and frustrating, and spending too much time on one technique can cause the performers to lose interest.

8. When rehearsing the “clothes grab,” make sure that the performers wear heavy, loose clothing, such as sweatshirts.

9. If you are using a television and the DVD during class, make sure that you allow the students to view each lesson several times before getting it on it’s feet. Use the pause, or frame by frame button to highlight details.
TIPS FOR PERFORMERS

1. Work in a clear open space and try to practice on a wooden floor. Use tumbling mats to cushion any accidental falls. Wear non-restrictive, comfortable clothing and supportive and protective footwear. Avoid high heels, boots, slippery shoes or socks.
2. Remove all jewelry and empty your pockets.
3. Respect and take care of your partner at all times.
4. Keep on the lookout for accidents that can happen around you and your partner. Watch out for the other performers wandering around you to make sure they don’t unknowingly enter your practice space.
5. Work at the same tempo as your partner whether you are working in slow motion while you learn a technique, or whether you are moving at a faster pace when you bring it up to performance speed. If you are uncertain what the tempo is, take a moment and make that decision together.
6. Respect the slower speed if two partners are working at different tempos. Everyone learns at a different rate of speed and it can be dangerous if one performer feels pressured to speed up before they are ready. Remember: STAGE COMBAT IS A TEAM EFFORT. It takes at least two people to create a stage fight.
7. Listen to each other’s suggestions, especially when they come from the partner playing the victim at that time.
8. Give equal weight to what each partner says. Neither one of you should work as the teacher of director unless mutually agreed upon by the performers and/or director/teacher.
9. It’s OK to wear knee, or elbow pads while you learn these techniques, in case of accidental falls.

CHAPTER 1. EXPANDED TERMS SECTION

These terms help you understand the safety and movement principles that underlie all of stage combat. Understanding them will help you and your partner create the techniques in a manner that is both safe and productive.

Teachers might wish to hand out this list of terms, and/or use the list as the basis for a written quiz.

Attacker
The attacker is the combatant initiating the technique such as a punch, kick, or slap.

Victim
The victim is the combatant on the receiving end of any attack. Combatants can potentially change roles from attacker to victim many times throughout the fight.
**Fight Distance**
The correct spacing between you and your partner should be at least 3 to 4 feet apart. Check distance by having the taller student (the one with the longer arms) reach out toward the partner with a straight arm. The hand should be at least 6 – 8 inches from the partner’s chest. This allows for maximum safety while maintaining the illusion of reality.

**Breath**
Remember to breathe throughout the fight no matter how much physical exertion is needed. Since breath and voice are linked, this will help you to vocalize during rehearsals and while performing fight techniques. It will also help the body to relax.

**Tension Relaxation**
Avoid becoming too tense when performing the fight. Excessive tension gets in the way of body control and quickly tires you out.

**Eye Contact**
Making eye contact prior to each and every sequence in the fight is a constant reminder to be ready and prepared for the next sequence. For example eye contact is made between the combatants before a slap is thrown to help both the attacker and victim prepare for the next move. The attacker knows the victim is ready to react and the victim knows the attacker is ready to initiate the next move. It is not necessary to maintain constant eye contact, but it is important to “check in” before each technique, and during potentially dangerous moves.

**Stance and Balance**
Always stand with your weight centered, your legs at least shoulder width apart, and with your knees slightly bent. This stance allows for freedom of movement in all directions. If your weight is leaning on one leg or the other, it will be hard to change directions when needed.

**Cueing**
The signal given from you to your partner at predetermined times throughout the fight. Cues should be choreographed into the fight at specific places to establish each other’s readiness to continue. All cues are made either physically (a touch, or a push for example), vocally (a yell or grunt for example), verbally (a line from the play for example), or through eye contact.

**Contact Blow**
A blow delivered to a major muscle group that actually strikes the victim and produces a realistic sound. The energy of the contact punch or kick is always pulled.

**Pulling the Energy**
Pulling the energy of a strike means the quick withdrawal of the punching or kicking action to avoid potential injury to the victim’s major muscle group.
**Non-Contact**
A blow delivered with the illusion of contact, a non-contact punch always misses its target by 6 – 8 inches or more.

**Reverse Energy**
Reverse energy is the concept of energy moving away from the attacker’s target area to protect the victim. For example, when a strangulation is performed the attacker actually pulls the energy away from the victim while the victim holds the attacker’s hand in place to stabilize the contact. This “reverse energy” results in a technique that is safe for the combatants.

**Masking**
Masking is the concept of hiding a moment of contact so that it will look as if the blow has struck its target. This is always true of non-contact blows and sometimes true of contact blows. All techniques need to mask the knap and fighting distance from the audience.

**Timing**
Good timing is crucial to the effectiveness of a good stage fight. Avoid anticipating the fight moves either by rushing the attack or reacting before the blow is delivered. Reacting too late also makes the fight look unrealistic.

**Breaking down a punch**
All punches, kicks, or slaps are made up of three parts.
1. The eye contact and checking of distance
2. The send up or cocking of the arm, hand or foot
3. The follow through of the action with simultaneous knap reaction

**CHAPTER 2. THE FULL SPEED FIGHT**
See DVD page 3.

**CHAPTER 3. EXERCISE COMBINATION # 1**

**The Wrist Grab with Release**
Don’t use “real” force to grab the wrist, but isolate the tension isometrically to create the illusion of force. To break the hold, the victim simply pulls sharply toward the thumb of the attacker, twisting to the right or left. The attacker allows the grip to be broken. Be careful that the victim doesn’t hit themselves in the face with his or her own hand when breaking the grip.

**The Arm Lock Behind the Back**
This is a controlling move.
The attacker grabs the right wrist with the right hand.
The victim “locks” the hand into his or her own wrist with the left hand.
The victim prepares slightly to the right, and then sweeps 360° to the left.
The attacker (not the victim of the arm lock) turns 180° to the left and puts the arm behind their own back. Don’t pull the arm too high up the back, or put pressure on any joints. The victim must control the speed and “force” of the turn and the arm lock. The attacker puts the left hand on the victim’s left shoulder for support, and to help prevent the victim’s head from banging into the attacker’s face. Practice alone by turning and putting your own arm behind your back as you do, then add the attacker.

*The Push Away (From the Arm Lock)*
The victim controls this move by stepping slightly backward as a cue. The attacker gives way, supporting the weight. The victim actually throws himself or herself away. The attacker “acts” the throw, releasing the grip and extending the arms forward at a 45° angle, being careful not to give any extra momentum to the victim.

*The Clothes Grab with Release*
Begin by grabbing the lapels of the partner’s clothes. It helps if your partner is wearing loose, heavy clothing such as a sweatshirt. Victims should grab both of the attacker’s wrists, and pull down to stabilize the partners, and prevent the attacker’s hands from impacting the victim’s neck area. This can also be performed with a one hand grab, the victim using one, or two hands on the attacker’s wrist. Make sure the victim controls any shaking motion, or changing of ground once the grip is established. Be careful not to bang heads together. Movement should be side to side for safety, not forward and back as this threatens the head and face. To break the hold, the victim releases the wrists and brings both arms through the middle. The attacker must give way to complete the illusion. Don’t strike the partner with the fist on the chin as you break the hold. Don’t lean together as the “break” occurs, as this threatens the head and face.

**CHAPTER 4. TRICKS OF THE TRADE:**

“ACTING AND INTENTION”
Stage fighting is about acting a scene of conflict. Don’t get so wrapped up in the physicality of the fight that you forget to act the scene. Find real emotional commitment in the scene without real emotion adding excessive energy or speed to the moves. Rehearse and play the fight as the character, experiencing if for the first time. Play the fight beat by beat. Perform the fight taking time for acting beats; don’t push the speed past ¾ tempo.
CHAPTER 5. EXERCISE COMBINATION # 2

Right and Left Hook Combinations
(Note: a complete breakdown of right and left hooks appears in DVD # 1. CHAPTER 8. A breakdown of knaps appears in DVD # 1. CHAPTER 5.)

The Duck and “Action – Reaction – Action”
Action – reaction – action means giving permission for a move to continue, for example:
Partner A. Cues by winding up (action)
Partner B. Begins duck (reaction/permission)
Partner A. Follows through (action)
In this example, Partner B gives permission for the punch to proceed by beginning the duck.

Helpful tips about ducking:
• When ducking, bend the knees and keep eye contact with the attacker.
• Never bend from the waist, as this will bring you dangerously into close distance.
• Never duck towards the incoming attack.
• Never close your eyes when ducking.
• Re-establish eye contact with your partner, after rising from the duck and before moving on to any other technique.
• When performed correctly, the attacker’s arm should miss the head by 8 to 12 inches, but never closer.

CHAPTER 6. STAGE COMBAT SAFETY

Accidents can and do happen, so throughout the training, rehearsal and performance process you must constantly be aware of the safety principals that keep you and your partner safe. It’s easy to get carried away when punching or reacting, and hurt yourself or someone else.

Teachers: Be especially careful placing students in the rehearsal room, as students can be injured if they stray into another group’s space. Keep partners aware of others around them at all times!

Helpful tips on Stage Combat Safety:
• When training, never use too much force or speed. Even rapidly changing your fighting distance can lead to injury.
• Respect your partner and work at their capacity and training level.
• Understand that it should take several weeks of training and rehearsal to bring the information in this DVD to performance level. Don’t expect to put these techniques safely to use after one or two sessions.
• Before beginning each session, look around and make sure your space is clear of furniture, other actors, and that the floor is clean and free of nails. Work in lots of light.
• In performance situations, always rehearse the fight many weeks before opening night, so that memory is not a problem
• Avoid staging, or rehearsing fights in tight spaces.
• Keep a first aid kit handy in case of accidents
• Whether in training sessions, or performance situations, SAFETY IS A STATE OF MIND.

CHAPTER 7. EXERCISE COMBINATION # 3

The Non-contact Stomach Punch
This punch never touches the victim at all.
Line up with your right shoulders in line, the attacker facing downstage and the victim facing upstage.
Make sure that your heads aren’t exactly lined up, so the audience can see the attacker’s face. This is a safety precaution so that the victim may react without threatening the attacker’s head.

This punch is performed in a 1, 2, 3 rhythm
1. Establish eye contact and check distance.
2. Cue by winding the arm back, down, and sideways.
3. The arm comes forward, stopping 6 – 8 inches from the victim’s stomach, coupled with a strong vocal reaction and a doubling over from the victim.

Helpful tips on the non-contact stomach punch:
• Keep the hands clear of the target.
• The victim must remember to give a big exhalation of breath to the reaction, and to never threaten the attacker’s head by bending toward them during the reaction to the punch.

Lifting the Victim
This is a technique to prepare the victim for another attack after the stomach punch. The lift is cued with a physical cue by placing the left hand on the victim’s right shoulder. A light lifting motion is then initiated, the speed of which is controlled by the victim.
The victim must do all the work of the lift.
Never forcibly lift the victim, or grab a sensitive area of the body like the face or neck to lift them.

The Uppercut Punch (Non-contact)
This punch is designed to look as if the fist is meeting the point of the chin, forcing the head upward. It is always a non-contact punch.

This punch is performed with increased fighting distance. A safe distance from fist to face is 10 to 12 inches or more, depending on the maturity of the performers in question, and the power of the punch.
The Uppercut is performed in a 1, 2, 3 rhythm:
1. Establish eye contact, and check fighting distance.
2. Cue by winding up, with the arm moving down, backward, and to the side.
3. Follow through on the diagonal, with a simultaneous clap knap, and head/body reaction. Never snap the head back too forcefully on the reaction, this may injure you.

Line up upstage/downstage to perform this punch. The audience should see the attacker over the victim’s left shoulder when performing a right uppercut punch. Keep the arm bent at the elbow and don’t perform any punch with a rigidly straight arm. Always hide the knap. (details on knaps in DVD # 1. CHAPTER 5.) The knap used here is the clap knap.

CHAPTER 8. TRICKS OF THE TRADE:

“PARTNERING”

When rehearsing stage combat always be aware of your partner and help make them look good. Never work selfishly, and never overpower or put your partner in any type of physical danger. When working with someone smaller or larger than yourself, adjust the techniques to take into account the height difference. Get to know your partner and work carefully so that your half of the fight is the same each time. Consistency is the key.

Teachers: Keep a sharp eye out for over enthusiasm, or aggression. Don’t hesitate to change partners, or to sideline any student who is working to aggressively, or too fast.

Helpful tips on Partnering:
- Don’t change the speed of the fight on your partner.
- Rehearse any change made necessary by new ideas, illness, or cast changes.
- A good partnering exercise is to change partners frequently when learning stage combat in the class.
- Another exercise is to change parts in the fight, so that you learn the other half of the fight after you have learned your own part.
- Always strive to make your partner look good, even at the expense of yourself.
- Listen to your partner’s suggestions especially if there is a great size difference between you.
CHAPTER 9. EXERCISE COMBINATION # 4

Specialty Techniques – The Strangle Hold
The strangle hold is designed to look as if the attacker is choking the victim, but the victim must always control the energy of the strangle for safety reasons.

Helpful tips on The Strangle Hold:
- As this is a contact technique, approach it carefully.
- The strangle hold has the illusion of pressure to the neck.
- Always bring the hands to the neck from left and right, never straight in, as this threatens the larynx.
- Interlace the thumbs 3 inches out from the larynx.
- The victim grabs the wrists of the attacker, and then places the chin over the thumbs.
- Finally, reverse the energy of the strangle for safety.
- The victim pulls toward the neck. The attacker pulls away from the neck.
- Work to equalize the energy of the strangle hold.
- Once the strangle is established, partners may move around. Make sure that the movement is staged. Examples might include: victim going to one knee, victim turning 180 degrees, victim backing into a wall.
- The victim must control the movement; the attacker follows, giving the illusion of control.
- To break the strangle hold, release grip on wrists, and bring hands through the middle. Attacker releases the hold.

The Hair Pull
This illusion is designed to look as if the attacker is controlling the victim by pulling their hair.
The attacker places one hand on the head.
The victim grabs the wrist, and will control any movement from this point.
Don’t actually pull the hair!
This is performed in a 1, 2, 3 rhythm:
1. Reach in and place the hand on the head.
2. Victim grabs wrist of the attacker.
3. Victim may react by moving the head, or changing position on stage.

Teachers: This technique can also be performed with the attacker behind the victim, or with the victim seated. Experiment with the attacker’s hand placement, such as on the side of the head above the ear.

The Push Away
This particular push is from the hair pull, and is a preparation for the crescent kick in the fight. As with all pushes, the victim controls the energy.
The attacker steps back slightly as a cue.
The victim steps forward, then throws himself or herself backward.
The attacker must act the illusion of a forceful push, releasing the “grip” on the hair.
CHAPTER 10. EXERCISE COMBINATION # 5

The Crescent Kick
This kick gives the illusion of the attacker striking the victim with great force with an arcing kick to the head.
The crescent kick is performed with greatly increased distance, 5 to 6 feet, or 2 meters.
The kicking foot is flexed.
The kick initiates from the major hip joint, and the sweep around is an arc, coming level with the victim’s head, but missing by 1.5 to 2 feet (30 centimeters).
Don’t allow students to surge forward when kicking. Keep weight centered.
Don’t lean too far forward, or backward.
Be careful not to let the supporting leg slip out form under you.
The kicking foot may land either on the opposite side, or the same side from which it starts.
The victim must prepare to receive the kick fairly erect (don’t lean forward), and by preparing the clap knap.
If the victim is too tall for the attacker’s leg to reach, he or she can either bend from the knees, or sink to a kneeling position prior to the kick.
Never allow the kick closer than 16 inches to the face!

The Drop to the Knees
This technique will safely allow the combatant to go tot the floor without damaging the knees.
Let the body relax.
Open up the stance.
Bend the knees, at the same time counter-balancing the upper body backward.
Controlling your weight, place one knee to the floor (either one) followed by the other one.
Don’t hit the floor with any speed or energy.
Exhale when you “hit” the floor.
Practice with kneepads, or on a mat until this technique is consistently controlled.

CHAPTER 11. TRICKS OF THE TRADE:

“PERFORMANCE ANXIETY AND STAGE FRIGHT”
We all get a touch of stage fright now and then, especially when performing a fight scene. When you perform a fight scene in front of an audience, the performance is likely to be faster and harder than it was in rehearsal, just from the adrenaline rush. Frayed nerves can even make you forget the next move in the fight. If that happens:

1. Stop fighting and back off
2. Stay in character, and collect your thoughts
3. Stay connected with your partner, and when you remember the next move, begin again.
Moments like these are why fights should only be performed at ¾ speed. Always make sure that you know the fight by rehearsing often before opening night so that memory is never a problem. Keep breathing so that your body is relaxed, and to keep tension at bay.

CHAPTER 12. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:

UP TEMPO STUDENT FIGHT
Partner A faces stage left
Partner B faces stage right
They stand opposite each other right shoulder to right shoulder

B: Wags right finger at A.
A: Grabs B’s right wrist with own hand and “squeezes”.
B: “Locks” A’s wrist onto own wrist with the left hand and then initiates “controlling move” by propping to the right then sweeping in a full circle to the left.
A: Gives with the sweep, turning 180 degrees to the left, and putting own right arm behind the back to give illusion of an arm lock.
B: Places let arm on A’s right shoulder to stabilize the position then “pulls” A slightly before pushing A away stage right.
A: Initiates a step back for the “pull” before throwing themselves stage right 2 or 3 steps. Turns back to B, moves in and grabs B by the collar.
B: Grabs A’s wrists.
A: “Pulls” B around so that B’s back is now facing downstage.
B: Controls the pull and moves into position, then “breaks” the hold by bringing arms up underneath the hold to force them aside.
A: “Gives way” to the break, steps back on his right leg, and cues and delivers a right hook.
B: Clap knaps and reacts.
A: Cue a bigger left hook.
B: Ducks and counters upstage of A.
A: The force of the missed punch makes A stumble forward as it misses.
   (A is now downstage of B).
B: Now places left hand on A’s shoulder as a cue, turns A around.
A: Faces upstage.
B: Initiates a non-contact right stomach punch.
A: Collapses over with vocal reaction.
B: Lifts A erect, steps strongly to right side and delivers a right handed uppercut punch with a clap knap.
A: Reacts and turns facing stage left.
B: Closes distance and begins a strangle hold.
A: Grabs both wrists to secure strangle. They strangle for 3 counts, then initiates a break hold with both arms underneath.
B: Releases the strangle.
A: Puts right hand on top of B’s head.
B: Supports it by grabbing A’s wrist with left hand.
A: Steps upstage of B.
B: Counters with A.
A: Initiates a “pull”.
B: Leans forward into the “pull”.
A: Initiates a “push”.
B: Pushes himself away, about 4 steps, to create a safe distance between them.
A: Gets eye contact then initiates a big right non-contact crescent kick to the face.
B: Clap knaps and then does a slow knee drop to the floor.

Helpful Tips When Acting Fights:
- Make sure you finish each move of the fight before you move on the next one.
- Remember: full performance speed is always ¾ tempo.
- Vocal warm ups should be done in advance to help keep the throat in good condition.
- React vocally when receiving any punch or kick.
- Be careful of vocally overplaying each reaction so that the fight sounds unrealistic.
- Play the pain of each attack and don’t forget it as you progress throughout the fight.
- Take care of each other throughout the fight.
- Stay in character, step back and collect your thoughts if you forget the fight.
LIST OF THE COMPLETE UNARMED STAGE COMBAT DVD
LIBRARY CONTENTS

LIST OF TERMS FOR ALL THREE DVDS

Attacker   Cueing
Victim     Contact
Fighting Distance Non-contact
Breathing Pulling the Energy
Tension Relaxation Reverse Energy
Eye Contact Timing
Stance     Breaking Down a Punch
Balance

TECHNIQUES CONTAINED IN EACH DVD

DVD 1: Learning the Basics
Push        Back Hand Slap
Pull        Right Hook
Clap Knap   Left Hook
Slip Hand Knap Back Fall
Shared Knap Front Fall
Forehand Slap

Tricks of the Trade:
Getting Ready
Staging Fights
Rehearsing Fights

DVD 2: Perfecting the Fundamentals
Wrist Grab w/Release Non-contact Stomach Punch
Arm Lock behind Back    Uppercut w/ Clap Knap
Push Away        Strangle Hold w/Break
Clothes Grab w/ Break Hair Pull
Right Hook        Crescent Kick
Left Hook         Knee Drop
Duck

Tricks of the Trade:
Acting and Intention
Partnering
Safety
Performance Anxiety and Stage Fright
**DVD 3: Mastering the Techniques**

- Backhand Slap  Uppercut w/Slip Hand Knap
- Choke from Behind  Contact Stomach Punch
- Elbow Strike  Straight Right w/ Slip Hand Knap
- Push  Kick to stomach with Shared Knap
- Clothes Grab with Break  Knee Drop
- Left Hook  Right Hook
- Block

**Tricks of the Trade:**
- Value of Striking and Reactions
- The Fight Captain
- Fight Calls
- Padding

**LIST OF THE MOST WIDELY PRODUCED MODERN PLAYS AND MUSICALS WITH FIGHTS**

**COMEDIES**

- Bus Stop  Jumpers
- Black Comedy  Lend Me a Tenor
- Cloud Nine  Mr. Roberts
- A Couple of White Chicks  The Nerd
- Sitting Around Talking  Noises Off
- A Cry of Players  Picnic
- Digby  Playboy of The Western World
- Entertaining Mr. Sloan  Private Lives
- Escape From Happiness  Ring Round the Moon
- The Fifth of July  Scapino
- The Foreigner  Stalag 17
- Geniuses  Trapper Tanzi
- The Good Doctor  What The Butler Saw
- The House of Blue Leaves

**DRAMAS**

- American Buffalo  Blood Knot
- And They Dance Real Slow In  Buried Child
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- The Ballad of the Sad Café  Cowboy Mouth
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**MYSTERY THRILLERS**

- The Bad Seed
- Corpse
- Dark at the Top of the Stairs
- Deathtrap
- Dial M for Murder
- Murderer
- Sleuth
- Sorry, Wrong Number
- Wait Until Dark
- Write Me a Murder

**MUSICALS**

- Brigadoon
- Cabaret
- Carpusel
- Chicago
- Oklahoma
- Peter Pan
- Pippin
- Pump Boys and Dinettes
City of Angels    The Robber Bridegroom
Diamond Studs    Shenandoah
The Fantastiks   Sweeney Todd
Guys and Dolls   The Three Penny Opera
Man of La Mancha West Side Story

A note from the Creative Team:
We hope you enjoyed, and found these DVD’s useful and informative. If you are interested in finding out more about stage combat, and training opportunities, please visit: www.safd.org

J. Allen Suddeth

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